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This article uses the anchor of place to contrast Anglo-Saxon interpretations of classical and patristic volcanic hell-mouth imagery with Icelandic organization of such conceptual *schemata* in Old Norse (hereafter ON). A third comparison, with tales of seafaring Irish monks encountering northern island volcanoes, permits finer, more contemporaneous distinctions to be made with regard to those Anglo-Saxon interpretations. Both the eighth-century Latin *Vita sancti Guðlaci* and tenth-century Old English (hereafter OE) *Life of St Guðlac* offer portrayals of the saint’s abduction by demons and aerial transport to a hell-mouth. These instances of an Anglo-Saxon conceptual *schemata* for hell are remarkable for transposing a visionary, volcanic-looking hell-mouth to a region geographically north of the British Isles. It is difficult to mistake the point of this—the temporal proximity of hell-as-Doomsday is now mirrored by its geographic nearness. It happens, of course, that volcanic Iceland is located geographically north of the British Isles, but, as this article will demonstrate, Felix’s *Vita* and the later OE translation seem as yet unaware of Iceland, while Icelanders themselves would develop an alternative to the moralisation of their lived environment.

While St Guðlac’s vision of a hell-mouth is structured by his location in the East Anglian fens, manifestations of evil spirits, and medieval Christian eschatology, the Icelandic conceptualisations of volcanism that appear in *Vǫluspá* and *Hallmundarkviða* reveal a markedly less-moralised environment. Place may simply mark the geographic intersection of

natural forces with actions on a supernatural plane. A giant's stomping about might cause eruptions and earthquakes, but these physical manifestations were merely consequences of the giant's existence, not necessarily expressions of malevolent powers (just as fatal storms might be summoned up and sent by sorcerers but were not thought evil in themselves). These disparate approaches operated within a much larger environmental context: Guðlac's vision is informed by a monastic ideology that equated sanctification of place with claiming and cultivating the property of 'heathens', living or long dead; while Icelandic settlers' conflicts with a heathen past would more often take the form of feuding with ghosts and other undead persons.¹ For Icelanders, environmental hazards retained an impersonal quality, as famously chronicled in the thirteenth-century *Kristni saga*: when pagans try to moralise an eruption as the gods weighing in on the conversion to Christianity, the rejoinder is to ask what the gods were angered by when the meeting ground's lava-field was created.²

The common, central ground for the purposes of this discussion is not ground, in fact, but the North Sea. The communications it carried—whether letters and manuscripts, or the people who accompanied them—marked its peripheries with a doubled perspective. English coastal towns looked inward to terrestrial seats of power, but also northward with what Irmeli Valtonen has described as 'a fusion of inherited Roman geography, ideas about the mythical and historical past, and empirical observation';³ at times that perspective was collapsed, as when the garrulous Norwegian merchant Ohthere arrived in Wessex around 890 and shared his geography of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark (possibly even Iceland) with King Alfred's

¹ For much more detail on evolving Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the past, see Sarah Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), esp. her mention of Guðlac at 151–52. For the vast variety of conceptualisations of the undead in Old Norse, see Ármann Jakobsson, 'Vampires and Watchmen: Categorizing the Mediaeval Icelandic Undead', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 110/3 (2011), 281–300.

² Ch. 12, *Kristni saga*, in *Biskupa sögur I 2*, ed. by Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, and Peter Foote, ÍF 15 (Reykjavík: Íslenska forritfélag, 2003), 1–48, at 33. Eng. trans.: *Íslendingabók—Kristni saga*, trans. by Siân Grønlie (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2006), 33–74, at 48–49.

³ Irmeli Valtonen, 'The North in the "Old English Orosius": A Geographical Narrative in Context', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 109/3 (2008), 380–84, at 383.

court. Ohthere's seafaring is interpolated into an OE version of Orosius's history of the known world from the early fifth century, whose geography omitted the north that the English knew;⁴ details of Ohthere's mapping remains hotly debated to this day because scholars do not agree on what the Norwegian's conceptual standpoint was (or standpoints were) with regard to his directions, or whether this was congruent with an Anglo-Saxon 'internal compass'.⁵ Similarly, in this article the conceptual underpinnings of terms such as 'north' and 'hell' will require investigation.

Because this is a cognitive analysis, the disparate functions of literary hells and their narrative construction take focus. Medieval Christian conceptions of Hell were, if anything, polymorphous. The earlier Hebrew locations, Sheol and Gehenna, already provided a dichotomy: Sheol is 'not the place of torment or the abode of fiends', as J. A. Emerton writes, but 'is the place to which everyone goes, good and bad alike'.⁶ Gehenna, meanwhile, could simply refer to a valley outside Jerusalem's walls, a place of eschatological punishment near Jerusalem, or to eternal subterranean fires.⁷ The Septuagint's Greek translation of Sheol as Hades, maintaining the idea of a cavernous antechamber of the dead, seems to have led to the fiery punishment of Gehenna becoming conceptually linked to Tartarus.⁸

The visionary experiences of Hell that circulated in the medieval period display further variations. Certainly this diversity reflects attempts to harmonise competing textual descriptions in classical and biblical sources. Partly, though this is sometimes harder to

⁴ See *The Old English Orosius*, ed. by Janet Bately, EETS Suppl. Series 6 (Oxford: OUP, 1980), 13–16.

⁵ Cf. Ian Whitaker, 'Ohthere's Account Reconsidered', *Arctic Anthropology* 18/1 (1981), 1–11, at 4.

⁶ J. A. Emerton, 'Sheol and the Sons of Belial', *Vetus Testamentum*, 37/2 (1987), 214–18, at 216.

⁷ Lloyd R. Bailey, 'Enigmatic Bible Passages: Gehenna: The Topography of Hell', *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 49/3 (1986), 187–91, at 188–89.

