



SAGA-BOOK

VOL. XLII

VIKING SOCIETY FOR NORTHERN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

2018

VIKING SOCIETY FOR NORTHERN RESEARCH
OFFICERS 2017–2018

President

Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir, Ph.D., University College London.

Hon. Secretaries

Haki Antonsson, M.Litt, Ph.D., University College London.
David Ashurst, B.Sc, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., Durham University.

Hon. Treasurer

David Reid, B.A., University College London.

Hon. Assistant Secretary

Richard North, B.A., Ph.D., University College London.

Saga-Book Editors

ALISON FINLAY, B.A., B.Phil., D.Phil., Birkbeck, University of London.

Christina Lee, M.A., Ph.D., University of Nottingham.

John McKinnell, M.A., Durham University.

Carl Phelpstead, B.A., M.Phil., D.Phil., Cardiff University.

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, B.A., Ph.D., University of Cambridge.

Reviews Editors

Alison Finlay

Erin Goeres, B.A., M.A., D.Phil., University College London.

ISSN: 0305-9219

Printed by Short Run Press Limited, Exeter

CONTENTS

WHY WAS LEIFR EIRÍKSSON CALLED ‘LUCKY’? AGAIN. Oren Falk	5
PURE FLESH AND VIRGIN EARTH IN <i>LILJA</i> . Megan Gilge	13
AFTER ADULTHOOD: THE METAMORPHOSES OF THE ELDERLY IN THE <i>ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR</i> . Thomas Morcom	25
THE FORMULA IN ICELANDIC SAGA PROSE. Daniel Sävborg	51
E. R. EDDISON’S <i>EGIL’S SAGA</i> : TRANSLATION AND SCHOLARSHIP IN INTER-WAR OLD NORTHERNISM. Matthew Townend	87
<i>NJÁLS SAGA</i> AND THE BATTLE OF CLONTARF: A CASE OF VERNACULAR SOURCE TRANSMISSION? Rosemary Power	125
FIGURA IN <i>NJÁLS SAGA</i> . Heather O’Donoghue	153

REVIEWS

SKALDIC POETRY OF THE SCANDINAVIAN MIDDLE AGES III. POETRY FROM TREATISES ON POETICS. Edited by Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold. (Erin Michelle Goeres)	167
EDDIC, SKALDIC AND BEYOND. POETIC VARIETY IN MEDIEVAL ICELAND AND NORWAY. Edited by Martin Chase. (Kate Heslop)	170
THE SAINTS IN OLD NORSE AND EARLY MODERN ICELANDIC POETRY. By Kirsten Wolf and Natalie M. Van Deusen. (Martin Chase) ..	173
AUÐNARÓÐAL. BARÁTTAN UM ÍSLAND 1096–1281. By Sverrir Jakobs- son. (Úlfar Bragason. Trans. Anna H. Yates)	175
ISLAND. EIN MYTHOLOGISCHER FÜHRER. By Matthias Egeler. (Rebecca Merkelbach)	178
THE SAGA OF THE VOLSUNGS WITH THE SAGA OF RAGNAR LOTHBROK. Translated by Jackson Crawford. (Rory McTurk)	180
AVALON, 66° NORD. ZU FRÜHGESCHICHTE UND REZEPTION EINES MYTHOS. By Matthias Egeler. (Marianne Kalinke)	184

ISLANDS IN THE WEST. CLASSICAL MYTH AND THE MEDIEVAL NORSE AND IRISH GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATION. By Matthias Egeler. (Kristen Mills)	186
THE REALITY OF THE FANTASTIC. THE MAGICAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UNIVERSE OF LATE MEDIEVAL ICELANDIC SAGA MANU- SCRIPTS. By Hans Jacob Orning. (Emily Lethbridge)	189
THE AGE OF THE VIKINGS. By Anders Winroth. (Haki Antonsson)	195
THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY INTO THE EARLY MEDIEVAL INSULAR WORLD. CONVERTING THE ISLES I. Edited by Roy Flechner and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh with Eric Cambridge. (Clare Downham)	197
VIKING BRITAIN: AN EXPLORATION. By Thomas Williams (Rory McTurk)	199
THE TRANSMISSION OF <i>BEOWULF</i> . LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND SCRIBAL BEHAVIOR. By Leonard Neidorf. (Peter Orton)	201

WHY WAS LEIFR EIRÍKSSON CALLED ‘LUCKY’? AGAIN

BY OREN FALK

Cornell University

PHILOLOGY IS TREACHEROUS GROUND, onto whose mudflats hobnail-booted historians trudge at their peril. It is therefore with great trepidation that I hazard the following tentative steps, especially after watching so illustrious an historian as Gunnar Karlsson vanish into the quicksand. His recent short article has sought to ‘demonstrat[e] that in Old Norse the word *heppinn* could have the sense “one who brings luck” and

that this is the sense in which it is applied to Leifr Eiríksson . . . The word *lucky* in modern English can be applied to an *object* that brings luck . . . but its application to a *person* implies the primary sense ‘attended by good luck; fortunate, successful, prosperous’. Calling him Leif the Lucky in English is misleading (2017, 45–46, emphases mine).

In this note, I argue that Gunnar has failed to establish his claim on any philological *terra firma*. Those who would wish to deny Leifr Eiríksson the English appellation ‘the Lucky’ must find a more secure bedrock for anchoring their assertion.

Gunnar’s argument may be schematised as follows:

- A. The adjective *heppinn* (and its weak byform, *inn heppni*) has, in modern Icelandic, approximately the same meaning as *lucky* in modern English, and that has been the prevalent understanding of Leifr’s byname *inn heppni*.
- B. The most significant and reliable (though not the oldest) of seven medieval sources for Leifr’s cognomen is *Grœnlendinga saga*, which explains that it is derived from his successful rescue of some castaways in the Greenland Sea.
- C. In view of how the nickname is commonly understood, the account in *Grœnlendinga saga* seems puzzling, since the lucky ones would appear to be those rescued, not their rescuer.
- D. The hypothesis is therefore formulated that ‘*heppinn* could refer to someone who tended to or was qualified to do something good or have some positive influence on others’ (2017, 40); in other words, someone who bestowed rather than enjoyed good luck.

- E. Old Norse adjectives ending in *-inn* often describe the effect a person has on others; some sixty-three examples are adduced, two of which are analysed to demonstrate the validity of the claim.
- F. Seven lexicographers' and modern translators' renditions of *heppinn* into modern English, Dano-Norwegian and German are consulted; all either point towards the traditional understanding of the adjective or are inconclusive.
- G. Seven instances of the adjective *heppinn* from prose texts¹ are compared to the use regarding Leifr; only one of these could arguably be interpreted to mean that the person so described imparts good luck on others.
- H. Six further examples of poetic uses of the adjective are discussed; of these, three—two of them from the twelfth-century *Leiðarvísan*—are said 'definitely to refer to someone who brings luck to other people' (2017, 44).

As a native speaker of neither Icelandic nor English, I plead agnosticism on point A above and accept Gunnar's claim on faith. Nor do I have any quarrel with points B, C and F, and the hypothesis in D certainly merits consideration. Point E, at least on the strength of the two instances Gunnar analyses, does not persuade; neither *fáskiptin[n]* in *Laxdæla saga* (1934, 66) nor *frændrækinn* in *Hungrvaka* (2002, 23) appears to possess the transitive quality Gunnar sees in them ('describing a person in terms of an effect he/she has on someone else', 2017, 40). Admittedly, both adjectives refer to socially interactive qualities—they indicate reluctance to engage in conversation and strong familial attachment, respectively—so, unlike the enjoyment of *höpp* usually understood by *heppinn*, neither are they entirely intransitive. In any case, point E does not appear to me as pivotal to Gunnar's analysis as some of the others, so, for the sake of argument, let us provisionally grant that it may not be impossible for adjectives with the morphology of *heppinn* to describe a person in terms of an effect s/he has on others.

This leaves us to consider points G and H, the thirteen examples of the adjective *heppinn* collected from various dictionaries and analysed for comparison to the case of Leifr Eiríksson. In nine of these, Gunnar himself concludes that the meaning 'one who brings luck' does not apply, or at any rate cannot be conclusively demonstrated to apply. We therefore need only

¹ Gunnar notes that sixteen such instances are referenced in the database of the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog / Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, but from this tally must be deducted two errors, he finds, as well as the seven instances that refer to Leifr Eiríksson (2017, 42).

consider the four cases—a prose usage from *Mágus saga jarls* (1949, 391) and three poetic instances from *Háttatal* (Snorri Sturluson 2012, 296–97) and *Leiðarvísan* (2007, 153, 160)—in which Gunnar finds this meaning ‘likely’ (2017, 43) or ‘definit[e]’ (2017, 44). Two of these four examples are in fact far from ironclad, however, so in the interest of brevity I will focus only on what seem to me the two strongest instances, those from *Leiðarvísan*.²

Leiðarvísan is a twelfth-century *drápa* belonging to the so-called Sunday Letter (or Epistle from Heaven) tradition—specifically, to that branch of the tradition in which the Letter’s admonitory message is scaffolded by the so-called Sunday List, a recollection of major events in Christian mythology said to have happened on the Lord’s day (cf. Lees 1985). The poem uses the adjectives *heppinn* to describe God Himself at His creation of the angels (st. 14, 2007, 153) and *allheppinn* to describe the archangel Gabriel at the moment of the Annunciation (st. 22, 2007, 160). Arguing that the adjective *lucky* (or modern Icelandic *heppinn*) suits the creature better than the Creator and the recipient of Gabriel’s prediction more than its deliverer, Gunnar reasons that (*all*)*heppinn* in this poem must rather describe persons who bestow good luck on others (2017, 45).

That these two instances of the adjective occur in the context of a religious poem should, however, immediately give us pause. Unlike *Grænlandinga saga* and other presumably native Norse works, *Leiðarvísan* introduces the possibility of influence, adaptation, even translation from foreign sources. Gunnar does usefully consider the issue of translation (point F above), but he only looks at how *heppinn* has been rendered from Old Norse into various modern vernaculars, neglecting to consider the range of medieval languages whose impact on Old Norse phraseology might be witnessed in texts such as *Leiðarvísan*, or which might offer illuminating parallels both antecedent to and contemporary with medieval Norse usage.

Unfortunately, no specific source text for *Leiðarvísan* has been identified, making it impossible to compare (*all*)*heppinn* with whatever original turn(s)

² The example from *Mágus saga jarls* is, as Gunnar himself admits, rather convoluted, not least in that ‘it is not clear why it was considered [a great] deed to kill a beggar’ (2017, 43), the act for which a character is described as *heppnastur*. I therefore do not find Gunnar’s conclusion that the adjective characterises a lucky feat ‘beneficent to others rather than to [the character] himself’ compelling (2017, 43). In the stanza from *Háttatal*, a ship’s planks are characterised as *heppnar*, which Gunnar deems ‘dubious . . . if read literally’ (2017, 45). Examples of personified ships in the poetry are legion, however (see, e.g., Jesch 2001, 177, for ships described as acting ‘without any human agency’), making it in my view unnecessary to transfer the luck enjoyed from the hull to its ‘owners or crew’ (2017, 45).

of phrase it might calque. Katrina Attwood and others have pointed out some affinities with versions in Old English and Middle High German (*Leiðarvísan* 2007, 139), but none of these, as far as I can tell, contains a relevant characterisation of God or Gabriel that could shed light on the *drápa*'s adjectival choices. Regardless of the poem's specific extra-Norse source, however, one relevant—if not, indeed, *the* single most relevant—linguistic context to be considered in evaluating any rendition of religious matter into Old Norse must be the *lingua franca* of Christendom. Even if the author of *Leiðarvísan* reworked the theme from a proximate vernacular source, the linguistic framework that must have governed much of his thinking about Christian doctrine and legend would have been Latin. This is perhaps especially true for content acquired in the cultural *potpourri* of twelfth-century Frankish Jerusalem (2007, 138). We should, therefore, turn our attention to identifying the Latin vocabulary which *heppinn* might conceivably reflect.

When Sveinbjörn Egilsson (whose original *Lexicon poëticum* Gunnar appears not to have consulted) sought to gloss *heppinn* into nineteenth-century Latin, he proposed 'felix, fortunatus, secunda fortuna usus' (1860, 323); *allheppinn* he rendered 'perquam felix, faustus' (1860, 11). (Incidentally, Sveinbjörn found no difficulty in accepting *heppinn* as an element in 'Epith[eta] dei' and 'navis', 1860, 323.) According to Charleton Lewis and Charles Short, three Latin terms chiefly occupy the semantic space held in modern English by *lucky* and in modern Icelandic by *heppinn*: these are *beatus*, defined as 'happy, prosperous, blessed, fortunate' (1879, 233), *felix* 'lucky, happy, fortunate' (1879, 733) and *fortunatus* 'prospered, prosperous, lucky, happy, fortunate' (1879, 773). (Of course, other words also sometimes wander into this semantic space: for example, *dexter* 'favorable, propitious, fortunate' (1879, 567), *prosperus* 'agreeable to one's wishes, favorable, fortunate, prosperous' (1879, 1476), or *secundus* 'favorable, propitious, fortunate' (1879, 1655)). Sveinbjörn presumably omitted *beatus* from consideration because it is so strongly tinged with the specific Christian colouring of benediction; but this sense, too, may in fact be perfectly appropriate for *heppinn*: the distinction between being lucky, fortunate, happy and blessed can be exceeding fine. As Gunnar, building on Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson (1957, 236), and on Snorri Sturluson (2014, 56), points out, if *hamingja* can refer to a transportable blessing, why not also *happ* (2017, 40)?³

³ *Þorláks saga B* further hints at the interchangeability of *happ* and *hamingja*. One of its chapter rubrics reads *af Sveini bonda. hinum uhepna* and tells of the misfortunes that befell Sveinn Sturluson when he tried to resist Bishop Þorlákr. The chapter goes on to state that, as a consequence of Sveinn's obduracy, *dro þeim*

It is worth noting that two of the three key descriptors highlighted by Lewis and Short are in fact verbal past participles, not adjectives at all: this effectively rules out ascribing to them the sense Gunnar wishes to assign to Old Norse *heppinn*. Someone characterised as *fortunatus* can only be the beneficiary of *fortuna*, not its bestower (and likewise a *beatus* the recipient of *beatum*, never its distributor).

The question then becomes: could a person conversant with medieval Latin plausibly describe the Annunciating archangel, or even God Himself, as *beatus*, *felix* or *fortunatus*? An affirmative answer would mean that the two strongest examples Gunnar cites in support of his hypothesis would have to be rejected as evidence, since they might very well render a Latin usage into Old Norse.

I have not been able to locate any texts in which *fortunatus* is applied to God. The other two descriptors, however, appear to sit more comfortably on divine shoulders.⁴ Albert Blaise’s dictionary of ecclesiastical Latin traces the development of *beatus* in a specifically Christian sense as a term of veneration (‘bienheureux, béni, saint’ (1954, 112)) applied to the Trinity, the Word, the Holy Ghost, and of course also the Virgin, the saints and other lesser personages. Locating examples of its application to angels is almost trivial; thus, for instance, Augustine compares our mortal lot to that of *angelos immortales beatosque* (*De civitate Dei* 9.15 (1955, 47.263)), a tenth-century *Gesta episcoporum Tungrensium, Traiectensium et Leodiensium* speaks of *beatorum angelorum et hominum spiritus* (Herigerus and Anselm 1846, 176) and William of Ockham reasons concerning a hypothetical *angelo beato* (*Quaestiones variae* 6.11 (1984, 305)). Similarly, Claudianus Mamertus, Francis of Assisi and Ramon Llull all refer to individual archangels as *beati* or *beatissimi* (*De statu animae* 3.6 (1885, 162); *Regula non bullata* 23.6 (1976, 399); *De locutione angelorum* (Prol. 1988, 216)). Both Augustine and the Latin translator of Lactantius use the same adjective to describe God Himself (as ‘souverainement heureux’, explains Blaise (1954, 112)): *solum Deum dicamus beatum; qui tamen vere beatus est, ut maior beatitudo esse non possit* (*De civitate Dei* 11.11 (1955, 48.333)); *solus igitur*

[= Sveinn and his men] . . . *mikla vhamingiu til handa* (*Byskupa sögur* 1938–78, 2.261–62).

⁴ So, too, do other terms from this semantic field. Prudentius, for instance, speaks of the approval of a *dexter Deus* (*Liber cathemerinon* 8.73 (1926, 50); Blaise 1954, 267), and the Psalmist, echoing a common pagan Latin usage (cf. Lewis and Short 1879, 1471), avers that *ipse* [= God] *autem est misericors et propitius* (Ps [iuxta LXX] 77.38, in *Biblia* 1983, 1.868), a characterisation often repeated in the Carolingian *Gregorian Sacramentary* (1915, 30, 31, 101, 178, 179 *et passim*).

deus est qui factus non est . . . impassibilis inmutabilis incorruptus beatus aeternus (*Divinae institutiones* 2.8.44 (1890, 137)). The designation of God as *beatus* is anticipated by St Paul, who speaks of the *evangelium gloriae beati Dei* (I Tim 1.11, in *Biblia* 1983, 2.1831) and of Christ, *beatus et solus potens rex regum et Dominus dominantium* (I Tim 6.15, in *Biblia* 1983, 2.1836). And although Blaise—not unlike Gunnar—engages in impressive definitional gymnastics in his effort to move away from the theologically uncomfortable conclusion that God could receive blessings, the Evangelist seems undeterred: in orthodox Jewish fashion, Zaccharias, father of John the Baptist, cries out *Benedictus Deus Israhel* at the birth of his son (Lc 1, 68, in *Biblia* 1983, 2.1608; cf. the common Hebrew refrain ברוך השם).

Felix likewise occurs not infrequently as a qualifier of both angels and God. Rupert of Deutz, for instance, describes the *felices angeli* living in the celestial Paradise (*De sancta trinitate et operibus eius* 2.27 (1971, 215)), and Bernard of Clairvaux states that *Qui ergo cognoscuntur a Deo et Deum cognoscunt, sancti angeli sunt, qui ab eo felices facti* (*Sermo LXXVII* (1970, 316)). Moving up the celestial hierarchy, Tertullian similarly explains that *solus deus de incorruptibilitatis proprietate felix* (*Adversus Marcionem* 2.16 (1906, 357)), and Thomas Aquinas confirms that the faithful may eat and drink of *qua Deus felix est*, sharing in His feast of divine joys (*Summa contra gentiles* 3.51.2289.c (1961–67, 3.70)). Most tellingly, perhaps, an anonymous, early fifth-century conversation between a pagan and a Christian mistranslates a Sibylline verse as *Felix ille deus, ligno qui pendet ab alto* (*Questions d'un païen à un chrétien* 1.4.6 (1994, 1.88)); the editors note: ‘Le traducteur anonyme inverse le sens des mots grecs qui signifiaient: “Heureux bois auquel Dieu est suspendu”’ (1994, 1.89 n.3).⁵ Later authors, such as a certain twelfth- or thirteenth-century Richard, nevertheless took up this mistranslation without question (*Passio Sancte Katerine* 3.249 (1992, 198)).

This striking poetic statement thus not only confirms that God could be called *felix* by Latinate Christian authors but also that failure to comprehend the source language correctly was no bar to applying an ill-fitting attribute to the Deity. The same could have been true in the transition from Latin to Old Norse. *Heppinn* need not, strictly speaking, have applied to God according to Christian theology or Old Norse lexicography in order to be so applied by the author of *Leiðarvisan*. Alternatively, if we wish to give this Norse poet more credit than his fifth-century colleague evidently deserves, we must concede that *heppinn*, like *beatus*, could very well have been a term appropriate to

⁵ For his invaluable help in locating this and other examples of *felix* applied to *Deus*, I am indebted to Paul Vinhage.

the Lord, even though its primary sense, in Old Norse as in modern Icelandic (and in Latin), was ‘beneficiary of *happ*’ rather than its bestower.

Ultimately, it should not surprise us too much that *beatus, felix* and *heppinn* could be used in ways that jar with our own linguistic—or theological or ontological—instinct. Or, rather, while we historians may bristle at such misuse of language, philologists will likely just nod in sage sympathy. *Pace* Humpty Dumpty (Carroll 2001, 113), words have a way of meaning rather more or less than we think they ought to mean. Gunnar’s consternation at finding *heppinn* grazing beyond the limits fenced off for it to roam is understandable; but his solution, to shift the lexicographical posts so as to enclose for it a new pasture, may be less satisfactory than simply admitting that Old Norse *heppinn*—like its modern English cognate, *happy* (think ‘happy coincidence’), or its synonym, *lucky* (think ‘strike lucky’), or really like all words—sometimes simply refused to stay within the bounds set down for it in the dictionaries. In the philological fenlands, it is the ones insisting on staking out definite plots of ground who are most likely to lose their footing.

Shorn of the comparison to instances of (*all*)*heppinn* in *Leiðarvísan*, the argument for reading Leifr’s cognomen as something other than *lucky* remains inconclusive. Gunnar may, of course, be correct in reading *heppinn* as ‘one who brings luck’, but, with only scant and highly equivocal evidence to confirm his intuition, his case must be left pending until further and firmer grounding can be claimed. Until such time, we may, in my opinion, indulge in the alliterative attraction of labelling Leifr ‘Lucky’ for a little longer.

Bibliography

- Augustine, Aurelius 1955. *De civitate Dei*. Ed. Bernard Dombart and Alphonse Kalb. Corpus Christianorum Series Latina XLVII–XLVIII.
- Bernard of Clairvaux 1970. *Sermones* III. Ed. J. Leclercq and H. Rochais. Sancti Bernardi opera VI.1.
- Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem* 1983. Ed. Robert Weber. 2 vols. 3rd edition.
- Blaise, Albert 1954. *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens*.
- Byskupa sögur* 1938–78. Ed. Jón Helgason. Editiones Arnarnagænae A 13.1–2.
- Carroll, Lewis 2001. *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*.
- Claudianus Mamertus 1885. *De statu animae*. Ed. Augustus Engelbrecht. Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum XI, 18–197.
- Cleasby, Richard and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1957. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. 2nd edition with a supplement by William A. Craigie.
- Francis of Assisi 1976. *Regula non bullata*. Ed. Kajetan Esser. Spicilegium bonaventurianum XIII, 377–401.
- Gregorian Sacramentary* 1915. Ed. H. A. Wilson.
- Gunnar Karlsson 2017. ‘Why was Leifr Eiríksson called “Lucky”?’ *Saga-Book* XLI, 35–48.

- ‘heppinn’. In *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog / Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*. <http://www.onp.hum.ku.dk/webart/h/he/33327cvkalf.htm>
- Herigerus and Anselm 1846. *Gesta episcoporum Tungrensium, Traiectensium et Leodiensium*. Ed. Rudolf Kœpke. Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores VII, 134–234.
- Hungryvaka* 2002. In *Biskupa sögur II*. Ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir. Íslenzk fornrit XVI, 1–43.
- Jesch, Judith 2001. *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse*.
- Lactantius, L. Caelus Firmianus 1890. *Divinae institutiones*. Ed. Samuel Brandt and Georg Laubmann. Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum XIX, 1–672.
- Laxdæla saga* 1934. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit V, 1–248.
- Lees, Clare A. 1985. ‘The “Sunday Letter” and the “Sunday Lists”’. *Anglo-Saxon England* 14, 129–51.
- Leiðarvisan* 2007. Ed. Katrina Attwood. In *Poetry on Christian Subjects* 2007. Ed. Margaret Clunies Ross. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* VII, 137–78.
- Lewis, Charleton T. and Charles Short 1879. *A Latin Dictionary*.
- Llull, Ramon 1988. *De locutione angelorum*. Ed. Antoni Oliver and Michel Senellart. Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis LXXVIII, 213–36.
- Mágus saga jarls him meiri* 1949. In *Riddarasögur II*. Ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 135–429.
- Prudentius, Aurelius Clemens 1926. *Liber Cathemerinon*. Ed. Johannes Bergman. Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum LXI, 5–76.
- Questions d’un païen à un chrétien (Consultationes Zacchei christiani et Apollonii philosophi)* 1994. Ed. Louis Feiertag and Werner Steinmann. Sources chrétiennes 401–02.
- Richard 1992. *Passio sancte Katerine ‘Ut super omne melos’*. Ed. A. P. Orbán. Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis CXIX, 151–259.
- Rupert of Deutz 1971. *De sancta trinitate et operibus eius: In Genesim I–IX*. Ed. Hrabanus Haacke. Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis XXI.
- Snorri Sturluson 2012. *The Uppsala Edda. DG II 4to*. Ed. Heimir Pálsson. Trans. Anthony Faulkes.
- Snorri Sturluson 2014. *Heimskringla II. Óláfr Haraldsson (the Saint)*. Trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes.
- Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1860. *Lexicon poetikum antiquæ lingua septentrionalis*.
- Tertullian, Quintus Septimus 1906. *Adversus Marcionem*. Ed. Emil Kroymann. Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum XXXXVII, 290–650.
- Thomas Aquinas 1961–67. *Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei contra errores Infidelium: qui dicitur Summa contra gentiles*. Ed. Petro Marc, Ceslao Pera and Petro Caramello.
- William of Ockham 1984. *Quaestiones variae*. Ed. Girard I. Etzkorn, Francis E. Kelley and Joseph C. Wey. Opera Theologica VIII, 195–320.

PURE FLESH AND VIRGIN EARTH IN *LILJA*

BY MEGAN GILGE
Independent Scholar

L*LILJA* HAS OFTEN BEEN ADMIRERD for the structural and technical sophistication of its composition (Vésteinn Ólason 2006, 51):

‘All poets wish that they had composed “Lilja”’, as the old Icelandic saying goes, and later the *hrynhent* meter was often called *Liljulag*, ‘Lilja’s measure’. Echoes of ‘Lilja’ are frequently to be found in later poems of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, and, by breaking with the skaldic tradition, the poem cleared the way for the direct influence of meters and styles practiced in European religious poetry.

The poem begins with the story of creation and Adam’s sin, proceeds through salvation history and ends with a meditation on judgment and with prayers to Mary and Christ. Its prayers and exclamations encourage its audience to engage personally in its narrative and rhetoric and it has inspired both later religious writing and vivid folklore (See *Lilja* 2007 554–55; Almqvist 1974, 184; *Lilja* 1870, xx–xxii).

The name *Lilja* ‘Lily’ most commonly refers to the purity of the Virgin Mary, but it can also refer to Christ (cf. *Lilja* 2007, 674–75). Stanza 12 describes Adam’s birth from his mother, the earth. The most recent editor, Martin Chase, sees a contrast between Adam’s flesh and the ‘mud’ from which he is created (*Lilja* 2007, 576). I, however, will argue that this stanza refers to another tradition of exegesis, which emphasises that Adam is created from pure earth. In this tradition, the earth is not ‘wretched’ until after Adam sins. In both *Lilja* and the larger tradition, the pure earth from which Adam is formed is linked to the purity of the Virgin Mary and the virgin birth of Christ, who is called the second Adam. Although it is difficult to identify direct sources for *Lilja*, I will show that this tradition is widely known in Christian exegesis and provide some additional analogues in northern European traditions.¹ The interpretation of this stanza is thus important to the interpretation of the poem as a whole because it emphasises Mary’s purity in contrast to the sinful impurity of fallen humanity.

¹ Chase explains, ‘While it has been impossible to identify many direct sources for *Lilja*, literary analogues abound and situate the poet at the centre of European literature and theology’ (*Lilja* 2007, 561).

Chase places *Lilja* in the context of mid-fourteenth-century Marian devotion (*Lilja* 2007, 555):

If *Lil* cannot have been composed after 1345, it cannot have been composed long before, either. Not only its language, but likewise its content situates it squarely in the C14th. The allusion to the *Anima Christi* prayer (st. 81), the image of the Virgin of the Mantle (st. 86), and the theme of double intercession (st. 87) would all have been quite fresh in 1345 and demonstrate just how familiar the poet was with the most current trends of his time.

The topic of the Virgin Mary's spotlessness, and how she was freed from sin, was extensively debated in late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Europe (Elder 2007, 78–97; Graef 1963, 210–308). By the mid-fourteenth century, religious orders were beginning to accept the explanation which would eventually form the basis for the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception—that is, that the Virgin Mary was not stained by original sin because she was purified and preserved by God at the moment of her conception (Elder 2007, 85–97). Although the feast was celebrated elsewhere in Europe, it was probably not observed in Iceland until 1364 or 1365 (Cormack 1994, 20). Nonetheless, a strong focus on Mary's purity is reflected in *Lilja* (see *Lilja* 2007, 591, 601, 655, 663, 670).

With this context, I turn to Stanza 12 of *Lilja* (*Lilja* 2007, 575):

Svá er líðandi maðr af móður-
moldu—þó er með skæru holdi—
Ádám nefndur, er alls í heimi
átti ráð með frelsi og náðum.
Höfginn rann svá hægr á þenna
heims stýranda; fekk hann skýra
andagift, og síðan sýndi,
svá vorðinna spádómsorða.

Thus a man proceeds from mother-earth, named Adam, though he is with unsullied flesh, who had power over everything in the world, with freedom and peace. Then a light slumber came upon that ruler of the world [= Adam]: he received a clear spiritual gift—and later demonstrated [it]—of prophetic words which came to fulfillment.

Chase interprets this stanza as referring to the filthiness of the earth. He uses the text of the earliest surviving manuscript, the fourteenth–fifteenth century Bergsbók, in which, he explains, the ‘skald sees a paradox in the creation of an unsullied being from mud’ and ‘may have known that the Hebrew text of Gen. plays on the words אָדָם (*’adam*) “human being” and אֲדָמָה (*’adamah*) “clay, soil”’ (576), also citing Genesis II.7, in which *formavit igitur Dominus Deus hominem de limo terrae* ‘the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth’. He sees an analogue in the Old

Norse *Elucidarius*, a popular manual of theology and exegesis originally composed in Latin by Honorius Augustodunensis in the twelfth century and first translated into Old Icelandic around 1200 (Firchow 1992 ix–x): *Hui scapape Gop mann or sua herue-lego efne* ‘Why did God create man out of such wretched material?’ (Firchow 1992, 16–17). I am not aware of a published alternative to Chase’s interpretation of this reference to the earth.

As the *Elucidarius* illustrates, there is a widely established medieval tradition of discussing the wretchedness of the human condition. For example, in 1195 Lotario dei Segni (later Pope Innocent III) wrote about human sinfulness and misery in *De Miseria Conditionis Humane* ‘On the Wretchedness of the Human Condition’, which was also widely distributed, appearing in 672 manuscripts (Lotario dei Segni 1978, 3). In a discussion of the grossness and inferiority of the earthly materials and elements from which humanity is created, he asks (Lotario dei Segni 1978, 96–97):

Quid ergo, lutum, superbis? De quo, pulvis extolleris? Unde, cinis, gloriaris?

Therefore, mud, what are you proud of? Dust, what are you puffed up about? Ashes, why do you boast?

However, he makes an exception for Adam (Lotario dei Segni 1978, 96–99):

An illud forsitan respondebis quod Adam ipse fuit de limo terre formatus, tu autem ex humane semine procreatus. At ille fuit formatus de terra, set virgine; tu vero procreates de semine, set immundo.

But perhaps you will reply that Adam himself was made from the slime of the earth but that you were created from human seed. On the contrary, he was made from earth, but virgin; you were created from seed, but unclean.

Lotario dei Segni’s designation of virgin earth draws on a strain of exegesis that was widely present from the earliest days of the Church until the fourteenth century and beyond. Instead of connecting filthiness and corruption with dirt, as in the sources cited by Chase, this tradition of Christian, and frequently Marian, exegesis says that Adam is created from ‘pure’ or ‘virgin’ earth. An early example is in the writing of the late-second-century bishop, Irenaeus of Lyon. In *On (or Proof of the) Apostolic Preaching*, created as a manual for new Christians, he links the earth of Adam’s creation to the Virgin Mary’s pure flesh (Mackenzie 2002, 30–32; Irenaeus 1997, 46):²

² Scholarly consensus is that this text was originally written in Greek. Fragments confirm that parts of it were preserved in Europe, but the only complete text was preserved in the thirteenth-century Armenian MS Erevan 3710, itself most likely a copy of a seventh-century translation from Greek (Irenaeus 1997, 27–37). I cite only the English text; see Behr’s introduction for a description of the Armenian source.

[11] But He fashioned man with His own Hands, taking the purest, the finest and the most delicate [elements] of the earth, mixing with the earth, in due measure, His own power; and . . . He sketched upon the handiwork His own form—in order that what would be seen should be godlike, for man was placed upon the earth fashioned in the image of God; and that he might be alive, ‘he breathed into his face a breath of life’ [Gen. 2:7].

Later he asserts that Adam must be born from *virgin* earth, as Christ is born from a virgin (Irenaeus 1997, 61):

[32] But whence, then, was the substance of the first-formed? From the will and wisdom of God and from virgin earth—‘For God had not caused it to rain’, says Scripture, before man was made, ‘and there was no man to till the ground’. So, from this [earth], while it was still virgin, God ‘took mud from the earth and fashioned man’, the beginning of mankind. Thus, the Lord, recapitulating this man, received the same arrangement of embodiment as this one, being born from the Virgin by the will and wisdom of God, that He might also demonstrate the likeness of embodiment to Adam, and might become the man, written in the beginning, ‘according to the image and likeness of God’.

He explains (Irenaeus 1997, 61):

[33] . . . For it was necessary for Adam to be recapitulated in Christ, that, ‘mortality might be swallowed up in immortality’, and Eve in Mary, that a virgin, become an advocate for a virgin, might undo and destroy the virginal disobedience by virginal obedience.

These themes are echoed in Tertullian’s third-century *De Carne Christi* chapter 17 (Evans 1956, 58–59):

sed tota novitas ista, sicut et in omnibus, de veteri figurata est, rationali per virginem dispositione homine domino nascente. virgo erat adhuc terra, nondum opere compressa, nondum sementi subacta: ex ea hominem factum accipimus a deo in animam vivam. igitur si primus Adam ita traditur, merito sequens vel novissimus Adam, ut apostolus dixit, proinde de terra (id est carne) nondum generationi resignata in spiritum vivificantem a deo est prolatus.

But that newness in its totality, as also in all its bearings, was prefigured of old, when by a reasonable ordinance by means of a virgin man was born to the Lord. The earth was still virgin, not yet deflowered by husbandry, not yet subdued to seedtime: of it we are told that man was made by God into a living soul. Therefore, seeing that of the first Adam it is so related, naturally the second or last Adam, as the apostle has called him, was likewise from earth (that is, flesh) not yet unsealed to generation brought forth by God to be a life-giving spirit.

Like Irenaeus, Tertullian links the pure earth in Adam’s creation to the virginity of Mary, who bears Christ, the new Adam. This theme occurs again in the eighth-century Merovingian Gelasian sacramentary (*Liber sacramentorum Gellonensis* 1981, 273):

Deus qui de terra uirgine adam pridem conderae uoluisti et tu adam caelestis quadam similitudine[m] sed perfecte sine peccato de uirgine dignatus es nasci.

[O] God who long ago [formerly] from the virgin earth wished to form Adam and you, celestial Adam [i.e. Christ], with a certain similitude [in like manner] deigned to be born from the worthy virgin perfectly without sin.

Thomas D. Hill has identified this motif in the opening of the Old English *Guthlac B*, where Adam was ‘made of *þære clænestan . . . foldan*, which literally must mean something like “from the cleanest earth” (Hill 1981, 387). Hill explains that the pairing of Adam and Mary’s virgin births is a common medieval typological association (Hill 1981, 388). Among his examples, he notes parallels in a homily of Maximus of Turin (who draws upon Irenaeus and Tertullian), the Old English prose *Solomon and Saturn* and a Middle Irish homily in the *Leabhar Breac*, a manuscript of mostly Christian texts in Irish and Hiberno-Latin (*The Passions and the Homilies from Leabhar Breac* 1887, 97, 342):

Uair ro-po chubaid co ro-cloitea o mac na hóige i.e. Crist, in tí ro-cloiestar Adam mac na hoige i.e. mac in talman nóim; ar in talam di-a ndernad Adam, óg e-side, ar ni ro-helned ó iarnd nách o fhuil dóenna, agus ni ro-heroslaiced fria hadnocul neich in tan-sin.

For it was fitting that Christ, the Virgin’s Son, should overcome him who had vanquished Adam, the Son of the Virgin, the holy earth: for the earth of which Adam was made was virgin soil, unstained by iron, or by human blood, nor had it ever yet been opened for the burial of anyone.

