

Guðrún Gjúkadóttir of *Völsunga saga* and *The Elder Edda* is the focus of this investigation into portrayals of ‘monstrous’ women in historical fiction. Through the production of a creative work, *A Cup of Dark Wine*, and accompanying exegesis, this project explores how Guðrún represents female monstrosity and monstrous motherhood within her own cultural environment before exploring how these ideas have changed over time, and unpacking what these changes mean for writers retelling stories of historical women today.

My exegesis examines ideas of gender, motherhood, and monstrous femininity in the Old Norse context, focusing on theories of gender and motherhood posited by Carol Clover in ‘Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe’ (1993) and Jenny Jochens in ‘Old Norse Motherhood’ (1996). I argue that Old Norse views of gender and motherhood differ from those of other early medieval European societies. As a result, Guðrún is perceived to be a less monstrous figure within her own society, but might nevertheless be considered monstrous by our Western twenty-first century standards.

I also explore the difficulties of addressing modern concepts like feminism within historical fiction and consider the significance of “accuracy” and “authenticity” within these narratives, using Lucy Holland’s *Sistersong* (2021), Madeline Miller’s *Circe* (2019), and Genevieve Gornichec’s *The Witch’s Heart* (2021) as case studies. Christa Wolf’s *Medea: Stimmen* (1998) is a touchstone for discussing inclusions, exclusions, and changes to Guðrún’s story in my own novel. Finally, I argue for the importance of writing complex historical women as a means of moving beyond the angel/monster binary typical of such characters. My novel, *A Cup of Dark Wine* is a practical engagement with these ideas, illustrating the responsibilities and considerations writers of historical fiction have when representing historical ‘bad’ women.