⁸ 'In the entire LXX, "Hades" is used to translate 61 out of the 65 occurrences of "Sheol" found in the Hebrew text', Steven James Schweitzer, 'Mythology in the Old Greek of Isaiah: The Technique of Translation', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 66/2 (2004), 214–30, at 221. Victorinus of Pettau, writing in the latter part of the third century, combines Tartarus and Gehenna in his commentary on The Apocalypse of St John: '*eius refugas in tartarum gehennae*': 20.1, *Victorini Episcopi Petavionensis Opera*, ed. by John Haussleiter, CSEL 49 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1916), 138.

source, descriptions of Hell are a hybrid of textual influences and cultural settings. Though they may all be grouped together in the ‘visions of Hell’ genre, the apocryphal, apocalyptic visions attributed to St Peter and St Paul arose from a far different era than the visions of Furseus and Drythelm (both given by Bede in the eighth century), or of Tundale (mid-twelfth century).⁹ Eileen Gardiner suggests that later visions were influenced by Irish penitential literature that circulated between the fifth and eleventh centuries.¹⁰ This narrative model might help to explain why Tundale, for instance, is shown settings of punishments tailored to kinds of sinners without practical reference to why souls, presumably guilty of any number of sins, should be grouped in this way. Tundale’s experience stands in contrast to Guðlac’s, who, as will be discussed, perceives Hell as a singular location of torment.

In this article, I turn to the theoretical platform of situated cognition (embodied, embedded, and extended) to aid an inquiry into the relationships between environmental features that appear in these texts and their interpretation, attempting to maintain diversity in the field of possible readings.¹¹ Essentially, this means linking embodied reports with how these experiences are embedded in contextual structures (*e.g.*, physiological, social, environmental). Extended cognition, the practice of thinking with and through one’s surroundings, is deep-seated, and it is not surprising to find affordances of the natural world, of geography and topography, conceptualised differently in the thought-worlds of multiple texts. How a text is interpreted can depend a good deal on where its audiences live.

⁹ A useful collection of a variety of visionary hells, including the apocalypses of St Peter and St Paul, and visions of Furseus, Drythelm, and Tundale (as well as St Brendan’s voyages), all in English translation, is contained in *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante*, ed. by Eileen Gardiner, Medieval & Renaissance Texts (New York: Italica Press, 1989).

¹⁰ *Heaven and Hell*, xiii.

¹¹ For a thorough introduction, see *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition*, ed. by Philip Robbins and Murat Aydede (Cambridge: CUP, 2009). Seminal texts in these areas include Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (London: OUP, 2008); Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). A practical overview of perspectives in cognitive literary research is offered by Peter Stockwell, *An Introduction to Cognitive Poetics* (London: Routledge, 2002).

This being the case, I must ask the reader to adopt a different mindset than might be typically the case in studies of textual influence. Insofar as the study of textual influence has included attempts to pre-state an interpretation for readers in different cultural milieus—as if the originary text bore universal conceptual *schemata* that could be only either apprehended correctly or misunderstood—then revisiting texts at the moment of their interaction with another cultural moment can be tremendously productive. What is vital to a cognitive analysis of these textual interactions is the extent to which different social imaginaries shape and even mandate differing interpretative strategies, as this article discusses.¹² Texts may travel, but social imaginaries, by and large, do not; they must evolve in place. At some time between Felix’s composition of his *Vita sancti Guðlaci* in the eighth century and the compilation of the *Chronicle of Lanercost* in the thirteenth century, Hell, as conceptualised in Guðlac’s portentous vision, has evolved into the wonders of a travelogue account. The chronicle’s entry for 1274 demonstrates the ease with which the patristic schema linking Hell and volcanic activity could later be deployed to make sense of Iceland’s sensationally dynamic landscape. A bishop of Orkney, while visiting Hartlepool, was telling eager listeners about the marvels of Iceland, which would have recently been brought under Norway’s rule. According to this ‘William’:

...in some place in Iceland the sea burns for the space of one mile, leaving behind it black and filthy ashes. In another place fire bursts forth from the earth at a fixed time—every seven or five years—and without warning burns towns and all their contents, and can neither be extinguished nor driven off except by holy water consecrated by the hand of a priest. And, what is still more wonderful, he said that they can hear plainly in that fire the cries of souls tormented therein.¹³

¹² Briefly, the use of the term ‘social imaginary’ here foregrounds its being composed of shared cognitive *schemata*, with particular emphasis given to their role in creating social expectations and their consequent normative social effects, as described by political and social science philosopher Charles Taylor. See Claudia Strauss, ‘The Imaginary’, *Anthropological Theory* 6/3 (2006), 322–44; and Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹³ The *Chronicle of Lanercost* gives the bishop’s name as ‘William’, but while there were several bishops of Orkney named William, none held the episcopate in the 1270s. In his translation of the *Orkneyinga saga*, Joseph Anderson names the bishop from 1270–84 as Peter, and mentions in a note that P. A. Munch had earlier suggested that ‘William’ was merely a titular bishop consecrated at York—perhaps helping to explain his presence in Hartlepool. *The Chronicle of Lanercost: 1272–1346*, notes and trans. by Sir Herbert Maxwell

It will become evident that while this conceptualisation of hellishness shares elements with Guðlac's vision, the details in this narration are ordered differently: they belong not to a singular hell-mouth but to Icelandic times and places.

The most significant religious authority for medieval authors who wished to portray volcanoes as literal portals to hell was likely Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604), whose *Dialogues* (4.30) contains the story of Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths, being thrown into a volcano (the '*Vulcani*' is commonly identified as Mount Etna), illustrating Gregory's contention that hell's fires were a real, corporal punishment for sinners.¹⁴ Classically, to enter the underworld Aeneas visits the crater lake Avernus, whose poisonous vapours keep birds from flying over it (*Aeneid*, 6), but there is none of the fiery torment offered by a glimpse into an active volcano's mouth.¹⁵ As Gregory stresses, it is the unceasing cooking away in an active volcano's interior that provides evidence for the kind of eternal fire supposed to exist in hell.¹⁶ It is worth noting, however, that Gregory's discussion of the matter is brief and does not linger on the prospect of such hellish torment. Later medieval narratives featuring visions of hell tend to savour the sights, sounds, and even smells of the punishments of the damned.