A later theologian, the twelfth-century Cistercian Isaac of Stella, also draws on this tradition:

Ibi de terra fit homo; hic de Maria fit Deus. Ibi de terra adhuc incorrupta et uirgine, homo rectus et ipse uirgo; hic de Maria semper incorrupta et uirgine, Deus iustus et ipse faciens uirgines. Ibi de uiri latere sine muliere mulier creata est; hic de mulieris utero sine viro uir generatur. (Isaac de Stella, Sermones – *Library of Latin Texts - Series A*. SChr 339, sermo 54, par. 7, linea 48)

There man was brought forth from earth; here God is brought forth from Mary. There, from earth still incorrupt and uirgin, comes an upright man, himself a uirgin; here from Mary, always incorrupt and uirginal, comes the just God, himself making uirgins. There, from the side of the man, woman was created without a woman [to act as mother]; here, from a woman’s womb, a man is generated without a man [to act as father]. (Gambero 2005, 172)

If these examples seem remote from an Old Norse text, I would like to suggest a few that are a little nearer. The *Elucidarius* links the births of Adam and Mary to virginity and, to a certain extent, virgin purity (Firchow 1992, 30–31):

Discipulus: Hvi villdi hann fra mærlata bæræz

Magister: Fíorom ættom skapaði gvð menn einvm hætte fyrir vtan foðvr ok moðor sem adam At oðrvm hætte af karlmanne einvm sem efo Þriðia hætte fra karlmanni ok kono sem altit er Fíorða hætf[-]ti fra mærio einni saman sæm kistr var borinn Avk sva sem davði kom iheim fyrir mærl Sva kom lif ok fyrir mærl þat er vti byrgði davðann

Disciple: Why did He allow Himself to be born of a virgin?

Master: God created men in four ways: first, without father and mother, like Adam; second, out of a single man, like Eve, third, out of man and woman in the usual way; fourth, out of a virgin alone, as Christ was born. And just as death entered the world through a virgin, so also life came shutting out death through a virgin.

Book V of the *Revelations of St Birgitta of Sweden*, known as *Liber quaestionum*, provides a very close parallel to *Lilja* and illustrates ideas that were current in Scandinavia near the time of its composition. Birgitta (1303–73, canonised 1391) began to have the visions which formed its basis in the 1340s (Searby and Morris 2008, 261). These visions are considered to be representative of wider medieval theological tradition as well as contemporary Swedish debate and also of the influence of the Cistercians she stayed with at Alvastra (Searby and Morris 2008, 261–63, 268 n. 4; Sahlin 2001, 28–31; France 1992, 394–401). Birgitta, occasionally counselled by the Virgin Mary, observes a dialogue between a monk who is ‘a learned scholar in the science of theology but full of guile and devilish wickedness’ (Searby and Morris 2008, 271) and ‘Christ the Judge seated on the throne’ (271). The vision’s explanation of Adam seems to parallel some of Isaac of Stella’s explanations. In a series of questions about the nature of creation, humanity and divinity, the monk asks:

Cur magis nasci voluisti de virgine quam de alia muliere non virgine? (*Sancta Birgitta Revelaciones Lib V* 1971, 136)

Why did you prefer to be born of a virgin rather than of another woman who was not a virgin? (Searby and Morris 2008, 298).

The response pairs the purity of the earth and the Virgin Mary:

Vt sicut primus homo factus est de terra, que quodammodo erat virgo, quia nondum polluta sanguine et quia Adam et Eva peccauerunt in sanitate nature, sic et ego Deus volui recipi mundissimo receptaculo, vt per bonitatem meam omnia reformarentur. (*Sancta Birgitta Revelaciones Lib V* 1971, 137)

Just as the first man was made from the earth when it was, in a way, virgin—for it had not yet been polluted with blood—and because Adam and Eve sinned while their nature was still healthy, so too I, God, willed to be received by the purest receptacle so that through my goodness all things might be reformed. (Harris 1990, 129)

Birgitta's explanation is in line with both ancient and medieval Christian theological traditions, which emphasise the purity of the earth at Creation, before its later corruption by sin. Although the specific explanation of why the earth ceased to be virginal varies in these examples, the reasoning is always along similar lines. That is, in the beginning, and when Adam and Eve are created, the earth is still virginal because no sin has occurred. After they sin and are expelled from paradise, the loss of the earth's virginal or uncorrupted condition occurs.

Irenaeus recalls the pure and sinless period as the time before rain occurred (Genesis 2:5 explains that before the expulsion of Adam and Eve, paradise was watered by a spring because *non enim pluerat Dominus Deus super terram, et homo non erat qui operaretur terram* 'for the Lord God had not rained upon the earth; and there was not a man to till the earth'), when the earth was virginal because it was not tilled. Tertullian echoes this claim, saying the earth was not 'deflowered by husbandry; not yet subdued to seed time' (Evans 1956, 59). In medieval thought, the taint or pollution derives from iron ploughs, but also from the blood of Abel (cf. Hill 1981, 388).

This context helps to explain *Lilja* stanza 12. I suggest a new interpretation of this stanza, based on the ongoing present action described by *líðandi* 'proceeding'. In the present time it describes, Adam is proceeding from mother-earth, but the primary focus is not the purity of Adam's flesh, but the purity of the earth. Thus, when the poem says, *þó er með skæru holdi* it is not he—Adam—who has unsullied flesh. Instead, it is the earth, and the line can be better interpreted 'yet/still it/she is with pure flesh.' Indeed, one might say that both Adam's flesh and *móðir mold* 'mother-earth' are pure at this time. As I have mentioned, Chase suggests that 'the skald sees a paradox in the creation of an unsullied being from mud' and 'may have known that the Hebrew text of Gen. plays on the words אָדָם ('*adam*) "human being" and אֲדָמָה ('*adamah*) "clay, soil"'.³ However, if there is a paradox here, it is that Adam, created pure, becomes a corrupter.

Even if one assumes that Adam is the subject of the clause, the phrase *með skæru holdi* 'with pure flesh' alludes to the tradition that human flesh is impure because it is conceived in sin by sexual intercourse (which in later medieval

³ *Lilja* 2007, 576. Although reading knowledge of Hebrew was not common among gentiles in the medieval West, glosses to explain specific words circulated widely. One example is Hieronymus's (Jerome's) *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* 'The interpretation of Hebrew names' which provided the following explanation (de Lagarde 1959, 61; my translation):

Adam [=] homo siue terrenus aut indigena uel terra rubra.

Adam [=] man or of earth or indigenous [to earth] or red earth.

thought is almost always considered to be sinful to some degree). Augustine illuminates the contrast between the *skærr* flesh of Mary and Jesus and the corruption that is inherited after the fall. In *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* ‘On Marriage and Desire’ or ‘On Marriage and Concupiscence’, he explains:

ubi quid intellecturi sumus, nisi quia corpus quod corrumpitur, adgrauat animam?

cum ergo id ipsum corpus iam incorruptibile recipietur, plena erit liberatio a corpore mortis huius, a quo non liberantur, qui sunt ad poenam resurrecturi . . . quod in carne nostra quamuis sub peccati lege teneatur, tamen in spe redemptionis est, quia ipsa uitiosa concupiscentia nulla omnino remanebit, caro autem nostra ab ea peste morbo que sanata et tota immortalitate uestita in aeterna beatitudine permanebit. (Augustinus Hipponensis, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* (CPL 0350). *Library of Latin Texts, Series A. Lib. 1*, cap. 31, par. 35, pag. 246, linea 27 [*]; pag. 247, linea 11 [*])

What are we to understand here but that the body which is being corrupted weighs down the soul (Wis 9:15)? Therefore, when we receive back the body as incorruptible, we will be fully set free from the body of this death, but those who are going to rise for punishment will not be set free from it . . . And though a part of our flesh is held captive under the law of sin, it still has hope of redemption, because in eternal beatitude nothing at all of sinful concupiscence will remain, but our flesh will remain, after it has been healed of that plague and disease and has been completely clothed with immortality. (Augustine 1998, 49–50)

Returning to stanza 12 of *Lilja*, it is important to consider what Adam might have dreamed while he was asleep. The poem refers to Genesis 2:21, which describes the creation of Eve: *Immisit ergo Dominus Deus soporem in Adam* ‘Then the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam’. Although the Bible is silent about whether Adam dreamt while he slept, numerous Christian traditions state that Adam had prophetic dreams that foretold the birth of Jesus Christ and the redemption of humanity.⁴ In this moment

⁴ According to Chase, Adam saw the future glory of his descendants. Chase cites the Old Norse *Elucidarius*, which says (Firchow 1992, 18–19):

Eluc: Discipulus: Hui licr vas suefn sia.

Magister: Goþs ande nam hann up í himnesca paradisum. oc sa hann þa þat at christus oc sancta cristne munde berasc ór hans cyne. þvi spaþe hann of þau begar es han vagnaþe

Disciple: How was Adam’s sleep?

Master: The spirit of God took man into heavenly paradise and man realized then that Christ and holy Christianity would be born out of his kin. Therefore man foretold this when he woke up.

where Adam's rib is used to create Eve, and ultimately all human flesh, including that of Mary and Christ, it is interesting that the poem links the pure state of Adam's flesh to both the fall and redemption of humanity.

This tradition of pure earth and pure flesh helps to illuminate the later stanzas of *Lilja*.⁵ Chase discusses the common medieval typology that links Adam's creation from earth with Christ's birth. However, he does not emphasise the similar terminology that is used both for the earth and for Mary and Christ. In stanza 30, Christ is made of *hold og bein af hreinum likam* 'flesh and bone from the pure body' (*Lilja* 2007, 597). In stanza 83, the poet has finished meditating on the earthly ministry of Christ and turns toward death and judgment. The stanza becomes a plea to Christ (*Lilja* 2007, 655; my emphasis):

Lífið sjálf, að luktri æfi
leys mitt bann fyrir iðran sanna;
óléo smurður, vænti, að eg verða
viðræknandi mjúkleik þenna.
Hreinast gief þú hjarta mínu
hold og blóð, það er tókt af móður;
listuliga að leiðarnersti;
leysiz önd af holdsins böndum.

Chase also refers to *Stjórn*, a fourteenth-century collection of Old Testament scripture and lore that describes and interprets events from the creation to the exile. For more information about *Stjórn* in English, see Kirby 1993. Chase cites Unger. I have included the text from Reidar Ástas's edition, published two years after Chase's edition of *Lilja*. The text varies mostly in punctuation.

Þá let gud þilikt sem suefn ok enn helldr nockurs konar umegin falla aa adam. ok i þerssu sama umegni. trúiz at hann hafi andliga leiddr uerit. ok upp numinn til himinríkiss. hirðar. þiat siðan er hann uaknaði. uar hann fullkominn. ok sua framr spá maðr. at hann spáði fyrir samband íhsu xpristi. ok heilagrar kirkíu. ok þat hit mikla floð er uarð æ dögum noe. ok þar meðr eigi sidr hinn efzta dom. er fyrir elldinn skal uerða. ok sagði alla þersa luti sinum sunum (*Stjórn* 2009, 51).

Then God caused something like sleep and a kind of powerlessness to come upon Adam, and in this powerlessness he thought that he had been led in spirit and taken up to the hosts of the kingdom of heaven, so that when he awoke, he was so perfect and proficient a prophet that he prophesied about the union of Jesus Christ and the holy church, and that great flood which would come in the days of Noah and likewise even the Last Judgement, which will precede the fire. And he told all these things to his sons (*Lilja* 2007, 577).

⁵ See Harris 2007, 35–41 for examples of more distant sacred-earth traditions in Germanic texts.

Life itself, loose my ban at the close of my life for the sake of my true repentance; anointed with oil, I hope that I will be in a position to acknowledge this consolation. *Give my heart the most pure flesh and blood, which you took from your mother*, wonderfully, for Viaticum; may the soul be freed from the bonds of the flesh.

Here again, this flesh and blood are ‘most pure’, like the earth from which Adam was formed. One of the most interesting examples of this tradition is a prayer of Peter Damian, *Oratio ad Deum Filium* ‘Prayer to God the Son’ which links the pure body of the Virgin Mary to pure earth:

Benedicta inter mulieres; redolet ager sacratissimi uteri tui naribus cordis mei; ex quo, videlicet agro, dum unicum illud ac singulare lilium prodiit, omne cum eo virtutum spiritualium germen erupit. Tu enim es coelestis illa terra, quae dedit fructum suum (Petrus Damianus, Preces [opera liturgica]. *Library of Latin Texts. Series A. Orationes ad Trinitatem*, PL 145, col. 921, linea 13).

You are blessed among women; the field of your most sacred womb diffuses the nostrils of my heart with a sweet smell. From that field the one unique lily sprang up, and the seed of all spiritual virtues with it. You are that heavenly land, which brought forth its fruit (*Lilja* 2007, 674).

Lotario dei Segni’s explanation of virgin earth helps to clarify medieval Christian responses to the tradition of the dirty and degraded earth in works such as the *Elucidarius* and even his own *De miseria*. Although one might reasonably be repelled by the nature of the earth element in humans other than the Virgin Mary, Christ and the uncorrupted Adam and Eve, the earth from which Adam was formed was not disgusting but instead a creation that was both good and clean.

Finally, the composition of *Lilja* emphasises the connection between the earth as mother of Adam and the Virgin Mary the mother of Christ. In stanza 12, Chase has identified an irregularity in grammar when he explains, ‘The separation of the two elements of a c[ompound] [that is, “móður-moldu” or “mother-earth”] over two subsequent lines, in natural order without tmesis, is unusual’ (*Lilja* 2007, 576). However, he has perhaps let the rules of form obscure the poet’s intent. The poet emphasises understanding over form (*Lilja* 2007, 672):

Varðar mest, að allra orða
undirstaðan sie ríttlig fundin,
eigi glögg þó að eddu regla
undan hljóti að víkja stundum.

It is of great importance that the right meaning of all words be found, even though the obscuring rule of the Edda must at times give way.

‘Mother-earth’ might be a compound, but this separation gives emphasis to the ‘mother’. The reference to ‘pure flesh’ in stanza 12 and Adam’s vision not only anticipate sin and the corruption of human nature and the earth, but also the ‘virgin’ birth of Christ from Mary. Thus *Lilja* prefigures salvation, purification and the redemption to come from Christ, whose flesh and nature, like his mother’s, will remain pure.

Note: I would like to thank Richard L. Harris, Thomas N. Hall, Thomas D. Hill, and the anonymous readers for providing helpful comments on drafts of this paper. I am also grateful for feedback given at the twelfth annual Fiske Conference on Medieval Icelandic Studies.

Bibliography

- Almqvist, Bo 1974. *Norrön niddikting* 2:1–2.
- Augustine 1998. ‘Marriage and Desire’. In *Answer to the Pelagians. II: Marriage and Desire, Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians, Answer to Julian*. Vol. 1/24. Ed. and trans. Roland J. Teske, S. J.
- Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem* 2007. Ed. Robert Weber and Roger Gryson.
- Cormack, Margaret 1994. *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*.
- Elder, E. Rozanne 2007. ‘Mary in the Common Latin Tradition: Agreement, Disagreements and Divergence’. In *Studying Mary: Reflections on the Virgin Mary in Anglican and Roman Catholic Theology and Devotion*. Ed. Nicholas Sagovsky and Adelbert Denaux, 73–109.
- Evans, Ernest, ed. and trans., 1956. *Tertullian’s Treatise on the Incarnation*.
- Firchow, Evelyn Scherabon, ed. and trans., 1992. *The Old Norse Elucidarius*.
- France, James 1992. *The Cistercians in Scandinavia*.
- Gambero, Luigi 2005. *Mary in the Middle Ages*. Trans. Thomas Buffer.
- Graef, Hilda 1963. *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*.
- Harris, Joseph 2007. ‘Heroic Poetry and Elegy: Beowulf’s Lay of the Last Survivor’. In *9. Pöchlerner Heldenliedgespräch Heldenzeiten – Heldenräume*. Ed. Johannes Keller and Florian Kragl. *Philologia Germanica* 28, 27–41.
- Harris, Marguerite Tjader et al. 1990. *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*.
- Hill, Thomas D. 1981. ‘The First Beginning and the Purest Earth: *Guthlac B*, Lines 1–14’. *Notes and Queries* n.s. 28, 387–89.
- Irenaeus of Lyon 1997. *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Trans. John Behr.
- Kirby, I. J. 1993. ‘Stjórn’. In *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. Ed. Phillip Pulsiano et al., 611–12.
- Liber sacramentorum Gellonensis* 1981. Ed. A. Dumas and J. Deshusses. *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (CCSL)* 159A, 159B.
- Lilja* 2007. Ed. and trans. Martin Chase. In *Poetry on Christian Subjects*. Ed. M. Clunies Ross. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* VII, 554–677.

- Lilja (The Lily)* 1870. Ed. and trans. Eiríkr Magnússon. *Library of Latin Texts*. <<http://www.brepols.net>>
- Lotario dei Segni (Pope Innocent III) 1978. *De Miseria Conditionis Humane*. Ed. Robert E. Lewis.
- Mackenzie, Iain M. 2002. *Irenaeus's Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching: A Theological Commentary and Translation*.
- S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera* 1959. Ed. Paul de Lagarde. Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (CCSL) 72A.
- Sancta Birgitta Revelaciones Lib V* 1971. Ed. Birger Bergh.
- Sahlin, Claire L. 2001. *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*.
- Searby, Denis, trans. and Bridget Morris, ed. 2008. *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden 2*.
- Stjorn. Gammelnorsk bibelhistorie fra verdens skabelse til det babyloniske fangenskab* 1862. Ed. C. R. Unger.
- Stjórn. Del I og II* 2009. Ed. Reidar Ástas.
- The Passions and the Homilies from Leabhar Breac: Text, Translation, and Glossary* 1887. Ed. R. Atkinson.
- Vésteinn Ólason 2006. 'Old Icelandic Poetry'. In *A History of Icelandic Literature*. Ed. Daisy Neijmann. *Histories of Scandinavian Literature* 5, 1–64.

AFTER ADULthood: THE METAMORPHOSES
OF THE ELDERLY IN THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

By THOMAS MORCOM

University of Oxford

THE NARRATIVES OF THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR* are overwhelmingly populated by capable adults, with the distinct period of childhood giving way to an early adulthood as members of both genders reach a level of violence, sexuality or social intelligence sufficient to assert their mature status. This maturity may then extend uninterrupted throughout the course of a character's depiction: in the case of men, an individual's violent death in his prime is more likely to end his presence in the saga than is a decline into senescence. Presentations of old age are exceptional and tend to occur only when characters have already completed an extended period of productive adulthood within the narrative. When depictions of the elderly do occur, authors tend to understand old age as a cultural, rather than biological, phenomenon, as argued for in a wider medieval context by Shahar (1997, 12). The classification of an individual as elderly is, therefore, an issue of societal arbitration, a point crucial to the literary presentation of elderly figures in the *Íslendingasögur*.

In a realistic portrayal of growing old in medieval Iceland, it would be reasonable to expect the sagas to present ageing as the naturalistic and progressive decline of the body from maturity into infirmity, particularly in the cases of central characters whose entire lifespans are encapsulated within the narrative. It is, however, probable that a saga redactor would have considered stylisation and structural patterning just as important as historical verisimilitude in his presentation of the Saga-Age elderly: this is in accordance with the critical consensus on the balance between the influences of oral tradition and literary composition on the saga form, as neatly summarised by Tucker (1989, 17). Yet this can be contrasted with the formulation of Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (2008, 233), in which the loss of utility immediately heralds the onset of old age:

It is the person's ability to work which is the central element in this definition of 'old'. The group we focus on here [within medieval Icelandic society] are therefore individuals over *c.*12 winters of age that could not fulfil the tasks the society demanded from the grown-ups.

Overing (1999, 212) has, similarly, argued that the onset of senescence for the Icelander is sudden, at least in its saga presentation; ageing is not depicted as a decline in which mental faculties and cultural relevance are slowly ceded, but as a demarcated boundary, on either side of which two different characterisations exist.¹

While both provide an understanding of old age as a distinct phase of life, a model from which the current work extends, neither Jón Viðar Sigurðsson nor Overing is able fully to capture the complexity and strangeness of what comes after adulthood in saga literature: the manner, both unsettling and poignant in turn, in which the elderly are depicted in the *Íslendingasögur*. This study will demonstrate the jarring contrast between mature and aged characterisations in a selection of saga characters, both male and female, to be the work of authors depicting the anxieties of aging in a sophisticated fashion. In a distinction from previous studies on this topic, it shall here be contended that the postlude of old age can often be read as an ironic inversion of the traits of potent maturity, but the strangeness and idiosyncrasy of specific depictions of aged individuals will not be overlooked, nor will the potential for multiple readings of these allusive episodes. The argument offered by Miller (2017, 12–14), which centres ambiguities at the core of his understanding of *Hrafnkels saga*, will be adopted in relation to this study: the inability to resolve a character's portrayal or action through reference to a single motivation, trait or emotional state is vital to approaching examples of agedness in the *Íslendingasögur*, where the obliqueness of saga style is further compounded by the brevity with which agedness is depicted in comparison to adulthood. The characters discussed below are not granted satisfying conclusions to famous lives in the depictions of their old age, rather, their senescences are dissonant enigmas that demand renewed reflection on their wider characterisations.

Defusing Feud through Decrepitude

Ingimundur Þorsteinsson is introduced in *Vatnsdæla saga* as a noble but successful Viking whose strength and prowess is such that he is compared with the great figures of legend and ancient history (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 19):

¹ For a discussion of the presentation of medieval elders, and their sudden shift towards baser mindsets, in a wider literary context, cf. Alicia Nitecki 1990, 107–16. The association of this transformation with moral degeneration is less widespread in the Icelandic tradition, but Nitecki neatly demonstrates the extent to which ageing is presented as a swift transition into an alien manner of living.

Þat sýndist brátt, at Ingimundr var djarfr í framgöngu ok góðr drengr, traustr til vápnis ok harðfengi, vinholmr ok góðgjarn, fastnæmr við vini sína, ok svá mátti höfðingja beztr farit vera sem honum var í fornum sið.

It soon appeared that Ingimundr was bold in attacking and a good fighting man, trusty with regard to weapons and endurance, staunch and kind, constant towards his friends and able to behave as best a leader could in heathen times.

After ending his raiding career and establishing his homestead in Iceland, however, he adopts a more passive and conciliatory attitude, adhering to the law codes and cultivating strong social ties with his neighbours. While McCreech (2010, 75–87) has discussed the probable link between the saga's strong sense of Christian morality and this renunciation of violent activity, the correlation between ageing and mellowing also accounts for Ingimundr's de-escalation into a more peaceful style of living. This comparatively early rejection of youthful activity means that Ingimundr's ageing process is divided, unusually, into two distinct phases, the first of which correlates with the shift to a style of living compatible with the values of the Icelandic commonwealth: *Ingimundr gerðisk nokkut aldraðr ok helt hann ávallt búrisnu sinni* 'Ingimundr became somewhat elderly, but he always retained his hospitable manner of housekeeping' (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 47). To clarify, this does not depict old age as a gradual and progressive deterioration, despite a liminal period of productive old age being added in this case: each phase is distinctly segmented and introduced through a rapid shift in Ingimundr's characterisation. This bridging period of hospitable senescence shows Ingimundr to be an elder-statesman figure and reinforces the connection between social utility and the staving off of decrepitude. This establishes Ingimundr, in the first phase of his old age, as a figure highly respected by both society and, crucially, his sons, as his changing relationship with the latter defines his transition into another, more pitiful stage of his old age.

During this second phase of his senescence, Ingimundr's capitulation to his advanced age is absolute and stresses the intertwined nature of physical and social decline: *Hann var þá gamall ok nær blindr. Hafði hann ok þá af höndum látit öll fjárforráð ok svá bú* 'He was at this point old and almost blind. He had also at that time handed over all the administration of his wealth and also the farm' (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 60). This pronouncement, signalling the social onset of old age proper, is embedded within an episode in which Ingimundr's sons seek to deal with Hrolleifr, who threatens the family and the wider region with injury and shame. Despite his sons' willingness to resolve the issue with violence, Ingimundr repeatedly seeks to curtail any possibility of conflict. He goes so far as to ride

into a river, despite his infirmity, invoking the water's symbolic status as a boundary to add weight to his attempts to use his body to disentangle the two combative parties. The body of the old man proves worthy of little respect, however, and he is swiftly mortally wounded by a spear thrown by Hrolleifr. Furthermore, his remark upon returning home to die, *Stirðr em ek nú ok verðu vér lausir á fótum inir gǫmlu mennirnir* 'I am now stiff, and we old men grow unstable on our feet' (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 61), uses wry understatement, which elsewhere might be expected of a heroic character, to conflate the suffering of growing old with the pain of grievous injury; both act as a harbinger of imminent death and the old man's anxiety about his increasing inability to affect society.

It can be argued, therefore, that the depiction of Ingimundr in his maturity as a calm and venerable man, who counsels against the rash action often advocated by his sons, is recast in a more extreme form on his entry into abject old age. His enthusiasm for appeasement is exemplified by his unwillingness to fight Hrolleifr and his supernaturally empowered mother, Ljót, which is at odds with the straightforward bravery of the raiding and duelling of Ingimundr's youth. This shift in characterisation is tellingly ambivalent, and exemplified in his final act of attempted authority, in bodily placing himself between his sons and Hrolleifr. On the one hand, Ingimundr may be attempting to pursue peace in a proto-Christian manner and, therefore, enacting a form of heroism suited to his bodily frailty. Yet, simultaneously, his sacrifice is rendered essentially pathetic and even farcical by the rapidity with which Hrolleifr wounds him, which once again stresses the degrading nature of his aged condition.

Ingimundr's behaviour is never as socially detrimental as, for example, Þórólfr bægifótr's in *Eyrbyggja saga*, a vicious elder whose already unpleasant character has degenerated into anti-social malevolence. Ármann Jakobsson (2005, 301) discusses the link between Þórólfr's malevolence and his agedness, which is seen as a proxy undeath that foreshadows his return as a *draugr*. The aged Ingimundr's trait of unease regarding violent struggle is, conversely, demonstrated to be grounded consistently in wisdom rather than cowardice. Nevertheless, it corresponds to Ármann's concept of old age as a transition into an afterlife. In this case, however, this aged behaviour is informed by an anxiety about the awareness that death marks the end of the power to affect society and, more crucially, family. This is not due, however, to an inversion in gendered presentation in advanced age, as Ingimundr does not become effeminate. He is instead rendered less masculine by the loss of aggressive traits, which are revoked without replacement in a process, to make use of Evans's model (2015,

23), that shifts Ingimundr from being closely aligned with hegemonic masculinity to adopting a subordinate form of masculine identity that is less compatible with idealised male performance. Ingimundr's progression—from taking action, to the giving of advice, and finally to forced inaction—is emblematic of this progressive loss of influence and relevance, and his dying plea exemplifies the struggle between the remnants of his authority and his increasing passivity: *Mín er eigi at betr hefnt, þótt hann deyri, en mér samir at skjóta skjóli yfir þann, er ek hefí áðr á hendr tekizk, meðan ek má [um] mæla, hversu sem síðar ferr* 'I am no better avenged if he dies, but it is fitting for me to protect the one whom I have already taken in hand, while I can have a say in it, whatever happens later' (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 61). This is a deceptively inflammatory statement for a dying patriarch to deliver to his sons—particularly if due consideration is given to Byock's arguments (1982) that feuding and vengeance cycles were essential to Icelandic society, and, more specifically, to fuelling the progression of saga narratives.

The relationship between this unwillingness to resort to blood vengeance and Ingimundr's agedness is twofold. In the first place, when he initially counsels against his sons' violent urges, his concern seems to arise from the fear that in the event of his sons' deaths he would no longer be able to avenge the younger generation of his family due to his infirmity and would almost certainly also die in the process; a wise decision in as much as it prioritises the survival of the household over the restoration of honour. He is also anxious to avoid a grief similar to that experienced by Egill in *Sonatorrek*, where the aged poet bewails his inability to avenge the death of his son (cf. Finlay 2015, 114–21). Legal redress seems to be implicitly dismissed in Ingimundr's case since Hrolleifr is an *ójafnaðarmaðr* 'overbearing man' who is unlikely to be constrained through settlement. Secondly, at the point of Ingimundr's death, the plea is inverted—he now fears that his sons will also lose their lives for his sake, a concern that is in keeping with his previous anxieties and which underpins his words as much as the explicit reasoning of a residual hospitality towards a former guest. It is therefore possible to read his dying plea for non-aggression as manipulating his infirm and marginalised social position as an old man so as to demonstrate to his sons that he is not worth avenging. Icelandic feud allows an individual to utilise a 'frequently moral, often juridical, and always political' (Miller 1990, 181) mode of violence that redresses perceived wrongs that arbitration cannot settle, while tacitly inviting a similar retributive violence upon his own head. Ingimundr's old age offers him perspective on the extent of his fall from hegemonic masculine

adulthood, and his realisation of his inability to contribute to the vengeance cycle provokes his demand that he be excluded from it.

Just as Ingimundr in his infirmity demonstrates the fragility of the concept of male hegemony extending into old age, Unnr djúpúðga² in *Laxdæla saga* demonstrates that the intersection of agedness and femininity can cause conventional gender roles to be dispensed with, particularly as she is one of the very rare examples within the *Íslendingasögur* of a family matriarch capable of constraining her male relatives' violent proclivities. She is certainly the best-known female settler of Iceland, and the saga is emphatic in declaring her unique status: *ok þykkjask menn varla dæmi til finna, at einn kvenmaðr hafi komizk í brott ór þvillikum ófriði með jafnmiklu fé ok foruneyti; má af því marka, at hon var mikit afbragð annarra kvenna* 'and people think that scarcely could an instance be found, that one woman had got away from such unrest with so much wealth and so large a company; it is possible to observe from this, that she was a great paragon compared to other women' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 7). This stress on Unnr being exceptional is double-edged, however: it simultaneously implies that this is an unusual and generally unattainable role for a woman in ordinary circumstances, and that to achieve her unique status, Unnr 'undertakes a male role' (Jesch 1991, 83). This is certainly supported by her physical description, and by her symbolic function as the ship's captain of her extended family—a conventionally masculine role—who guided their successful relocation to Iceland: *Svá segja menn, at Unnr hafi verit bæði há ok þreklig* 'People say that Unnr had been both tall and strong of frame' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 12–13). Once settled, Unnr continues to display patriarchal qualities, distributing the large areas of land that she has claimed amongst her male descendants, and organising apposite marriages for them. Of particular interest is the manner in which her death corresponds to those of several cantankerous men, most notably Skalla-Grímr in *Egils saga* (1933, 174) and Þórólfr bægifótr in *Eyrbyggja saga* (1935, 96), who similarly die sitting upright in their beds: *En um daginn eptir gekk Óláfr feilan til svefnstofu Unnar, frændkonu sinnar; ok er hann kom í stofuna, sat Unnr upp við hægendin; hon var þá önduð* 'And on the day after, Óláfr feilan went to the sleeping quarters of Unnr, his kinswoman; and when he came into the room, Unnr was sitting up amongst the cushions; she was lifeless at that point' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934,

² Unnr is usually referred to by the variant form Auðr in other sources, including in *Landnámabók*, *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Eyrbyggja saga*: cf. Vanherpen 2013, 62. Since the most complex presentation of her old age appears in *Laxdæla saga*, however, the name Unnr will be used for the purpose of this discussion.

13). While Skalla-Grímr and Þórólfr are violent and spiteful elders, which differs from Unnr's more respectable presentation, Vanherpen has pointed out that all three have their stubbornness and resilience reflected in their pose at death (2013, 70).

Unnr is not explicitly demarcated as old until some time after her settlement in Iceland, but during her orchestration of the migration from Norway she is a grandmother with a number of masculine qualities, and this portrayal remains consistent into her old age. It could be argued that as she 'passed the last phase of her life in conformity with the masculine model available to mature men' (Jochens 1995, 62) her actions are implicitly incongruous with expectations that the denigration of ageing would further reduce the lesser social value associated with her womanhood. To accept this, however, would be to overlook the fact that Unnr possesses these masculine qualities long before the saga specifies she has become elderly, and to ignore the crucial point that old age is defined by loss of utility rather than simple chronological age. Unnr's case is unusual in separating social and physical utility: while her respect and authority amongst her family remains unchallenged until her death, her mobility is shown to decline dramatically. The key features of Unnr's shift into old age are that she is not able to leave her bed until noon and retires in the early evening, and that the periods in which she is available to offer guidance become limited. This stress upon becoming both static and silent can therefore be seen as the ironic inversion of the mature qualities of a figure who was previously defined by her 'settler' identity, where wilful movement and decisive leadership were crucial qualities. Once in Iceland, however, Unnr takes on a 'settled' identity in which she functions as a fixed root from which her descendants, and on a structural level the saga's narrative, branch out from the point at which she has chosen to become immobile. Within this reading a further irony is visible, between Unnr's decision to die with static dignity seated upright and her relatives' choice to give her a boat burial that recalls her adult voyaging phase and points to the afterlife as another region that must be journeyed towards (Vanherpen 2013, 73).

The depictions of Unnr's stoicism and Ingimundr's desire for appeasement are similar in that both attributes attempt to curtail the future possibility of feud and are suggested to be associated with the wisdom of both figures. Unnr's astute division of land amongst her male descendants rests on her status as leader of the family unit, which ensures respect for the boundaries that she has dictated. Her homestead, Hvammr, becomes the communal centre of the radiating familial group, furthermore, with Unnr's association with the building establishing her as the symbolic *húsfreyja*

‘mistress of the house’ of the entire district that she has established. After her death, the social order she has brokered fractures and in doing so provides momentum for the ensuing plot of *Laxdæla saga* (Jesch 1991, 83). Both Unnr and Ingimundr fail in their attempts to avoid feud after their deaths, but what proves intriguing is that both synthesise elements of the harsh realities of their bodily old age into their performances of venerability. Unnr’s reduced mobility is amalgamated into her identity as the focal point for her family, and Ingimundr exaggerates his own frailty to the point that he no longer considers himself to be worth avenging. Both are examples of wisdom born out of an abject existence, which is heavily associated with the elderly in the *Íslendingasögur*. The degradation of ageing is harnessed by venerable individuals, with the unexpected inversion associated with their decrepitude being used, in a manner that seems to fit well with the perspective of thirteenth-century Christian Icelanders, to attempt to preserve a secure social order.

The Old Man in the Arena of Law

The link between the loss of prowess and reputation associated with male ageing, and an inability or reluctance to engage in feud, has been demonstrated through the example of Ingimundr. The option that is not considered in *Vatnsdæla saga* is settlement through the legal system of the Icelandic commonwealth, a non-violent avenue that remains open to the old man. This is not to force a dichotomy between feuding and the legal system—in many ways they regularly bleed into one another in saga narratives, as ‘no one understood law and feud to be necessarily opposed’ (Miller 1990, 236). Heusler goes so far as to contend that legal practice was simply a stylised form of feud (1911, 103), and while this formulation is not subtle enough to take account of the nuances of legal settlement, the idea that the masculine posturing at a *þing* acts as a proxy, both pragmatic and symbolic, for physical combat is a convincing one. Miller compares legal proceedings to horse fighting, as a spectator sport that had codified rules but could boil over into violence (1990, 257). What he fails to add is that the horses, like the law, absorb the wish to inflict humiliation or injury, therefore allowing a socially and physically weaker man to challenge those who exceed him in social status. The old man is one of the most marginalised individuals able to participate in legal proceedings, and while he is neither dominant nor *de facto* sagacious in this sphere, in this section it will be demonstrated that he is afforded more opportunity for potency and respect in the shadow of the Law Rock than elsewhere in Icelandic society.

For an instance of an old man reclaiming, sustaining and amplifying his place in a saga narrative by means of legal procedure, one may turn to *Bandamanna saga* and the character of Ófeigr. He is introduced at the outset of the saga as a respected *bóndi* ‘householder’ whose reputation is nevertheless undercut by his lack of *lausafé* ‘liquid assets’. At this point there is no indication that Ófeigr has entered old age: his son Oddr is twelve years old, initially seeming unlikely to challenge Ófeigr’s status as patriarch. This is swiftly proved inaccurate, however, when Oddr runs away from home, breaking off contact with his father and accruing large amounts of wealth, by the standards of Icelandic society, through avaricious trading as he matures into an adult. Pencak notes that father and son embody ‘a compressed history of the island’ (1995, 100), with the earlier generation’s vast land claims contrasting with their poverty in moveable goods, while the later generation embraces mercantile trading to gain wealth and status as the availability of land becomes limited. It certainly seems that the younger generation has supplanted the older within the narrative: the focus shifts to Oddr’s acquisition and defence of his *goðorð* ‘chieftaincy’ against a certain Óspakr, and it appears that Ófeigr has been implicitly sidelined in favour of his successful son.

The opportunity for Ófeigr to re-enter the narrative is afforded by the humiliation of Oddr when his legal proceedings against Óspakr collapse on a technicality. As Oddr returns to his booth he is confronted by a mysterious figure (*Bandamanna saga* 1936, 318–19):

Ok er hann kemr í búðarsundit, þá gengr maðr í mót honum; sá er við aldr. Hann var í svartri ermakápu, ok var hon komin at sliti; ein var ermr á kápunni, ok horfði sú á bak apr. Hann hafði í hendi staf ok brodd í, hafði síða hettuna ok rak undan skyggnur, stappaði niðr stafnum ok fór heldr bjúgr. Þar var kominn Ófeigr karl, faðir hans.³

And when he entered the passage between the booths, a man was coming towards him; he was advanced in age, was in a black cape with sleeves, and it was threadbare; a single sleeve was on the cape, and it was pointing backwards. He had in his hand a staff with a point on it, he wore the hood low and peered with wide open eyes from under it, he put his weight on his staff (as he moved) and walked somewhat stooped. Old man Ófeigr, his father, had come there.