In his edition of the *Vita sancti Guðlaci*, Bertram Colgrave mentions Felix's knowledge of Bede's *Vita sancti Cuthberti*, Gregory's *De Vita et miraculis sancti Benedicti* (from his *Dialogues*), Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini*, Evagrius's translation of Athanasius's *Vita Antonii*, Jerome's *Visio Pauli*, and the *Vita Fursei*.¹⁷ But St Guðlac's vision

(Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1913), 10; *The Orkneyinga Saga*, ed. by Joseph Anderson, trans. by Jon A. Hjaltalin and Gilbert Goudie (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1873), lxxvi.

¹⁴ Gregory may have been thinking of Tertullian's earlier distinction between common and eternal fires (which the damned would suffer within), in which he specified lightning and volcanic eruption as examples of the latter, that which can burn without consuming—see his *Apologeticus*, Ch. 48. Gregory the Great, *Dialogorum libri quatuor*, in PL 77:368–69.

¹⁵ Cf. Nicholas Horsfall, *Virgil, "Aeneid", 6: A Commentary* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 15–17.

¹⁶ Gregory uses the unusual phrase '*Volcani ollam*', which Nancy Mandeville Caciola notes turns the volcano into a 'clay cooking pot or vessel' and urn: *Afterlives: The Return of the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2016), 53.

¹⁷ *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: CUP, 1956), 16–17.

of hell, specifically, is both atmospherically elaborate and difficult to relate to these more proximate hagiographic textual influences—being much less concerned with descriptions of the types and kinds of hellish torments than with noting the details of observable apocalyptic signs. Indeed, as discussed later, elements of Guðlac’s vision seem keyed to the Apocalypse of St John (9. 1–10), in which a smoking, fiery pit is opened and phantasmagoric locusts emerge. The subsequent anonymous OE translation was written or copied probably by the early-tenth century, according to Alaric Hall, and in the main closely follows the *Vita sancti Guðlaci*.¹⁸ Felix says in his text that it was written at the request of Ælfwald, who was King of East Anglia from 713 to 749. Colgrave proposed that Felix’s ‘ornate and bombastic style’ was due primarily to Aldhelm’s influence, and that any ‘Hisperic’, *i.e.*, Irish, borrowings were filtered through Aldhelm—despite noting that Felix’s *Vita* was the only source for almost fifty words in Du Cange’s glossary of medieval Latin, and that Felix had apparently coined words that Aldhelm had invented.¹⁹ More recently, Claudia Di Sciacca would seem to agree with Colgrave’s assessment:

Indeed, the wide range of sources and their subtle integration and layering as well as the ornate, flamboyant Latin displayed by Felix reveal that he was a well-read, sophisticated author who must have benefited from a high standard of Latin training and access to a well-stocked library. In particular, Felix seems to have been thoroughly conversant with and heavily influenced by Aldhelm, who, notably, is also the earliest literary witness to the circulation of the *Synonyma* in Anglo-Saxon England.²⁰

Little remains known of Felix, however, other than that he was likely a monk and familiar with East Anglia, an area reached by the Irish missionary St Fursey by the 630s. We do not know where he was born or instructed or how old he was when writing the *Vita*.

¹⁸ Alaric Hall ‘Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity: Tradition, Innovation and St Guðlac’, in *Images of Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson*, ed. by Debra Higgs Strickland, *Visualising the Middle Ages*, 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 207–35, at 207. Jane Roberts has proposed that this is a late West Saxon copy of an earlier translation nearer to ‘the Old English Bede and Wærferth’s version of Gregory’s *Dialogues*’: see Roberts, ‘On Multi-Using Materials from The Dictionary of Old English Project, with Particular Reference to the hapax legomena in the Old English Translation of Felix’s *Vita Guthlaci*’, *Florilegium* 26 (2009), 175–205, at 200.

¹⁹ Colgrave, *Felix’s Life*, 16–18.

²⁰ Claudia Di Sciacca, ‘Isidore of Seville in Anglo-Saxon England’, in *Isidore of Seville and his Reception in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Andrew Fear and Jamie Wood (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2016), 131–58, 141.

If Felix looked south, in drawing from a few of Aldhelm's works, he also looked north, in using Bede's *Vita sancti Cuthberti*. It is perhaps a relevant coincidence that not long after Guðlac's death in 714 Northumbria's Lindisfarne would no doubt have been celebrating the centennial of its founding *circa* 634 by St Aidan from Iona. Adomnán, the hagiographer of Iona's St Columba, died ten years before St Guðlac, in 704, near the end of an era in which Northumbria's Lindisfarne relied on the Iona abbey as its motherhouse. Lindisfarne would gradually reorient toward Rome through the English seat at Canterbury, but this did not mean that Irish texts went unread or uncopied. For example, Bede's reuse of Pliny and Isidore's *De natura rerum* for his own work titled *De natura rerum* has been shown by Kendall and Wallis to be complemented by his use of the Irish pseudo-Isidore's *De ordine creaturarum*.²¹ We also know Adomnán made the Northumbrian king Aldfrith a gift of his *De locis sanctis*, which Bede again reworked.²² Prior to Felix, Adomnán used Evagrius's *Vita Antonii* as a model for his *Vita sancti Columbae*, working a remarkable transformation in which eremitic Irish monks sailed a desert made of ocean.²³ It would not be surprising to find that Felix's *Vita* illustrates an Anglo-Saxon social imaginary in conversation with Irish hagiography or Irish-transmitted versions of classical works.²⁴

The admixture of moralisation with cosmological and meteorological observation that one sees in the Irish Reference Bible and the pseudo-Isidorean *De ordine creaturarum* has counterpart reflexes in Guðlac's vision.²⁵ Here is the hell-mouth scene in Felix's *Vita*,

²¹ Bede, *'On the Nature of Things' and 'On Times'*, trans. by Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2010), 12.

²² Thomas O'Loughlin, *Adomnan and the Holy Places: The Perceptions of an Insular Monk on the Locations of the Biblical Drama* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 182.

²³ O'Loughlin, *Holy Places*, 161.

²⁴ Conversely, Bede's reworking of Adomnán's *De locis sanctis* omits that work's description of the gates of hell: Adomnán had woven together Gregory the Great's story of Theodoric and the volcano with material likely from Isidore's *Etymologiae* and *De natura rerum* to create a volcanic mountain (*Vulganus*) on an island just twelve miles from Sicily. During daylight hours people could see its smoke and at night its fires lit the sky; its thundering increased on Fridays and Saturdays (when Christ descended into Hell). O'Loughlin, *Holy Places*, 139.

²⁵ Cf. *The Reference Bible = Das Bibelwerk : inter Pauca problemsmata de enigmatibus ex tomis canonicis, nunc prompta sunt Praefatio et libri de Pentateucho Moysi*, ed. by G. MacGinty, CCCM 173 (Turnhout: Brepols,

followed by the OE *Life*. I have indicated the remarkable interweaving of embodied report, location, and moralising framing, with boldface for sensory information, double-underlining of location and orientation, and italics to identify value judgements conditioned by a penitential conceptual schema:

...**horridis alarum stridoribus** inter **nubifera gelidi** aeris spatia illum subvectare coeperunt. Cum ergo ad ardua aeris culmina adventasset, *horrendum* dictu! ecce septentrionalis caeli **plaga fuscis atrarum nubium caliginibus nigrescere** videbatur. **Innumerabiles** enim *immundorum spirituum* **alas** in obviam illis dehinc venire cerneret. Coniunctis itaque in unum turmis, cum **inmenso clamore leves in auras** iter vertentes, supra memoratum *Christi famulum* Guðlac ad *nefandas* tartari fauces usque perducunt. Ille vero, **fumigantes aestuantis** infernī cavernas prospectans, omnia *tormenta*, quae prius a *malignis spiritibus* *perpessus* est, tamquam non ipse *pateretur*, obliviscebatur. Non solum enim **fluctuantium flammaram ignivomos gurgites** illic turgescere cerneret, immo etiam **sulphurei glaciali grandine mixti vortices, globosis sparginibus sidera paene tangentes videbantur**; *maligni* ergo *spiritus* inter **favillantium** voraginum atras cavernas discurrentes, *miserabili fatu animas impiorum diversis cruciatuum generibus torquebant*.

(...they began to drag him through the **cloudy stretches** of the **freezing skies** to the **sound of the horrid beating of their wings**. Now when he had reached the **lofty summit of the sky**, then, *horrible* to relate, lo!, the **region of the northern heavens** seemed to **grow dark with gloomy mists and black clouds**. For there could be seen coming thence to meet them, **innumerable squadrons of foul spirits**. Thus with all their forces joined in one, they turned their way with **immense uproar** into the **thin air**, and carried the aforementioned *servant of Christ*, Guðlac, to the *accursed jaws of hell*. When he indeed beheld the **smoking caverns** of the **glowing infernal region**, he forgot all the *torments* which he had *patiently endured* before at the hands of *wicked spirits*, as though he himself had not been the *sufferer*. For not only could one see **there** the **fiery abyss swelling with surging flames**, but even the **sulphurous eddies of flame mixed with icy hail** seemed almost to touch the stars with **drops of spray**; and *evil spirits* running about amid the **black caverns** and **gloomy abysses** *tortured the souls of the wicked, victims of a wretched fate, with various kinds of torments*.)²⁶

[OE *Life*]

...and þa æfter þon hi hine læddon on þam **ongrylican fiðerum** betwux ða **cealdan** facu þære lyfte. Þa he þa wæs on þære heannysse þære lyfte, þa geseah he ealne norð-dæl heofones, swylce he wære þam **swartestan wolcnum ymbseald swiðlicra þeostra**. Ða geseah he færinga **unmæte werod** þæra *awerigedra gasta* him on gean cuman; and hi þa sona þær tosomne gegaderodon, and hi þa sona ealle þone *halgan* we gelæddon to þam **swertan** tintreh-stowum, helle dura hi hine gebrohton. Ða he þa þær geseah þa *fulnysse* þæs **amyces** and þa **byrnendan lega** and þone *ege* þære **swertan** deobnysse, he þa sona wæs forgitende ealra þara *tintrega* and þæra *wita* þe he fram þam *awyrgedrum gastum* ær *drah* and *apolode*. Hi þa sona þa *awyrgedan gasta* betwux þa **grimlican lega** inhruron and feollon, and þær þara *arleasra manna sawla mid manigfealdum wutum getintregodon*.

(...after that they brought him on their **creaking wings** amidst the **cold regions of the air**. When he was at **this height in the air** he saw all the **north part of heaven** as it were surrounded by the blackest clouds of intense darkness. Then he saw suddenly an **immense host of cursed spirits** come towards him; and they soon gathered together, and forthwith all led the *holy man* to the **black places of torment**, and brought him to **hell's door**. When he

2000); Pseudo-Isidore, *Liber de ordine creaturarum: un anónimo irlandés del siglo VII*, ed. by Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1972).

²⁶ Ch. 31, Colgrave, *Felix's Life*, 104/105.

saw the *foulness* of the **smoke** and the **burning flames**, and the *horror* of the **black abyss**, he quickly forgot all the *torments and the punishments* which he had before suffered and endured from the *accursed spirits*. Then the *cursed spirits* rushed in and tumbled among the *horrible flames*, and there they *tormented with manifold punishments the souls of unrighteous men.*²⁷

The first thing to be said about these descriptions is to note the kind of Hell that pointedly does not take place here. These fiery, smoky caverns stand in stark contrast to the saint's chosen settlement in the fens of East Anglia. Critics have proposed a concordance between Guðlac's fens with the marshlands that hide the submerged hall of Grendel's mother, guarded by malevolent water-beasts.²⁸ Guðlac's vision, though, foregoes this more traditional chthonic environment for an aerial abduction which does not take place in Evagrius's *Vita Antonii*. In contrast to more pedagogic visions of hell, Felix's account of Guðlac's vision is singularly concerned with marrying its substantial physical observations to malignant forces and places: proffering a boiling black cloud of demons, then a cavernous mouth belching fire and swirling smoke mixed with hail, a location into which miserable souls are dumped and stirred around a bit by demons, as in a cauldron. Though the OE account is much compressed and boasts less of a naturalist's eye, it retains this moralisation of Guðlac's sensory experiences; it could be argued that this sparer account makes more starkly visible the collocation of moralising terms and sensations or locations.