It appears that during the time in which both his son and the narrative have been ignoring him Ófeigr has entered decrepit old age. Magerøy

³ *Íslensk fornrit* prints the *Konungsbók*, Gl. kgl. saml. 2845, 4to (K) and *Möðruvallabók*, AM132, fol. (M) variants in parallel. Both versions have their merits, but M tends to provide significant additional details, particularly concerning Ófeigr and the depiction of his agedness, and will be favoured for reference in this article.

notes that Ófeigr's dyed cloak and metal-tipped staff are conventionally symbols of masculine status (1981, 49), but here the elderly man's body has collapsed in spite of them, rendering them a tattered protection from the cold and a walking stick for support. Here the concept of old age as an ironic inversion of adulthood is made manifest: a *bóndi*'s symbols of past authority are converted into the trappings of frailty as he enters old age. Simultaneously worth consideration, however, is Lindow's contention that there are Odinnic elements to this characterisation that complicate it beyond a depiction of infirmity (1989, 241–57). When considering Old Norse portrayals of the elderly, it is necessary to be cautious and not to see all old men as reflecting a facet of the complex and varying presentations of Óðinn, who sometimes appears as an old man in Eddic poetry and saga prose. In this case, however, the comparison may be recommended by several specific details: Ófeigr appears in disguise, glaring from under the hood that partially conceals his eyes and wielding a pointed staff reminiscent of Óðinn's spear Gungnir. It is, nevertheless, unwise to overstate the importance of the mythic analogue; while it adds a subtext to Ófeigr's characterisation by hinting that his elderly performance may contain some form of crafty power, the saga redactor steers the reader away from the Odinic connotations by employing the plural *skyggmur* 'wide open eyes', whereas Óðinn has only one eye.⁴

Previous criticism of *Bandamanna* saga is neatly encapsulated in Magrøys's suggestion that the text's moral concern is protest against abuse of the law by *godar*, particularly in this case where they cooperate to increase their wealth and status further, and its chief entertainment value is in the humiliation of these powerful men (1981, xxx–xxxi). In this reading, 'Ófeigr's shabby appearance symbolizes the neglect of the law and the old traditions' (Pencak 1995, 102). This interpretation of Ófeigr's return to prominence, however, does not fit the account of his actions in the legal arena, which stresses his cunning primarily through his ability to manipulate the legal procedure, and his aged identity. The most egregious of his tactics is the free and frequent use of bribes to fracture the confederacy of *godar* allied against him, craftily positioning himself as the lordly dispenser of what is, in reality, his son's wealth. The saga does not, therefore, present Ófeigr as merely a venerable custodian of legal lore, but rather as a desperate opportunist who sees in the chaotic conflict between rival *godar* the chance to regain his status, and implicitly his social utility. Ófeigr's situation can

⁴ Another potential indication by the redactor that the two figures should not be conflated is the very name Ófeigr, which means 'not fated to die'. This fundamentally distinguishes Ófeigr from Óðinn, who is doomed to die at Ragnarök.

be contrasted with that of Þorbjörn in *Hrafnkels saga* who demands, and ultimately rejects, compensation from Hrafnkell for the killing of his son Einarr and whose pitiful weeping at the Alþingi contrasts with his successful prosecution of his formidable opponent (1950, 104–10). Miller, in pondering why Þorbjörn fares so well against Hrafnkell when other more powerful foes have failed, suggests that old men are underestimated as not being completely in control of their actions: ‘it is one of the ways they are denied full social (and legal) capacity; they are not held completely responsible’ (2017, 83). Both Ófeigr and Þorbjörn are allowed to engage in suspect social practices, be they engaging in bribes or rejecting reasonable offers of compensation, because of the ambiguity that informs their aged characterisation. The ambiguity lies in whether their enfeebled state is best understood as a disarming performance enacted for legal expedience or a genuine reflection of their pitiful social position, in which they have ceded culpability through infirmity.

To a greater extent than in *Hrafnkels saga*, however, the legal process in *Bandamanna saga* provides a space where societal preconceptions can be challenged and even mildly ridiculed; it is a zone of inversions of a status quo often predicated on physical strength, within which the old man flourishes. It may be that the legal arena was selected as one of the only places where an old man could better a younger, stronger opponent, and the only area in which the confederacy of *goðar* that Ófeigr pits himself against, as the epitome of Icelandic masculinity at the peak of its authority, could be overcome. Thus, as Oddr, Egill and Gellir all reveal themselves to be more foolish, greedy and gullible than their status would suggest, they lose masculine credibility, which is in turn transferred to Ófeigr as he mocks or outmanoeuvres them.

The symbolic return to youthful social utility is reflected in a parallel physical regeneration, as Ófeigr is rejuvenated throughout the course of the narrative. Initially, when the confederates seem unshakable in both their loyalty to one another and their legal rectitude, he is described in a manner that conflates his apparently troubled and uncertain mind-set with his body’s weakness (*Bandamanna saga* 1936, 330):

Þat var einn dag, er Ófeigr karl gekk frá búð sinni, ok var áhyggjumikit; sér enga liðveizlumenn sína, en þótti við þungt at etja; sér varla sitt færi einum við slíka hofðingja, en í máli váru engar verndir; ferr hækilbjúgr, hvarflar í milli búðanna ok reikar á fótum; ferr þannig lengi; kemr um síðir til búðar Egils Skúlasonar.

It was a certain day, that old man Ófeigr walked away from his booth, and was deeply anxious; he saw no prospect of supporters for himself and thought

it difficult to cope with; he could scarcely see any way to contend with such chieftains on his own, and there was no defence in the legal case; he walked bent at the knees, wandering between the booths and tottering on his legs; he walked in that way for a long time; he came finally to the booth of Egill Skúlason.

By the time he has established his scheme ensuring the duplicity of Egill and Gellir, who have both agreed to break ranks from the confederacy prosecuting Oddr, however, both Ófeigr's prospects and his gait have greatly improved: *Síðan ferr Ófeigr nú í brott ok til búðar Egils ok hvárki seint né krókótt ok eigi bjúgr* 'Afterward Ófeigr went away and to Egill's booth and (walked) neither slowly nor crookedly and not bent over' (*Bandamanna saga* 1936, 345). Furthermore, at the dénouement of the legal intrigue, where Ófeigr, with comic showmanship, selects Egill and Gellir as the two arbitrators of Oddr's case, ensuring his son is required to pay only a trivial settlement, he simultaneously completes his revivification: *strykr handleggina ok stendr heldr keikari; hann titrar augunum* 'He stroked his arms and stood rather more upright; his eyes twinkled' (*Bandamanna saga* 1936, 347).

Three readings may be suggested that account for this reversal of agedness, the first aligning with Magerøy's view that Ófeigr's elderly persona is a convincing deceit intended to elicit sympathy and complacency on the part of the *goðar* with whom he is negotiating (*Bandamanna saga* 1981, xxiii). While this interpretation fits with his characterisation as a cunning manipulator, it ignores the fact that Ófeigr acts in this wretched manner consistently from his reintroduction into the narrative, including when he seems to be unobserved while tottering between booths, suggesting that, if this is a performance rather than the true onset of old age, then Ófeigr himself has also been convinced of the actuality of his condition. The saga also regularly uses the formulation Ófeigr *karl* 'old man Ófeigr' (*Bandamanna saga* 1936, 319, 321, 329, 330) within the objective narrative, suggesting that his aged condition is real.⁵ The second option would be to embrace the Odinic parallel, suggested by Lindow (see above), and assert that Ófeigr is undergoing a supernatural transformation: as his deceit succeeds, his ageing process is literally reversed, leaving him with a potent body to match his restored social position. It would be incorrect to rule this interpretation out immediately because of its reliance on magical regeneration: a medieval Icelandic audience

⁵ It is of note that the saga does not make use of the expression after page 330, the point at which Ófeigr begins his negotiations with Egill. The first explicit elements of his regeneration follow shortly afterwards at page 345, when he has talked successfully with Gellir.

probably had a different sensibility for the appropriateness of uncanny details in otherwise realistic narratives.

It is possible, however, to suggest a third, previously unconsidered, option where the change in Ófeigr's presentation is induced not by an old man's *Realpolitik*, nor Iðunn-esque magic, but rather a shift in perception on the part of society, and crucially on the part of Ófeigr himself. According to this view, agedness is rendered irreducibly ambiguous by being simultaneously and inextricably performative and a bodily reality: Ófeigr's senescence is not purely an enacted deceit but a stylised response that embodies society's view of the hapless manner in which the old man should act and the mythological *topoi* with which he should be associated. As the progress of the legal proceedings humiliates the *goðar* and vindicates the elderly man, Ófeigr is able to shift his masculine performance to one closer to that of the conventional hegemony and have that shift acknowledged by the community; this is not simply the result of trickery, but rather of a man having his elderly status revoked through a demonstration of utility through legal prowess, with positive effects that are physically as well as socially demonstrable.

This reading casts light on another, even more subtle, presentation of a famous Icelander associated with both agedness and the law, that of Njáll Þorgeirsson, the eponymous central character of *Njáls saga*. The following analysis does not seek to challenge the significant body of work dedicated to analysis of his characterisation, but rather to add a specific qualification, in that Njáll, like Ófeigr, manipulates the law to stave off encroaching old age. While it is possible to agree with Ordower that Njáll's deviousness is veiled by the saga's approval of his concern for social harmony (1991, 52), it remains the case that his use of the legal system 'is directed towards achieving definite material aims and is fraught with egoism and the hope for the advancement of his own and his friend's interests' (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1971, 159). Njáll's reliance on the law to vindicate his social power should not be understated, with his legal skill being derived in part from his performance of traits conventionally associated with agedness. Throughout his mature depiction he is somewhat similar to the aged Ófeigr in as much as both are unable or unwilling to initiate violent action, instead relying on persuasive conversation with both friend and foe to achieve his aims. It would, nevertheless, be an overstatement to identify these figures too closely: Njáll is politically much more powerful than Ófeigr and does not need to rely on his opponents underestimating him. Furthermore, despite being coded as elderly, Njáll's depiction is multi-faceted and idiosyncratic: he is also often mocked for his inability to grow a beard, a traditionally

youthful trait. The *karl inn skegglaus* ‘the old beardless man’ (*Njáls saga* 1954, 314) insult is indicative of the odd duality of Njáll’s characterisation throughout the saga: he is permanently aged on a social level, due to his non-violent methods and venerable status, but also permanently childish, physically, owing to his smooth face. The unifying element, I suggest, is that, throughout his life, Njáll possesses characteristics associated with marginalised male groups, both the pre-pubescent and the elderly, and must strive to overcome them to remain a productive patriarch. His semi-prescient ability to foretell the outcome of legal proceedings allows him to maintain this status throughout a great part of his adulthood despite the violent potency of his sons. In a similar manner to Ófeigr, who gains the grudging respect of the *goðar* through his legal acumen, this supernatural characteristic increases the respect he is afforded by hyper-masculine figures such as Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi.

It would be a mistake, however, to assert that Njáll adheres to only one mode of agedness throughout the saga’s narrative: while elements of his legal persona seem to be informed by tropes surrounding the elderly, he also experiences another form of old age in which he is less productive. This is manifested after the slaying of Hqskuldr by the Njálssons, a deceitful piece of violence that through its extra-legality shows Njáll’s progeny rejecting the system of arbitration and settlement he has advocated. Their rebellion robs him of his authority and heralds the beginning of his infirmity. Just as is the case for Ófeigr, therefore, Njáll’s loss of the respect expected from his sons catalyses his transition into a more degrading version of old age. Perhaps, then, ‘his gravest fault . . . is he lived too long’ (Miller 2014, 246), and the role he has built for himself, based around a kindly cunning, was necessarily going to be challenged eventually by the violent masculinity of Skarpheðinn.

The effects of this familial rejection appear almost immediately, as Njáll is frail enough by the following *Alþing* to require another man to carry him from his horse to his chair (*Njáls saga* 1954, 296). Njáll’s loss of faith in the legal procedure, and with it his authority over his sons and the wider community, leads to this rapid shift in his social performance, with Njáll physically demonstrating his newfound dependence on stronger men. Njáll’s waning powers are also reflected in his decision to give Flosi an ornate but potentially unisex garment, the perceived insult giving the latter an opportunity to reject the settlement. This can either be read, as it is by Miller, as the degeneration of Njáll’s mental faculties, as he misses the potential danger in the inclusion of such a gift (2014, 246), or as a self-immolating gesture by an old man bitter at the failure of his vision—the

vision of social cohesion attained through the repeated de-escalation of feud through settlement. Njáll's characterisation is therefore inverted in old age through his capitulation to the inevitability of violence, which sets in motion the events leading up to the burning of Bergþórshváll.

By this point Njáll, like Ingimundur, welcomes his death with an admission of his unsuitability to participate in feud: *Eigi vil ek út ganga, því at ek em maðr gamall ok lítt til búinn at hefna sona minna, en ek vil eigi lífa við skömm* 'I will not come out, because I am an old man and am little fit to avenge my sons, and I do not wish to live in shame' (*Njáls saga* 1954, 330). It is of note, however, that even at this juncture, Njáll retains a degree of authority, as his sons obey their father's command to retreat into the farmstead, an action that can be read either as alignment with the defeatist whims of an old man or as a reluctant obedience to the potential wisdom of de-escalating feud through martyrdom. Whichever reading is accepted, Njáll is, nevertheless, able to supersede his sons, at the last, by the degree of his withdrawal from the conflict: Miller notes that Njáll's retreat to his bed, as his house burns down around him, indicates a ritualistic retreat from society, and a profession of absolute vulnerability and infirmity (2014, 231–32). When feud reaches its most destructive extremes, as in the burning of Njáll and his family, legal acumen is superseded by the threat of violence on one side and the embracing of Christian martyrdom on the other, and those that do not have the strength to participate, or even competently defend themselves, are rendered old shortly before their deaths. Njáll's famous pronouncement that law is crucial to Iceland *því at með lögum skal várt byggja, en með ólögum eyða* 'because with the law our land will be set in order, but with lawlessness laid waste' (*Njáls saga* 1954, 172) applies just as aptly to his own identity and status as it does to wider Icelandic society.

Two Grand Ironies of Old Age

Up to this point it has been demonstrated that characters in the *Íslendingasögur* often undergo a stark inversion of their attributes, roles and ideologies upon entering old age. These shifts, while intriguing on the level of an individual's characterisation, can often be only a dissonant afterword in the wider context of a saga's overarching narrative. With the possible exception of *Bandamanna saga*, sagas on the whole do not centralise the elderly, so their depictions, however unsettling, tend not to be able to compete with those of the more common modes of action that dominate the rest of a saga. There are two instances, however, where the presentations of short periods of old age that follow long and eventful lives

are deliberately ironic and occur in such pre-eminent figures within their respective sagas that they undermine the social and literary structures that have been built in celebration of these characters' potency. These are the presentations of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir in *Laxdæla saga* and Egill Skallagrímsson, the eponymous hero of *Egils saga*. Both will be considered here, paying particular mind to the literary manner in which the inversions inherent in old age are both wryly and sympathetically depicted.

Laxdæla saga is notable within the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur* for its depictions of women functioning on an equal and sometimes superior level to men of equivalent social status, as already suggested here in the discussion of the steadfastness of Unnr in her old age. Auerbach lists Þorgerðr, Jörunn, Melkorka, Auðr and Vigdís as women who are resistant in various ways to masculine dominance, and who are depicted in the saga in particular depth and detail (1998–2001, 33–35). These characters all prepare for the introduction of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, a woman so formidable that 'if she had been a man, the saga would probably be named after her' (Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, 276). Her initial description stresses her credentials in a society already well-populated with exceptional women: she is the superlative Icelandic woman in terms of beauty and wisdom, as well as more specifically as *kurteis* 'courtly' and *örlynd* 'generous' (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 86). Such is the hyperbole of the attributes of the youthful Guðrún that she is temporarily an unqualified paragon of Icelandic womanhood, at least equal to the model of masculinity provided in parallel by Kjartan.

Guðrún's role in the narrative is not, however, that of an uncomplicated exemplar; it could even be argued that her numerous relationships with ambitious and violent men necessitate the warping of her personality into that of a colder woman. In the case of her first husband Þorvaldr, Guðrún retains financial autonomy and compels him to fund her extravagant lifestyle; despite his attempt to subdue her with a slap, she domineers effectively over a man who is her social inferior (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 93–94). The drowning of her second husband Þórðr may well have been deeply destabilising for Guðrún considering her affection for him, but in imbuing her with the status of widow, despite her young age, it may account for her increase in masculine authority to such a point that Jochens sees her social power as reminiscent of that of the aged Unnr (1995, 61–62). The blow, however, which seems to cause the deepest offence, is Kjartan's refusal to allow her to accompany him abroad. Until this point, Kjartan and Guðrún have not only been suggested as the best match for one another but have also vied for narrative focus as dominant characters, and Kjartan's justification for rejecting Guðrún's demand is pivotal: '*Þat má eigi vera,*'

segir Kjartan; ‘bræðr þínir eru óráðnir, en faðir þinn gamall, ok eru þeir allri forsjá sviptir, ef þú ferr af landi á brott, ok bið mín þrjá vetr’ “‘That cannot happen,” said Kjartan. “Your brothers are not settled, and your father is old, and they will be deprived of all supervision if you go abroad from the country; but wait for me three years” (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 115). While Kjartan travels abroad to gain prestige through interaction with the renowned King Óláfr Tryggvason, Guðrún is instead associated with figures marginalised by youth and old age, which, despite her authority over them, in turn leads to her comparative marginalisation. Kjartan’s choice of rhetoric can be seen to invoke a romance motif, in which Guðrún is rendered a passive heroine awaiting the return of her questing lover, but in doing so, he also casts Guðrún’s father and brothers as dependents rendered helpless by their respective agedness and youth. This analogy between age and gender as limiting factors upon an individual’s agency is an injustice that Guðrún resists. Unlike the old man typified by her father, Guðrún refuses to conform to the passivity and deference associated with her role, and the ensuing bloody love-triangle, coupled with her escalating rhetoric of contempt and fury, can be seen as a response to the implied slight of Kjartan’s refusal.

Thus ensue the deaths of Kjartan and Bolli, as part of a prolonged feud, which, for all its various male participants, retains Guðrún in a central and implacable role. The ascendancy of Þorkell Eyjólfsson, her fourth husband, shifts the narrative away from her somewhat, but their clear affection for one another continues to gain her a great deal of glory by association, in what could be described as a more comfortable maturity. Þorkell’s drowning, as the death of her last husband, heralds the rapid onset of Guðrún’s old age, which occurs in parallel with her increasing piety and repentance for her previous actions. In comparison to the time spent detailing her wit and resolve during adulthood, Guðrún’s old age earns only a brief and understated reference: *Nú tekr Guðrún mjök at eldask ok lifði við slíka harma, sem nú var frá sagt um hríð. Hon var fyrst nunna á Íslandi ok einsetukona* ‘Now Guðrún began to age rapidly and lived with such sorrows as were related at length. She was the first nun and female hermit on Iceland’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 228). During the description of her agedness it is revealed that she has also gone blind, a condition that stresses Guðrún’s isolation on a sensory level, but also accentuates her decision to disengage from social stimuli.

A similar progression occurs in relation to Spes in *Spésar þáttur*, an episode that acts as a postscript to *Grettis saga* (1936, 271–89). Following her affair with, and eventual marriage to, Þorsteinn drómundr, Spes wishes

to atone for her sins, seeking absolution in Rome, and eventually isolating herself from her husband so both can become exemplars of Christian morality by living in seclusion (*Grettis saga* 1936, 286–89). Tellingly, Spes explains that her penitence for her previous misdeeds derives from an acknowledgement of her advanced age: *En vit gerumsk nú gømul bæði ok af æskuskeiði, en okkr hefir gengit meir eptir ástundun en kristiligum kenningum eða røksemdum réttenda* ‘But we are now both getting old and past the time of youth, and we two have been led more by our desires than by Christian doctrine or the authority of righteousness’ (*Grettis saga* 1936, 287). *Spésar þáttur* makes frequent use of romance motifs, and this scene of a woman striving to atone for her previous sexual liberty through a retreat from male company into a religious sanctuary is somewhat reminiscent of Guinevere’s entrance into a nunnery as penance for her affair with Lancelot in Arthurian literature. A similar influence from romance may have, in part, informed the depiction of Guðrún’s old age in *Laxdæla saga*, although the focus on Guðrún’s unmitigated grief is in contrast with the sanctimonious self-satisfaction of Spes.

Despite its brevity, this short sequence encapsulating the misery of Guðrún’s infirmity is both evocative and disruptive of the characterisation that has preceded it. Previous critics have been sensitive to the jarring shift the onset of old age evinces; in the words of Dronke, the saga redactor ‘has re-enacted for his own time a golden age of passionate expectations and has shown it pass into a settled, elderly, repentant age of pewter’ (1989, 225). This touches upon the reason why this postlude is so disturbing to the thematic unity of the saga as a whole, in that it replaces fluctuation with a static state. Guðrún throughout the saga embodies an endurance, and an ability to adapt, to both the vagaries of fate and the cruelty of men, and it is not unreasonable to imagine an Icelandic audience celebrating a figure who not only survives but flourishes despite a range of adverse circumstances: she plays a strong and sometimes dominant role in all four of her marriages. During her adulthood, Guðrún seems critical of the recklessness of those who surround her and their lack of consideration for the consequences of snap decisions (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 115), yet she herself is at the core of the impetuous generation that maintains the feud’s momentum throughout the saga’s central section.

In her old age, conversely, Guðrún is isolated from such accelerating action; she is borne backwards instead into guilty recollection through her remorse for her deeds—a particularly pointed example of old age’s retrospective upon youth. Her role as the purported first Icelandic nun is also relevant: vital to Guðrún’s independence is her survival of all four of

her husbands, yet in the piety of her old age she becomes a *sponsa Christi* ‘bride of Christ’,⁶ pledging herself to the one spouse she cannot hope to outlive or overtop.⁷ This can be read as a profession of profound vulnerability, since a woman who in her youth proved her ability to compete within a masculine system, professes her need for protection by a spiritual patriarch. Coupled with her status as an anchoress, Guðrún has enacted an inversion of her adult characterisation that is ironic in its opposition to her previous lifestyle: she is isolated from society, unquestioningly submissive to a male lord, and penitently weeping. Guðrún’s penance may have been viewed by the saga’s Christian author as an appropriate demonstration of remorse, but the radical dichotomy between her past of romance and violence and her present of reflective but miserable piety leaves ambiguously unanswered the question whether Guðrún’s transformation was fitting for such a pre-eminent woman. The saga limits itself to stressing the unattainable nature of the aggressive and ambitious lifestyles it has so eloquently celebrated; despite its brevity, the postlude does much to emphasise that the saga’s subject matter no longer exists, in rendering Guðrún as the lone repentant survivor of a different age.

⁶ An Icelandic saga redactor would almost certainly have been aware of the theological formulation of the nun as a bride of Christ. It has been present within doctrinal tradition from, at the latest, Tertullian’s *Ad Uxorem* in the third century and was popularised by the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo, which were widely disseminated throughout Scandinavia: see Chavasse 1940, 133, 157. Icelandic hagiographical writing also makes use of the *sponsa Christi* motif, for instance in *Agnesar saga*, where St. Agnes’ marriage to Christ is a major theme that informs her pious rejection of carnal relations: see *Agnesar saga meyjar (Heilagra manna sögur* 1877, 15–22). Agnes was a sufficiently popular saint in twelfth-century Iceland to have her feast day celebrated: see Wolf 2008, 245. When this is coupled with the fact that the earliest extant manuscript fragments of *Agnesar saga* date from c. 1300, it is highly likely that the author and audiences of *Laxdæla saga* were aware of the basic themes of St Agnes’s story. Given the above, it is reasonable to assume that *Laxdæla saga* makes use of the term *nunna* with the sophisticated literary connotations argued for in this article.

⁷ The only other work I have seen that touches on Guðrún’s being a bride of Christ is Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir 2008, ix–xxxix, xxxv. In Bergljót’s reading, however, this is used to accentuate Guðrún’s lifelong love for Kjartan by associating him with Christ and suggesting that Guðrún will achieve union with him in the next life. This is not theologically cogent, however, and in any case, it is hard to see many elements of the Christ figure in the ambitious and initially heathen Kjartan; nevertheless, it is possible to agree with Bergljót’s view that Guðrún’s period of repentance is intended to generate a stark contrast with the un-Christian action that preceded it.

In its most sophisticated depictions old age is destructive in its torpor, corroding the Icelandic ideal of independence by demonstrating great champions of self-determination to have fallen abruptly into dependency. Of the portrayals of ageing found within the *Íslendingasögur*, Egill Skalla-Grímsson's decline into frailty is one of the most striking and well-known episodes. Ármann Jakobsson considers Egill's complaints about his infirmity consistent with the wider medieval tradition of lamenting the negativity of old age but notes, nevertheless, the particular irony of Egill, who in his youth was so steadfastly resistant to subjugation, becoming dependent on his household (2005, 302). Ármann also offers an analysis of the famous episode in which Egill warms himself by the fire, only to be berated by a washer-woman (*Egils saga* 1933, 295):

Egill varð með öllu sjónlauss. Þat var einnhvern dag, er veðr var kalt um vetrinn, at Egill fór til elds at verma sik; matseljan ræddi um, at þat var undr mikit, slíkr maðr sem Egill hafði verit, at hann skyldi liggja fyrir fötum þeim, svá at þær mætti eigi vinna verk sín.

Egill became altogether blind. It happened one day, when the weather was cold during the winter, that Egill went to the fire to warm himself; the washer-woman said of this that it was a great wonder, for a man such as Egill had been, that he should lie in the way of their feet, so that they could not do their work.

His interpretation of the irony of this scene is simply that it goes against expectation, as a great warrior is admonished by a low-status member of the household: this is judged to have been intended to elicit a blended response of satisfaction and sympathy on the part of the reader, with Ármann suggesting a cosmic irony is at play, and fate conspiring to render a once mighty individual pathetic (2005, 316). In relation to Egill's misery, Ármann makes reference to Hólmǫngu-Bersi, the highly successful duellist who is depicted in both *Laxdæla saga* and *Kormáks saga*, and who composes a verse towards the end of his life in which he relates his condition to that of his infant foster-son, as both lie passively on a bench in the homestead, marginalised through their respective extremities of age (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 76):

Liggjum báðir
í lamasessi
Halldórr ok ek,
höfum engi þrek;
veldr elli mér,
en æska þér,
þess batnar þér,
en þeygi mér.

We both lie in feebleness, Halldórr and I—we have no strength. Old age rules over me but youth over you. This will improve for you and yet not for me.

The saga explicitly compares the marginal role of the infant and the geriatric, the latter clearly the more wretched in that his plight can only deteriorate. Figures such as Egill and Bersi are also acknowledged as particularly denigrated individuals because their awareness of their plight leads them to lament it vocally, as in the case of Egill's skaldic verses that bemoan his impotence and failing body (*Egils saga* 1933, 294–96). The old are a noisy subaltern group, and therefore of particular frustration to wider society.

The presentation of old age as a degeneration into an even more hapless version of childhood informs the irony in the saga's later sequences. It is not simply that Egill has become bitter through being rendered immobile and marginalised, but that an aggressively masculine patriarch has been recast in a state analogous to that of dependent youthfulness. Egill functions as a mature adult almost from the point of his introduction into the saga, proclaiming his intellectual standing within society from the age of three by publicly attending a feast and reciting poetry against his father Skalla-Grímr's wishes (*Egils saga* 1933, 81). By the age of seven, he has also asserted his violent potential by killing the older and stronger boy Grímr Heggsson after a dispute during a ball game (*Egils saga* 1933, 99–100). These early episodes are typified by a rejection of both familial authority and of the dependency on adult support usually associated with childhood, foregrounding the stubborn and short-tempered nature of many of the skald's later interactions, in particular with kings, who in their patriarchal authority can readily be seen as symbolic father figures. Egill therefore functions as an Icelandic prodigy, whose poetic genius and superlative strength allow him to bypass childhood and immediately progress to functional adulthood. His maturity is therefore hyper-extended across the vast majority of his appearances within the saga.

Thus, we may return to the episode discussed above, in which Egill as an old man is insulted for being curled by the fire. Like Guðrún, Egill is blind and immobilised; unlike her, he remains located in the bustle of the homestead. Thus, while Guðrún's isolation preserves some of her dignity, Egill's decline into frailty is visible and frustrating to those who have to support him, and therefore takes on additional social dimensions. While Ármann does not extend his analysis of this sequence to consider the co-option of the language and depictions of the marginalised by Egill in his aged performance, the issue has been covered by Clover, who sees the increase in women interacting with Egill towards the end of his life as

evidence that Egill is associated with and denigrated by the ‘second class company’ he keeps (1993, 381–82). This is an astute reading of Egill’s loss of status, through becoming a housebound man and suffering the implications of such a reputation. To suggest that the transformation implies that Egill becomes womanly, however, is to ignore both the alienating hostility with which women treat him during his old age, and the compatibility of his portrayal with another social group also associated with the household: the immature man.

The irony, but also the pathetic degradation, of Egill in his old age is that the saga cannibalises tropes conventionally used in the portrayal of youth to stress the bathos of the vulnerability that comes upon him for the first time in his old age. At one level this is a reflection of the harsh realities of ageing and of the decline in status associated with a loss of utility in a society with little tolerance for infirmity. The saga is sufficiently sophisticated, however, to allow the further argument that this depiction intentionally evokes the topos of the *kolbítar*, the feckless adolescent men that Ásdís Egilsdóttir defines through their ability to frustrate their family in their indolence, and who take their name from their habit of lying idle close to the fire (2005, 87–100). Both the *kolbítar* and the old man are marginalised male characters placed in a shamefully passive position in the feminine indoors space and condemned as a nuisance and a drain on the resources of the household. The redactor of *Egils saga* manipulates the well-known folkloric trope of the *kolbítar* to convey the debilitating effect Egill’s decline has on his reputation and show how swiftly physical frailty can corrode dignity.

Just as a *kolbítar* figure such as Gunnlaugr ormstunga is forbidden by his father Illugi from travelling abroad in his youth due to the offence he may cause (*Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* 1974, 22), Egill’s rash fantasy of journeying from home to disrupt the *Alþing* is swiftly curtailed by his step-daughter Þórdís and her husband Grímr, with Ármann Jakobsson noting that the latter’s name recalls Egill’s own father and his blunt attempts to censor his son’s behaviour (2008, 3–5). Not only does this herald a loss of ingenuity for Egill, who in his youth was truculently persuasive in his demands to be allowed to travel, but, in an infantilising inversion, the younger generation take on the role of arbitrators and upholders of socially condoned ethics, with Þórdís condemning her rebellious elder’s actions in the strongest of terms (*Egils saga* 1933, 297). Egill’s plan to cause chaos at the assembly through flinging his silver down into the crowd to instigate a fight is as immature as any display of adolescent posturing, but it can be read as overcompensation for his waning status. Egill’s wish to overtop the

Commonwealth, physically and symbolically, from the heights of the Law Rock, is not only due to a desire to once again function as an unconstrained troublemaker, as he did in his youth, but also, in a secondary sense, to use King Aðalsteinn's gift to play at being a pre-eminent gift-giver who can recreate dependants for himself with his silver. Yet the ease with which he capitulates to Grímr's demand that he not undertake the scheme reveals that, despite the bravado of Egill's posturing, this is a futile attempt by an old man to re-centre himself within Icelandic society. His identity as an agitator was safeguarded by his daunting strength, and as a blind and weak elder he is obliged to comply with the social consensus.

Just as a *kolbíttr*, when familial censure becomes unbearable, eventually leaves home with a portion of the family's wealth that facilitates his efforts to shake off his idle reputation and gain widespread renown,⁸ Egill departs the homestead with Aðalsteinn's silver to assert his independence from constrictive familial concerns and ensure a form of enduring autonomy. Unlike a rebellious character maturing out of youth, however, Egill cannot now re-enter productive adulthood, so his burial or sinking of his silver is vindictive towards his surviving family. Rather than acting as a triumphant departure from the *kolbíttr* identity, this gesture instead become morbid in prefiguring his impending death by stripping Egill of a signifier of his glorious past: the ageing warrior literally buries his violent legacy. This episode also suggests that Egill has disregarded Aðalsteinn's previous command to distribute the silver to his father and select members of his family (*Egils saga* 1933, 145). Egill's implied contempt both for the king and for his own family, therefore, further undermines his position as a mature and respected member of Icelandic and wider Scandinavian society. I contend, therefore, that the extended ironic comparison of Egill to a *kolbíttr* is intended to elicit a blend of scorn and pity. The disparagement involved in the remodelling of a hyper-masculine warrior-skald as a figure associated with feckless laziness, is sympathetically tempered by the knowledge that, unlike that of the youthful *kolbíttr*, Egill's degeneracy is outside his own control and beyond social remedy. In this manner, the values that Egill and his family have championed throughout the saga, those of autonomy and violence, are doubly eroded by both contempt and empathy in the disturbing final image of the reduction of their fiercest proponent to an abject state.

⁸ For an excellent case, within the *fornaldarsögur* corpus, of a *kolbíttr* demonstrating his ability to accumulate wealth once he leaves home, see the example of Refr, who takes his father's prize black bull to Neri jarl in *Gautreks saga* (*Fornaldarsögur norðurlanda* 1945–59, III 39).

Conclusions

It is not a chronologically advanced age that determines that an individual has become old; loss of productivity within the familial group, at whatever point it occurs during adulthood, is likely to be the traumatic event that leads a saga to comment that an individual has entered old age. This is the case, in particular, for the pre-eminent men and women of saga literature discussed above, who, despite their previous potency, must renegotiate their social position following the intervention of old age. In the cases of Egill and Guðrún, ageing occasions an implosion into irredeemable feebleness that belies their formidable maturity and casts a pall over their past accomplishments. For others, such as Ingimundr and Unnr, familial authority is reconciled with decrepitude, albeit in a form that is necessarily more passive. The example of Ófeigr, however, serves as a reminder that, for old men at least, immersion in, and manipulation of, the legal process can rejuvenate the manner in which their bodies and social status are approved. Elderliness within the *Íslendingasögur* is a state of existence that, while ambiguous in the multiple interpretations that its brief and abstruse presentations can support, is consistently defined against a preceding maturity. Unsettling depictions of senescence reveal that the norms of redoubtable adulthood are provisional for even eminent saga characters, and the unexpected rescission of productivity and respect creates a phase in which Icelanders are transfigured through their complex performances of agedness. In sagas which offer extended narration of feats of physical prowess and social distinction, the crumpling of both body and status during the postscript of old age has all the impact of a concluding plot twist in modern film, in providing a final disturbing sequence that threatens to call into question all preceding action.

Bibliography

- Ármann Jakobsson 2005. 'The Specter of Old Age: Nasty Old Men in the Sagas of Icelanders'. *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104.3, 297–325.
- Ármann Jakobsson 2008. 'Egils saga and Empathy: Emotions and Moral Issues in a Dysfunctional Saga Family'. *Scandinavian Studies* 80.1, 1–18.
- Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2005. 'Kolbítur verður karlmaður'. In *Miðaldabörn*. Ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Torfi Tulinius, 87–100.
- Auerbach, Loren 1998–2001. 'Female Experience and Authorial Intention in *Laxdæla saga*'. *Saga-Book* XXV, 30–53.
- Bandamanna saga* 1936. In *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar; Bandamanna saga, Odds þáttur Ófeiggssonar*. Ed. Guðni Jónsson. Íslensk fornrit VII, 291–363.
- Bandamanna saga* 1981. Ed. Hallvard Magerøy. Introduction and notes trans. Peter Foote and Sue Margeson.

- Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir 2008. 'Introduction'. In *The Saga of the People of Laxardal and Bolli Bollason's Tale*. Trans. Keneva Kunz, ix–xxxix.
- Byock, Jesse 1982. *Feud in the Icelandic Saga*.
- Chavasse, Claude 1940. *The Bride of Christ: An Enquiry into the Nuptial Element in Early Christianity*.
- Cleasby, Richard, and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1957. *An Icelandic–English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. with a supplement by Sir William A. Craigie.
- Clover, Carol 1993. 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women and Power in Early Northern Europe'. *Speculum* 68.2, 363–87.
- Dronke, Ursula 1989. 'Narrative Insight in *Laxdæla saga*'. In *Sagas of the Icelanders: A Book of Essays*. Ed. John Tucker, 206–25.
- Egils saga = Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* 1933. Ed. Sigurður Nordal. Íslenzk fornrit II.
- Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1971. *Njáls saga: A Literary Masterpiece*. Ed. and trans. Paul Schach.
- Evans, Gareth 2015. 'Models of Men: The Construction and Problematization of Masculinities in the Íslendingasögur'. DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford.
- Eyrbyggja saga*. In *Eyrbyggja saga, Brands þáttur orva, Eiríks saga rauða, Grænlendinga saga, Grænlendinga þáttur* 1935. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson. Íslenzk fornrit IV, 1–186.
- Finlay, Alison 2015. 'Elegy and Old Age in *Egils saga*'. In *Egil the Viking Poet: New Approaches to Egil's saga*. Ed. Laurence de Looze et al., 111–31.
- Fornaldarsögur norðurlanda* 1954–59. Ed. Guðni Jónsson. 4 vols.
- Grettis saga*. In *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, Bandamanna saga, Odds þáttur Ófeigssonar* 1936. Ed. Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit VII, 1–290.
- Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* 1974. Ed. Peter Foote and Randolph Quirk.
- Heilagra manna sögur: Fortællinger og Legender om hellige Mænd og Kvinder* 1877. Ed. Carl Rikard Unger.
- Heusler, Andreas 1911. *Das Strafrecht der Isländersagas*.
- Hrafnkels saga*. In *Austfirðinga sögur* 1950. Ed. Jón Jóhannesson. Íslenzk fornrit XI, 95–133.
- Kormáks saga*. In *Vatnsdæla saga, Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks saga, Hrómundar þáttur halta, Hrafnis þáttur Guðrúnarsonar* 1939. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit VIII, 203–302.
- Jesch, Judith 1991. *Women in the Viking Age*.
- Jochens, Jenny 1995. *Women in Old Norse Society*.
- Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2008. 'Becoming "Old", Ageism and Taking Care of the Elderly in Iceland'. In *Youth and Age in the Medieval North*. Ed. Shannon Lewis-Simpson, 227–42.
- Jónas Kristjánsson 1988. *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*. Trans. Peter Foote.
- Laxdæla saga*. In *Laxdæla saga, Halldórs þættir Snorrasonar, Stífs þáttur* 1934. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit V, 1–248.
- Lindow, John 1989. 'A Mythic Model in *Bandamanna saga* and its Significance'. In *Sagas of the Icelanders: A Book of Essays*. Ed. John Tucker, 241–57.

- McCreesh, Bernadine 2010. 'The Structure of *Vatnsdæla saga*'. *Saga-Book* XXXIV, 75–87.
- Miller, William Ian 1990. *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland*.
- Miller, William Ian 2014. 'Why Is Your Axe Bloody?' *A Reading of Njáls saga*.
- Miller, William Ian 2017. *Hrafnkel or the Ambiguities: Hard Cases, Hard Choices*.
- Morris, Katherine 1991. *Sorceress or Witch? The Image of Gender in Medieval Iceland and Northern Europe*.
- Nitecki, Alicia K. 1990. 'Figures of Old Age in Fourteenth-Century English Literature'. In *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*. Ed. Michael McMahon Sheehan, 107–16.
- Njáls saga = Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit XII.
- Ordower, Henry 1991. 'Exploring the Literary Function of Law and Litigation in "Njal's Saga"'. *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 3.1, 41–61.
- Overing, Gillian R. 1999. 'A Body in Question: Aging, Community and Gender in Medieval Iceland'. *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29.1, 211–25.
- Pencak, William 1995. *The Conflict of Law and Justice in the Icelandic Sagas*.
- Shahar, Shulamith 1997. *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain*. Trans. Yael Lotan.
- Sturlunga saga* 1946. Ed. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn. 2 vols.
- Tucker, John, ed., 1989. *Sagas of the Icelanders: A Book of Essays*.
- Vanherpen, Sofie 2013. 'Remembering Auðr/Unnr djúp(a)úðga Ketilsdóttir: Construction of Cultural Memory and Female Religious Identity'. *Mirator* 14.2, 61–78.
- Vatnsdæla saga*. In *Vatnsdæla saga, Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks saga, Hrómundar þátrr halta, Hrafn þátrr Guðrúnarsonar* 1939. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit VIII, 1–131.
- Wolf, Kirsten 2008. 'Pride and Politics in Late-Twelfth-Century Iceland: The Sanctity of Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson'. In *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*. Ed. Thomas A. DuBois, 241–70.

THE FORMULA IN ICELANDIC SAGA PROSE

BY DANIEL SÄVBORG

University of Tartu

DURING THE LAST CENTURY many scholars of Icelandic saga literature have devoted their research to macro structures, while, in contrast, much less attention has been paid to style (see Sävborg 2017, 111–26).¹ One element that is frequently mentioned in connection with saga style, however, is the use of verbal formulas. Sometimes the formulas are only mentioned as a typical feature of the sagas (e.g. Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 112). But sometimes the use of formulas is assigned an important role in an argument for the oral background of the sagas and their style.²

In spite of this, there has been remarkably little analysis of the formulas in saga prose: what types of formulas there are, how they should be described as stylistic phenomena and what function they have. Most often they have been only briefly mentioned. The formulas which are mentioned are the most transparent ones, such as the typical opening of an *Íslendingasaga*, *X hét maðr*, and there is therefore a risk that the saga formulas in general might be regarded as an uncomplicated phenomenon, whose character, function and meaning are obvious. The scholars who have paid attention to the formulas in the sagas have hardly ever put the term into a larger context of formula use or in any kind of theoretical model, and the research on formulas in the sagas generally only scratches the surface. A scholarly analysis or description of the formula as a phenomenon in the saga literature is still lacking.

The present article aims to at least partly fill this gap. It aims to give a theoretical description of the formulas in saga prose by putting them in a larger research context, and to clarify their role as a central stylistic feature of the sagas. The article also aims to discuss a selection of different types of formulas in the sagas and establish their function, meaning and formal character.

¹ For example, Andersson 1967; Harris 1972, 1–27; Danielsson 1986; Lönnroth 1976; Clover 1982; Madelung 1972.

² For Robert Kellogg and Robert Scholes, the ‘formulaic’ character of saga style is one of the main arguments for its oral background (Scholes and Kellogg 1966, 43); this argument is even more pronounced in the work of Knut Liestøl, although he does not use the word ‘formula’ (Liestøl 1929, 30–32). The same argument is found in Lönnroth 1993, 93.

'Formula' is not a concept that has a strong position in modern literary theory. In most of the more recent dictionaries on literary theory and criticism the term is entirely lacking.³ In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* the term 'formulaic' has an entry, but the description is short and rather superficial, and it does not mention the possible occurrence of formulas in prose (Baldick 1990, 87).

The silence in works on literary theory stands in sharp contrast to the interest in the concept of formula and the role ascribed to it in research on oral and medieval vernacular poetry. The 'oral-formulaic theory' was fashionable in research on e.g. Old Norse, Old English, Middle High German and Homeric poetry from the 1960s to the 1990s. The research was usually based on Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales* from 1960, where the oral-formulaic theory had its breakthrough, but went back, at least indirectly, to the works of Lord's former tutor, Milman Parry, from the 1920s and 30s.

In Old Norse research this trend was influential in the study of Eddic poetry.⁴ But the treatment of formulas in saga prose is also clearly related to the oral-formulaic theory, as is evident from references in works by, for example, Lars Lönnroth (1993, 92–93) and Richard F. Allen (1971, 63, 74 etc.). This means that an analysis of the formulas in the sagas must take the oral-formulaic theory into account and take a position on the view of formulas established by Parry and Lord.

Parry gave a first definition of *formula* in his 1928 dissertation, written in French, on the epithet in Homer's poetry,⁵ but it is his revised definition in a work on Homer's style from 1930, this time in English, that has become standard: 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea' (Parry 1930, 80). Parry was still referring only to Homer; the definition is actually introduced by: 'The formula in the Homeric Poems may be defined as . . .', but the definition was later applied to formulas in oral poetry in

³ Such as Carey and Snodgrass 1999, Cuddon 1991, Murfin and Ray 1997.

⁴ See the useful surveys in Frog 2011, 19–28; Thorvaldsen 2006, 19–34; Acker 1998, 85–110; Harris 1985, 112. For examples of the trend of applying the oral-formulaic theory to Eddic poetry (with or without reservations), see Lönnroth 1971, 1–20 and 1981, 310–27; Kellogg 1998, vii; Gísli Sigurðsson 1990, 245; Mellor 2008, 114–24. For other types of formula analyses of Eddic poetry, see Mellor 2008, 62–63, 69–112, 169–287; Frog 2011, 28–63; Acker 1998, 63–83.

⁵ 'Dans la diction des poèmes aédiques la formule peut être définie comme une expression qui est régulièrement employée, dans les mêmes conditions métriques, pour exprimer une certaine idée essentielle' (Parry 1928, 16).

general. The scholar mainly responsible for this development was Albert Lord in *The Singer of Tales* from 1960, whose main focus was the still living oral poetry in Yugoslavia. Lord adopts Parry's 1930 definition of the formula word for word (Lord 2000, 4), but comments further on its function. Parry's definition had already emphasised the close connection between the formula and the metre of a poem in the words 'under the same metrical conditions'. Lord goes a step further and underscores the fundamental connection between formula and metre in oral composition in general: this way of composing poetry 'consists of the building of metrical lines and half lines by means of formulas and formulaic expressions and of the building of songs by the use of themes' (4). He returns to this connection several times; for instance: 'the formula is the offspring of the marriage of thought and sung verse . . . Any study of the formula must therefore properly begin with a consideration of metrics and music' (31). The function of the formula, according to Lord, is to serve as a tool to handle (improvised) composition at the pace of the performance: '[the singer] is forced by the rapidity of composition in performance to use the traditional elements [i.e. formulas and themes]' (4).⁶

In short, the formula in Parry and Lord's view is closely connected with metrical form and oral performance; these features are laid down in the definition itself and are basic characteristics of the formula. Since the sagas constitute a literary prose genre, these two basic elements make Parry and Lord's formula definition impossible to apply to this genre. Nevertheless, the rest of the definition, 'a group of words which is regularly employed . . . to express a given essential idea' might still also be relevant for written prose works, such as the sagas.

The most useful modern theoretical discussion of formulas is found not in works of literary theory but rather in linguistics. Considering the formula as a linguistic phenomenon, rather than as a literary device, has turned out to be a fruitful development in the research of the last decades. The leading scholar within this field of research is Alison Wray, whose view of formulas is influential in linguistic research on formulaic language (see e.g. Schmitt and Carter 2004, 2–4). Rather than referring to 'formulas' she uses the terms 'formulaic language' and 'formulaic sequence', of which the last term seems to be relevant as an equivalent of the unit otherwise called 'formula'. Wray's definition of 'formulaic sequence' is:

⁶ Lord avoids the term 'improvisation' for the oral poet and prefers 'composition in performance' (Lord 2000, 4).

a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is sorted and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar (Wray 2002, 9 [after Wray 2009, 29]).

For Wray, formulaic sequences do not constitute a stylistic device in poetry or narrative literature, but a central feature of language in general. Many of her examples come from everyday language, such as ‘nice to see you’ or ‘let me see’ (Wray 2009, 38), and the same is true for other scholars in the same linguistic tradition; in his discussion of ‘formulaic expression’ Andrew Pawley gives examples such as ‘excuse me’, ‘on the contrary’, ‘I wouldn’t dream of it’, ‘I am pleased to meet you’ (Pawley 2009, 6–7; cf. also Schmitt and Carter 2004, 3–6). In light of this it should not come as a surprise that some scholars use the term ‘formulaic sequence/expression’ almost synonymously with ‘idiom’ (e.g. Schmitt and Carter 2004, 1). Nor should we be surprised when Norbert Schmitt and Ronald Carter claim that ‘Formulaic sequences are ubiquitous in language use . . . and they make up a large proportion of any discourse’: in the statistics given by Britt Erman and Beatrice Warren formulaic sequences constitute as much as 58.6% of spoken English and 53.2% of written English (Schmitt and Carter 2004, 1; Erman and Warren 2000, 37, who use the term ‘prefabs’). While the problem with Parry and Lord’s definition of ‘formula’ is that it is too narrow, the problem with the linguists’ definitions of ‘formulaic sequence/expression’ might be, by contrast, that they are too broad to reveal the particularities of the style and narrative technique of the Icelandic sagas.

There are also more impressionistic attempts to define or describe the formulas in saga prose, descriptions which, however, have the advantage of applying specifically to this genre. Knut Liestøl, who does not use the term, simply claims that ‘Ein vil ofte finna dei same orðlagi so snart dei same, eller liknande situasjonar kjem att’ (One will often find the same wording whenever the same, or similar situations occur) (Liestøl 1929, 30). Lars Lönnroth, who does use the term ‘formula’, gives the following description: it is ‘a particular kind of phrase associated with a particular type of meaning’ (Lönnroth 1976, 44).⁷ These descriptions are actually not bad—and Liestøl successfully identifies some important formulas in

⁷ Lönnroth (1974, 44) also gives a somewhat longer description of the formula in *Íslendingasögur*:

It is a frequently recurring sequence of words which may be used in the construction of stock scenes and stock descriptions, i.e., segments associated with a particular type of traditional content . . . But a formula may also have other functions, and it is by no means a necessary ingredient in any type of segment.

Íslendingasögur—but they seem too vague to serve as the theoretical basis for an analysis, and they evidently lack any connection with the definitions used in any theoretical literature or in scholarly works on any literature other than the particular genre of *Íslendingasögur*.⁸

By contrast, in a recent work William Lamb has examined the form and function of ‘verbal formulas’ in Gaelic traditional narrative. His investigation, like the present one, concerns prose narratives, and may in fact be the most thorough attempt ever to analyse formulas as a stylistic device in narrative prose. Unlike the saga scholars mentioned above he connects his discussion to theory in the field and thus avoids the impressionistic character of Liestøl’s and Lönnroth’s definitions and descriptions. Lamb’s article is therefore highly relevant to the present study.

Lamb takes Wray’s definition of formulaic sequences as his point of departure (with the exclusion of phrases that seem to be idiolectic, i.e. used by a single narrator), although he refers to ‘formulas’ instead of ‘formulaic sequences’ (Lamb 2015, 226–27). In the present study I will follow Lamb’s example and adopt Wray’s definition as the basis, but add to it that the ‘sequence’ in question is a sequence in narrative discourse, avoiding the inclusion of idioms from ordinary discourse. One reason for using Wray’s definition is that it lacks the connection to metre and improvised verse. Another reason is that this definition, in contrast to Parry’s, is not based on exact lexical repetition, but describes the sequences as ‘continuous *or discontinuous*’ and specifies the sequence as based on ‘words *or other elements*’ (my italics in both cases), which is a clear advantage when analysing Icelandic narrative prose. Another advantage of using Wray’s and other linguists’ view of formulas in contrast to Parry and Lord’s is that the linguists stress the importance of a particular meaning connected to the formula/formulaic sequence. This is, as we will see, of fundamental importance in the analysis of saga prose.

Saga prose is found in native works usually divided into the genres of *Íslendingasögur*, *samtíðarsögur*, *fornaldarsögur* and *konungasögur*. Many of the formulas discussed in this article are found in all these native genres, while others seem to be specific to one or some of them. To avoid making the study too broad I will focus on one of these (generally accepted)

⁸ In a series of inspiring articles Slavica Rankovic has also discussed what she calls ‘formulas’, ‘formulaic features’, etc. What she discusses under this heading, however, are mainly recurring motifs, themes and story patterns (e.g. Rankovic 2013a, 259; 2014, 46, 49), and she never defines what she means by the term or discusses any formal characteristics. Nevertheless, in one case her view of a ‘formula’ coincides with mine (see below).

genres, the *Íslendingasögur*. This also makes this work more compatible with the formula research of other saga scholars, which has exclusively discussed the formulas in *Íslendingasögur*. But formulas are used, as already stated, in similar ways in other parts of the native saga literature, and I will sometimes note such occurrences when they seem relevant.

Function of the formulas

What function does the use of formulas have in the sagas? Most earlier scholars have not been particularly interested in this question. Leading saga scholars who have noted the formulas, such as Margaret Clunies Ross (2010, 16, 26) and Vésteinn Ólason (1998, 112, etc.), have hardly acknowledged their function at all, nor does Knut Liestøl acknowledge it in his discussion (Liestøl 1929, 30–32). For Albert Lord, the function of the formulas was to serve as a tool for the rapid performance of a non-memorised text in verse, something that lacks relevance for the literary prose genre of *Íslendingasögur*. The only saga scholar who has commented on the function of the formulas is Lars Lönnroth.

Lönnroth divides the formulas in *Íslendingasögur* into three categories. One consists of proverbs, legal formulas and figurative statements (Lönnroth 1976, 45), i.e. wordings which were also formulas outside the sagas. I agree with Lönnroth that they certainly constitute a special category, and since they should be seen as quotations within the sagas rather than precisely saga formulas proper, they will not be discussed further in the present article. Another category mentioned by Lönnroth consists of transition formulas, which often mark new episodes, such as *Nú er þar til máls at taka* ‘Now let us speak of’ or *Víkr nú sǫgunni til* ‘The saga now turns to’.⁹ Their function according to Lönnroth is to be ‘a kind of cement between the larger building blocks’ of the saga (Lönnroth 1976, 45). The third and largest category consists of all other types of formulas in the sagas, among them the introductory formula *X hét maðr* and formulas mentioning recurring events, such as *þeir riðu til Alþingis* ‘they ride to the Althing’ and *X fór útan* ‘X travelled abroad’ (Lönnroth 1976, 45, 44).¹⁰ Since the last group

⁹ This type has frequently been mentioned by scholars; Vésteinn Ólason (1998, 112), for example, calls this type of saga formula the most typical.

¹⁰ Lönnroth gives the second of these formulas in English translation (‘They now ride to the Althing’), but it is clear from the context that his description of the formulas is dependent on Richard F. Allen’s concept ‘the minimal fact’, which Allen in his theoretical model explicitly ‘substitutes for the poetic formula [of the Homeric songs]’ and one of his main examples of this notion is ‘... at þeir bræðr riðu til alþingis’ (*Njáls saga*, 7; Allen 1971, 63–64, 71).

includes most of the formulas in *Íslendingasögur*—including all formulas relating to situations, events, actions and narrative motifs—it is of particular importance. It is therefore interesting to see how Lönnroth describes these formulas and their function. In his view, they are ‘commonplaces for presenting recurrent but fairly trivial motifs’ (Lönnroth 1976, 45). The words ‘commonplaces’ and ‘trivial’ seem to indicate that Lönnroth means that these formulas—i.e., most of the formulas in *Íslendingasögur*—are empty clichés without any other function than to give factual information necessary for the plot (and to serve as pure decoration?). This opinion is not unique. Walter Baetke (1956, 29) has called the transition formulas ‘Floskeln’, thus equating them with clichés without any deeper meaning.

Is this a correct view of the formulas in the *Íslendingasögur*? Let us start with the introductory formula, which was explicitly mentioned by Lönnroth. This is probably the best known formula in the *Íslendingasögur* and the one every reader meets first. The majority of sagas begin with the formula *X hét maðr* ‘A man was called X’, for example ‘*Morðr hét maðr, er kallaðr var gígja*’, the opening words of *Njáls saga* (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 5).¹¹ Richard Bauman (2004, 4) has pointed to the important connection between opening formula and genre:

The invocation of generic framing devices such as ‘Once upon a time’ or ‘Voy a cantar estos versos’ or ‘Bunday!’ carry with them sets of expectations concerning the further unfolding of the discourse, indexing other texts initiated by such opening formulæ. ‘Once upon a time’, of course, has come to signal the modern literary rendition of a fairy tale . . . These expectations constitute a framework for entextualization.

This is how the opening formula of the *Íslendingasögur* must be seen. It is anything but trivial. It signals narrative discourse, and genre, and putting this particular *Íslendingasaga* in the light of all other *Íslendingasögur*, it arouses our expectations of the following story and creates a framework for its understanding.

In a similar way, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has interpreted formulas such as *svá/pat er sagt* ‘it is said that’ not primarily as a genuine reference to actual oral information, but as a signal to the audience or readers for how the saga should be understood, in this particular case as a traditional narrative (‘De er . . . en påmindelse om, at sagaen er en traditionel fortælling . . . De er en signal til tilhørerne eller læserne om, hvordan sagaen skal forstås’, Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, 55). This function as a signal

¹¹ All references to *Íslendingasögur* in this article are to the editions in *Íslensk fornrit* I–XIV, which also constitute my corpus.

for the audience's or reader's interpretation is similar to the function of the standard opening formula of the *Íslendingasögur*, and again it is clear that we do not have to do with something trivial.

What is the function of the largest group of formulas in the *Íslendingasögur*, those mentioning or describing events and actions? Here Parry and Lord's description of the function of the formulas is of little use, nor is Lönnroth's short description of the saga formulas as 'cement' between building blocks or as trivial commonplaces fruitful. To understand their function the more recent theory of oral tradition is more useful.

Íslendingasögur, as we have them, are a written genre and do not constitute pure oral tradition. Scholars dispute how much of their form and content goes back to oral tradition, although everybody agrees that the existing sagas have some sort of background in it. I will not discuss this matter here, important though it is, but the present analysis will assume that the recurring features in *Íslendingasögur* which will be called 'formulas' here are, in general, not primarily the products of direct literary borrowing, but are rooted in a common tradition which precedes the written sagas. Thus, theories and concepts formulated by scholars of oral tradition are relevant to the *Íslendingasögur*, although it is certainly possible that some formulas developed further, and even established new meaning and form, after the *Íslendingasögur* became established as a literary, written, genre.

In *Oral Poetry: An Introduction* Paul Zumthor described the role of formulas and formulaic style in the following words (1990, 89–90):

Rather than as a type of organization, the formulaic style can be described as a discursive and intertextual strategy: it inserts and integrates into the unfolding discourse rhythmic and linguistic fragments borrowed from other preexisting messages that in principle belong to the same genre, sending the listener back to a familiar semantic universe by making the fragments functional within their exposition.

The view of formulas as parts of an intertextual strategy, which relate them to pre-existing messages of the same genre, seems to be a fruitful way of understanding saga formulas and their function. A similar view is developed more fully by John Miles Foley in his theory of the traditional oral epic. He notes that modern literary works are praised for the way the individual author confers meaning on his work, and he points out that a traditional work from an oral culture works in a different way (Foley 1991, 8). Foley claims that traditional elements, such as formulas, 'reach out of the immediate instance in which they appear to the fecund totality of the entire tradition, defined synchronically and diachronically, and they bear

meanings as wide and deep as the tradition they encode'. He coins the term 'traditional referentiality' for this fundamental phenomenon in oral tradition and explains this concept as follows (Foley 1991, 7):

Traditional referentiality, then, entails the invoking of a context that is enormously larger and more echoic than the text or work itself that brings the lifeblood of generations of poems and performances to the individual performance or text. Each element in the phraseology or narrative thematics stands not simply for that singular instance but for the plurality and multiformity that are beyond the reach of textualization.¹²

Applying this concept to the formulas in saga prose will mean that a central function—or rather, the most important function—of the formulas is that they place this particular instance in relation to all other instances in the totality of the Old Norse story world—for us at least partly accessible through the preserved sagas—where the same formula occurs. It is in the light of this context that the formula in any particular instance should be understood. This, of course, holds true for the introductory formula *X hét maðr*.¹³ The allegedly trivial statements *X fór útan* or *þeir riðu til Alþingis*, in the light of traditional referentiality, are not trivial at all. These formulas place this particular journey abroad in the context of all other instances where this formula is used, and this particular ride to the Althing in the context of all the other instances of that formula. Thus, the listener or reader gets a signal that *this* journey abroad will be of a kind similar to all other journeys abroad in the saga world, and the listener or reader is invited to compare this one with all the others, something that strongly influences our expectations, and we hear or read the whole episode in the light of all the others; the same holds true for the formula about the ride to the Althing.

This is a view which is far from obvious from formula research. Albert Lord, for example, explicitly claimed that formulas were not meant for the audience, but solely, or almost solely, as a tool for the oral performer in his performance of metrical verse: 'The repeated phrases [the formulas] were useful not, as some have supposed, merely to the audience if at all, but also and even more to the singer in the rapid composition of his tale'

¹² Slavica Rankovic has made excellent use of Foley's concept of traditional referentiality in analyses of saga literature, dealing mainly, however, with recurring themes rather than formulas (e.g. Rankovic 2013a, 253–61 and 2014, 47–49).

¹³ This was also noted by Richard Bauman in the quotation given above, although he interpreted it in the light of genre rather than oral tradition. He correctly notes: 'When an utterance is assimilated to a given genre, the process by which it is produced and interpreted is mediated through its intertextual relationships with prior texts' (Bauman 2004, 4).

(Lord 2000, 30) and ‘Formulas and groups of formulas, both large and small, serve only one purpose. They provide a means for telling a story in song and verse’ (68). But in the case of the *Íslendingasögur* we are dealing with prose, not metrical verse, which makes this view of the function of the formulas irrelevant. Foley’s ‘traditional referentiality’ makes more sense here. The formulas in the sagas should primarily be seen as a tool, provided by the teller or author for the listeners’ or readers’ understanding and interpretation of the text.

Meaning of the formulas

Closely connected to function is the meaning of the formulas. This is another aspect to which literary scholars have paid remarkably little attention. Lars Lönnroth does indeed mention meaning in his definition (‘a particular kind of phrase associated with a particular type of meaning’), but he does not discuss the meaning of any particular formulas, which is in line with his general view of the formulas in the *Íslendingasögur* as basically unproblematic. Parry mentioned in his definition of the formula that it should be used ‘to express a given essential idea’. What he meant by this is, however, quite banal: ‘The essential part of the idea is that which remains after one has counted out everything in the expression which is purely for the sake of style’ (Parry 1930, 80). The essential idea of the formula θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη ‘the owl-eyed Athena’ is, for example, simply ‘Athena’, the essential idea of the formula ἤμος δ’ ἠριγένεια φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως ‘but when the early-born rosy-fingered Eos appeared’ is ‘when it was morning’ (Parry 1930, 80–81). Parry has been criticised on this point by Foley, who remarks (1995, 3) that

little attention was paid to the possibilities of these units as meaning-bearing entities. The formulaic phrases were said to reduce to metrically apposite essential ideas, the import of ‘grey-eyed Athena’ (γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη) . . . being simply ‘Athena’.

Later in the same work (96–97) Foley returns to his criticism of Parry:

Homer’s ‘rosy-fingered dawn’ line acts as a signal for the introduction of a new episode or activity; what proves important is not just the semantic content—the dawning of a new day—and certainly not just the metricality of the line, but rather the idea of initiation, of beginnings, that is the rhetorical content of the metonymic phrase.

Foley’s *traditional referentiality* develops the discussion, but it still gives only a general idea of how the meaning of formulas is created and can be decoded. But the linguists in the field of formula research also agree that

it is an essential feature of a formula that a certain meaning is connected to it. Norbert Schmitt and Ronald Carter note (2004, 2) as a characteristic of idioms that ‘their meaning could not be derived from the sum of meanings of the component words’, which is relevant for the formulas in the *Íslendingasögur* too. Alison Wray claims that ‘formulaic sequences are learned whole and stored whole, with a reliable meaning attached to the form’ (Wray 2009, 41; cf. 38 footnote 6).

The principle that a certain meaning is connected to the formula as a whole is thus clear, both from linguistic theory and from the concept of traditional referentiality. But what meaning do the individual formulas in the *Íslendingasögur* have?

We should probably refrain from calling any formulas in *Íslendingasögur* simple or obvious, but there are certainly degrees in terms of their opacity of meaning. The formulas mentioned so far are clearly among the less opaque ones, although, as stated, a lot of their meaning requires knowledge of the tradition. This holds true for the opening formula *X hét maðr* as well as transition formulas such as *víkr nú sǫgunni til* and many formulas describing events, such as *X fór útan*. It is also true for closing formulas (see for example ‘Lúku vér hér Gísla sǫgu Súrssonar’, *Gísla saga* 118, and ‘Lýk ek þar Brennu-Njáls sǫgu’, *Njáls saga* 464). The closing formulas, together with introductory formulas—and, to some extent, transition formulas—can be described as boundary-marking formulas, such as are typical and important in all traditional narrative. Stephen Belcher has discussed these in African storytelling and noted that tales are ‘frequently introduced by formulas that define the subsequent content as something set apart from ordinary discourse, and . . . invite the audience’s attention and participation’ (Belcher 2008, 17; cited here from Lamb 2015). A similar point can be made about the well-known formula *ok er hann ór sǫgunni* (e.g. *Njáls saga*, 197; *Grettis saga*, 194; *Gunnlaugs saga*, 55), which points to what is told as narrative discourse and guides the audience or readers in their reception of the story. Generally unproblematic to interpret are also common formulas in the introductions to characters in the sagas, such as *hann var hávaðamaðr mikill* (e.g. *Þorsteins saga hvíta*, 5–6 and *Gunnlaugs saga*, 59), although—it is necessary to remember—such ‘easy’ formulas too always get their deeper meaning from traditional referentiality, which invites the audience to compare this case with all others in the same tradition and to interpret it in the light of all the others.

Some formulas have meanings on more than one level. This seems to be the case with one of the most debated types of formula in the *Íslendingasögur*, those that refer to oral tradition, such as *svá er sagt, er svá sagt*,

þat er sagt etc. (see the collection of examples in Andersson 1966, 5–7). For a long time these wordings were only acknowledged for the factual information they claimed to give: that this is oral tradition. The first scholar to pay attention to them was Knut Liestøl (1929, 31), for whom they were evidence for the oral character of the *Íslendingasögur*. Walter Baetke (1956, 29) rejected this interpretation and claimed that they were rather transition formulas. Theodore Andersson later examined all the instances of alleged references to oral tradition. He came to the conclusion that some of the cases were likely to refer to real oral tradition, but agreed with Baetke that most of them—the most formulaic ones—had the function of transition formulas; they were thus ‘stylistic features’ rather than reflections of real tradition (Andersson 1966, 7), and ‘they signal that there is a break in the narrative and a new phase is about to begin’ (5). This is probably correct. Yet the formula makes a claim that something has been told (before the writing of the saga), and we cannot ignore that fact in a discussion of the meaning of this formula. Here we should follow John Miles Foley’s distinction, mentioned above, between ‘the semantic content’, which in this case would be the claim of an oral tradition behind the factual statement in the saga, and the ‘rhetorical content’—here, as in Foley’s example, the ‘signal for the introduction of a new episode or activity’—of a formula (Foley 1995, 96–97). The formula *svá er sagt* thus carries expectations of a new beginning, of a new exciting episode, and it is not such an empty cliché as Baetke thought. The explicit reference to oral tradition was central in Preben Meulengracht Sørensen’s interpretation of this formula. But he rejected the whole question of genuine vs. not genuine. For him these formulas were, as mentioned earlier, reminders to the audience that the saga is a traditional narrative and thus signals to the listeners or readers how the saga should be understood (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, 55). The argument is convincing, and *svá er sagt* is thus an example of a saga formula with meanings on several levels.

Relatively transparent in their meaning are several common formulas connected with certain situations. We will nevertheless take a short look at them, since they are not only clearly formulaic in their relatively fixed form, but also very common and still only rarely mentioned in the scholarly literature. Here only two examples will be discussed, but they are typical.

The departure is a recurring scene with a standard formula, *skiljask með kærleik* ‘part in friendship’, used to indicate the quality of the relation between the characters at that moment, e.g. ‘skilðusk þeir með kærleik’ (*Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, 122), ‘Skilðusk síðan með inum mesta kærleik’

(*Laxdæla saga*, 78), etc. The departure formula gets its meaning, as do all formulas, from a comparison with all other episodes in the tradition where the same formula occurs. It also has the structural function of concluding an episode, often before a new episode about a longer journey. It also summarises the present relationship between two important characters in the saga. But in this case we should probably not go too far in search of hidden meanings behind the formula.

Marriage is a situation in life with an almost obligatory formula, *takask með þeim (góðar) ástir* ‘good love develops between them’, e.g. ‘Tókusk góðar ástir með þeim Kjartani ok Hrefnu’ (*Laxdæla saga*, 139), ‘Takast nú ástir með þeim hjónum’ (*Finnboga saga*, 301). This formula is well attested also in *fornaldarsögur* and, more sparsely, in *konungasögur* (see Sävborg 2007, 38–39, 599, 150), but it is most common in *Íslendingasögur*. We should not be misled by the explicit mention of love in this formula. Nothing in the context indicates any sort of passion or even strong emotion in these cases. The meaning of the formula is to mark the marriage as successful and the new family as functional. But the formula is an important signal. In *Laxdæla saga* this formula, placed after Kjartan and Hrefna’s wedding, marks the end of Kjartan’s long period of depression, caused by his *eptirsjá* ‘longing’ for Guðrún (*Laxdæla saga*, 135–37). Sometimes this formula creates a contrast with other marriages where the formula does not occur, for instance in the account of the marriage of Kjartan and Hrefna (*Laxdæla saga*, 139), where it contrasts with its absence from that of the marriage of Bolli and Guðrún.¹⁴ This means that the formula establishes the conditions for the following description of the characters’ relation to each other and thus often for the following events. Another example of this is found in *Hallfreðar saga*, where the negative version of the same formula, ‘Ekki váru miklar ástir af hennar hendi við Grís’ ‘There was no great affection on her part for Gríss’ (*Hallfreðar saga*, 150), is an important signal, foreshadowing the later episode in which Hallfreðr has an adulterous encounter with Gríss’s wife. In addition, the formula has a structural function, since it usually concludes an episode describing the proposal, the betrothal, the wedding preparations and the wedding between two important characters in the saga, thus serving to summarise the outcome of the episode.

Some formulas describe particular behaviour. The formula *sitja/setjask hjá* ‘sit/set oneself by’ when used about a man and a woman, indicates attraction, usually mutual, e.g. ‘Hon fagnaði honum vel ok

¹⁴ For a discussion of this formula, see Sävborg 2007, 38–39.

gefr rúm at sitja hjá sér' 'She received him well and made room for him to sit by her' (*Laxdæla saga*, 131), 'Eitt kveld var þat sagt, at Björn sat hjá Oddnýju' 'It was said Björn sat by Oddný one evening' (*Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa*, 145). Judging from the context and subsequent events, the attraction indicated is emotionally strong, and this formula is frequently used in connection with clear love stories. It is emotionally charged, despite the absence of explicit emotion. It is quite surprising that this frequent and important formula has not even been noticed by earlier scholars.¹⁵

Another formula signalling attraction between a man and a woman is the 'talk' formula. It might also be described as a group of formulas (see below), connected by the same behaviour and the same meaning, all based on the idea of a man talking to a woman. The most common types are *sitja á tali við* 'sit and talk with', e.g. 'ok sat jafnan á tali við Oddnýju Þorkelsdóttur' 'and always sat talking with Oddný Þorkelsdóttir' (*Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa*, 113); *ganga/koma/riða til tals við* 'go/come/ride to talk with', e.g. 'Gunnlaugr gekk þá til tals við Helgu, ok tölðu lengi' 'Then Gunnlaugr went to talk to Helga, and they spoke at length' (*Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, 89). Altogether there are about ninety instances of this type of formula in the corpus of *Íslendingasögur*, pointing to its significance, and it is attested in all other native saga genres as well.¹⁶

Judging by the context, the 'talk' formula is emotionally charged. In many cases, it has to do with strong mutual love (e.g. in *Gunnlaugs saga*, *Laxdæla saga*, *Kormáks saga* and *Víglundar saga*), often combined with passionate love stanzas or other forms of open emotional expression (Sävborg 2007, 49–50).¹⁷ The shared meaning and emotional charge of both this type and the *sitja hjá* formula is further indicated by the fact that they are often combined, e.g. 'ok sat hjá henni ok talaði við hana ok kyssti hana fjóra kossa' 'and sat by her and talked with her and kissed her four

¹⁵ The first analysis of this formula seems to be my own (Sävborg 2007, 55–57).

¹⁶ See Sävborg 2007, 45–49, for a list of the instances and a discussion of the formula in the *Íslendingasögur*; for the instances in other saga genres see Sävborg 2007, 152–53, 185, 597.

¹⁷ A few scholars, Jenny Jochens, Dorothee Frölich and Alison Finlay, have noticed this formula and its erotic connotations. They claim that the formula type implies a sexual relationship and see the formula as a euphemism for 'intercourse'. See Jochens 1991, 357–92, 370, Jochens 1999, 116, and Frölich 2000, 133; Finlay 2001, 236. Rudolf Meissner had already noticed the type and its erotic connotations but thought its function was to forebode a wooing; see Meissner 1925, 140–91, 167. See Sävborg 2007, 50 for a refutation of these interpretations.

times' (*Kormáks saga*, 293) or 'Hon fagnaði honum vel ok gefr rúm at sitja hjá sér, ok taka þau tal saman' 'She received him well and made room for him to sit by her, and they had a conversation' (*Laxdæla saga*, 131).

In these cases we can see an important function of the formulas of the *Íslendingasögur* which has frequently been overlooked. They are neither merely decoration nor tools for the oral saga teller's performance; they are wordings charged with meaning—in the cases above, emotional meaning—and their correct interpretation is necessary for understanding the behaviour and reactions of characters and plot development. None of the *sitja hjá* formulas or the 'talk' formula is in itself emotional, instead they get their emotional charge from the tradition. Therefore, knowledge of this tradition is required to understand them. Therefore, a reading based only on the literal surface results in an incorrect interpretation of sagas and saga episodes.¹⁸

It has long been observed that the sagas depict emotions through the characters' external behaviour (the well-known 'objectivity'). This is basically correct (see the analysis of this phenomenon in Sävborg 2007, 90–95). But it is a mistake to see the sagas and their depiction of emotion in the light of modern literature and describe them as if they were Hemingway novels. Some physical reactions might indeed relatively easily be interpreted as signs of emotion, but this is not the case with the *sitja hjá* or the 'talk' formula. The external behaviour which indicates emotions in the sagas is in fact limited to a relatively small group of formulas. Sveinn Bergsveinsson once described the sagas' way of depicting emotions by external behaviour thus: 'Man maa udfylde Tomrummene, det usagte, med egen Livserfaring' (Sveinn Bergsveinsson 1942, 56–62, 58) ('One has to fill in the empty spaces, the unsaid, with one's own life experience'). This is a misunderstanding of the technique of the sagas. The interpretation of the 'empty spaces' (*Tomrummene*) does not require life experience, but a good knowledge of the tradition and of a limited group of formulas belonging to it (see Sävborg 2007, 147–48).