Though Gregory's account of Theodoric being dropped into the mouth of a volcano is terse, it might yet be a literary model for Guðlac's hell-mouth visitation; envisioning a narrative experience where an earlier source has mentioned an event is a hallmark of Anglo-Saxon literature.²⁹ The air-dwelling demons that exist in Felix's primary source, Evagrius's

²⁷ Ch. 5, *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Charles Wycliffe Goodwin (London: John Russell Smith, 1848), 36–39.

²⁸ Cf. Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford: OUP, 1951) at 75–76, and more recently, Justin T. Noetzel, 'Monster, Demon, Warrior: St. Guthlac and the Cultural Landscape of the Anglo-Saxon Fens', *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 45 (2014), 105–31.

²⁹ The integration of Lucifer's fall into the Adam and Eve narrative of *Genesis B* is one striking example, but as M. S. Griffith observes, these interpolations occur on smaller scales as well. Discussing the appearance of birds of carnage at biblical battles, he notes 'poets felt the beasts to be a compulsory element of battle narration. They do not advance the action, but they are symbolically essential to it, and cannot be eliminated without destroying

Vita Antonii, are in Felix's telling historicised to correspond with the OE *Genesis* account of renegade angels cast down from the celestial to mundane heavens. In contemporaneous Irish hagiography, these demons take material, if transient, shape and their workings are frequently audible and visible in storms and other meteorological disturbances. This might represent an opportunity for spiritual battle; St Columba once spent a day in combat with a 'foul and very black array of demons making war against him with iron spits', and when repulsed, that cloud attacked monasteries elsewhere with pestilence.³⁰ Similarly, the Irish pseudo-Isidore was the source for Bede's recounting that when the former angels who now inhabit the lower heavens appear to people, they may take on shapes which resemble their just deserts.³¹

While other literary visions of Hell may look like St Guðlac's, especially those furnished as well with saints and seeming to provide a similar cautionary tale, the conceptual configuration of these visions differs. St Guðlac's vision is often said to have been influenced by the earlier *Visio Pauli* (late-fourth century) or Bede's accounts of the visions of Furseus (set *ca* 633) and Drythelm (*ca* 700).³² Yet the *Visio Pauli*'s episodic narrative structure delves into punishments and locales appropriate to gradations of sinners of particular types and degrees: a spiritual guide explains the judgments of poor souls standing to certain depths in a river of fire, being devoured by beasts, or getting tossed into foul pits. Furseus has a guided visionary flight, but while he sees a dark valley below similar to the biblical Gehenna, his real destination is Heaven. Furseus's visionary flight in particular dramatizes the popular belief that demons contended for the souls of the recently departed as they made their way

its poetic coherence': M. S. Griffith, 'Convention and originality in the Old English "beasts of battle" typescene', *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993), 179–99, at 184.

³⁰ 3.8, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, ed. and trans. by Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 193.

³¹ Ch. 25, Bede, *De natura rerum*, as noted by Kendall and Wallis, 89.

³² For the Latin, see *Visio sancti Pauli: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin together with Nine Texts*, ed. by T. Silverstein, Studies and Documents 4 (London: Christophers, 1935); Furseus 3.19 and Drythelm 5.12, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: OUP, 1969; repr. 2001), at 268–77, 488–99. Eng. trans.: *Heaven and Hell*, 13–46, 57–64, respectively.

toward Heaven, and that a guardian angel or angels might offer protection. The hell-mouth described in Drythelm's vision perhaps most closely corresponds to Guðlac's vision, with its souls trapped in globes of flame, rising and falling in stench and ash and tormented by tong-wielding demons, but differs in many other respects: Drythelm has fallen seriously ill, and his vision is a guided perambulation to a dark valley. This valley is, however, purgatory, not Hell, and offers a glimpse of a beautiful field where the holy await their resurrection.

In contrast, Guðlac's vision is not the result of a near-death experience, and his notice of what could be easily taken for the smoke of an eruption in the north leads to demons carrying him off to the horrors of the hell-mouth. When his guardian spirit belatedly arrives, Bartholomew offers no explanation but simply orders the demons to put Guðlac back. In the context of comparable visions, Guðlac's vision is much less pedagogically- or theologically-minded than portentous, a presentiment of the onrushing fate of the sinful. Because, in Felix's *Vita*, Guðlac's vision of hell first appears in the north, there is a further conceptual complication. Felix writes: '*ecce septentrionalis caeli plaga fuscis atrarum nubium caliginibus nigrescere videbatur*' ('the region of the northern heavens seemed to grow dark with gloomy mists and black clouds', in Colgrave's translation), where *septentrionalis* relates to the polar wind Boreas (also known as Septentrio), which Bede, following Pliny, says brings cold and clouds.³³ The focalisation of Guðlac's vision is thus quite clearly situated as an interaction between his terrestrial location and meteorological spaces, and it is in this defined area that the hell-mouth appears.³⁴ Regardless of whether this is a narrative reimagining of Gregory's volcano or an apocalyptic source's, Felix's context imposes a specifically East Anglian perspective, I think, to mark the proximity of the danger for the

³³ Ch. 25, Bede, *De natura rerum*, as discussed in Kendall and Wallis, 90.

³⁴ Classically, the septentrional region of the sky makes reference to both its weather and winds, and to the stars which were supposed to influence them.