Another formula type connected with a particular situation is the 'frequent visit', which is used in the context of a man's courting of a woman. The formula is frequent in both *Íslendingasögur* and *samtíðarsögur*, but it is attested more sparsely also in *fornaldarsögur* and *konungasögur* (Sävborg 2007, 186, 598, 153). Most common is the formula *venja kvámur sínar* 'to

¹⁸ A typical case of such a misinterpretation is Mikhail Steblin-Kamenskij's interpretation of *Laxdæla saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga* and others as uninterested in emotions (Steblin-Kamenskij 1973, 87, 90–94). See the discussion of his interpretation in Sävborg 2007, 340–62.

visit habitually', e.g. 'hann venr nú kvámur sínar til Qlvis at hitta dóttur hans' 'he habitually visits Qlvir to meet his daughter' (*Ljósvetninga saga*, 4) and variations of it (e.g. *venja gongur sínar*). The formula is strongly connected with a particular stock episode which Jenny Jochens in an important analysis has called 'the illicit love visit' (Jochens 1991, 364–90).

There are about twenty-five episodes in the *Íslendingasögur* which follow a similar pattern: the saga mentions, by using this formula, a man's frequent visits to a woman, the male relatives of the woman protesting about the courting, the courting man continuing his visits, the woman's relatives trying to stop him by using force, and the episode ending with violence and killing. The formula is repeatedly alluded to during the narrative, e.g. 'Þat vilda ek, Björn, at þú létir af kvámum til Þórdísar' 'Björn, I want you to stop visiting Þórdís' (*Droplaugarsona saga*, 151), which underlines the meaning of the formula. This type of formula carries associations not only with courting, but also humiliation, conflict and violence. When the audience or reader first encounters the wording *venja kvámur sínar*, or other variants of the formula, they will already be aware of how subsequent events will develop. Thus, although seemingly innocent, the formula *venja kvámur sínar* is charged with a particular meaning which the reader lacking knowledge of the tradition will entirely miss.¹⁹

Another formula charged with connotations of violence is *vera í blári kápu* 'to wear a blue/black cloak', with variants such as *vera í blám klæðum/stakki/kyrtli* 'to wear blue/black clothes, cape, tunic'. A man dressed like this will usually soon either kill or try to kill his opponent. On his journey to kill Björn Breiðvíkingakappi, 'Snorri goði var í blári kápu ok reið fyrstr' 'Snorri the chieftain wore a blue cloak and rode at the front' (*Eyrbyggja saga*, 134); before killing Þráinn, 'Skarpheðinn var fremstr ok var í blám stakki' 'Skarpheðinn was in front and wore a blue cape' (*Njáls saga*, 231); journeying to kill Einarr, Hrafnkell 'ríðr í blám klæðum' 'rides in blue clothes' (*Hrafnkels saga*, 104); other cases also confirm the combination of the formula and the motif of violence.²⁰ Again, knowledge of the tradition is needed to decode the meaning behind the seemingly neutral description of clothes.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the formula and the motif of the illicit love visit, see Jochens 1991, 364–90, Bandlien 2001, 60–82 and Sävborg 2007, 51–55, 111–29.

²⁰ For a discussion of all the cases, see Rankovic 2013b, 158–83 and Sauckel 2013, 214–18. For analyses of the formula and its meaning, see Heinemann 1993, 419–32, 420, 426–27 and Acker 1988, 207–37, 209.

Several scholars have discussed the background for the connection between blue clothing and violence. Marina Mundt has argued that it is not a traditional feature in Icelandic storytelling but a direct literary loan—from an episode in *Þiðreks saga* where the blue colour is claimed to denote a cruel heart (Mundt 1973, 335–59). Peter Foote and Paul Acker have pointed to the high value of blue clothing in medieval Iceland and claim that killers' blue clothes can be explained by the fact that one should wear one's finest on such important occasions as killing (Foote 1963, 77; Acker 1988, 209–10). G. I. Hughes sees the 'putting on of blue clothes' before killing as 'an almost ritualistic' act (Hughes 1969, 167–73, 171). Hermann Pálsson is more concerned with literary function, claiming that 'riding in blue clothing is all we need to know about [a person's] mood and intentions' (Hermann Pálsson 1971, 27–28).

While the mention of blue clothing is clearly a signal charged with information, it is unclear for whom the signal is intended: for the characters within the saga or for the saga audience? Is it primarily a gesture within the narrative universe, or a narrative formula with a meaning for the listener or reader? Fredrik J. Heinemann argues for the former in an analysis of *Bjarnar saga Hítödlakappa*, and on the basis of this argument, he reinterprets a puzzling episode in the saga: Þórðr's inviting his enemy Björn to overwinter with him at his house. This has traditionally been seen as an unexpected and badly motivated gesture of reconciliation (see, for instance, Andersson 1967, 138–39). According to Heinemann, however, the invitation is not a gesture of reconciliation at all; rather, Þórðr's blue coat signifies a direct challenge to Björn to take up the feud again—a signal, moreover, which Björn understands and accepts (Heinemann 1993, 422; cf. Rankovic 2013b, 173, who agrees with this interpretation).

However, there are instances in the *Íslendingasögur* where the formula can hardly be a signal between saga characters. This is the case in *Gísla saga*, for example, where Gísli 'er í kápu blári' on his way to kill Þorgrímr (*Gísla saga*, 52). This act of violence is an assassination which is intended to be secret, and in this case the blue clothing must be a signal not to the sleeping victim or any other character in the saga, but to the audience or reader. It is likely that this is the case in other instances as well, and this is also what we could expect from a formula. If so, Þórðr's inviting Björn in *Bjarnar saga* would be a real attempt at reconciliation, and the blue clothing is a signal to the audience or reader that what happens now nevertheless marks the beginning of a series of events which will end with Þórðr killing Björn.

Form of the formulas

Milman Parry's definition of 'formula' seems to assume that only exactly repeated word strings can be 'formulas', an interpretation of his view supported by the examples he quotes. But Parry does in fact also discuss, in the context of formulas, constructions with lexical variation in the Homeric epics. Cases with a similar construction—and the same metrical position, something which is always important for Parry—although with different lexical and semantic elements are collected in 'series of . . . formulas', such as Πηληιάδεω Ἀχιλῆος 'of the Peleus-son Achilles' and Λαερτιάδεω Ὀδυσῆος 'of the Laertes-son Odysseus' (Parry 1930, 126). Here the construction and the function (of noun epithets) are the same, but the lexical form and the semantic content are different. Parry also mentions a kind of formula 'which is like one or more which express a similar idea in *more or less* the same words' [my italics], such as ἱερὸν ποτλίεθρον ἔπερσε 'destroyed the holy city' and ἱερὸν ποτλίεθρον ἐλόντες 'having conquered the holy city' (85). In his view, such wordings with similar semantic elements but slightly different lexical elements are different formulas, but belong to the same 'system' (86).

In principle, linguists working with idioms of everyday language also stress their lexical constancy. Alison Wray mentions in her general background to the notion of 'formulaic language' that it is based on 'the sense that certain words have an especially strong relationship with each other in creating their meaning—usually because only that particular combination, and not synonyms, can be used' and gives the example: if something is beyond consideration we can say that it is 'out of the question', but we cannot rephrase the description as '*external to the query' (Wray 2008, 9). Britt Erman and Beatrice Warren (2000, 29) gives a similar description in their analysis of the 'idiom principle' (of 'preconstructed multi-word combinations'); one of their main criteria for ascertaining 'prefab status' is '*restricted interchangeability*', namely that 'at least one member of the prefab cannot be replaced by a synonymous item without causing a change of meaning or function and/or idiomacity'; one cannot, for example, replace *good friends* with *nice friends* without losing the implication of reciprocity (Erman and Warren 2000, 32).

In practice, however, recent scholars analysing 'formulaic language' and 'formulas', not least in prose, agree that we have to make room for a less fixed lexical form than the one Parry once established in his definition of 'formula'. This also holds true for Alison Wray's own view of formulaic language, and this is in fact one of the main advantages of her definition of 'formulaic sequence' as a sequence not only of words but

also of ‘other elements’ which are or seem ‘prefabricated’ (Wray 2002, 9; Wray 2009, 29). This opens up the possibility of recurring sequences with prefabricated construction types or semantically fixed, although lexically varying, elements.

Norbert Schmitt and Ronald Carter (2004, 6) point out that there certainly are formulaic sequences which are ‘completely fixed strings of words’—that is, we might say, the formula as Parry understood it—but that there are also other those that have ‘slots in addition to their fixed elements’. Schmitt and Carter also note that such slots ‘are not always completely open . . . there are often semantic constraints which control which word or words can be used in the slots’ (2004, 7). This is an important observation, and the concept of ‘semantic constraints’ will be adopted here for the lexical variations which occur in the formulas in the *Íslendingasögur*. William Lamb has taken over the concepts of slots and semantic constraints and further developed this terminology. He distinguishes three levels of formulaicity: *closed* (i.e. fixed, lexically identical apart from word order and morphology), *semi-open* (i.e. lexically different but semantically similar), and *open* (i.e. lexically and semantically entirely different) elements (Lamb 2015, 228–31). This view is in accordance with Andrew Pawley’s idea of a ‘substitution system’, which is defined as ‘a group of formulas which show lexical substitutions expressing the same basic structure and idea, or which express the same basic idea with varying number of syllables’ (Pawley 2009, 15), although of course we have to omit the metrical part (the syllable counting) of the definition in our analysis of *Íslendingasögur*. Pawley, too, notes the problem in describing the formula as a completely fixed unit. He suggests the notion of a productive formula—a ‘construction type that is partly lexically specified and so can generate a number of formulaic expressions that belong to the same family’ (2009, 6).

These are all valuable terms and aspects of the formula which we will put to good use in returning now to the *Íslendingasögur*.

The departure formula, which we have already met in the earlier discussion of meaning, is one of the relatively fixed formulas in the *Íslendingasögur*. I have found the following eighteen cases, which all contain the meaning ‘They parted in friendship’ and could be said to express a formula *skiljask með kærleik*:

- Eptir þat **skilja** þeir feðgar **með kærleikum** (*Bandamanna saga* 358, M)

- ok **skilðu** þau mæðgin **með kærleikum** (*Grettis saga*, 156)
- ok því **skildu** þeir, ok þó **með kærleikum** ok vináttu (*Orms þáttr Stórolfssonar*, 408)
- **skilðusk** þeir **með kærleik** (*Egils saga*, 122)
- **skilðusk** þeir Arnórr **með kærleik** (*Bolla þáttr*, 235)
- **skilðusk** þá **með kærleik** miklum (*Egils saga*, 29)
- **Skiljast** þeir nú **með kærleikum** miklum (*Finnboga saga*, 271)
- Eptir þat **skiljask** þeir konungr ok Kjartan **með** miklum **kærleik** (*Laxdæla saga*, 132)
- **skilðusk** þeir Þorkell **með** miklum **kærleik** (*Laxdæla saga*, 217)
- ok **skildu** þeir frændr **með** mestu **kærleikum** (*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, 172)
- ok **skiljast** þeir þá allir **með** inum mesta **kærleik** ok blíðu (*Finnboga saga*, 339)
- ok **skiljask** þeir Haraldr konungr **með** inum mesta **kærleik** (*Laxdæla saga*, 61)
- **Skiljask** þeir nú **með** inum mesta **kærleik** (*Laxdæla saga*, 75)
- **Skilðusk** síðan **með** inum mesta **kærleik** (*Laxdæla saga*, 78)
- **Skilðusk** þeir **með kærleik** inum mesta (*Egils saga*, 195)
- **skilja** þeir Guðmundr **við** inum mestum **kærleikum** (*Bolla þáttr*, 244)
- **skilðu** þeir feðgar **með** litlum **kærleikum** (*Grettis saga*, 49)
- **skilðu** **með** engum **kærleikum** (*Grettis saga*, 85)

The formula is already remarkably fixed with regard to lexis. All instances contain the verb *skilja* and the noun *kærleikr*. All instances but one (seventeen out of eighteen) contain the preposition *með* (the remaining instance uses the synonymous *við*). This formula is also rather fixed syntactically. In all instances the formula begins with the predicate, and in all instances the subject is in the second place (fifteen instances) or is omitted (three instances). This uniformity is remarkable, since the opposite word order (subject + predicate) is, in most instances, equally possible from a grammatical point of view and in fact is much more common in medieval Icelandic prose. This seems to establish the wording in question as a formula in a narrative set apart from ordinary discourse.

Grammatically there are variations without semantic significance. For the verb *skilja* there is a variation between the present and the past tense (*skilja*, *skilðu*) and between the active and the middle voice (*skilja*, *skiljask*). For the noun *kærleikr*, there is a variation between the singular and the plural (always in the dative: *kærleik*, *kærleikum*). The variation is only morphological and these elements can still be described, in Lamb's terminology, as closed.

Some variation does occur in respect of the grammatical subject. In all fifteen instances, where the subject is not omitted it contains a pronoun in the third person plural (masc. *þeir* in fourteen instances, neuter

þau in one instance). In five instances the subject consists only of a pronoun, and in the other ten instances the pronoun is followed by an identification in the form of a word for a family relation (*feðgar*, *mæðgin*, *frændr*), a personal name or the pronoun *allir*. In short, variation is limited here too, and there is a clear semantic constraint controlling the lexical variation.

There are also some optional elements in the formula. In most instances, thirteen out of eighteen, there is a word modifying the noun *kærleikr*. In eleven of them the modifier is a form of the adjective *mikill* (the two remaining instances contain the opposite *lítill* and the pronoun *enginn*). At this point there is a slight variation in the word order: in ten instances, the modifier stands before the noun, in three instances after it; in seven instances the adjective *mikill* is in the superlative, in four instances in the positive degree. Here, too, there is a clear semantic constraint in the lexical variation, which makes this element semi-open. Another optional element in this formula is an adverb of time, which is included in five instances (*nú*, *þá*, *síðan*). Again, there is a clear semantic constraint in the variation. In fact, the only remaining element that has been included in the formula is a single instance of *ok þó*.

To summarise: there are only small differences between the manifestations of this formula. If, following Lamb, we ignore some slight variation in morphology and word order, the sole possible variations come in the shape of three optional additional elements: a specification of the parting persons, a word modifying the noun *kærleikr* and an adverb of time. Usually at least one of the optional elements is included, but not always. We have a basic form of the formula in *Egils saga*, ‘*skilðusk þeir með kærleik*’, which demonstrates that it is not obligatory to include any of the optional elements. Compared with the formulas in Parry and Lord’s material, most formulas in the *Íslendingasögur* are looser in their form. The departure formula is, however, an example of a relatively fixed formula in the *Íslendingasögur*.

Nevertheless, the departure formula is also an example of the difficulties in drawing lines between different formulas or distinguishing between different formulas on one hand and variation within the same formula on the other. Beside the instances of *skiljask með kærleik* quoted above, there are also some instances in *Íslendingasögur* with a slightly varied lexis, *skiljask með blíðu* and *skiljask með vináttu* (see Sävborg 2007, 109). Both *blíða* and *vinátta* are semantically so close to *kærleikr* that these cases could well be seen as variants of the same formula, *skiljask með kærleik/blíðu/vináttu*, with a semi-open slot and the lexical variation controlled by

semantic constraint. We might also follow Pawley and describe *skiljask með* [word denoting friendship] as a productive formula, which, within the substitution system, generates different formulaic expressions such as *skiljask með kærleik*, *skiljask með blíðu* and *skiljask með vináttu*, all belonging to the same formula family.

The ‘marriage’ formula, usually mentioning that ‘good love grew between them’, was also mentioned earlier. I would count the following eighteen instances in the *Íslendingasögur* as examples of this formula:

- takask með þeim góðar ástir (*Laxdæla saga*, 15)
- tókusk með þeim ástir góðar (*Þorsteins saga hvíta*, 6)
- tókusk með þeim góðar ástir, Grími ok Droplaugu (*Brandkrossa þátr*, 189)
- Tókusk góðar ástir með þeim Kjartani ok Hrefnu (*Laxdæla saga*, 139)
- tókusk brátt góðar ástir með þeim Þórdísi (*Laxdæla saga*, 207)
- En með þeim Dagfinni ok Hlaðreiði tókust brátt miklar ástir (*Stjörnu-Odda draumr*, 476)
- Brátt takast þar miklar ástir í millum þeira (*Stjörnu-Odda draumr*, 470)
- tókusk þar brátt góðar samfarar ok miklar ástir (*Brandkrossa þátr*, 184)
- Ástir takask miklar með þeim Þorkatli ok Guðrínu (*Laxdæla saga*, 203)
- Tókusk nú ástir með þeim (*Reykðæla saga*, 176)
- Takast nú ástir með þeim hjónum (*Finnboga saga*, 301)
- tókusk þar ástir góðar (*Þorskfirðinga saga*, 197)
- takask þar ástir miklar (*Laxdæla saga*, 66)
- Brátt váru ástir góðar með þeim Þorsteini ok Þórdísi (*Vatnsdæla saga*, 16)
- Góðar urðu ástir þeira Odds ok Þórdísar (*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, 136)
- ástir þeira váru at góðum sanni (*Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa*, 125)
- Ekki váru miklar ástir af hennar hendi við Gris (*Hallfreðar saga*, 150)
- Ekki varð ástríki mikit með þeim hjónum (*Grettis saga*, 274)

The noun *ást* (always in the plural, *ástir*) is present in almost all the instances (seventeen out of eighteen), and the verb *takask* is present in most (thirteen out of eighteen). We should again ignore slight variations in morphology (e.g. between the past and the present tense, *tókusk–takask*) and word order (e.g. *góðar ástir–ástir góðar*), but it is clear nonetheless that this formula is less fixed in its form than the previous one.

However, many elements are semi-open with a semantic constraint in the lexical variation. The verb *takask* alternates with *verða*, and again we have a semantic constraint in the variation, since both verbs refer to the *growing* of the love. There are, however, some instances of the verb *vera*, which refers to the presence of love rather than its growth. Even so, the

semantic difference is still relatively small, and it does not really break the rule of semantic constraint within the substitution system; in one of the instances of *vera* it follows the adverb *brátt*, ‘Brátt váru ástir góðar með þeim’, which still implies the notion of growing. Even the main word of the formula, the word for ‘love’, in this formula normally *ástir*, is replaced in a single instance by another, although lexically related, compound noun, *ástriki*, also meaning ‘love’.

In short, no element even in the most stable part of the formula is entirely lexically fixed, but the variation is always accompanied by a semantic constraint, and together with the fact that both the structure of the formula and the context where it appears within the saga are also stable, the formula remains easy to recognise for an experienced saga reader.

There are also several optional semantic elements which might or might not be added to the formula. Most of the instances (sixteen out of eighteen) qualify the noun expressing ‘love’ with an adjective. The most common adjective is *góðr* (nine instances), but in seven instances another adjective which also emphasises the high quality of the love, *mikill*, is used instead. The construction *með þeim* is present in the majority of instances (ten out of eighteen), and in some instances where *með þeim* is lacking it is replaced by other pronoun constructions, such as [*ástir*] *þeira* (two instances) and [*ástir*] *í millum þeira* (one instance). In half of the instances (nine out of eighteen) the temporal adverbs *brátt* (five instances), *nú* (two instances) or *þar* (three instances) are present in the formula. Generally there is a systematic distribution, in that the adverbs *nú*, *þar* and *brátt* alternate with and exclude one other, although there is a single instance which includes both *brátt* and *þar*. In short, while lexical variation operates in the case of the optional elements too, a clear semantic constraint is evident.

The mention of the names of the couple is another optional element of the formula. The names are mentioned in seven out of the eighteen instances (in one instance only the woman’s name is mentioned). The addition of names only appears in the variants of the formula where the element *með þeim*, or, in one instance, *þeira*, is present; these two optional elements thus seem to be connected to each other.

The case of the marriage formula demonstrates the difficulties in describing and defining the formulas in the *Íslendingasögur*. The formula is easy for an experienced saga reader to recognise, and it can give the impression of being relatively fixed. In reality, however, there are no lexically fixed elements in the formula, no element which is present in all its manifestations. It is tempting to establish a sort of basic form which

could be seen as a productive formula (in Pawley's sense), which then generates several different formulaic expressions belonging to the same family. The basic form could then be based on the constant semantic elements: [a noun for 'love'] + [a verb for 'grow'] + [a pronoun construction expressing 'between them'; alternatively this might be understood by the previous text]. Each slot could be filled with lexically different elements controlled by a semantic constraint; then formulaic expressions, or sub-formulas, generated by the basic form, could include lexically different but semantically related elements.

This description of the marriage formula is not impossible, but it fails to explain the absence of any lexically fixed element, and why the formula *never* occurs in only its basic form and why the formula is so easy to recognise in all its manifestations in spite of all lexical variation.

Another way of describing this formula is to see it as a sort of puzzle with six different components, defined both semantically and grammatically, which were all known in the tradition: a) a verb expressing the presence or growing of the love; b) an adjective or adjective construction marking the love mentioned as positive (good or strong); c) a noun meaning 'love'; d) an adverb, either marking the presence in time or space or expressing how fast the love arose; e) a pronoun or pronoun construction in the plural, marking the reciprocity of the love; f) a specification of the two parts, by mentioning either personal names or a word for a married couple. Most of the components can be either included or excluded, and for all the components there are lexical alternatives but a semantic constraint. There are no obligatory lexical elements, and only two obligatory semantic-grammatical components: a noun meaning 'love' and a verb expressing the presence or growing of this love. The order of the components is in principle free, only restricted by the general grammatical rules of Old Norse language. This system of components could be described in the following figure, where the obligatory semantic-grammatical components are placed within boxes and the lexical alternatives follow the order of their frequency:

a	b	c	d	e	f
takask verða vera	góðr mikill at góðum sanni	ást ástríki	þar nú brátt	með þeim í millum þeira þeira	[personal name] hjón

It should be noted that it is not possible to use only the obligatory components (for example **tókusk ástir* only). This never occurs in the material; the addition of at least two other semantic-grammatical components is required for the realisation of the formula. There is, on the other hand, an almost free choice as to which of the other components should be included. The free choice is, however, somewhat restricted by the rule that the addition of the component ‘pronoun construction’ is required if the component ‘personal name’ is included.

This totality, with all its components, could be described as a *potential full formula*, which, however, is never realised in the material, since in practice not all optional components are taken up.

This model explains how the formula can have a stable semantic core although the formula is never realised in this core only (at least in the works preserved to us). It also explains why the formula is so easy to recognise in spite of the variations, and how we can feel the formula to be partly lexically fixed although there is no single lexical element which occurs in all its manifestations: at least one of the most frequent lexical alternatives will always be present. One example: in the instance ‘Ekki varð ástríki mikit með þeim hjónum’ the most frequent word for ‘love’, *ástir*, is replaced by the synonymous *ástríki* and the verb is the less frequent *verða* instead of the most frequent *takask*, but the pronoun construction occurs in its most frequent form *með þeim*, thus giving the impression that this manifestation of the formula is lexically similar to other instances.

The formulas discussed so far exhibit a greater variation than most formulas discussed by previous scholars, yet also a clear uniformity in construction and partly in lexis—so clear that it seems unproblematic to call them ‘formulas’. However, other formulas mentioned earlier in this article exhibit even less uniformity and far fewer fixed elements, and later we will consider whether they should be described as ‘formulas’ at all. These formulas—to use this term for the present—are in fact more important than the two previous types, since they are much more frequent and much more significant for the understanding of the sagas. Nevertheless, they have hardly been studied at all.

Let us start with the ‘talk’ formula. The semantic core is ‘a man talks with a woman’, and the meaning is, as mentioned earlier, that a man falls or is in love with a woman.

At first sight it might seem entirely unproblematic to use the term ‘formula’ here, as these instances demonstrate:

- Oddr venr kvámur sínar í Tungu til Þorkels ok **sitr á tali við** Steingerði (*Kormáks saga*, 217)
- er þú **sitr á tali við** Ingibjörgu konungssystur (*Laxdæla saga*, 126)
- Þat var eitt sinn, at Björn kom til Fróðár, at hann **sat á tali við** Þuríði (*Eyrbyggja saga*, 78)

Here we could easily isolate a formula *X sitr á tali við Y*, where X is always a man and Y a woman. The only variation between the instances is between the past and the present tense. Nor is it problematic, in the light of our findings in the analysis of the marriage formula, that we also have a very common, but optional, element, which marks the talks as long or frequent, for example:

- ok sat **löngrum** á tali við Þórdísi (*Fóstbræðra saga*, 161)
- ok sat **jafnan** á tali við Oddnýju Þorkelsdóttur (*Bjarnar saga Hít-dælakappa*, 113)
- tók hann þá í vana at sitja á tali við hana **hvern dag** (*Kjalnesinga saga*, 16)

This could be described as a sub-type *X sitr [word(s) marking quantity] á tali við Y*, where the quantity element is given a different place in the various instances.

Sometimes there is lexical variation in several elements, even the semantic main element, the word for ‘talk’. One might compare these two instances:

- ok **settisk** á **tal með** Sigríði (*Þórðar saga hreðu*, 187)
- ok **settisk** á ræður **við** Hródnýju (*Vatnsdæla saga*, 52)

But the basic structure as well as the semantic elements are the same, and we have no problem in recognising the formula.

In several instances expressions for both sitting and for the duration of the conversation are absent, resulting in a sort of minimal version of the formula, for example:

- ok **talaði við** dóttur hans (*Vatnsdæla saga*, 122)
- ok **talaði við** hana (*Kormáks saga*, 293)
- ferr til Lauga ok **talar við** Guðrúnu (*Laxdæla saga*, 112)

In many instances the reciprocity of the talks is marked. In the simplest form this is done by the pronoun and the verb form, for example:

- settusk þau þá niðr ok **töluðu** (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, 85)
- þóttisk vita, at þau Björn ok Oddný **ræddusk við** (*Bjarnar saga Hít-dælakappa*, 141)
- ok **töluðust þau við** (*Kjalnesinga saga*, 17)

In some instances the reciprocity is indicated by phrases including *milli/millum* ‘between’, in what could be described as a sub-formula, for example:

- ok **taka** þau tal sín á milli (*Hænsa-Þóris saga*, 42)
- **tóku** þau tal sín í millum (*Víglundar saga*, 90)
- Síðan **taka** þau tal milli sín (*Laxdæla saga*, 65)

We should note that these instances differ considerably regarding lexis and optional elements from the first ones mentioned here.

The notions of reciprocity and quantity are frequently combined, although with lexical variation in the quantity element, for example:

- Gunnlaugr gekk þá til tals við Helgu, ok **töluðu lengi** (*Gunnlaugs saga*, 89)
- þau Sigríðr **hafa talat í allan morgun** (*Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 296)
- **Töluðu þau mart** um kveldit (*Egils saga*, 16)
- ok **tala þann dag allan** (*Laxdæla saga*, 65)

But there are also other instances where the reciprocity is expressed in a lexically entirely different way, for example:

- Ok var þat mál manna, at **tal þeira Sörla bæri saman opt** (*Ljósvetninga saga/Sörla þátr*, 109)
- ok mæla menn þat, at **hjal þeira beri opt saman** (*Gull-Ásu-Þórðar þátr*, 340)
- Eptir þetta **er komit saman tali þeira** Hrefnu (*Laxdæla saga*, 137)

In a few instances the reciprocity and the quantity of the talk is expressed in a syntactically completely different construction, for example:

- ok varð þeim **allhjaldrjúgt** (*Vápnfirðinga saga*, 36)
- þótti monnum at vánum, at þeim yrði hjaldrjúgt (*Eyrbyggja saga*, 107)

The last instances demonstrate the remarkable variation we find in the various manifestations of this formula, concerning not only lexis and semantic elements, but also the syntactical structure. The degree of variation at all these levels becomes clear if we compare the following five instances:

- ok **talaði við** dóttur hans (*Vatnsdæla saga*, 122)
- ok varð þeim **allhjaldrjúgt** (*Vápnfirðinga saga*, 36)
- ok **settisk á ræður við** Hróðnýju (*Vatnsdæla saga*, 52)
- ok mæla menn þat, at **hjal þeira beri opt saman** (*Gull-Ásu-Þórðar þátr*, 340)
- Síðan **taka þau tal milli sín** (*Laxdæla saga*, 65)

The optional semantic elements, lexical forms and syntactic constructions all differ.

It is clear that the 'talk' formula is much less fixed than any of the other saga formulas discussed so far. There are no fixed lexical or syntactical elements, and also rather few fixed semantic elements. The lack of a common basic syntactical structure makes this formula difficult, if not impossible,

to force into the model of components of a potential full formula, which worked well for the marriage formula. There are no ‘slots’, in Lamb’s sense, which we could fill with open, semi-open or closed elements. For example, the grammatical subject might be the man (e.g. ‘talaði hann’, ‘kom hann til tals’), or the man and the woman (e.g. ‘töluðu þau’), or the conversation itself (e.g. ‘at hjal þeira beri opt saman’), or left implicit in an impersonal construction (e.g. ‘varð þeim allhjaldrjúgt’), with radically different syntactical structures as a consequence. The conversation itself, the semantic core of the formula, is realised not only in lexically different forms, but also in different grammatical categories: as a noun (*tal*, *ræður*, *hjal*), a verb (*tala*, *ræða*, *mæla*), or even an adjective (*hjaldrjúgt*), and of course as a consequence this variation too has entirely different syntactical structures. The reciprocity is stressed not only in a number of lexically different forms but also by different grammatical categories: by a pronoun (in the plural), by a verb (in the plural) or by some different adverbs (*saman*, *á milli*, *í millum*).

In spite of all this, the ‘talk’ formula too is relatively easy for an experienced saga reader to recognise. The semantic core ‘A man talks with a woman’ is present in all the instances, and two further—optional—semantic elements are very common: the information that the talks were long or frequent and the information that they were mutual. For the identification of a talk in a saga as the formula in question with its meaning of love, one is also helped by the context—the mention of the talk is often supplemented in the scene or episode by the formula *sitja hjá* and/or skaldic stanzas with open expressions of love—and by the development of events, where we usually get more expressions, indications or consequences of love.

Should we then apply the term ‘formula’ to the unit which includes such different constructions as ‘talaði við dóttur hans’ and ‘varð þeim allhjaldrjúgt’? Clearly this phenomenon deviates from both Parry’s classical definition, which focuses on ‘a group of words’ and from Wray’s ‘sequence’ of words or other elements. No group of words, or actually any words at all, are common for all the manifestations of this phenomenon, and we are hardly dealing with a recurring ‘sequence’ of anything in all the instances.

It might be tempting to solve the problem by calling ‘A man talks [a lot] with a woman’ a *motif* with the symbolic meaning of love, and describing *sitja* (*lǫngum/jafnan*) *á tali við*; *ganga/koma/ríða* (*hvern dag*) *til tals við*; *tala* (*mart/lengi/allan dag*) *við*; *taka tal sín á millum/í milli*; *verða þeim* (*all*)*hjaldrjúgt* etc. as different *formulas*, which realise

the motif in different ways. This would do justice to the uniformity we certainly have in many of the instances (for example, exactly the same wording ‘sitr á tali við’ occurs in three different sagas, *Kormáks saga*, *Laxdæla saga* and *Kjalnesinga saga*). This solution seems, however, to create new problems.

First, it is difficult to draw lines between distinct groups, each of which could be called a ‘formula’. If we try, there will nevertheless be a considerable variation within each group (cf. the case with the marriage formula) and also a considerable similarity between the alleged different ‘formulas’. It is also notable that the most discrepant instances—where there is no sliding scale of difference towards other instances—are unique wordings, such as the occurrence of ‘. . . ok væri við þar of fjölræðinn’ (*Hrafn's þáttur Guðrúnarsonar*, 325), and it would be strange to call a unique wording a ‘formula’; but the instance still clearly belongs to the larger group of ‘A man talks a lot with a woman’.

Second, the term ‘motif’ for the phenomenon is somewhat misleading, since ‘motif’ in conventional use is not a stylistic device, but stands for a larger unit on the macro level.²¹ With this conventional use of the term it would be possible to call love a ‘motif’ in the context in question, but then we should preferably not call one of the means of indicating this love a ‘motif’ too. Even if we accept that the phenomenon in question could be called a ‘motif’, we still need to distinguish it from the ‘motifs’ on the macro level. In the case of ‘A man talks with a woman’ we are always dealing with a short wording, consisting of a few words within (and usually only a small part of) a sentence—there is never a depiction of a conversation, and the recognisability lies in the concentrated wording itself, however different the instances might be from each other. Thus ‘A man talks (a lot) with a woman’ with the meaning ‘love’ as a meaning-bearing unit has more in common with formulas than with motifs in the common use of that term. But the phenomenon in question is still so different from ‘formulas’ in any sense we have met, that we might need to coin a new term for it. I here tentatively suggest using the term ‘formula motif’. The individual manifestations of a ‘formula motif’ might or might not be members of subgroups of formulas, but they are all members of the same family, the same formula motif.

²¹ E.g. ‘one of the dominant ideas in a work of literature; a part of the main theme’ (Cuddon 1991, 558); cf. also Baldick 1990, 142.

What has been said here about the degree of variation in the case of the ‘talk’ formula generally holds true also for the ‘visit’ formula, the formula which by mentioning a man’s (frequent) visits to a woman marks forbidden courting, usually with violent consequences (the so-called illicit love motif; see above). Here too, a lexically and syntactically stable core form is lacking, while at the same time there is a remarkably fixed semantic and contextual core, for example:

- Nú **venr** Þormóðr **kvámur sínar** til húss Kǫtlu (*Fóstbræðra saga*, 170)
- Síðan **ferr** Kormákr **at finna** Steingerði jafnt **sem áðr** (*Kormáks saga*, 222)

The semantic core ‘A man visits a woman’ is thus constant, and to this core element can be added another semantic element which is present in the large majority of all instances (and in the rest it is implicit by the context): that the visits were frequent.

This formula too can in principle be divided into a number of recurring relatively fixed construction types, although with lexical variation controlled by semantic constraints, for example: *venja kvámur/gǫngur sínar; koma/ríða/fara/ganga (jafnan/opt/hvern dag) til; fara/ríða/koma at finna/hitta* etc. There are, however, a lot of instances which either combine these construction types or use unique constructions, although with the common semantic elements and sometimes with the most common of the lexical forms.

In spite of the lexical variation there are some remarkably frequent lexical elements in this formula, for example the noun *kvámur* for the visits or the marking of the regularity of the visits by the verb *venja*. In comparison with the ‘talk’ formula, the ‘visit’ formula, seems, in spite of the variation, syntactically and lexically more stable. This fact, in combination with the stable context, makes this formula easy for an experienced saga reader to identify.

The ‘talk’ and the ‘visit’ formulas are united by yet another feature which appears to be atypical in a larger, international, context of formula use: they can occur in short forms, consisting of just one word. This might seem to violate two of the fundamental rules for formulas: that they are multiword constructions and that it is not possible to reduce them to any of their individual words (at least not without a change of meaning). There are, however, special conditions required for this type of one-word formula.

The one-word versions of these formulas all occur when the love and the forbidden courting motifs have already been established in the saga. ‘Lát

af tali við dóttur Óttars bónda', Þorsteinn orders Ingólfr in *Hallfreðar saga* (143), but this follows shortly after the saga has given the 'talk' formula in full form: '[Ingólfr] settisk niðr hjá Valgerði ok talaði við hana allan þann dag' (142). In the case of the 'visit' formula, the one-word form is very common and actually makes up more than one third of all the instances of the formula. 'Hugsa þú svá um ferðir þínar, Björn', Þuríðr says to Björn Breiðvíkingakappi in *Eyrbyggja saga* (78), but the saga has told us shortly before: 'En þegar Þuríðr kom til Fróðár, vanði Björn Ásbrandsson þangat kvámur sínar' (77), thus using the formula in full form, although with a lexically unrelated word for the visits (*kvámur* instead of *ferðir*). The one-word version of the formula thus works only when the motif of the illicit love visit has already been established, often, but not always, by means of the formula in full form.

A general tendency has been that lexical stability is not nearly as important in saga formulas as in other narrative traditions where formulas are central. We do indeed have fixed formulas in *Íslendingasögur* too, such as *X hét maðr* and *sitja/setjask hjá*, but all somewhat longer formulas contain more variation than in comparable traditions. The 'talk' formula might be an extreme case (if it should be seen as a formula at all) but cases which are undoubtedly formulas, such as the departure and the marriage formulas, also demonstrate much more both lexical and syntactical variation than formulas in comparable traditions of prose or verse. Most important in the saga formulas is always the semantic core consisting of a few fundamental semantic elements, with several optional, more or less common, additions and a large freedom for lexical substitutions.