English audience. It is not implausible that this impending doom was related to the association of *circa* 800 *anno Domini* with the year 6000 *anno mundi*.³⁵

An undercurrent of apocalypticism would help explain why Felix's narrative, during Guðlac's vision particularly, makes free use of polysemous imagery, producing quite different readings depending on the frame within which they are read (and creating impossible dilemmas for translators such as Colgrave). In Felix's Latin, for instance, it is possible to see, in addition to dark and stormy clouds, a dark (*fuscis*) cloud made up of demons with buzzing wings: a plague (*plaga*) of locusts, a double-image drawn from biblical apocalypse. In the Vulgate's Apocalypse of St John, the visionary says: '*et aperuit puteum abyssi et ascendit fumus putei sicut fumus fornacis magnae et obscuratus est sol et aer de fumo putei*' ('and he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the pit rose smoke like a great furnace's smoke, and the sun and the air are darkened from the pit's smoke'). Out of the smoke come strange locusts: '*et habebant loricas sicut loricas ferreas et vox alarum earum sicut vox curruum equorum multorum currentium in bellum*' ('and they were wearing breastplates [which looked] like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings [sounded] like the noise of many horse-chariots running to war').³⁶ The OE *Life*, arriving perhaps two centuries later, makes little attempt to retain this kind of prophetic language. It is worth considering whether the remarkable literary presence that Guðlac enjoys is partly due to his vision having indeed been followed by 'a host of cursed spirits' arriving from the north, bringing fire down on the unrighteous. Crowland itself is said to have been sacked and

³⁵ Benjamin Arnold suggests that one benefit seen in adopting Bede's AD reckoning was to tamp down on this kind of millenarianism: see Arnold, 'Eschatological Imagination and the Program of Roman Imperial and Ecclesiastical Renewal at the End of the Tenth Century', in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950–1050*, ed. by Richard Landes, Andrew Gow, and David C. Van Meter (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 271–87, at 273.

³⁶ Apoc. of John 9. 2, 9, in *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, 4th edn., ed. by B. Fischer, R. Gryson, R. Weber, *et. al.* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 1882–1906, at 1890. My Eng. translation.

burned by Danes in 870, and any subsequent translator would, I think, have struggled not to see a connection between that event and Guðlac's vision.³⁷

Before turning to the Icelandic conceptualisation of volcanic activity, it is worth briefly mentioning a later conceptual arrangement that is cousin to Guðlac's envisioned volcanic hell-mouth: in this instance the importation of patristic volcanic hell-mouths to an area north of the British Isles seems to correspond with at least legendary knowledge of the existence of active islands there. In the ninth-century-or-earlier *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis*, mountains are multiplied as islands in the oceanic desert and Hell figured as a volcanic island, or islands, in the north. In chapter 23, after having been blown northward for eight days, Brendan and his monks come upon an island of angry smiths, and one throws a lump of slag from his forge at them:

The sea, where it fell, began to boil, as if a volcano were erupting there [...] It looked as if the whole island were ablaze, like one big furnace, and the sea boiled, just as a cooking pot full of meat boils when it is well plied with fire.³⁸

On the one hand, this island, with its fires, Vulcan-at-his-forge figure, and cooking pot metaphor, relates to the tradition typified by Gregory's '*Vulcani*' story. But like Guðlac's hell-mouth, it is placed in the north, and carrying on, the monks sail by another volcanic island-mountain, smoky at the top and surrounded by sheer cliffs as dark as coal, which shoots flames up to the ether and then inhales them again. The legend of Brendan is famous of course for latterly scholarly attempts to identify its islands and seas, some more speculative than others.³⁹ But the *Navigatio* does seem to point toward the Orkney, Shetland,

³⁷ One might compare this to Ælfric's recruitment of Judith, in his 'On the Old and New Testament', as a figure of godly resistance to the Danes, writing that her example should encourage the English: '*eowerne eard mid wæmnum bewerian wiþ onwinnendne here*' ('to defend your land with weapons against the invading force', my translation). *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. by S. J. Crawford, EETS os 160 (London: OUP, 1922), 48.

³⁸ *The Voyage of St Brendan: Representative Versions of the Legend in English Translation*, ed. by W. R. J. Barron and Glyn S. Burgess, trans. by John J. O'Meara of Latin Version (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 13–64, at 54–55.

³⁹ Cf. Geoffrey Ashe, *Land to the West: St. Brendan's Voyage to America* (New York: Viking Press, 1962); Honor Walsh, 'Did St. Brendan Discover Brazil?', *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of*

and Faroe Islands, perhaps Iceland as well, in terms of their geographic relation to Ireland. Recent archaeological research indicates that someone was growing barley oats on the Faroes in the sixth century, making a possibility of the ninth-century monk Dícúill's (*De mensura orbis*, 7.2) claim that much earlier *peregrini* had settled islands two days and nights' sail from the northern British Isles before being driven off by Norwegian pirates.⁴⁰ In contrast, Guðlac's vision makes no such claims about its fiery caverns—all we know is that the saint is carried aloft and brought to the hell-mouth by demons arriving from the north. The crucial conceptual anchor is the hell-mouth's location *relative* to Guðlac's position near the East Anglian coast, not the precise details of its geographic instantiation.

The cognitive structure of Guðlac's prophetic vision, asserting an Anglo-Saxon focalisation of its patristic Christian sources, differs substantially from the portents recounted in the tenth-or-early-eleventh-century poem *Vǫluspá*, which survives whole in the Codex Regius and Hauksbók manuscripts, and which also yokes the enormity of its observed physical disturbances to eschatology. While Felix as an Anglo-Saxon Christian, presumably a monk (although commissioned hagiographers were not always), wrote comfortably within the patristic tradition that could supply him with a volcanic hell-mouth, the mind or minds behind the visionary *Vǫluspá* imagined a volcanic fire which consumes the world of the old gods, before a rebirth. It is in the main considered a pre-Christian response to a Christianising social imaginary; John McKinnell has argued that it was composed 'either in the late heathen period or in the first half-century or so of Icelandic Christianity', noting that while the poem's cultural bias is pre-conversion, it is not uninterested in using Christian material.⁴¹ The persistence of this mythic Norse world view is seen in one of the most explicit literary

Philadelphia 38/4 (1927), 377–84; W. H. Babcock, 'St. Brendan's Explorations and Islands', *Geographical Review* 8/1 (1919), 37–46.

⁴⁰ For a synopsis of these archeological discoveries, see Símun V. Arge, 'Viking Faroes: Settlement, Paleoeconomy, and Chronology', *Journal of the North Atlantic* 7 (2014–15), 1–17.