Conclusion

Formulas constitute an underestimated element of saga style and of the distinctiveness of saga literature. There has been no previous examination of them as a phenomenon, and they are rarely discussed at all. They establish the genre, arouse the expectation of the audience or reader, and they are charged with meaning necessary for the understanding of the events, characters and plot. Some of the most important and frequent formulas are so opaque in terms of their meaning that they have often been misunderstood by modern readers. The formulas in the *Íslendingasögur* are different from formulas in comparable traditions in their much less stable lexical form, where the semantic elements form the stable basis, sometimes with an almost free lexical variation controlled by semantic constraints.

Bibliography

- Acker, Paul, trans., 1988. 'Valla-Ljóts saga. Translated with an Introduction and Notes'. *Comparative Criticism: An Annual Journal* 10, 207–39.
- Acker, Paul 1998. *Revising Oral Theory: Formulaic Composition in Old English and Old Icelandic Verse*.
- Allen, Richard F. 1971. *Fire and Iron: Critical Approaches to Njáls saga*.
- Andersson, Theodore M. 1966. 'The Textual Evidence for an Oral Family Saga'. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 81, 1–23.
- Andersson, Theodore M. 1967. *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading*.
- Baldick, Chris 1990. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.
- Bandamanna saga*. In *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936. Ed. Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit VII.
- Bandlien, Bjørn 2001. *Å finne den rette: Kjærlighet, individ og samfunn i norrøn middelalder*.
- Baetke, Walter 1956. *Über die Entstehung der Isländersagas*.
- Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*. In *Harðar saga* 1991. Ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. Íslenzk fornrit XIII.
- Bauman, Richard 2004. *A World of Others' Words: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality*.
- Belcher, Stephen 2008. 'African Tales'. In *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*. Ed. Donald Haase, 12–20. Reprinted in Lamb 2015.
- Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa*. In *Borgfirðinga sögur* 1938. Ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit III.
- Bolla þáttur Bollasonar*. In *Laxdæla saga* 1934. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit V.
- Brandkrossa þáttur*. In *Austfirðinga sögur* 1950. Ed. Jón Jóhannesson. Íslenzk fornrit XI.
- Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954. Ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit XII.
- Carey, Gary and Mary Ellen Snodgrass 1999. *A Multicultural Dictionary of Literary Terms*.
- Catalán, Diego 1987. 'The Artisan Poetry of the Romancero'. *Oral Tradition* 2, 399–423.
- Clover, Carol J. 1982. *The Medieval Saga*.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret 2010. *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga*.
- Cuddon, J. A. 1991. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*.
- Danielsson, Tommy 1986. *Om den isländska släktsagans uppbyggnad. On the Construction of the Old Icelandic Family Saga*.
- Droplaugarsona saga*. In *Austfirðinga sögur* 1950. Ed. Jón Jóhannesson. Íslenzk fornrit XI.
- Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* 1933. Ed. Sigurður Nordal. Íslenzk fornrit II.
- Erman, Britt and Beatrice Warren 2000. 'The Idiom Principle and the Open Choice Principle'. *Text: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse* 20, 29–67.

- Eyrbyggja saga* 1935. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson. Íslenzk fornrit IV.
- Fidjestøl, Bjarne 1980. *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*. Nordisk institutts skriftserie 11.
- Finnboga saga*. In *Kjalnesinga saga* 1959. Ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson. Íslenzk fornrit XIV.
- Finlay, Alison 2001. 'Skald Sagas in their Literary Context 2: Possible European Contexts'. In *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*. Ed. Russell Poole, 232–71.
- Foley, John Miles 1991. *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*.
- Foley, John Miles 1995. *The Singer of Tales in Performance*.
- Foote, Peter 1963. 'An Essay on the Saga of Gisli and its Icelandic Background'. In *The Saga of Gisli*. Trans. George Johnston, 93–134.
- Fóstbræðra saga*. In *Vestfirðinga sögur* 1943. Ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit VI.
- Frog 2011. 'Alvíssmál and Orality I: Formula, Alliteration and Categories of Mythic Being'. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 126, 17–71.
- Frölich, Dorothee 2000. *Ehre und Liebe: Schichten des Erzählens in der Laxdæla saga*.
- Gísla saga Súrssonar*. In *Vestfirðinga sögur* 1943. Ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit VI.
- Gisli Sigurðsson 1990. 'On the Classification of Eddic Heroic Poetry in View of the Oral Theory'. In *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages, Spoleto, 4–10 September 1988. The Seventh International Saga Conference*. Ed. Teresa Pàroli, 245–55.
- Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936. Ed. Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit VII.
- Gull-Ásu-Þórðar þáttur*. In *Austfirðinga sögur* 1950. Ed. Jón Jóhannesson. Íslenzk fornrit XI.
- Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*. In *Borgfirðinga sögur* 1938. Ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit III.
- Hallfredar saga*. In *Vatnsdæla saga* 1939. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit VIII.
- Harris, Joseph 1972. 'Genre and Narrative Structure in Some Íslendinga þættir'. *Scandinavian Studies* 44, 1–27.
- Harris, Joseph 1985. 'Eddic Poetry'. In *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*. Ed. Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, 68–156.
- Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*. In *Vestfirðinga sögur* 1943. Ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit VI.
- Heinemann, Fredrik J. 1993. 'Intertextuality in *Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa*'. *Saga-Book* 23, 419–32.
- Hermann Pálsson 1971. *Art and Ethics in Hrafnkels saga*.
- Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*. In *Austfirðinga sögur* 1950. Ed. Jón Jóhannesson. Íslenzk fornrit XI.
- Hrafn's þáttur Guðrúnarsonar*. In *Vatnsdæla saga* 1939. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit VIII.

- Hughes, G. I. 1969. 'A Possible Saga Convention'. *English Studies in Africa* 12, 167–73.
- Hænsa-Póris saga*. In *Borgfirðinga sögur* 1938. Ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit III.
- Jochens, Jenny 1991. 'The Illicit Love Visit: An Archaeology of Old Norse Sexuality'. *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, 3, 357–92.
- Jochens, Jenny 1999. 'Triangularity in the Pagan North: The Case of Björn Arngeirsson and Þórðr Kolbeinsson'. In *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*. Ed. Jacqueline Murray, 111–34.
- Kellogg, Robert 1998. *A Concordance to Eddic Poetry*.
- Kjalnesinga saga* 1959. Ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson. Íslenzk fornrit XIV.
- Kormáks saga*. In *Vatnsdæla saga* 1939. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit VIII.
- Lamb, William 2015. 'Verbal Formulas in Gaelic Traditional Narrative: Some Aspects of their Form and Function'. In *Registers of Communication*. Ed. Asif Agha and Frog, 225–46.
- Laxdæla saga* 1934. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit V.
- Liestøl, Knut 1929. *Upphavet til den islenske ættesaga*.
- Ljósveitinga saga með þáttum* 1940. Ed. Björn Sigfússon. Íslenzk fornrit X.
- Lord, Albert B. 2000. *The Singer of Tales*.
- Lönnroth, Lars 1971. 'Hjálmar's Death-Song and the Delivery of Eddic Poetry'. *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 46, 1–20.
- Lönnroth, Lars 1976. *Njáls saga: A Critical Introduction*.
- Lönnroth, Lars 1981. 'Iðrð fannz æva né uphiminn: A Formula Analysis'. In *Speculum Norrænum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*. Ed. Ursula Dronke et al., 310–27.
- Lönnroth, Lars 1993. 'På andra sidan Fyrisvallarna: Några tendenser i modern sagaforskning'. In *Snorre Sturlasson och de isländska källorna till Sveriges historia: Fyra föreläsningar från ett symposium i Stockholm hösten 1988*, 85–103.
- M = Möðruvallabók.
- Madelung, Margaret Arent 1972. *The Laxdæla saga: Its Structural Patterns*.
- Meissner, Rudolf 1925. 'Ermengarde, Vicegräfin von Narbonne, und Jarl Rögnvald'. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 41, 140–91.
- Mellor, Scott A. 2008. *Analyzing Ten Poems from The Poetic Edda: Oral Formula and Mythic Patterns*.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben 1993. *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændinga-sagaerne*.
- Mundt, Marina 1973. 'Observations on the Influence of *Þiðriks saga* on Icelandic Saga Writing'. In *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference, University of Edinburgh*. Ed. Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson and Desmond Slay, 335–59.
- Murfin, Ross and Supryia M. Ray 1997. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*.
- Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar*. In *Harðar saga* 1991. Ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. Íslenzk fornrit XIII.

- Njáls saga* = *Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954. Ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit XII.
- Parry, Milman 1928. *L'Épithète traditionnelle dans Homère: Essai sur un problème de style homérique*.
- Parry, Milman 1930. 'Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style'. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 41, 73–148.
- Pawley, Andrew 2009. 'Grammarians' languages versus humanists' languages and the place of speech act formulas in models of linguistic competence'. In *Formulaic Language 1. Distribution and Historical Change*. Ed. Roberta Corrigan et al., 3–26.
- Rankovic, Slavica 2013a. 'The Performative Non-Canonicity of the Canonical: Íslendingasögur and their Traditional Referentiality'. In *The Performance of Christian and Pagan Storyworlds: The Non-Canonical Chapters of the History of Nordic Medieval Literature*. Ed. Lars Boje Mortensen et al., 247–72.
- Rankovic, Slavica 2013b. 'The Temporality of the (Immanent) Saga: Tinkering with Formulas'. In *Dating the Sagas: Reviews and Revisions*. Ed. Else Mundal, 147–90.
- Rankovic, Slavica 2014. 'Immanent Seas, Scribal Havens: Distributed Reading of Formulaic Networks in the Sagas of Icelanders'. *European Review* 22, 45–54.
- Reykðæla saga*. In *Ljósvefninga saga með þáttum* 1940. Ed. Björn Sigfússon. Íslenzk fornrit X.
- Sauckel, Anita 2013. *Die literarische Funktion von Kleidung in den Íslendingasögur und Íslendingaþættir*.
- Schmitt, Norbert and Ronald Carter 2004. 'Formulaic sequences in action: An introduction'. In *Formulaic Sequences*. Ed. Norbert Schmitt, 1–22.
- Scholes, Robert and Robert Kellogg 1966. *The Nature of Narrative*.
- Steblin-Kamenskij, Mikhail Ivanovich 1973. *The Saga Mind*. Trans. Kenneth H. Ober.
- Stjörnu-Odda draumr*. In *Harðar saga* 1991. Ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. Íslenzk fornrit XIII.
- Sveinn Bergsveinsson 1942. 'Sagaen og den haardkogte roman'. *Edda* 42, 56–62.
- Sävborg, Daniel 2007. *Sagan om kärleken: Erotik, känslor och berättarkonst i norrön litteratur*.
- Sävborg, Daniel 2017. 'Style'. In the *Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic sagas*. Ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, 111–26.
- Thorvaldsen, Bernt Øyvind 2006. *Svá er sagt í fornum visindum: Tekstualiseringen av de mytologiske eddadikt*.
- Vápnfirðinga saga*. In *Austfirðinga sögur* 1950. Ed. Jón Jóhannesson. Íslenzk fornrit XI.
- Vatnsdæla saga* 1939. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit VIII.
- Vésteinn Ólason 1998. *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*. Trans. Andrew Wawn.

- Víglundar saga*. In *Kjalnesinga saga* 1959. Ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson. Íslenzk fornrit XIV.
- Wray, Alison 2002. *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon*.
- Wray, Alison 2008. *Formulaic Language: Pushing the Boundaries*.
- Wray, Alison 2009. 'Identifying Formulaic Language: Persistent Challenges and New Opportunities'. In *Formulaic Language 1. Distribution and Historical Change*. Ed. Roberta Corrigan et al., 27–51.
- Zumthor, Paul 1990. *Oral Poetry: An Introduction*. Trans. Kathryn Murphy-Judy. *Theory and History of Literature* 70.
- Þórðar saga hreðu*. In *Kjalnesinga saga* 1959. Ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson. Íslenzk fornrit XIV.
- Þorskfirðinga saga*. In *Harðar saga* 1991. Ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. Íslenzk fornrit XIII.
- Þorsteins saga hvíta*. In *Austfirðinga sögur* 1950. Ed. Jón Jóhannesson. Íslenzk fornrit XI.

E. R. EDDISON'S *EGIL'S SAGA*: TRANSLATION
AND SCHOLARSHIP IN INTER-WAR OLD NORTHERNISM

By MATTHEW TOWNEND
University of York

IN 1930 CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS published the translation *Egil's Saga* by E. R. Eddison. There was a lengthy subtitle: *Done into English out of the Icelandic with an Introduction, Notes, and an Essay on some Principles of Translation*. It was a handsome production, with over 350 pages of high-quality paper and two elegant, double-page maps at the back. It was the first full translation into English of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* since 1893 (by W. C. Green), and there would not be another until 1960 (by Gwyn Jones). But in spite of the academic standing of its publishers, Eddison's *Egil's Saga* has not, over the years, enjoyed a particularly lofty position in the pantheon of saga translations, and the place of Eddison himself in the historiography of Old Norse studies is peripheral at best.

But Eddison's name does have a very secure position in a different literary genealogy, that of twentieth-century fantasy or heroic romance, and it is in this context that he has received critical attention. Eddison wrote four books in the then embryonic genre of high or heroic fantasy: *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922), *Mistress of Mistresses* (1935), *A Fish Dinner in Memison* (1941), and the incomplete and posthumously published *The Mezentian Gate* (1958), the last three of which make up his 'Zimiamvia' trilogy. These are landmark books, generally recognised as being among the most important and distinguished such works to be produced by an English writer between William Morris and J. R. R. Tolkien. His fame has also been perpetuated by the fact that his works were admired by C. S. Lewis, and he was invited to attend two meetings of the 'Inklings' group in Oxford, where he met both Lewis and Tolkien (Carpenter 1978, 190–91; Hooper 2004). In a well-known letter, Tolkien wrote that he regarded Eddison 'as the greatest and most convincing writer of "invented worlds" that I have read', while Lewis declared admiringly that 'no author can be said to remind us of Eddison' (Carpenter 1981, 258; Lewis 1982, 55).

The purpose of this article is to examine and appraise Eddison's Old Norse studies, primarily through a detailed examination of his

translation of *Egil's Saga*. Eddison's finished version is full of interest, from many points of view; but his unpublished papers and letters also reveal a great deal about the motivation and genesis of his translation. Andrew Wawn, in his magisterial work *The Vikings and the Victorians* (2000), took the story of what he called 'Old Northernism' up to the end of the nineteenth century. A close engagement with Eddison's *Egil's Saga* offers an opportunity to illuminate and understand some of the new forms and movements of Old Northernism in the first third of the twentieth century, and in the inter-war period in particular. In what follows, I will trace Eddison's Norse enthusiasms from his earliest discovery of the sagas through to the publication and reception of his translation of *Egils saga*. I will also, in conclusion, make some brief observations regarding the relationship between Eddison's Norse studies and his heroic romances, for it is of course striking that three of the great English pioneers of heroic romance or fantasy—Morris, Eddison and Tolkien—were all profoundly influenced by Norse language and literature.

Early studies and *Styrbiorn the Strong*

Eric Rücker Eddison was born in 1882, in Adel near Leeds. After an education at Eton and Oxford (where he read Classics), he became a civil servant in London, for over thirty years, rising to the post of Deputy Comptroller-General of the Department of Overseas Trade. He retired to Marlborough in 1938, and died in 1945.¹ His parents were Octavius Eddison, a solicitor in Leeds, and Helen Rücker. Octavius Eddison was the youngest of nine children (and the eighth son) of Edwin Eddison, also a solicitor and one-time Town Clerk of Leeds. One of Octavius Eddison's friends was Cyril Ransome, Professor of History and Modern Literature at the Yorkshire College (later the University of Leeds), and the Eddisons and Ransomes shared family holidays in the Lake District (Hardyment 2012, 17). The young E. R. Eddison, known as Ric, and Cyril Ransome's son Arthur shared a number of private tutors, whom they ingeniously tricked and tormented before their confederacy was ended, and Arthur Ransome's autobiography (1976, 37–40) gives a warm account of these times spent with his childhood friend Ric ('I think any unprejudiced observer would have said that Ric and I were a pair of horrid little boys, and that it was high time we were sent to school'). It is Ransome who gives the best introductory sketch of Eddison (1976, 38):

¹ See the obituary in *The Times*, 24 August 1945.

My friendship with Ric, thus begun in the nursery, lasted until he died during the last war, after a long career in the Board of Trade, and the writing of some very unusual books, *The Worm Ouroboros*, *Styrbiorn the Strong*, other romances and a very fine translation of *Egil's Saga*. *The Worm Ouroboros* was a book of strange power, a story of fantastic heroes in a fantastic world, written in a consistent, fastidious prose that seemed devised for that purpose. The language, the place-names and the names of the heroes were for me an echo of those ancient days when Ric and I produced plays in a toy theatre with cardboard actors carrying just such names and eloquent with just such rhetoric. Gorice, Lord Goldry Bluszco, Corinius, Brandoch Daha seemed old friends when I met them nearly forty years later. Ric throughout his life had a foot in each of two worlds, and the staid official of the Board of Trade was for ever turning from his statistics to look out from the towers of Koshtra Belorn.

Childhood drawings, now preserved in the Eddison archive at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, confirm that the young Eddison was already telling stories about the future characters of *The Worm Ouroboros*, his most famous work (see Thomas 1992, xviii–xxii; Young 2013).

It may, at this early point, be worth quoting a sample passage from *The Worm*, to demonstrate the kind of ‘fastidious prose’ that Ransome was referring to. In what follows, a survivor narrates the ‘Battle of Krothering Side’ (Eddison 1991, 307):

‘All great deeds seemed trash beside the deeds of my Lord Brandoch Daha. In one short while had he three times a horse slain stark dead under him, yet gat never a wound himself, which was a marvel. For without care he rode through and about, smiting down their champions. I mind me of him once, with’s horse ripped and killed under him, and one of those Witchland lords that tilted at him on the ground as he leaped to’s feet again; how a caught the spear with’s two hands and by main strength yerked his enemy out o’ the saddle. Prince Cargo it was, youngest of Corund’s sons. Long may the Witchland ladies strain their dear eyes, they’ll ne’er see yon hendy lad come sailing home again. His highness swapt him such a swipe o’ the neck-bone as he pitched to earth, the head of him flew i’ the air like a tennis ball. And i’ the twinkling of an eye was my Lord Brandoch Daha horsed again on’s enemy’s horse, and turned to charge ’em anew.’

Clearly, this is an extraordinary prose style, marked above all by prominent, and even wilful, archaism, in terms of word order (‘In one short while had he . . .’), vocabulary or word forms (‘gat’, ‘smiting’, ‘mind’ [= recall], ‘yon’, ‘swapt’), rare words (‘yerked’, ‘hendy’), and a fondness for old- or oral-style ellipses (‘with’s’, ‘to’s’, ‘on’s’, ‘’em’, ‘o’, ‘i’, and ‘a’ for ‘he’ in a position of low stress). The tennis-ball simile is not an anachronism, but indicates Eddison’s indebtedness to Elizabethan and

Jacobean drama. This is a fair sample of *The Worm Ouroboros*, and not an exceptional passage.

It is not clear how Eddison first encountered Old Norse literature. But we can date when it happened: Eddison was later to write that he ‘first took up Icelandic at the age of 17’, in a ‘saga-madness’, and there is indeed abundant evidence to confirm an astonishing and overwhelming *berserksgangr* of enthusiasm in 1900 and 1901.² This evidence comes in the form both of books from Eddison’s library and also of unpublished manuscripts. Eddison bequeathed his Old Norse books to his undergraduate college (Trinity College, Oxford), and these are now deposited at the English Faculty Library in Oxford. The collection is extensive, and many (though not all) of the books bear bookplates or inscriptions by Eddison, recording the date of acquisition; several, as we will see in due course, also bear strong-minded annotations.

The earliest inscriptions date from 1900 and 1901, and many bear the localisation of Adel. Eddison’s acquisitions during this two-year period were extensive, and in terms of saga translations included George Webbe Dasent’s *Story of Burnt Njal* (two volumes, 1861) and *Story of Gisli the Outlaw* (1866), Edmund Head’s *Story of Viga-Glum* (1866) and Frederick York Powell’s rendering of *Færeyinga saga* as *The Tale of Thronð of Gate* (1896). Translations by the Anglo-Icelandic team of William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon include *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* (in a 1900 reprint), *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers* (that is, *Eyrbyggja saga*), and the first volume of their four-volume translation of *Heimskringla*. Later, Eddison would acquire the other three volumes of Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon’s *Heimskringla*, and also the volume containing *Howard the Halt* (that is, *Hávarðar saga*) and other short sagas, so giving him a full set of the six-volume ‘Saga Library’.

There are no surprises here: such translations are standard fare, the customary possessions of late Victorian Old Northernists. But when we turn to the primary, original-language texts acquired in 1900–01, it becomes clear that Eddison represents an exceptional, and precocious, case. Older publications bearing an inscription date of 1900 or 1901

² E. R. Eddison to E. V. Gordon (draft) 18 March 1930 (Leeds Central Library); Eddison 2011, 10. Eddison’s unpublished papers are split between Leeds Central Library and the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the Eddison archive in Leeds Central Library is not shelfmarked. Eddison seems often to have retained draft versions of more formal letters, which have been helpfully preserved together with the replies he received, so that both sides of a correspondence can often be reconstructed.

include early Copenhagen editions of *Njáls saga* (1772), *Hrafnkels saga* (1847), *Droplaugarsona saga* (1847) and *Vápnfirðinga saga* (1848), and the pioneering volume of *Sögu-Þættir Íslendinga* published in Hólar in Iceland in 1756. Other works acquired at this time include Gustaf Cederschiöld's 1875 edition of *Jómsvíkinga saga* and (an important work for Anglophone readers) Guðbrandur Vigfússon's two-volume edition of *Sturlunga saga* (1878), published by the Clarendon Press. Two publications that were to prove important for Eddison's own later works are the three-volume *Flateyjarbok* edited by Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C. R. Unger (1860–68) and Finnur Jónsson's 1894 edition of *Egils saga*. Finally, among the primary texts acquired in 1900–01 there is an important collection of Valdimar Ásmundarson's 1890s pocket editions of the *Íslendingasögur*, published in Reykjavík. Eddison's copies have been bound together into a uniform set of seven volumes, in each of which he has written neat and decorative contents pages. Taken altogether, this is an extraordinary collection for a 17- or 18-year-old to possess, and is characterised by a number of recondite items. That the Icelandic sagas rapidly assumed an important role in Eddison's identity and self-projection is also suggested by the bookplate which he designed in 1901, and which is pasted into several of these early volumes. This depicts, in the background, a bookcase with a number of volumes on it and, in the foreground, the surface of a table: on this table rest a winged helmet, a short-handled version of what looks like Gunnarr's *atgeirr* from *Njáls saga* and an open book, whose pages bear the names *Skarphedinn*, *Snorri*, *Glum*, *Egill*, *Gisli*, *Njal* and *Stir*. Around the edge of the bookplate, interspersed with sun-symbol swastikas, runs the motto: *Mart er í karls koti sem ekki er í konungs garði* 'There is much in a peasant's cottage which is not in a king's court', a proverb occurring in various forms in various texts.

Also among these early books is a copy of Henry Sweet's *Icelandic Primer* (1896), bearing a number of pencil annotations—possibly the textbook from which Eddison began to teach himself Old Norse. (That the extant Eddison collection does not, however, represent everything that he once owned is suggested by a number of absences, most obviously of Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon's *Icelandic-English Dictionary* (1874), a volume which he surely possessed; so we cannot be certain precisely which books Eddison used to learn Old Norse.) Moreover, this copy of Sweet's *Primer* bears a presentation inscription: 'to Eric R. Eddison from F. Y. P. 30 May 1900'. 'F. Y. P' is of course Frederick York Powell, Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford,

and Guðbrandur Vigfússon's erstwhile collaborator on many of his Norse projects (most importantly, the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* of 1883) (see Elton 1906). Other books presented to Eddison by York Powell include Kristian Kålund's edition of *Fljótsdæla saga* (1883) and Theodor Wisén's *Riddara-Rímur* (1881), both given in December 1900, and R. C. Boer's 1900 edition of *Grettis saga*, given in December 1901. Eddison also owned a copy of Guðbrandur Vigfússon and York Powell's *Icelandic Prose Reader* (1879), though this does not bear a dedicatory inscription. That these gifts testify to a sincere and significant association between the young Eddison and the aged, eminent York Powell, and are not merely casual cast-offs or donations, is suggested by a letter Eddison wrote twenty years later, in which he remarked that 'since the death—a gd. many years ago now—of Prof. York Powell I have no friend who is an authority on the Sagatimes'.³ This statement also indicates that Eddison pursued his Norse studies essentially as a private and amateur enthusiasm, outside of formal academic structures—a point I will return to later.

Impressively, in these early years Eddison also began a saga translation of his own. He chose *Reykdale saga* (sometimes called *Reykdale saga ok Víga-Skútu*), an oddly bipartite saga in which Chapters 1–16 are focalised through Áskell goði Eyvindarson and his nephew Vémundur kǫgurr Þórisson, and Chapters 17–30 through Áskell's son Skúta. No English translation of this fairly short saga had been published before Eddison embarked on his own version, and in fact no English translation appeared until 1997 (by George Clark), in the *Complete Sagas of Icelanders* project. Eddison's hand-written translation, dated to 1901, is preserved among his papers at the Bodleian Library. The title-page announces the work as *The Saga of Vemund Kögur Fjörleif's Son*, and the opening of the first chapter reads as follows:⁴

I. Of the Reekdale Men

There was a man named Thorstein Head that dwelt in Hordaland. He was the father of Eyvind and of Kettle the Hordalander. On a time when these brethren were talking together, Eyvind said that he heard men speak good of Iceland, and pressed his brother Kettle to fare to Iceland with him when their father should die. Kettle would not go, but prayed Eyvind to take land so wide as might suffice for them both, if the choice of land there pleased him. Eyvind fared to Iceland, and came in his ship into Housewick at Tarnness; he

³ E. R. Eddison to Bertha Phillpotts (draft) 8 February 1923 (Leeds Central Library).

⁴ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Misc. c. 456/1, fol. 2. I have transcribed the final reading, incorporating Eddison's working revisions.

took Reekdale up from Westmanswater, and dwelt at Helgistead. And there was he laid in how.

The translation is lucid and accurate. Its style, as can be seen, is not strongly marked, though clearly it inclines more to the archaic than to the contemporary, for example in the preference for 'brethren' over 'brothers' and the Verb-Subject inversion of 'There was he laid'. But this is not all-encompassing: in the first sentence Eddison resists the temptation to use 'high' instead of 'was . . . named'. There is also some evidence of an inclination to use an English cognate for a related Norse word, most obviously in the choice of 'fare' instead of 'go' (for Old Norse *far*). In the last sentence 'how' is preferred to 'mound'—a Norse loanword in English (*haugr*) rather than a cognate. But Eddison does not systematically eschew Romance or Latinate vocabulary: this short passage contains 'pressed', 'prayed', 'suffice', and 'pleased'. It is, however, the treatment of place-names, in which name-elements are rendered by their English cognates, which really shows that the main influence on Eddison's translation preferences is the work of Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon: 'Housewick' for Old Norse *Húsavík*, 'Tarnness' for *Tjörn*, 'Reekdale' for *Reykjadalr*, 'Westmanswater' for *Vestmansvatn*, and 'Helgistead' for *Helgastaðir*. The personal name Ketill appears as 'Kettle'. A similar, Anglicising treatment of names is also, it is true, found in the translations of Guðbrandur Vigfússon and York Powell; but I will return to the influence of Morris when we come on to Eddison's rendering of *Egils saga*.

The translation of what Eddison called *The Saga of Vemund Kögur* is complete (that is, *Reykdaela saga* Chapters 1–16), and extends over 40 hand-written folios. It concludes: 'And as to Vemund Kögur there is this to say, that he died of a sickness; albeit men thought him the greatest [*space*], while he was alive'.⁵ The blank space in the manuscript awaited a rendering of the Old Norse word *garpr*, and over thirty years later Eddison supplied one: the word, he notes in an addition dated 1935, 'means a ruffler & swashbuckler, but with a strong flavour of admiration abt. it' (see also Eddison 1930, 258). However, the second part of the saga, about Vémundr's cousin Skúta, does not seem to have been translated; or at least, Eddison's extant papers only preserve the opening of the first chapter (Chapter 17), under the heading *Slaying Skuti's Saga*.

We can now move forward with some rapidity over more than two decades. Eddison's book inscriptions indicate that he continued to make a number of additions to his collection over the next few years, but it

⁵ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Misc. c. 456/1, fol. 46.

seems that his Norse interests were held somewhat in abeyance as he established both a career and a family. Eddison started work in London at the Board of Trade in 1906 and he joined the Viking Club, as it was then called, in the same year (another member at this time, who had joined in 1902, was a Miss Sarah C. Rücker, presumably an aunt or cousin of Eddison).⁶ But within two or three years Eddison had let his membership of the Club lapse, not to be renewed for nearly twenty years. In 1909 he married Winifred Grace Henderson, and in 1910 their only child was born, a daughter whom they named Jean Gudrun Rücker. Clearly the name ‘Gudrun’ is significant: it gestures not only towards an Old Northern commitment in general, but specifically towards Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir of *Laxdæla saga*, known to Victorian and Edwardian readers primarily through Morris’s retelling in ‘The Lovers of Gudrun’ (though Eddison, the saga-lover, also possessed copies of the two translations by Muriel Press and Robert Proctor, both acquired soon after their respective publication in 1899 and 1903).

Eddison’s most famous work is *The Worm Ouroboros*, his vast heroic narrative published in 1922. Saga elements are certainly at play in *The Worm*, but so are many other influences, most importantly from Greek literature and early modern drama (see Thomas 1991). The opening is startling, though, and suggests the acknowledgement of a particular debt. Before the narrative of *The Worm* takes us to the planet Mercury, to follow the endless wars, adventures and intrigues between the rulers of Demonland and Witchland, the book begins with a curious ‘Induction’, a sort of dream framework (Eddison 1991, 1):

There was a man named Lessingham dwelt in an old low house in Wastdale, set in a gray old garden where yew-trees flourished that had seen Vikings in Copeland in their seedling time . . . Thick woods were on every side without the garden, with a gap north-eastward opening on the desolate lake and the great fells beyond it: Gable rearing his crag-bound head against the sky from behind the straight clean outline of the Screes.

The first sentence, of course, recalls the typical opening of an Icelandic saga (*Maðr hét X*), and the geographical setting evokes an association between the Vikings and Cumbria which is perhaps reminiscent of the works of W. G. Collingwood (see Townend 2009). After dinner one evening, Lessingham’s wife speaks to him (Eddison 1991, 1–2):

⁶ See *Saga-Book* V (1906–07), 3–15 (list of members in 1907), *Year-Book* I (1909), 5–17 (list of members in 1909, including Eddison’s name) and 107–08 (obituary of Sarah Rücker), and *Year-Book* III (1910–11), 6–14 (list of members in 1911, from which Eddison’s name is absent).

'Should we finish that chapter of Njal?' she said.

She took the heavy volume with its faded green cover, and read: 'He went out on the night of the Lord's day, when nine weeks were still to winter; he heard a great crash, so that he thought both heaven and earth shook . . .'

Not many novels begin with characters reading aloud from *Njáls saga*, and, as Andrew Wawn (2007a, v) has pointed out, both the text quoted and the green binding enable us to identify this as Dasent's translation of *Njáls saga*. (And it is satisfying to report that Eddison's own volumes of Dasent, now preserved in Oxford, are themselves much worn and battered, with 'faded green cover[s]'). In a curious and even inept manner, the narrative soon leaves behind *Njáls saga*, Lessingham and indeed planet Earth, and never returns to them, though there is an intriguing echo of the book's opening once we reach Mercury: the place-names of Demonland are manifestly modelled on those of the Lake District, with a markedly Norse flavour—for example, Mosedale and Brankdale, Beckfoot and Kestawick, and Brocksty Hause and Starksty Pike.

The Worm Ouroboros brought Eddison both public and private plaudits: he exchanged correspondence with such diverse men of letters as Hilaire Belloc, H. Rider Haggard and Henry Newbolt.⁷ His next literary endeavour was a retelling of a Norse story, and the narrative he chose was *Styrbjarnar þáttur Sviakappa*, a short tale preserved in the compendium *Flatexjarbók* (the three-volume edition of which, as we have seen, Eddison acquired in 1901). *Styrbjarnar þáttur* is a brief work, taking up a little over three pages in the 1860s edition, and it is also a little-known one: its selection again reveals Eddison as 'a serious and imaginative Icelandicist' (Wawn 2007a, vi). *Styrbiorn the Strong*, Eddison's novelistic retelling, expands the narrative to over 250 pages, and his work on the story occupied the first half of an eight-year period in which Old Norse dominated his creative endeavours (*Styrbiorn the Strong* 1922–26, then *Egil's Saga* 1926–30) (see Thomas 2011).

Styrbiorn himself conforms to what *The Worm Ouroboros* had established as the prevailing type of Eddison's heroes: high-born, masterful, decisive. In his youth Styrbiorn likes to wrestle with a pet ox, and the story tells of his adventures with the legendary Jomsvikings and his tragic conflict with his uncle King Eric of Sweden. The dangerous Queen Sigríð the Haughty also fits the type of Eddison's heroines. As a whole, *Styrbiorn the Strong* is informed and amplified by Eddison's

⁷ See Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Lett. c. 231.

extensive knowledge of Norse literature, and its vocabulary echoes Old Norse in some of its choices (Styrbiorn, for example, ‘sailed now in west-viking [*vestrviking*] into Denmark and there made great unpeace [*ófrið*]’ (Eddison 2011, 285)). Eddison also engages with Eddic poetry: both *Vǫluspá* and *Helreið Brynhildar* are recited at certain points in the narrative, and Eddison’s translations attempt broadly to replicate the alliterative metre. (Tolkienists will also want to note the occurrence in Eddison’s *Vǫluspá* translation of the term ‘Middle-earth’—complete with capital ‘M’, hyphen and lower-case ‘e’—some years before its more famous user first deployed the term with precisely this orthography (see Gilliver, Marshall and Weiner 2006, 162–64).) But even in this process of vast narrative expansion, Eddison oddly leaves things out: the brief Norse *þátr* contains three *dróttkvætt* stanzas, but Eddison includes only one of them in his retelling. Eddison’s full-scale engagement with skaldic poetry would come, of course, with his work on *Egil’s Saga*.

***Egil’s Saga* (1): progress and models**

Eddison’s papers contain a number of memoranda in which he records or articulates key points of principle or self-development as a writer, and an important one is dated 26 January 1926:

Walking in a gale over High Peak, Sidmouth, on 3rd Jan. 1926, when I had just finished writing Styrbiorn the Strong, I thought suddenly that my next job should be a big Saga translation, and that should be Egil. This may pay back some of my debt to the Sagas, to which I owe more than can ever be counted.

A translation such as I intend can be made, I am very sure, in one way only: by getting to know the Saga so well that I can see it from inside, as if it were my own work, & only then setting to work to translate it.⁸

Eddison did indeed set to work purposefully. He resumed the buying of books on Old Norse subjects (for example, his signature in his copy of W. A. Craigie’s *The Icelandic Sagas* (1913) is dated February 1926). He also rejoined the Viking Club (or rather, the Viking Society for Northern Research, as it had been renamed in his absence). The Society’s *Year-Book* indicates that Eddison became a member again in 1926: he was quickly recruited as a potential officer, and served as a member of Council from 1926 to 1930. In those years, and in 1931 too, he also made extra contributions to the Society’s funds, and he attended the annual dinner

⁸ Leeds Central Library.

in 1926 and 1929.⁹ (Early Viking Society dinners included post-prandial entertainments, usually musical, but the 1929 dinner also boasted a performance from a certain 'Besoni, from Maskelyne's Theatre, conjurer and ventriloquist'.) In late summer 1926 Eddison also made his one and only journey to Iceland, visiting saga sites, buying more books and making important friendships with Icelanders (as recorded in the dedication and preface to the published translation of *Egil's Saga*). The following year he published a brief account of his travels, as part of an article introducing the sagas (Eddison 1927).

Eddison evidently worked fast, at least on his initial draft of the saga. By March 1927, he was able to write to the Icelander Jón Stefánsson that he was 'two-thirds of the way through my translation of Eglá, and my mind is much occupied (in such leisure moments as I have) with that magnificent classic'.¹⁰ Eighteen months later, he submitted a not-quite-complete version to the firm of Jonathan Cape, publishers of *The Worm Ouroboros* and *Styrbiorn the Strong*, to inquire if they would publish *Egil's Saga* as well, but Cape's response was disappointing: they could not see such a book being a commercial success.¹¹ A year later, with translation and apparatus now fully complete, Eddison tried again, proffering multiple reasons why his work should be published: these included the approach of the millennial anniversary of the establishment of the Icelandic Althing ('it is therefore the psychological moment to wade in with a new translation').¹² But again Cape failed to rise to his bait, so Eddison turned instead to Cambridge University Press, an academic publisher with a record of important Norse publications over the previous twenty years (not least through their association with H. M. Chadwick and his school).¹³ Cambridge were willing to take the book, but Eddison was not willing to make the reductions to the editorial apparatus that the Press requested; so it was finally agreed that the translator would provide a

⁹ See *Year-Book* 17–22 (1931, for 1925–30) and 23–24 (1932, for 1931–32).