⁴¹ John McKinnell, 'Vǫluspá and the Feast of Easter', *Alvíssmál* 12 (2008), 3–28, at 9.

descriptions of volcanic eruption, the thirteenth-century poem *Hallmundarkviða*, provided by the mountain-dwelling giant Hallmundr, whose recitation is included in *Bergþúa þátr*.

Icelandic texts in general tread conspicuously around the volcanism in the room. In his article on the topic, Oren Falk notes that not only are mentions of volcanic activity sparse in the *Landnamabók*, but they can also be surprisingly glancing. Falk offers the entirety of one laconic example:

Hrafn hafnarlykill [...] foretold a volcanic eruption (*eldsuppkváma*, lit. “coming up of fire”) and removed his farm to Lágey.⁴²

Falk notes as well the occurrences in which Þórir Grímsson sees what sounds like a giant (big and ugly) in an iron rowboat head up Kaldárós just before a lava flow, and Molda-Gnúpr’s timely distribution of his land to settlers occurs before a lava flow as well.⁴³ The same word is used in both cases, *jarðeldr*, to describe the hot lava, while *hraun* refers to the (cooled) lava fields. The flash flood that provokes Loðmundr’s sorcerers’ duel with his neighbour to reroute the swollen river is, Falk suggests, most likely descriptive of a sub-glacial eruption below Myrdalsjökull.⁴⁴ This conceptual emphasis on portents and details of physical volcanic activity differs from the Guðlac material firstly in that the portents warn of eruption, rather than use volcanicity as an apocalyptic signifier, but as Falk observes of and *Hallmundarkviða* as well, ‘neither poem insists on viewing the disruption of the landscape as an exercise of supernaturally endowed will.’⁴⁵ Volcanic activity conceptualised as the doings of supernatural beings in an adjacent but interconnected plane meant that moralisation of the event was unnecessary to describe it. Falk considers this conceptual arrangement compatible with the importation of patristic material discussed earlier, in which volcanic fires serve quite

⁴² Oren Falk, ‘The Vanishing Volcanoes: Fragments of Fourteenth-Century Icelandic Folklore’, *Folklore* 118/1 (2007), 1–22, at 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Falk, ‘Volcanoes’, 3–4.

⁴⁵ Falk, ‘Volcanoes’, 8.

literally as hellish torment, but I find these conceptual systems difficult to unite. Instead, I would argue that the existing compartmentalisation of the mythic Norse world view, its adjacency to the intentional thought-world of humans, meant that mythic understandings of natural forces like volcanicity did not necessarily compete, cognitively, with Christian conceptual *schemata* in which places and natural forces were more or less holy. As George Lakoff has theorised, any given mind is more likely to adopt a distinct ideological perspective (where ‘ideology’ is understood as a particular constellation of conceptual frames) depending on initial framing conditions.⁴⁶ Those conceptual frames which are mapped to the lived environment, however, are not easily displaced.

Recent research on *Völuspá* demonstrates how the poem sits not only within the cultural moment of conversion, but potentially responds to the 936 and 940 eruptions of Eldgjá, offering a view of Icelandic ‘sense-making’ of volcanic activity. Volcanologist Clive Oppenheimer, working with a group of scholars that also included medievalist Andy Orchard, compared ice-core analysis, tree-ring records, and meteorological reports found in Irish, European, and Chinese annals to aid in ‘triangulating’ the eruptions.⁴⁷ Research on several fronts supports this time period:

A report for 939 from the [Irish] Annals has been interpreted by McCarthy and Breen (1997a, 1997b), Oman *et al* (2006) and McCormick *et al* (2007) as a direct observation of Eldgjá’s volcanic plume. This report remarks that ‘the sun was the colour of blood from the beginning of day to midday on the following day’ (*Chronicon Scotorum*), thus extending for too long to be a solar eclipse.⁴⁸

It is perhaps significant in this context that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles evince a disregard for meteorology, outside of the appearance of comets, which were associated with regnal

⁴⁶ Lakoff discusses this dynamic at length in the popular *Don’t Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate: the Essential Guide for Progressives* (White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green Pub., 2004). Also of interest in this context may be Lakoff’s ‘Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment’, *Environmental Communication*, 4/1 (2010), 70–81.

⁴⁷ Clive Oppenheimer; Orchard, Andy; Stoffel, Markus; *et al.*, ‘The Eldgjá eruption: timing, long-range impacts and influence on the Christianisation of Iceland’, *Climatic Change* 147 (2018), 369–81.

⁴⁸ Francis Ludlow, *et al.*, ‘Medieval Irish chronicles reveal persistent volcanic forcing of severe winter cold events, 431–1649 CE’, *Environmental Research Letters* 8 (2013), 1–10, at 7.

transition (the observational detail in Felix's account of Guðlac's portentous vision making it an outlier).

On the literary front, Oppenheimer, *et al.*, point to stanzas 41 and 57, particularly, of *Völuspá* as references to volcanic activity:

41: *Fylliz fjörvi
feigra manna,
rýðr ragna sjöt
rauðum dreyra;
svart var ða sólskin
of sumur eptir,
veðr öll válynd.
Vituð ér enn—eða hva?*

57: *Sól tær sortna,
sigr fold í mar,
hverfa af himni
heiðar stjörnur;
geisar eimi
við aldrnara,
leikr hár hiti
við himin sjalfan.*

(41: He [the wolf] is filled with the life-blood of doomed men, reddens the powers' dwellings with ruddy gore; the sun-beams turn black the following summer, all weather woeful: do you know yet, or what?