¹⁰ E. R. Eddison to Jón Stefánsson 7 March 1927 (Reykjavík, National Library of Iceland, Lbs 3426 4to). Jón Stefánsson (1862–1952) is now best remembered as W. G. Collingwood's travelling companion around Iceland in 1897, and co-translator with him of *Kormáks saga* (see Townend 2009, 87–116). Eddison acquired a copy of their *Life and Death of Cormac the Skald* (1902) in March 1927, perhaps as a gift from the Icelander.

¹¹ G. Wren Howard to E. R. Eddison 19 December 1928 (Leeds Central Library).

¹² E. R. Eddison to Jonathan Cape (draft) 29 November 1929 (Leeds Central Library).

¹³ Jonathan Cape to E. R. Eddison 19 November 1929 (Leeds Central Library).

subvention of £100 towards the costs of publication.¹⁴ Arthur Ransome read a proof copy, and at the last moment the book was given its present lengthy subtitle, changed from the simpler *Done into English out of the Old Northern Tongue*.¹⁵ Eventually, it was published in October 1930—in the thousandth year after the Althing's founding, but too late for the celebrations that took place that summer.

Eddison's *Egil's Saga* is a very substantial volume, with over a third of its bulk made up of the contextual apparatus that Eddison was so reluctant to cut. There is a four-page 'Preface' and a seventeen-page 'Introduction' on 'The Heroic Age and the Sagas'. The translation itself is followed by genealogies, a chronology, and (very importantly) a 'Terminal Essay: On some Principles of Translation'. Next come seventy pages of 'Notes' and a very thorough thirty-three-page index. Finally, there are the two double-page maps, one of 'Norway in the Saga-Time', the other of 'The Countryside about Burgfirth'; these were drawn by Gerald Hayes, a cartographer and civil servant who would later produce the maps for Eddison's *Zimiamvia* books. As a way in to the riches and provocations of Eddison's volume, it may be desirable at this stage simply to offer a couple of sample passages from his translation, to give a sense of its flavour, before we consider in more detail the choices and arguments that underlie and inform it. So here is a brief passage of narrative, taken from Chapter 21 (Eddison 1930, 37):

Harald the King was in the Wick when Thorolf was a-harrying. He fared in the autumn to the Uplands and thence north to Throndheim, and sat there for the winter and had great throng of men.

Then were Sigtrygg and Hallvard with the King, and had heard tell what way Thorolf had put in order their abode in Hising, and what man-scathe and fee-scathe he had there wrought them. They minded the King oft of that, and moreover of this too, that Thorolf had robbed the King and his thanes, and had fared with harrying there within the land. They prayed leave of the King that they two brethren should fare with that band which was wont to follow them and set upon Thorolf in his home.

And here is a passage of dialogue, from Chapter 68 (Eddison 1930, 161):

Egil gat great ungladness after Yule, so that he quoth never a word. And when Arinbiorn found that, then took he to speech with Egil and asked what that

¹⁴ S. C. Roberts to E. R. Eddison 19 January 1930 (Leeds Central Library).

¹⁵ Eddison's corrected proofs are in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Misc. d. 656. See also E. R. Eddison to Arthur Ransome 7 September 1930 (MS Eng. Misc. c. 456/1, fol. 73).

betokened, that ungladness which he had. 'I will,' saith he, 'that thou let me know whether thou beest sick, or beareth somewhat else hither? We may then work some remedy.'

Egil saith, 'Nought have I of ailments, but great concern have I of this, how I shall get that fee which I won, then when I felled Ljot the Pale, north in Mere. 'Tis said to me that the King's bailiffs have taken up all that fee and cast the King's ban on it. Now will I fain have thy help over this fee-claiming.'

I will return to both of these passages shortly, to compare them with other translations of the same section.

The most thorough and lucid survey of historical trends in saga translation is John Kennedy's *Translating the Sagas: Two Hundred Years of Challenge and Response* (2007), and Eddison stalks the pages of Kennedy's book as a maverick, contrary figure: he is variously described as 'fervently self-assured', 'a belated disciple of Morris', 'a vociferous reactionary in translation matters' and trying to 'turn the clock back' (Kennedy 2007, 91, 116, 121, 127; on translations of *Egils saga* see also Capildeo 2000). As we will see, this portrait of Eddison as a Grettir-like misfit, born out of his due time, certainly has its justification, but it is not necessarily the whole story, and nor, perhaps, was there ever a right time for Eddison's translation: it would probably have seemed equally distinctive fifty years earlier. For as the two passages quoted above immediately indicate, Eddison was a man possessing both strong opinions and the literary skills to implement them. He knew what he liked, and (especially) what he didn't like; and in appraising his translation we may begin with the latter.

There had been one previous published translation of *Egils saga* into English, by the Rev. W. C. Green in 1893 (see Capildeo 2000, 54–62, 198–214). Green's version is called *The Story of Egil Skallagrimsson: Being an Icelandic Family History of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, and Eddison hated it. In a letter he dismissed it as 'a wretched "school-boy's crib" version'.¹⁶ He was no more diplomatic in print: the Preface to Eddison's own translation shows no piety towards his predecessor (1930, xiii):

It is to be feared that the translator little understood the qualities of his original or the difficulties of his task. His version (now out of print) in its flaccid paraphrasing, its lack of all sense of style, its latinized constructions, and (a comparatively venial offence) its foolish and unavowed

¹⁶ E. R. Eddison to S. C. Roberts (draft) 25 November 1929 (Leeds Central Library).

expurgations, conveys no single note or touch of the masterpiece with which he was dealing.

(No copy of Green's translation, it may be noted, survives among Eddison's Old Norse books: did it perhaps meet some terrible end?)

'Unfortunately many translations of sagas are inferior', Eddison had written in 1927 (1927, 389). Two other names on Eddison's blacklist of bad translators are Sir Edmund Head and John Sephton. A marginal annotation in Eddison's copy of Craigie's *The Icelandic Sagas* groups the three villains together and asserts that 'Sephton & Sir E. Head and W. Green are so bad as to be unreadable'.¹⁷ Sir Edmund Head's *Story of Viga-Glum*, published as early as 1866, was something of a pioneering work, but Eddison despised it, and his own copy is full of marginal crosses, exclamation marks and interlinear rewritings: Eddison had evidently checked Head's translation against the original Old Norse, and found it (very) wanting. 'Sloppy substantival paraphrase' reads one annotation, and 'Why this journalese?' reads another. The polysyllabic translation of Old Norse *vel* as 'prosperously' (rather than simply 'well') excites Eddison's ire, and the final verdict is damning:

This translation bears the same relation to its original as a billy-cock hat bears to a Viking helmet. Such a translation is an active disservice to O.N. literature.¹⁸

John Sephton fares no better. Sephton was an important figure, a productive and influential Old Northernist who became Reader in Icelandic at the University College of Liverpool (see Wawn 2007b, 148–54). But in a 1922 annotation to his own copy, Eddison summed up Sephton's translation of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* (still the only one in English) as follows:

This is, I think, incomparably the worst translation of a Saga that I have come across. Its vulgar Latinized idiom & drab journalese are so rank as to dispel any whiff of the keen flavour of the Norse. Further it is well bowdlerized and emasculated: & dishonestly, too, for the translator doesn't confess his mishandling of it.

Faugh!¹⁹

¹⁷ Annotation to W. A. Craigie, *The Icelandic Sagas* (1913), 111 (Oxford, English Faculty Library).

¹⁸ Annotations to Edmund Head, *The Story of Viga-Glum* (1866), xvi, 2, 41, 82 (Oxford, English Faculty Library).

¹⁹ Annotation to John Sephton, *The Saga of King Olaf Tryggvason* (1895), front end paper (Oxford, English Faculty Library).

Sephton's translation is dedicated to the memory of the late Guðbrandur Vigfússon; Eddison's annotation laments that 'Poor Vigfusson is likely to turn in his grave, I shd. think'.²⁰

What was it that Eddison didn't like about these translations? A parallel passage from Green's *The Story of Egil* will start to provide the answer. I give below the opening sentences of Chapter 68 in the standard *Íslenzk fornrit* edition (by Sigurður Nordal) together with the versions of Green and Eddison:²¹

Egill fekk ógleði mikla eptir jólin, svá at hann kvað eigi orð; ok er Arinbjörn fann þat, þá tók hann ræðu við Egil ok spurði, hverju þat gegndi, ógleði sú, er hann hafði; 'vil ek,' segir hann, 'at þú látir mik vita, hvárt þú ert sjúkr, eða berr annat til; megum vér þá bætr á vinna.' (Nordal 1933, 214)

Egil after Yule-tide was taken with such sadness that he spake not a word. And when Arinbjorn perceived this he began to talk with Egil, and asked what this sadness meant. 'I wish,' said he, 'you would let me know whether you are sick, or anything ails you, that I may find a remedy.' (Green 1893, 149)

Egil gat great ungladness after Yule, so that he quoth never a word. And when Arinbjorn found that, then took he to speech with Egil and asked what that betokened, that ungladness which he had. 'I will,' saith he, 'that thou let me know whether thou beest sick, or beareth somewhat else hither? We may then work some remedy.' (Eddison 1930, 161)

At first appearance, the differences between Green's version and Eddison's seem quite minor, and certainly not sufficient to justify such disdain on Eddison's part. But cumulatively they reveal a very different concept of fidelity to the original. So in the opening sentence Eddison keeps *fekk* as an active verb ('gat'; contrast Green's 'was taken'), and *ógleði* as a negative compound ('ungladness'; contrast 'sadness'). Both translators observe a sentence-break after *orð*, but then Eddison renders *fann* with cognate 'found' (contrast Green's Latinate 'perceived'), and keeps *ræðu* as a noun ('took he to speech'; contrast 'he began to talk'). Eddison also keeps the complexity, and the word order, of *hverju þat gegndi, ógleði sú, er hann hafði* ('what that betokened, that ungladness which he had'), whereas Green simplifies and paraphrases ('what this sadness meant'). Finally, in Arinbjörn's speech, Eddison retains *látir* as a simple verb ('let';

²⁰ Annotation to John Sephton, *The Saga of King Olaf Tryggwason* (1895), [v] (Oxford, English Faculty Library).

²¹ I have cited *Egils saga* from the normalised *Íslenzk fornrit* text for ease of reference; Eddison himself worked from Finnur Jónsson's 1924 Halle edition.

contrast complex ‘would let’) and *megum* as a plural one (‘we may’; contrast singular ‘I may’).

These are all small touches, but Eddison was hyper-sensitive to them, as he was in all the translations that he read and made. His copy of Sweet’s *Icelandic Primer*, for example, bears an annotation to the section on the middle voice in Old Norse verbs: Eddison adds ‘N.B. – And of course these peculiarities of syntax, which are of the utmost importance to style & “flavour”, shd. be kept in a translation wherever practicable (as Morris does, & as bad translators do not.)’²² Minor features might have major effects.

As an experiment Eddison attempted a translation of part of *Egils saga* into a contemporary style. Here is the opening to the same Chapter 68 in this alternative measure:

Egil became very gloomy after Yule, so that he said never a word. And when Arinbiorn noticed that, he had a talk with Egil & asked what it was all about, this gloominess of his: ‘I wish,’ says he, ‘that you would let me know whether you’re sick, or something else brewing? We may then do something to help.’²³

Eddison’s verdict, scribbled on this trial sample and dated to August 1927, is that ‘this experiment shows that the modern colloquial style adds nothing & takes much away. This confirms me in my choice of rigid faithfulness & natural colloquial archaism’.

As this suggests, Eddison was just as unwavering in his likes as in his dislikes. The annotation to Craigie’s *The Icelandic Sagas*, quoted above, begins as follows: ‘There are only two satisfactory translators (1) Dasent (2) Morris & Magnússon’.²⁴ Repeatedly, Eddison stresses the unique distinction of these translators, with the crown being given to Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon (or rather, strictly speaking, to Morris specifically, as the figure believed to be responsible for the characteristics of which Eddison approves). Morris’s work, according to Eddison (1930, 233), has not only ‘the life and freshness of an original composition’ but also ‘on the whole the very tone and accent of the saga’. I will examine in more detail below the ways in which Eddison endeavoured to emulate Morris’s language and approach; here, it is worth noting that Eddison approved of these translators not only in matters of style, but also in terms of apparatus: his correspondence with Cambridge University Press indicates that

²² Annotation to Henry Sweet, *An Icelandic Primer* (1896, 41) (Oxford, English Faculty Library).

²³ Leeds Central Library.

²⁴ Annotation to W. A. Craigie, *The Icelandic Sagas* (1913, 111) (Oxford, English Faculty Library).

Eddison desired an introduction as full and wide-ranging as that which Dasent gave for his 1861 *Burnt Njal*, and an index as extensive and detailed as that supplied by Eiríkur Magnússon for the fourth and final volume of his and Morris's *Heimskringla*.

***Egil's Saga* (2): dialogue with Bertha Phillpotts**

We can access Eddison's thoughts on translation even more closely by means of a remarkable correspondence, and conversation, with Bertha Surtees Phillpotts (and as we will see in a moment, 'conversation' is not being used metaphorically here). Phillpotts (1877–1932) had a very distinguished career as a Norse scholar and educationalist, and travelled widely in Iceland and other Scandinavian countries. She was, at various times, a Fellow of Somerville College, Oxford, Principal of Westfield College, London, and Mistress of Girton College, Cambridge; and in 1929 she was made a Dame of the British Empire for her services to education. Her major scholarly works are *Kindred and Clan in the Middle Ages and After* (1913), *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama* (1920) and *Edda and Saga* (1931) (see Gunnell 1999, 2004; Poole 2005).

Eddison had first made contact with Phillpotts during the composition of *Styrbiorn the Strong*, writing to ask her for guidance concerning Jomsborg and other historical matters; in response, Phillpotts set a couple of her students to work as Eddison's research assistants.²⁵ Then in early 1926 Phillpotts cast her eye over the Eddic translations to be included in *Styrbiorn*, and gave her opinions on modern alliterative composition in English ('I really believe it to be impossible to imitate the metre in English. Your translation is near enough to remind one of the original & seems to me to be often happily expressed').²⁶ By this time, as we have seen, Eddison had already resolved that a translation of *Egils saga* would be his next task, so once a sample of Eddison's version had been prepared, he sent it to her for comment.

Phillpotts's reply began gently enough: 'Your translation seems to me to be very accurate', she wrote.²⁷ But then came disagreement. 'Where

²⁵ See 1923–24 correspondence at Leeds Central Library. The Leeds archive preserves Eddison's draft letters to Phillpotts, and her replies. Regrettably, none of Eddison's sent letters are preserved in the Phillpotts archive at Girton College, Cambridge (shelfmark GCPP Phillpotts).

²⁶ Bertha S. Phillpotts to E. R. Eddison 15 February 1926 (Leeds Central Library).

²⁷ Bertha S. Phillpotts to E. R. Eddison 18 June 1926 (Leeds Central Library).

I differ, of course, is about the suitability of your style. Between us, in that matter, there is a great gulf fixed'. Phillpotts had two objections in particular, the first being to a malign influence. 'The language adopted by you is roughly the language used by Malory', she wrote, and while this might be appropriate for 'romantic stories' (including *The Worm Ouroboros*, 'which I have been reading with great enjoyment'), it was not at all suitable for 'the realism of the Saga': 'When [Malory's] style is used to translate the terse retort of a farmer in Iceland it appears to me to kill the quality of the Saga & substitute nothing for it'.

Phillpotts's second objection was to the use of English cognates to render related Norse words, regardless of semantic fitness—a much more fundamental criticism of Eddison's philosophy of translation. The example she chooses is Eddison's practice of translating the Old Norse compound term *lausafé* 'moveable wealth; livestock' as 'loose fee'. Phillpotts contends:

Having some philological education I realize when you speak of 'loose fee' that you mean by fee something that hasn't been meant by that word for centuries (if indeed ever) . . . If the story is to be held up constantly by such violent wrenches of the ordinary associations of words, how can it give the impression of directness & certainty of touch which is the glory of the Saga?

Eddison dashed back a reply, responding optimistically that perhaps there wasn't such a *ginnungagap* of disagreement between them ('I think you and I do not differ . . . fundamentally, as might appear'). The first point Eddison willingly conceded ('I will exclude Malory like the plague', he wrote), but the second he would not budge on.²⁸ He protested: 'Surely to say "A. let slay B." [*lét drepa*] is simple, direct, & farmer-like?' This manner of translating the common Old Norse construction of *láta* + infinitive was already, clearly, a line in the sand for Eddison.

Two days later, on 23 June 1926, Eddison and Phillpotts met face-to-face, apparently for the first and only time, to thrash out their views on saga translation. After their meeting, and on the same day, Eddison drafted a remarkable document, a seven-page transcription of their conversation, headed 'Note of talk with Miss Phillpotts'.²⁹ The document begins with a mission statement from Eddison:

²⁸ E. R. Eddison to Bertha S. Phillpotts (draft) 21 June 1926 (Leeds Central Library).

²⁹ This document, now in Leeds Public Library, is written on the letter-paper of Eddison's club, the Athenaeum, suggesting the meeting took place in London.

Translation is to say over again what has already been said in another language. (This only ideally possible.)

2 ways of doing it: –

(1) Say it in idiomatic English, as an Englishman wd. have said it if he'd written the Saga. But no Englishman cd have written it: he'd have written something else . . .

(2) Say it so that an Englishman can understand it & have same impression as if he had known it in Icelandic. For this you must create an English style appropriate.

After this the dialogue begins:

BSP. This (2) is impossible. No transln can give the effect. However –

ERE. Morris & Dasent have shown the way, tho' both have faults: Morris's fault is 'Malory' . . .

Then Eddison goes on the attack, and the debate intensifies:

Hundreds of words the same in English & Icelandic: the onus shd. always be on the prosecution to prove the corresponding English word shd. not be used to translate the Icelandic (e.g. hight for heita, drake for drekja [*sic*], etc.).

BSP. Nearly always, where words are alike in 2 languages, they mean different things. Morris's, 'he let fetch a Worm'. láta never = 'let': it means active causing. Fá does not mean 'fetch' but 'provide'.

ERE. 'Provide' is horrible word.

BSP. (Agrees.) But why not 'have E. slain', inst of 'let slay E.?' 'Let' has never, or never for hundreds of years meant 'láta'.

ERE. USA – 'Have him write me'.

BSP. This is mechanical faithfulness to original. You want a higher faithfulness. You want somethg. that people will read.

The conversation ranges widely, over questions of dialect and register, the proper treatment of place-names, and the history of saga translation (or even non-translation: W. P. Ker, Phillpotts reported, 'said he wd. never translate a Saga: it was too heart-breaking'). Then Eddison seems to have produced a pre-prepared list of words, and asked Phillpotts's opinion as to whether or not she would countenance their use, ticking them off as she passed judgement: Phillpotts said Yes to the use of 'thou', 'will' (*vilja*, meaning 'to wish, desire'), and the demonstrative 'that' (as in *sá maðr* 'that man'), and Maybe to 'unfriend' and 'unpeace' (for *óvinr* and *ófrið*), but a firm No to 'let' (for *láta*), 'fare' (for *fara*), 'busk' (for *búask* 'to make ready'), 'scathe' (for *skaði*, 'harm') and 'manfall' (for *manfall* 'slaughter'). 'Cheaping', a favourite Morris word (for *kaupangr* 'market') was dismissed as 'a special abomination'.³⁰

³⁰ This list, with Eddison's annotations, is preserved at Leeds Central Library.

Eddison's transcription of their conversation ends with him pining for 'a later stage of civilization', in which '[we] shall be able to think & speak simply again, like farmers—& Gods'. But Phillpotts does not believe it: 'I think we have too many thoughts,' she says; 'We shall never get back to the old simplicity again.'

Many of the points enunciated in the dialogue with Bertha Phillpotts appear in more polished form three years later, in the 'Terminal Essay' which Eddison appended to his translation (discussed also in Capildeo 2000, 76–81). Here he defines a 'good translation' as 'a recognizable shadow that being looked on recalls the features and movements of its original without much degradation or distortion' (1930, 230), strongly committing himself, in other words, to the second approach outlined in his conversation with Phillpotts (which the Cambridge scholar had dismissed as 'impossible'). There should be 'likeness of spirit and likeness of language', and for translation between Old Norse and Modern English this means that, if the translator 'avails himself to the uttermost of the resemblances between the languages, it is within the bounds of possibility that he may succeed in producing an English version of a saga which shall convey in some degree the style and flavour of the original' (1930, 230, 232). Moreover, Eddison argues that since the sagas 'are written in what is, to us . . . , old-fashioned language', the translator should also use old-fashioned language: the world of the sagas 'will seem not old-fashioned only but unreal and ridiculous if we attempt to galvanize it into a semblance of modernity by putting into its mouth the sophisticated parlance of our own very different times' (1930, 239–40). The translator should therefore cultivate 'an archaic simplicity of speech', but Eddison points out that 'Archaism is not an end in itself. The end is, truth to the original' (1930, 241, 242).

We can, therefore, characterise Eddison's translation as an extreme form of what has been called the 'Icelandicising' approach to saga translation, or more broadly (to use an influential term from Lawrence Venuti) the 'foreignising' approach to translation in general (Kennedy 2007, 33–36; Venuti 1995). A 'foreignising' translation, according to Venuti, imports linguistic and cultural features from the source language into the target language, so that the resultant translation seems in some way 'foreign' compared to original compositions in the target language ('in its effort to do right abroad,' he writes, 'this translation method must do wrong at home, deviating enough from native norms to stage an alien reading experience' (1995, 20)). A 'domesticating' translation on the other hand, downplays linguistic and cultural difference, accom-

modating the source language to the characteristic features of the target language (a process that Venuti deplors as 'the ethnocentric violence of translation'). In the particular case of saga translation, there are two, potentially separable, issues here: in Eddison's terms, those of 'resemblance' (that is, the use of cognate words and constructions) and of 'archaism' (that is, the use of old or obsolete words and constructions). Both may contribute to the effect of 'foreignisation', but it is possible to have one without the other: Dasent's *Burnt Njal* on the whole offers archaism rather than resemblance (Dasent 1861), whereas the more recent translations of George Johnston, for example, strive for resemblance in terms of syntax and idiom, while mostly avoiding archaism (see Johnston 1957–61, 1963, 1999). But Eddison's great exemplars, the translations of Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon, do of course employ both (see Felce 2016, 2018).

Egil's Saga (3): language and style

Let us now look in detail at some of the translation choices that Eddison makes, and the principles that he adopts (see also Capildeo 2000, 237–49). The first principle is a strong commitment to translation-by-cognates. Setting his face against Bertha Phillpotts's warning that (for example) Old Norse *láta* does not correspond semantically to Modern English 'let', or *fé* to 'fee', Eddison builds his prose, as far as possible, out of words that have formal Norse cognates. Indeed, so fundamental and systematic was Eddison's commitment to this principle that in the preparatory stages of translation he seems to have compiled at least two word-lists. First, there is among Eddison's unpublished papers a document entitled 'From Skeat's list of English Words the derivation of wh. is illustrated by the Icelandic'.³¹ This refers to a short publication produced by W. W. Skeat in response to Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon's dictionary (Skeat 1876), and Eddison's list indicates that he had gone through Skeat's pamphlet item by item, making a long list of potentially useful words (from 'aftermost', 'aghost' and 'agog', through to 'yew', 'yew-bow' and 'yield'). Second, Eddison's 'Terminal Essay' on translation contains a lengthy footnote that lists over 500 of the 'more important' words that are 'substantially the same in English and Icelandic': these run from 'after', 'ale' and 'all', through 'mind', 'mire' and 'mirk', to 'write', 'wrong' and 'young' (Eddison 1930, 229–30). These lists of words, carefully marshalled, were the lexical building-blocks out of which Eddison constructed his translation,

³¹ This document is in Leeds Central Library.

seeking to use English cognates for Norse words whenever possible. Indeed, Eddison is dedicated to doing this even where the English word or meaning is not part of the core vocabulary of the language, or where there has been semantic divergence between the Norse exemplar and the English cognate: examples of this sort include ‘drake’ (*dreki* ‘war-ship’), ‘gild’ (*gjald*), ‘rede’ (*råd*, a Morrisian favourite), ‘scathe’ (*skaði*), ‘to egg’ (*eggja*), ‘to flit’ (*flytja*), ‘to ken’ (*kenna*), ‘to let’ (*letja* ‘to hinder’) and ‘to tilt’ (*tjalda* ‘to pitch, or cover with, a tent’). The title of Eddison’s own most famous work is itself an example of cognate translation: the ‘worm’ of *The Worm Ouroboros* means ‘serpent’ or ‘snake’, paralleling Old Norse *ormr*.

These examples of cognate translation are all simplexes. But it is in his rendering of compounds that Eddison especially demonstrates his desire to ‘avail himself to the uttermost of the resemblances between the languages’: the result is a translation that can be very readily characterised as ‘foreignising’ in terms of word-formation as well as lexis. Examples in which both elements of the original Norse compound are translated by English cognates include the following: ‘day-set’ (*dagsetr*), ‘faring-days’ (*farðagar*), ‘fell-wind’ (*fallvindr*), ‘grey-wares’ (*grávörur*), ‘high-seat’ (*háseti*), ‘home-bidding’ (*heimboð*), ‘homemen’ (*heimamenn*), ‘loose bridal’ (*lausabrúllaup*), ‘man-boot’ (*mannbætr*), ‘man-fall’ (*manfall* ‘slaughter’, one of the words proscribed by Phillpotts), ‘man-spill’ (*mannspell* ‘slaughter’), ‘over-man’ (*yfirmaðr*), ‘shield-burg’ (*skjaldborg*), ‘stem-men’ (*stafnmenn*), ‘thing-brent’ (*þingbrekka*), ‘word-sending’ (*orðsending*) and ‘Yule-bidding’ (*jólaboð*). A different set of compounds, in which element-by-element translation still occurs, but only one element is rendered by a cognate, includes the following: ‘bane-wound’ (*bana-sár*), ‘day-meal’ (*dagverðr*), ‘guest-hall’ (*gesta-skáli*), ‘hewing-spear’ (*höggspjót*), ‘howe-fire’ (*hauga-eldr*), ‘peace-land’ (*friðland*), ‘scat-payers’ (*skattgildir*) and ‘war-blast’ (*herblástr*). Eddison’s customary use of ‘loose goods’, rather than ‘loose fee’, to render *lausafé* would also come into this category (perhaps indicating a willingness to heed Phillpotts’s warning on this item at least). Finally, in terms of word-formation, Eddison takes a systematic approach to negative compounds in *ó*-: examples include ‘unfriend’ for *óvinr* (rather than ‘enemy’), ‘unmerry’ for *ókátr* (rather than ‘sad’), ‘unpeace’ for *ófrið* (rather than ‘war’), ‘unblithe’ for *óblíðr*, ‘unbolder’ for *ódjarfari*, ‘unjustness’ for *ójafnaðr* and ‘unwiser’ for *óvittrari*.

Not all compounds are translated element-for-element, however. The well-known term *kolbítr* is rendered not as ‘coal-biter’, but more peri-

phrastically as 'sit-by-the-fire'. The legal vocabulary of *ffjorbaugssok* and *skóggangssok* appears as 'lesser outlawry' and 'full outlawry', a decision that may have been eased for Eddison by the fact that 'outlaw' is already a Norse loanword in English. As these examples suggest, there is also a value in looking at Eddison's choices in rendering key cultural terms. So, for example, *bóndi* appears sometimes as 'goodman' and sometimes 'bonder', *níðingr* as 'dastard', *goðorð* as 'priesthood', *gæfa* as 'hap', *tún* as 'home-mead', *lqgberg* as 'Hill of Laws'; again, in some of these Eddison is following a Morrisian exemplar. But some Norse words are left untranslated, standing forth boldly as loanwords into Modern English: 'berserk-gang', 'holmgang' and 'jokull' ('holmgang' and 'jokul(l)', at Eddison's time of writing, had found a place in the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*; 'berserk-gang' had not).

As can be seen, Eddison was not consistent in either following or rejecting Bertha Phillpotts's judgements on individual words. 'Scathe' and 'manfall' remain prominent, for example, but 'busk' is banished, at least from the prose translation (where *búa(sk)* is translated by 'to make ready'), as is 'loose fee', at least for most of the time. A whole host of Morrisian 'cheaping' words do, however, appear defiantly in Eddison's text (for example, 'cheaping-fair', 'cheaping-mart', 'cheaping-ship' and 'cheaping-stead', all rendering Norse compounds in *kaup-*), and 'let' + infinitive remains a favourite construction ('Thorolf had let make ready a great corn-barn that was there, and let lay benches in it, and let drink there'). There are ample instances, too, of what Phillpotts might have criticised as 'violent wrenches of the ordinary associations of words': for example, 'boon' (*bæen*) bears the obsolete sense of 'request' rather than the more usual 'benefit', and 'sake' (*sok*) is used as an independent noun with the full meaning of 'cause, reason' ('for those sakes that be already known to you').

'Busk', as noted above, is excluded from Eddison's prose, but he does allow its use in his translation of verse. In fact, in his rendering of Egill's poetry Eddison deploys a significantly different vocabulary, one that is much less concerned with the shadowing or replication of Norse cognates or compounds. Instead he reaches for a repertoire of rare or archaic words and forms, of a sort used earlier in the heroic romance of *The Worm Ouroboros* (and later, even more prominently, in the 'Zimiamvia' books): 'corse', 'drouth', 'eyen' (plural), 'to gar', 'gowk', 'kempe', 'laidly', 'stound', 'slubber', 'swale', 'wite' and even 'a' for 'he'. This vocabulary has its roots in Eddison's study of Elizabethan

literature, and also in his purposeful browsing of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. There is, nonetheless, ample archaism to be found in the prose of *Egil's Saga* too, in the grammatical archaism of past participles such as 'bounden', 'boughten', 'gotten' and 'holden', and variant past tenses such as 'drave' (for 'drove'), 'gat' (for 'got'), 'sate' (for 'sat') and 'spake' for 'spoke'. In dialogue in particular Eddison also uses archaic ellipses or colloquialisms such as 'i'" (for 'in'), 'o'" (for 'of'), 'tis', 'twas', 'twill' and 'twixt'.

It is important to note, however, that Eddison is not committed to a Germanic vocabulary at all cost. As we have seen, Eddison is dedicated to making his lexis 'Icelandic', but we will misread him if we regard him primarily as a linguistic 'Saxoniser' or Germanicist; unlike Morris, he seems, for example, to have had little or no interest in the Anglo-Saxons and their culture. So it is not difficult to find Latinate or Romance words in Eddison's translation, such as 'captain' (*forstjóri*), 'esteem' (*virðing*), 'largesse' (*rausn*), 'management' (*forráð*), 'revenue' (*veizlur*), 'valiancy' (*kapp*) and 'war-duke' (*hertogi*).

But it is Eddison's desire to replicate Norse syntax that is especially thorough and unusual. Whole clauses or even sentences reproduce the word order of the original (often with cognate words adding to the effect): for example, *Þá lét hann kalla konung til sín ok sagði honum svá* > 'Then let he call the King to him and said to him thus', or *Þorgils bjó byrðing mikinn ok góðan* > 'Thorgils arrayed a ship of burden, a great and a good', or *fagnaði hann vel Grími frænda sínum* > 'welcomed he well Grim his kinsman', or *upp af víkinni stóð borg mikil* > 'up from the wick stood a great burg', or *Maðr sá, er bæ þann átti, var ríkr ok auðigr* > 'That man who had that farmstead was a powerful and a wealthy', or *Egill spurði, ef hann vildi upp ór gröfinni* > 'Egil asked if he would up out of the hole'. Particular idioms or syntactic structures elicit responses that cleave as closely as possible to the original: for example, Eddison attempts to reproduce the original idiom in *eitt skal ganga yfir okkr* (> 'one fate shall go over us two'), and to replicate the dative of reference (rather than the genitive) with regard to parts of the body (*í höfuð honum* > 'into the head of him', rather than 'into his head'). The 'group subject' of *þeir Hallvarðr* or *þeir Kveldúlfr* is rendered as 'Hallvard and his', 'Kveldulf and his' (or occasionally 'Biorn, he and his'). Etymological *tractio* is retained: *æpðu heróp*, *námu neshám*, and *huggu strandhogg* reappear as '[they] whooped the war-whoop', 'lifted ness-liftings' and 'hewed them strand-hewings'. Alliterative or phrasal doublets are also preserved, in 'bidden and boun' (*búnir ok*

boðnir), 'inland and outland' (*innan lands ok útan lands*) and 'shape and shear' (*skapir . . . ok skerir*).

The effect on the reader of this persistent practice presumably varies according to that reader's knowledge of Old Norse, and whether or not he or she can perceive the original structures that lie behind or below Eddison's sentences (and the same is true of Eddison's treatment of compound nouns and adjectives). But we seem to have travelled so far down the route of 'foreignisation' here that the relevant field of linguistics is not so much translation theory, but rather bilingualism or language acquisition: what we are seeing is heavy substratum influence from a source or donor language, so that the target or recipient language itself is being remade into new forms. One could almost reconstruct the Old Norse original of *Egils saga* from Eddison's translation alone (as noted also in Capildeo 2000, 244). As Matthew Reynolds (2011, 11) has written, very finely: 'Translation stretches words, bridges times, mingles personal identities, and unsettles national languages'. Eddison's *Egil's Saga* does all of these, with force and assurance, and I shall return later to the particular question of identities. But we should also acknowledge a further factor that is less often invoked in academic analyses, and that is love: Eddison was motivated by philology not only in the technical sense of linguistic knowledge, but also in the literal sense of the 'love of words'; and in his translation of *Egil's Saga* he expressed to the full his love for the Old Norse language. As he wrote in his 'Terminal Essay' (Eddison 1930, 238–39):

For the translator, then, this is the commandment that contains all the law: Thou shalt love thy Mistress . . . The saga-man (simply, no doubt, as simple men enjoy good beer or sunshine) tasted and enjoyed every word: so must the translator, if his translation is to bear any likeness to his original.

In most of this, Eddison's great master, his forebear and inspiration, was of course William Morris. But what Eddison didn't know when he was working on the saga was that Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon had themselves produced a translation of at least part of *Egils saga*. Posthumously published by Morris's daughter May in 1936, this only extends as far as Chapter 40, and it omits most of the verses; but it does allow us to examine how closely Eddison does or does not conform to Morrisian practices. Here is Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon's opening of Chapter 21, to compare with Eddison's version, quoted above (Morris 1936, I 600):

King Harald was in the Wick while Thorolf was a-warring: and he fared that harvest to the Uplands, and thence north to Thrandheim, and abode there that winter with a great company.

Sigtrygg and Hallvard were with him there, and had heard how Thorolf had dealt with their dwelling at Hising, and what scathe of men and goods he had wrought there. Oft they called it to the King's mind and therewithal how Thorolf had robbed the King and his thanes, and fared with warfare in the very land; and they prayed the King's leave to go with the company which was to follow them, and set on Thorolf in his home.

In contrast to that of W. C. Green (1893, 34), there is not much to choose between the versions of Morris and Eddison, and some of the resemblances are striking: both Morris and Eddison, for example, choose to render the noun phrase *í hernaðinum* with a characteristic gerund showing the archaic but productive *a-* prefix ('a-warring' and 'a-harrying'). Both opt for cognate 'fared' for *fór* (contrast Green's 'went'), and cognate 'thanes' for *þegna* (contrast Green's 'subjects'). But in fact Eddison out-Morris Morris in his policy of translating through cognates: Morris changes Old Norse *sat* to 'abode' where Eddison retains 'sat' (contrast Green's 'stayed'), and reaches for a circumlocution 'they called it to the King's mind' to translate *þeir minntu konung*, where Eddison, employing archaic or non-standard usage, keeps 'they minded the King' (contrast Green's more standard 'reminded'). Most noticeable of all is Eddison's commitment to the doublet of compound nouns *mannskaða ok fjárskaða*, which he retains as 'man-scathe and fee-scathe', where both Morris and Green lose the repetition in the second element of the compounds (Morris: 'scathe of men and goods'; Green: 'scathe . . . on men and property').

As the parallel use of 'the Wick' suggests, Eddison is also a strong supporter of Morris's treatment of place- and personal names (and also, to some degree, of Dasent's): Eddison's 'Terminal Essay' on translation ends with a plea for future translators to follow their forms in order to ensure 'clearness and continuity' (1930, 242). The basic policy, of course, is translation and Anglicisation, rather than retention of the Old Norse/Icelandic form, especially where an English cognate exists for the place-name element(s) in question. This can be seen especially clearly with simplex names: in Eddison's text, *Brekkar* appears as 'the Brents', *Hváll* as 'the Knoll', *Mýrar* as 'the Myres', and so on. Egill's home of *Borg* appears as 'Burg'—in spite of Phillpotts's explicit recommendation in their 1927 conversation that Eddison should 'keep Borg' (perhaps because archaic English 'burg' might exclusively, and in this case inappropriately, suggest the meaning 'city'). Many compound place-names are Anglicised or translated in both elements too: *Gljúfrá* becomes 'Gorgewater', *Hválslækr* 'Knollslech', *Reykjanes* 'Reekness'. But there are some oddities in Eddison's forms, too, for instance his decision to refashion all personal names

(frequent as first elements in place-names) according to the possessive inflexion in Modern English: so, for example, the place-name *Ánabrekka* (where *Ána-* is the genitive singular of the weak masculine personal name *Áni*) becomes 'Anisbrent'.