57: The sun turns black, land sinks into sea; the bright stars scatter from the sky. Flame flickers up against the world-tree; fire flies high against heaven itself.)⁴⁹

In this reading, steam and magma shoot up from the ground, and ash clouds lead to red skies and subsequent darkened, frigid summers, and indeed the researchers' methodology relies in part on the impact of lingering volcanic winters caused by the aerosol that would have dispersed solar energy in the troposphere. It is worth underscoring the conceptual argument that structures this account. The image of the wolf Fenrir swallowing the sun is decomposed into a portentous dynamic in which the sun dims, crops fail, and scarcity prompts the breakdown of social structure: a striking appearance of the famine wolf so prevalent in later

⁴⁹ Stanzas 41 and 57 from *Völuspá*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1952), at 113, 142, respectively; English version is *The Elder Edda: myths, gods and heroes from the Viking world*, trans. by Andy Orchard (London: Penguin, 2011), 11 and 13.

medieval writings. This fascinating sequence links eruption, a lingering dimness to the sun, and poor harvests, but refuses depictions of a purely infernal environment by keeping volcanic agency (in the form of giants and pagan gods) on a separate, if porous, plane of reality. I imagine that it is Orchard who notes in the study that the appearance of the fire-giant Surt is a geographical reference, locating the eruption in the south; and that *Völuspá*'s deployment of this cataclysmic event is as well a narration of the cultural upheaval of Christianisation. Still *Völuspá* clearly provides an alternative to the eschatologically volcanic hell-mouth—rather than offering a symbol of purely destructive power, the poem does not forget to note that eruptions bring the rise of new land.

Another explicit literary reference to volcanic eruption comes when the mountain-dwelling giant Hallmundr, whose recitation (known as *Hallmundarkviða*) is provided in *Bergbúa þáttur*, admits they are a consequence of his heavy-footed striding about:

*Spretta kámir klettar;
knýr víðis þol hriðir;
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)⁵⁰

Declan Taggart, whose translation appears above, thinks this 'extraordinary mud' ('*undarligr aurr*') could be a technical term referring to lahars, superfast hot mudflows that occur when a pyroclastic flow meets water. Conceptually, the energies of the earth remain linked to the triggering giant figure, even if only poetically in this thirteenth-century *þáttur* from a Christianised Iceland. Because the giant's agency (walking around) and his impact (the

⁵⁰ 6. 1–4, *Bergbúa þáttur* in *Hardar saga. Bárðar saga. Thorskfirdinga saga. Flóamanna saga ...*, ed. by Thórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, ÍF 13 (Reykjavík: Íslenzka fornritafélag, 1991), 439–50, at 45–46; English trans. by Declan Taggart, 'All the Mountains Shake: Seismic and Volcanic Imagery in the Old Norse Literature of Þórr', *Scripta Islandica* 68 (2017), 99–115, 112.

destructive effects of an eruption) exist on separate conceptual planes, they forestall a Gregorian reading in which a soul's spiritual deserts collapse into physical volcanic fire.

This evidence from Icelandic texts reveals a lived acquaintanceship with volcanism and active tectonics, resulting in conceptualisations quite distinct even from Pliny's and Isidore's naturalist theorising about subterranean winds bringing about earthquakes and fiery eruptions.⁵¹ As *Hallmundarkviða* illustrates, even after the arrival of these authorities' texts conceptualising volcanic activity outside of classical, patristic, or eschatological frames remained an Icelandic habit of mind. In this context, it is interesting to compare the conceptual fusion found in the thirteenth-century Norwegian text *King's Mirror* (*Konungs skuggsjá*). Within a father-son dialogue format, the son asks of Iceland: 'What do you think of the extraordinary fire which rages constantly in that country? Does it rise out of some natural peculiarity of the land, or can it be that it has its origin in the spirit world?' The father responds in a manner that both admits patristic knowledge while insisting on a 'Norse' perspective, rooted in place, generating a new, hybrid conceptualisation:

'But concerning the extraordinary fires which burn there, I scarcely know what to say, for they possess a strange nature. I have heard that in Sicily there is an immense fire of unusual power which consumes both earth and wood. I have also heard that Saint Gregory has stated in his *Dialogues* that there are places of torment in the fires of Sicily. But men are much more inclined to believe that there must be such places of torment in those fires in Iceland. For the fires in Sicily feed on living things, as they consume both earth and wood. [...] Both these things, earth and wood, the fires of Sicily can burn and consume as nourishment. The fire of Iceland, however, will burn neither earth nor wood, though these be cast upon it; but it feeds upon stone and hard rock and draws vigour from these as other fires do from dry wood. And never is rock or stone so hard but that this fire will melt it like wax and then burn it like fat oil. But when a tree is cast upon the fire, it will not burn but be scorched only. Now since this fire feeds on dead things only and rejects everything that other fires devour, it must surely be said that it is a dead fire; and it seems most likely that it is the fire of hell, for in hell all things are dead.'⁵²

⁵¹ See Pliny on earthquakes and volcanoes in *Naturalis historia*, 2.79–83, in *Histoire naturelle, Livre II 2*, ed. and French trans. by Jean Beaujeu (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1950); Isidore of Seville, *De natura rerum*, 46.1–3, in *Traité de la nature*, ed. by J. Fontaine, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études Hispaniques 28 (Bordeaux: Féret, 1960); and Isidore's *Etymologies*, 14.1.2–3, in *Étimologias 2*, ed. and trans. by Jose Oroz Reta and Manuel A. Marcos Casquero (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1983), 164, and esp. his mention of Gehenna (14.9.9), 208–10.

⁵² *The King's Mirror*, trans. by Laurence Marcellus Larson (London: OUP, 1917), 126–28.

Nonetheless the father concludes by agreeing with the faraway *Chronicle of Lanercost* that the signal importance of Iceland's marvels of ice and fire are that they are exemplary proofs of Hell's existence: 'But now no one can deny what he sees before his own eyes, since we hear exactly the same things about the tortures of hell as those which one can see on the island called Iceland.'⁵³ Again, the anchor of place exerts its pull on this conceptual schema for Hell. While for the Guðlac texts, a geographical-meteorological-theological complex called 'north' could easily harbour a hell-mouth's outcast evil spirits (a vision later verified by Danish incursion), we can see that Icelandic and Norwegian responses negotiate differently Iceland's place as the intersection of 'north', volcanism, and pre-Christian belief. Each of these disparate conceptualisations of Hell coordinates, crucially, with the lived environment, the social and physical geographies of the readers of these texts, hinting at the pluralism in perspectives around the North Sea.

⁵³ *Mirror*, 131.

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