Some of Eddison's forms are also, needless to say, taken over directly from his predecessors: the chosen forms for the landmarks of *Njáls saga* country, such as 'Lithend' (*Hlíðarendi*), 'Markfleet' (*Markarfljót*), and 'Rangriver' (*Rangá*), are of course hallowed by their use in Dasent's *Burnt Njal*. For the first forty chapters of *Egils saga*, we can also compare Eddison's place-name choices with Morris's (though it should be repeated that Eddison did not know Morris's translation when he produced his own). So, for instance, if we look at the account of Skalla-Grímr's land-taking in Chapter 28, we can see that the two translators share some choices (such as 'Burgfirth' for *Borgarfjörðr*, 'Havenfell' for *Hafnarfjöll*, 'Thwartwater' for *Þverá*), but diverge in others, with Morris usually making the bigger changes: Morris has 'Shipness' for Eddison's 'Knarrarness' (*Knarrarnes*), 'Duckcreek' for Eddison's 'Andakil' (*Andakill*), 'Swanness' for Eddison's 'Alptaness' (*Álptanes*), and even 'One-ken' for Eddison's 'Einkunnir' (*Einkunnir*)—though Eddison does have 'Burglava' for Morris' 'Burghraun' (*Borgarhraun*). Throughout his translation, Eddison is also less ready to Anglicise personal names than place-names, and certainly much less ready than Morris: as a representative example, Egill's grandfather is called 'Kveldulf' in Eddison's translation, but 'Nightwolf' in Morris's.

Eddison's long letter to Jón Stefánsson, written when he was two-thirds of the way through his work, was on this very subject of the treatment of place-names in saga translation.³² 'Anglicization is easy and gives a homely feeling to English readers,' he argued, 'because our languages are so intimately related: most of the best English words are Icelandic or Old Norse. We need not talk about "firds": we have your word, firth, in our own language: so with fell, dale, hause, flow . . . and scores of others'. Moreover, 'I believe that one of the minor things that discourage the educated public from taking a greater interest in our great Northern ancestors and their history and literature is the barrier caused by jaw-breaking words, and the confusion caused by the chaotic renderings of place-names and proper names.' As if to make this precise point, in his *Egil's Saga* translation Eddison sometimes takes the process of Anglicisation so far as to present Icelandic place-names in forms that replicate or

³² E. R. Eddison to Jón Stefánsson 7 March 1927 (Reykjavík, National Library of Iceland, Lbs 3426 4to).

recall place-names in Britain: so *Sauðey* becomes ‘Sheppey’, and *Þjórsá* becomes ‘Thursowater’. A personal name parallel is the representation of *Qlvir* as ‘Oliver’.

But there is, of course, a potential problem or paradox here: a decision to Anglicise names, rather than to leave them in their Old Norse forms or to use modern Icelandic or Norwegian forms, works in the opposite direction to the impulse to remake the English language according to the lexical, semantic and syntactic patterns of the Old Norse source text. The prose seems to show ‘foreignisation’, but the names ‘domestication’.

It is therefore worth returning to Venuti’s terminology in the light of Matthew Reynolds’s point about identities (‘Translation stretches words, bridges times, mingles personal identities, and unsettles national languages’). In a recent analysis, Ian Felce (2016, 234–35) has argued that Venuti’s distinction between ‘foreignisation’ and ‘domestication’ is unsustainable in the face of William Morris’s translation practices: Morris’s belief, simply put, was that in following the patterns of his Old Norse original (supposedly a ‘foreignising’ approach), he was in fact writing the best, and most desirable, form of English—ancient, undegraded, and (for Morris) imbued with the spirit of Gothic democracy. Except for the last point, the same is true of Eddison: to foreignise is in fact to domesticate; or at least, to domesticate towards what Modern English should ideally be. And this, of course, is because of the kinship between English and Norse: according to Eddison, ‘the Old Northern tongue . . . more than any other language resembles our own’, which means that ‘for an Englishman to render the sagas into his own language is to labour under no alien sky and dig no inhospitable soil’ (1930, 229). This also helps to explain the treatment of names by both Morris and Eddison. In pitching his book to Cambridge University Press, Eddison described the Icelandic sagas as ‘a magnificent field of literature which belongs to us . . . as Englishmen’; in other words, there was a principle of ownership at stake, and the value of the sagas did not lie in their world-literature offer of cultural alterity.³³ As Eddison writes in his ‘Terminal Essay’, the two languages ‘are akin in word, syntax, and idiom’; the cognate words that Eddison marshals so conscientiously are not present simply for decorative or stylistic reasons, but to make a cultural or political point too, about the close family relationship between the English and the Norse—as peoples as well as languages (Eddison, 1930, 229; see also Eddison 1927, 384). This relationship is urged by Eddison in the

³³ E. R. Eddison to S. C. Roberts (draft, no date, 1930) (Leeds Central Library).

very first paragraph of his preface, where he appeals to 'the Norse strain in our ancestry' (1930, xii).

But although Eddison shared many of William Morris's beliefs concerning the proper approach to saga translation, and also, like Morris, believed in a special relationship between England and Iceland, he did not perceive the same political meaning in the sagas as his great predecessor did. I have suggested above that we will misread Eddison's style if we simply regard him as a Saxoniser or Germanicist, and—notwithstanding his stress on 'the Norse strain in our ancestry'—this is true of his racial or cultural politics as well as his linguistic ideology. Eddison seems not to have been preoccupied by ideas about Germanic purity: his work is motivated, for instance, by a profound admiration for early Greek culture, and there are few signs that he was filled with anxiety or hostility about the non-Germanic 'other'. But nor, unlike Morris, did Eddison find a proto-socialist significance in the sagas: on the contrary, what Eddison valued was the very opposite of the equality and communitarianism which Morris had found in them. At the start of his introduction on 'The Heroic Age and the Sagas', Eddison states that what Iceland 'means', in terms of politics, is 'aristocratic individualism of an uncompromising kind' (and of all the sagas, moreover, *Egils saga* is 'the most aristocratic in spirit') (1930, xvii). This 'aristocracy' was 'not feudal but anarchical': the Icelanders, Eddison writes, 'had come from Norway because they were minded to be their own masters, and in no other civilized community has there been greater freedom of the individual' (1930, xvii, xxi). As a political system, he states bluntly and approvingly, 'this anarchy succeeded'; and 'great men' (Eddison's phrase) flourished in Saga-Age Iceland until the thirteenth century, when it was 'the great men who fought to the death' (1930, xxi, xxii; see also Eddison 1927, 387).

The reverse of the idea of 'great men' is, of course, 'little men' (again, Eddison's own phrase, and one used with scorn). So, for example, he declares that temperance and moderation are 'drab virtues of little men', whereas 'it is never to be said of Egil, whatever his faults, that he was a little man' (1930, xxxii, xv). In the body of the saga, Eddison, not surprisingly, translates the collective noun *stórmenni* as 'great men', and the adverb *litilmannligt* as '[in] the fashion of a little man'. And Egill is taken to be representative of his people as a whole: 'eugenically', Eddison writes, 'it may be doubted whether any country in history has possessed a population of a higher quality. For the men who settled Iceland were precisely the pick and flower of the Norse race; precisely those whose fierce spirit

of independence and freedom could not abide the new “enslavement” in Norway’ (1930, xix).

The celebrated association of the Vikings with liberty and self-determination, dating back at least to the eighteenth century, is here given an aristocratic and most un-Morrisian twist—and, given inter-war politics, a potentially ominous one. Eddison himself was adamant that no sympathy for fascism could be found in his writings: the evil of fascism, he insisted, was a ‘20th-Century disease’, which arose from ‘industrial civilization’ and resulted in tyranny, just as ‘communism & all forms of collectivism issue in tyranny’ (quoted in Young 2012, 83). Moreover, the Second World War was, he was to write, ‘a Ragnarok struggle between good and evil’, fought against ‘an enemy who would destroy, if he could, all that makes life worth living’ (quoted in Young 2012, 79, 80). Nonetheless, this emphasis on aristocratic individualism was an element in Eddison’s thought that troubled his admirers, and which featured even more strongly in his ‘Zimiamvia’ books: Tolkien, writing privately after his death, feared that Eddison ‘was coming to admire, more and more, arrogance and cruelty’, while C. S. Lewis, writing for publication and thus with greater circumspection, confessed that, even as he admired his works very greatly, he found Eddison’s world-view to be ‘alien and even sinister’ (Carpenter 1981, 258; Lewis 1982, 55; see also Hamilton 1949, Young 2012, Young 2014).

Reception and afterwards

As we have seen, then, Eddison’s *Egil’s Saga* is the product of a very unusual literary intelligence, a saga translation arguably like none other of the inter-war period (or even, perhaps, of any period). The works of William Morris formed the obvious precedent, but Eddison went considerably further than Morris in some of his translation choices, and the political meanings that Eddison read in the sagas were significantly different from those that Morris perceived. So what reception did Eddison’s *Egil’s Saga* receive? How did his work relate to, or fit in with, Old Norse studies as they were developing in the inter-war period? In pitching his book to Jonathan Cape, Eddison had written that ‘There is a growing interest in Old Norse (i.e. Icelandic) studies in the Universities . . . I have reason to think that it will be placed on the syllabus for students taking the subject, at any rate at Cambridge’.³⁴ In other words, Eddison was hopeful that a

³⁴ E. R. Eddison to Jonathan Cape (draft) 17 November 1929 (Leeds Central Library).

publication by an amateur, self-taught enthusiast like himself might find a central place within the university study of Old Norse; and the eventual acceptance of his book by Cambridge University Press may have reinforced this hope significantly.

As one might imagine, the contemporary reviews make for interesting reading, especially as several reviewers seem somewhat nonplussed, uncertain what to say about a performance that so combines devotion with oddity. So, for example, for the Viking Society Eddison's correspondent Jón Stefánsson gave the work a very warm review, acclaiming it as 'a spirited and brilliant attempt . . . to get as close as possible to the Saga style in English', and recognising the work as 'a labour of love', marked by 'glowing enthusiasm and passion' (1931, 22–23). But he also recognised the snags: some of the rare words are not even to be found in the *OED*; the translation of place-names and personal names is problematic; and 'here and there [the translator] has to do violence to his mother tongue'. Stefán Einarsson, in *Modern Language Notes*, enthusiastically welcomed the book's appearance, but observed, delicately, that 'I must say that to me the language of the translation looked a bit more old-fashioned as English than the language of the original is as Icelandic' (1931, 487). Richard Beck, in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, took a similar line: Eddison's translation was 'obviously done by one who is thoroughly in love with his task', but nonetheless 'he is so anxious to be literal that not infrequently his version becomes over-literal, unidiomatic' (1932, 142, 143). It was left to Edith Batho, in the *Modern Language Review*, to offer a more brutal frankness (1932, 231–32). There was nothing to fault, she suggested, in Eddison's 'love of his original' and the 'affectionate care' indicated by the very full apparatus. However, 'it is the version itself, the actual translation, which awakens uneasiness'. Eddison, Batho claims, has mistaken kinship between languages for identity: English and Norse 'are akin, and not, as he sometimes makes them, identical'. The use of an 'Icelandicising' vocabulary can perhaps be justified, Batho feels, especially for the 'vivid word or idiom', but an Icelandicising syntax simply cannot: 'Norse English is no better than the Latinised English which most of us dislike as heartily as Mr Eddison does'. The translation fared no better in literary periodicals than in academic journals: Bruce Dickins in the *Times Literary Supplement* commented that Eddison's translation 'is close and . . . accurate, but one certainly could wish that he had adopted another model', while *The Saturday Review* declared that 'Mr Eddison's version may be accurate, but, to be brief, it is unreadable', and *The Bookman* judged (crushingly)

that ‘in ease and style . . . it is not a bit superior to that of the Rev. W. C. Green, which he abuses so roundly; and beside Dasent’s “Burnt Njal” it is utterly dwarfed’.³⁵

In his account of the rise of Middle English studies and its institutionalisation within academic structures, David Matthews has suggested that by about 1910 ‘the function of the nonacademic scholar was finished’ (1999, 186). This is probably not quite so true of Old Norse studies; but even so, one only needs to compare the contents of *Saga-Book* in the 1920s and 1930s with its pre-First World War contents to gain a strong sense of the academicisation of the field during this period. And Eddison’s optimism might have been tempered if he had heeded some of Bertha Phillpotts’s warnings.

There are at least two issues at stake here. The first relates to styles of translation. As the reviews make clear, it is fair to say that support for the archaic, Morrisian approach was in decline in the decades after the First World War, not least in academic circles—whereas Eddison was pushing this approach further, arguably, than it had ever been taken before. But the second point relates to scholarship, and to Eddison’s notes in particular. As Phillpotts reassured him, Eddison’s translation was and is a very accurate piece of work; there could and can be no dispute about his understanding of the Old Norse language, nor indeed about his breadth of reading in the Icelandic sagas. But his notes were a different matter, as Phillpotts explained bluntly in a pre-publication letter in early 1930. ‘If the notes are on the scale they now are,’ she wrote, ‘readers would I think have a right to demand more than you can give them.’³⁶ What they would have a right to demand, to be precise, was up-to-date scholarship, and not simply in English but also in German and the modern Scandinavian languages—none of which, other than Icelandic, Eddison could read. Phillpotts herself did not have the time to overhaul Eddison’s notes (‘it would take me a month’s work in Copenhagen or Oslo’), and her strong recommendation was to make the notes much briefer, so that their historiographical inadequacy would be far less of an issue: ‘with such ample notes the lack of balance becomes noticeable—& strikes one as unscholarly’.

This letter seems to have panicked Eddison, and in the last months before publication he tried, unsuccessfully, to get his notes checked by

³⁵ *Times Literary Supplement* 27 November 1930, 1012; *The Saturday Review* 16 May 1931, 729; *The Bookman* December 1930, 6.

³⁶ Bertha S. Phillpotts to E. R. Eddison 11 March 1930 (Leeds Central Library).

one or more Norse scholars. Targeting E. V. Gordon of the University of Leeds (partly on the grounds of his connections with the city), Eddison confessed that his notes might be 'a bit unbalanced & amateurish', and inquired: 'Would it be possible for you to consider collaboration with me to the extent of going through my Notes & amending them where necessary?'³⁷ But Gordon failed to reply to Eddison's increasingly anxious letters, and on (seemingly) the only occasion on which he did so it was merely to brush Eddison off with the trope of the over-busy academic (in the course of the previous week, Gordon informed Eddison, he had spent no fewer than 105 hours at work).³⁸ As a result, the best Eddison could do in the end was to shore up his authority by flagging whatever professional input he had received, such as informal conversations with Sigurður Nordal (see for example 1930, xxxii, 271)—a sort of strategic name-dropping.³⁹

In preparing his translation, Eddison had placed great importance on his notes, introduction and other supporting materials, seeing them as an essential component if his own translation of *Egils saga* was ever to aspire to the same value and usefulness as Dasent's 1861 translation of *Njáls saga* (as he wrote to E. V. Gordon, regarding Robert Proctor's apparatus-free 1903 translation of *Laxdæla saga*: 'who has ever read it, or will?').⁴⁰ But Eddison's published notes amply bear out Phillipotts's concerns: gregarious, enthusiastic, and full of quirky personal observations, they are also lacking in up-to-date historiography. Eddison's basic explanatory principle is to cast light on historical and cultural cruxes in *Egils saga* not by citing modern scholarship on them, but by appending parallel references in other sagas (often quoted at great length, with the effect of giving some of his notes the flavour of an anthology). The most frequently cited secondary sources are all quite old: Dasent's *Burnt Njal* (1861), Guðbrandur Vigfússon and York Powell's *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* (1883), and Eiríkur Magnússon's fourth volume of his and Morris's *Heimskringla* (1905). The only recent work that is referenced with comparable frequency is Finnur Jónsson's 1924 edition of *Egils saga* itself—Eddison's source-text. Alongside such historiographical notes, one finds a gallimaufry of other material: references to

³⁷ E. R. Eddison to E. V. Gordon (draft) 18 March 1930 (Leeds Central Library).

³⁸ E. V. Gordon to E. R. Eddison (no date, but received 9 May 1930) (Leeds Central Library).

³⁹ Eddison's papers also contain correspondence from Nordal (Leeds Central Library).

⁴⁰ E. R. Eddison to E. V. Gordon (draft) 18 March 1930 (Leeds Central Library).

contemporary Icelandic customs ('just as they do in Iceland to-day'), reminiscences of Eddison's 1926 Iceland trip ('I crossed in a heavy open boat . . .'), and *belle-lettriste* comparisons between *Egils saga* and other writers and works, including Thucydides, Horace, Shakespeare, the border ballads and Lewis Carroll (the saga's famous vomiting scene, for example, is twice described as 'Rabelaisian') (1930, 260, 270, 275, 296). There is speculation on antipodean toponymy ('Cf. the curious New Zealand place-name "Snufflenose", which is obviously "Snæfell-snes" corrupted by foreigners who did not understand its meaning'), a disquisition on Icelandic *skyr* ('served (as it is) with cream and sugar, it is a dish for kings'), and even a private joke about baldness ('Egil, too, was early bald . . . an inconvenience which he shares with other famous men, e.g. Scipio Africanus and Julius Caesar'—and also, as photographs confirm, Eddison himself) (1930, 265, 274, 307). All of this is enjoyable, fascinating, distinctive; but it is hardly in keeping with the more austere, scholarly practices of inter-war, academicised Old Northernism.

I will conclude by covering more quickly Eddison's post-*Egil's Saga* years. As the 1935 addition to his youthful translation of *Reykðæla saga* suggests, Eddison may have considered following his *Egil's Saga* with another saga translation. At this period he seems to have made two successive revisions of the early chapters of his old translation, the first to archaize the style from his 1901 idiom, and then the second (very curiously) to archaize the spelling. This resulted in the following opening:⁴¹

There was a man highte Thorstein Head. He dwelt in Hordaland. He was the father of Eyvind & of Ketil the Hordalander. It fel on a time when these brethren were a talking that Eyvind sayd that he herde men speke good of Icelande, and he desired his brother Ketil to fare to Icelande with him whenas theyr father sholde dye. Ketil woulde not go, but bade Eyvind take lande so wide as might suffice them bothe, if he liked well the choyce of lande there.

This new experiment in saga translation extended to fewer than ten pages of draft; Eddison abandoned the attempt to load archaism on archaism. And after that, it seems, he also abandoned any further saga plans. In 1944, and on the basis of his *Egil's Saga*, the publisher Stanley Unwin wrote to Eddison inquiring if he might undertake further Old Norse translations.⁴² But Eddison turned down the invitation: it was *Egil's Saga* that had marked

⁴¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Misc. c. 456/1, fol. 62.

⁴² Stanley Unwin to E. R. Eddison 13 November 1944 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Misc. c. 456, fol. 123).

the high-watermark of his engagement with Old Norse, and by the time of Unwin's request Eddison had already let his membership of the Viking Society lapse, never to be renewed.⁴³

The last decade and a half of Eddison's creative life were taken up instead with the writing of his 'Zimiamvia' books: *Mistress of Mistresses*, *A Fish Dinner in Memison*, and the unfinished *The Mezentian Gate* (Eddison 1992). This is not the place to enter into a discussion of these complex, astonishing works. But we can at least note the lingering presence within them of Eddison's Old Northern enthusiasms, in terms of story elements, cultural allusions and even language. A key figure in the Zimiamvia books is Edward Lessingham, last seen in the prologue to *The Worm Ouroboros*. The three books move between the familiar world and the other-world of Zimiamvia: this-worldly scenes occur in the Lake District and in Norway (where Lessingham has a castle in the Lofoten Islands). Old Norse literature is repeatedly, pervasively, cited and invoked. So, for example, in *Mistress of Mistresses*, *Völuspá* and *Hákonarmál* are quoted in conversation, one character kills another by biting him through the throat in an Egill-like act of ferocity, and Lessingham himself can trace his descent back 'to King Eric Bloodaxe in York, the son of Harald Hairfair, that Charlemagne of the north'. In *A Fish Dinner in Memison*, there are allusions to *Völundarkviða* and *Eyrbyggja saga*, the slap of a face prefigures death for one character (as it does for Gunnarr in *Njáls saga*), and we learn that Lessingham possesses the sword of Egill's uncle, Þórólfr, 'dug up, at the very spot which expert conjecture pointed to as the site of the old hall at Sandness'. Finally, in *The Mezentian Gate*, the *Njáls saga* proverb 'Bare is back without brother behind it' (stamped on the decorative binding of Dasent's *Burnt Njal*) is quoted without acknowledgement of its origin, as is *Völuspá* ('The wolf will run: you shall see'), and a central character is modelled on Ragnhildr Eiríksdóttir in *Orkneyinga saga*. Moreover, the vocabulary of all three books is peppered with Norse loanwords or translations such as 'grith', 'day-meal', 'high-seat', 'home-men', 'self-doom', 'skin-changer' and—an Eddisonian favourite—'berserk-gang'. There are also Norse-style place-names to be met with in the imagined geography (Bardardale, Ketterby, Swinedale, Upmire under the Forn, and so on). This is not remotely an exhaustive list: it is merely a taster of some of the ways in which the Zimiamvia books bear the marks of Eddison's Old Northernism—as they do also of his devotion to both Greek and Elizabethan literature.

⁴³ His name is absent from the list of 'Members 1936–37' in *Saga-Book XI* (1928–36), 301–06.

In this article, then, I have taken Eddison's *Egil's Saga* as my central focus, in an attempt to give a detailed biography and analysis of a highly distinctive saga translation. But I have also ranged widely through a variety of texts and sources, to explore and understand E. R. Eddison's extensive Old Norse studies, and to place them in relation to his more famous fantasy writings. I have tried to contextualise Eddison's activities in this area within the changing intellectual and institutional environment of Norse studies of his time. And indeed, it may be that, in describing the inter-war period, 'Norse studies' is the appropriate term to use, rather than Andrew Wawn's more capacious 'Old Northernism'; the late Victorian Old Northernism within which Eddison had first embarked on his life-long love affair with the sagas had by the 1920s and 1930s transmuted into something else, in which saga study and saga translation were increasingly pursued within a professional, academic culture that was governed by a different set of values and priorities. Eddison's *Egil's Saga* marks the high-point of a certain approach to saga translation, one which traces its descent from the work of William Morris. But Eddison's version also exemplifies precisely the quality of extreme individualism which he valued so highly in the sagas themselves.

Note: For permission to quote from published and unpublished writings, I am very grateful to the Estate of E. R. Eddison, and also to Greg Phillpotts. For access to unpublished materials, and/or permission to quote from such materials, I am grateful to the following institutions: Leeds Central Library; Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford; the English Faculty Library, University of Oxford; the National Library of Iceland, Reykjavík; and Girton College Archive, University of Cambridge. I am also grateful to Carl Phelpstead and Paul Edmund Thomas for their helpful comments on a draft version of this article.

Bibliography

- Batho, E. C. 1932. Review of Eddison 1930. *Modern Language Review* 27, 231–32.
- Beck, Richard 1932. Review of Eddison 1930. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 31, 142–44.
- Capildeo, S. V. P. 2000. 'Reading *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*: Saga, Paratext, Translations'. Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford.
- Carpenter, Humphrey 1978. *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and their friends*.
- Carpenter, Humphrey, ed., 1981. *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*.
- Dasent, George Webbe, trans. 1861. *The Story of Burnt Njal, or Life in Iceland at the End of the Tenth Century*. 2 vols.
- Eddison, E. R. 1927. 'The Sagas and Iceland of Today'. *The Bookman: A Review of Books and Life* 66.4 (December 1927), 384–92.

- Eddison, E. R., trans., 1930. *Egil's Saga Done into English out of the Icelandic with an Introduction, Notes, and an Essay on Some Principles of Translation*.
- Eddison, E. R. 1991. *The Worm Ouroboros*. Ed. Paul Edmund Thomas.
- Eddison, E. R. 1992. *Zimiamvia: A Trilogy* [*Mistress of Mistresses, A Fish Dinner in Memison, and The Mezentian Gate*]. Ed. Paul Edmund Thomas.
- Eddison, E. R. 2011. *Styrbiorn the Strong*. Ed. Paul Edmund Thomas.
- Elton, Oliver 1906. *Frederick York Powell: A Life and a Selection from his Letters and Occasional Writings*. 2 vols.
- Felce, Ian 2016. 'The Old Norse Sagas and William Morris's Ideal of Literal Translation'. *Review of English Studies* 67, 220–36.
- Felce, Ian 2018. *William Morris and the Icelandic Sagas*.
- Finnur Jónsson, ed., 1924. *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar nebst den grösseren Gedichten Egils*. Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 3.
- Gilliver, Peter, Jeremy Marshall and Edmund Weiner 2006. *The Ring of Words: Tolkien and the Oxford English Dictionary*.
- Green, W. C., trans., 1893. *The Story of Egil Skallagrímsson: Being an Icelandic Family History of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*.
- Gunnell, Terry 1999. 'Dame Bertha Phillpotts and the Search for Ancient Scandinavian Drama'. In *Anglo-Scandinavian Cross-Currents*. Ed. Inga-Stina Ewbank, Olav Lausund and Bjørn Tysdahl, 84–113.
- Gunnell, Terry 2004. 'Newall [née Phillpotts], Dame Bertha Surtees (1877–1932)'. In *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <www.oxforddnb.com>.
- Hamilton, G. Rostrevor 1949. 'The Prose of E. R. Eddison'. *Essays and Studies* New Series 2, 43–53.
- Hardyment, Christina 2012. *The World of Arthur Ransome*.
- Hooper, Walter, ed., 2004. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis. II Books, Broadcasts, and the War, 1931–1949*.
- Johnston, George 1957–61. 'On Translation – 2'. *Saga-Book* XV, 394–402.
- Johnston, George, trans., 1963. *The Saga of Gisli*.
- Johnston, George, trans., 1999. *The Schemers and Víga-Glúm: Bandamanna Saga and Víga-Glúms Saga*.
- Jón Stefánsson 1931. Review of Eddison 1930. *Year-Book of the Viking Society* 17–22 (1931[for 1925–30]), 22–23.
- Kennedy, John 2007. *Translating the Sagas: Two Hundred Years of Challenge and Response*. Making the Middle Ages 5.
- Lewis, C. S. 1982. *Of This and Other Worlds*. Ed. Walter Hooper.
- Matthews, David 1999. *The Making of Middle English, 1765–1910*. Medieval Cultures 18.
- Morris, May 1936. *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*. 2 vols.
- Nordal, Sigurður, ed., 1933. *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*. Íslenzk fornrit II.
- Poole, Russell 2005. 'Kindred, College, and Scholarship in the Lifework of Bertha Surtees Phillpotts (1877–1932)'. In *Women Medievalists and the Academy*. Ed. Jane Chance, 200–12.
- Ransome, Arthur 1976. *The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome*. Ed. Rupert Hart-Davis.

- Reynolds, Matthew 2011. *The Poetry of Translation: From Chaucer and Petrarch to Homer and Logue*.
- Skeat, W. W. 1876. *A List of English Words, the etymology of which is illustrated by comparison with Icelandic, prepared in the form of an appendix to Cleasby and Vigfusson's Icelandic-English Dictionary*.
- Stefán Einarsson 1931. Review of Eddison 1930. *Modern Language Notes* 46:7, 486–87.
- Thomas, Paul Edmund 1991. 'Introduction'. In Eddison 1992, xv–xlii.
- Thomas, Paul Edmund 2011. 'Afterword: The Writing of *Styrbiorn the Strong*'. In Eddison 2011, 263–74.
- Townend, Matthew 2009. *The Vikings and Victorian Lakeland: the Norse medievalism of W. G. Collingwood and his contemporaries*. Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society Extra Series 34.
- Venuti, Lawrence 1995. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*.
- Wawn, Andrew 2000. *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain*.
- Wawn, Andrew 2007a. 'Foreword'. In *Old Norse Made New: Essays on the Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature and Culture*. Ed. David Clark and Carl Phepstead, v–vii.
- Wawn, Andrew 2007b. 'Making the Old North on Merseyside: A Tale of Three Ships'. In *The Making of the Middle Ages: Liverpool Essays*. Ed. Marios Costambeys, Andrew Hamer and Martin Heale, 139–57.
- Young, Joe 2012. 'Aphrodite on the Home Front: E. R. Eddison and World War II'. *Mythlore* 30.3/4, 71–88.
- Young, Joseph 2013. 'The Foundations of E. R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*'. *Extrapolation* 54.2, 183–203.
- Young, Joseph 2014. 'Artemis at Ragnarok: E. R. Eddison's Queen Antiope'. *Mythlore* 32.2, 83–96.

NJÁLS SAGA AND THE BATTLE OF CLONTARF: A CASE OF VERNACULAR SOURCE TRANSMISSION?

BY ROSEMARY POWER
Research Affiliate, NUI Galway

THE MILLENNIUM OF THE BATTLE OF CLONTARF in 2014 has prompted much recent reconsideration. The event is dated in Norse sources to Good Friday 1014. According to Marianus Scotus, an Irish monk in Mainz (1028–c.1083), the elderly Munster king Brian *boru* or *bóruma* died ‘with his hands and mind directed towards God’ during the preparation for Easter (Mac Carthy 1892, 8). The incoming tide helped to ensure the victory of the predominantly Irish side over an opposition led by Sigtryggr king of Dublin and Sigurðr earl of Orkney with forces gathered from Ireland, Orkney, the Hebrides and possibly York. The battle was noted only a decade or so after the event by the chronicler Adémar de Chabannes in the Bordeaux region, in the course of a fanciful account of the Norse in Ireland (1897, 177). About a hundred years after the battle it appears as the climax of the partisan account of Brian’s life, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* ‘The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill’. This is likely to have been commissioned in the early twelfth century, and although only three manuscripts survive, two of them incomplete, it had considerable impact on later poets and historians. The battle was treated as a major event in the Irish annals, and to the fourteenth-century compilers of the western *Annals of Loch Cé* it was a defining moment which they made the subject of their lengthy opening sequence. A later romance based largely on the *Cogadh* has recently been re-edited (Ní Úrdail 2011).

The purpose of this paper is to consider whether the main Norse account, which appears towards the end of the late thirteenth-century *Njáls saga*, is based upon the Irish *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, and if so how this was transmitted and translated. The approach is by its nature speculative, but seeks to reassess the textual evidence from the starting-point that opportunities existed for direct borrowing from Irish to Norse, and assumes that in some cases written texts as well as oral accounts may have been transmitted. The discussion therefore focuses on textual transmission rather than evidence regarding the battle itself.

Since J. H. Todd’s edition of the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* appeared in 1867, its Irish context has frequently been addressed by romanticists, nationalists, novelists and scholars. Todd thought that the work was

compiled soon after the battle. A date later in the eleventh century was proposed by Alexander Bugge in his edition of a panegyric to the rival Munster royal family, *Caithréim Chellacháin Cháisil* (Bugge 1905, xv–xvi), and he thought the *Cogadh* was based on prose tales and poetry derived from people who had been at the battle (see too Ní Mhaonaigh 1995, 354–55). John Ryan in a classic study (with entertaining moralising asides), and A. J. Goedheer in his assessment of the similarities between Gaelic and Norse sources, assigned to the *Cogadh* a date in the mid-twelfth century (Ryan 1938, 3; Goedheer 1938, 10, 98, 103). Recent work on the battle and its sources from the Old Norse perspective as well as the Irish includes that of Máire Ní Mhaonaigh (2007, see too 1995, 2012), who dated it convincingly to the reign of Brian’s great-grandson and powerful successor, Muirchertach Ua Briain (1086–1119). The *Cogadh* is assumed in this paper to have been composed after 1102 and before 1114 when Muirchertach became seriously ill and in consequence lost most of his power (see Ó Corráin 2008, 2015, and 1972, 137–50 for Muirchertach’s career.)

Benjamin Hudson (2003) came to the conclusion that a mixture of oral tradition, poetry and a text, possibly from Dublin and from a slightly earlier time, are behind the episode in *Njáls saga*. Specific aspects of this account have been considered by Denis Casey (2013), Seán Duffy (2014), Andrew Hamer (2014), Clare Downham (2014, 2015, 2017) and Catherine Swift (2015, 2016, 2017). As well as numerous conferences, two recent books marked the battle’s millennium: Sean Duffy’s *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf* (2014) and Darren McGettigan’s *The Battle of Clontarf—Good Friday 1014* (2014).

The Icelandic sources for the Battle of Clontarf include the short description in *Orkneyinga saga*, which is known in a version from about 1230. The great Orkney earl Sigurðr, who owned a magic banner made by his Irish mother and had been a forced convert to Christianity, was killed there, as is testified by the Irish sources (*Orkneyinga saga* 1965, 27). Much more extensive is the account in *Njáls saga*, which dates from about 1280; by 1300 manuscripts of the saga were circulating (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1954, cxlix). It recounts events leading up to and including the participation in the battle of many of the burners of Njáll and his family who followed Jarl Sigurðr to Ireland, a country that the author apparently did not know, though he shows some understanding of Shetland, Orkney, North-east Scotland, the Hebrides and the Irish Sea area (*Njáls saga* 1954, 205–07, 224, 240; Hudson 2003, 251–04). Embedded in the saga are two poems which can be considered as separate sources. Closely linked to *Njáls saga*, and including a similar account of the battle, is the

short *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, about the son of an early convert to Christianity (1950, 301–02, see Hamer 2014, 99–116). A number of other Norse sagas and annals refer to *Brjáns bardagi* ‘Brian’s battle’. The convergences between the episode in *Njáls saga* and the account of the battle in the *Cogadh* are so great that many scholars have assumed that in some way they, and indeed the other Norse sources, are drawing on the same material, despite the difference of period and language. This has led to the question whether they are based on independent but direct reportage of events which survived orally in Ireland for up to a century and in Iceland for much longer; or whether there was a later, and literary, connection between the two traditions.

Three areas of similarity between the Norse and Gaelic sources, especially between the *Cogadh* and *Njáls saga*, will be considered here. These are the lead up to the battle; its outline; and the names and relationships of many of the chief protagonists. These will be explored from the perspective of later periods of contact. This approach is similar to that of Hudson (2003, 263), who posited oral tradition and a written source; and more explicitly to the view of Ní Mhaonaigh that the author of *Njáls saga* had access to an earlier account of the battle of Clontarf, possibly in written form, which circulated where some degree of bilingualism prevailed (2007, 90). The question then arises how a source in a vernacular language might be transmitted at a time when contacts such as those derived from trade or diplomacy seem to have been scarce. This is not to propose the *Cogadh* as the only source; undoubtedly some memory of the Battle of Clontarf survived in Iceland from the early eleventh century, and more was retained from contact at the court of Muirchertach Ua Briain in 1102–03, which will be considered later. However, the correspondence of personal and place names and the general outline of the events leading up to and including the battle suggest a specific source, such as the *Cogadh*, and it will be argued here that this was transmitted not long before the composition of *Njáls saga*. It is assumed in this paper that only the section of the Irish text concerning the battle was known or at least used, for the author of *Njáls saga* shows no interest in Brian’s career before the events leading up to Clontarf, nor does he make reference to figures who were significant from an Irish perspective but not to a Scandinavian audience.

‘*Brjáns saga*’

Alongside discussion of the dating of the *Cogadh* there has been since the 1880s a suggestion in Scandinavian studies that the Clontarf episode in *Njáls saga* comes from a lost written **Brjáns saga* (Lehmann

and Carolsfeld 1883; see Bugge 1905, 57–88; Christiansen 1931, 52–77, 122–37; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1935; 1954, xlv–xlix; Goedheer 1938, 87–92; Lönnroth 1976, 8). This independent saga of Brian, on which the anonymous author of *Njáls saga* (and the other Norse sources) drew, was considered to be no earlier than about 1200 (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1954, xlv), that is, old enough to influence *Orkneyinga saga* but little older. The proposed existence of this saga was based partly on the similarities in the three main Icelandic texts, and on a reference in *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar: Jarl [Sigurðr] þakkaði honum orð sín. Þeir fóru síðan til Írlands ok þorðusk við Brján konung, ok urðu þar mǫrg tíðendi senn, sem segir í sögu hans* ‘The earl thanked him for his comments. They then went to Ireland and fought with King Brian, and much of note occurred there, as is told in his saga’ (*Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* 1950, 301). ‘His saga’ could refer to a saga of Earl Sigurðr, which could be *Orkneyinga saga* itself, as Jón Jóhannesson suggested (*Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* 1950, ci–cviii, see too Ní Mhaonaigh 2007, 96–97).

Sagas about non-Scandinavian kings are not common, and a **Brjáns saga* would be unusual. Further, there is no evidence in *Njáls saga* or any other Norse work of material about Brian other than events relating to his death, that would suggest a lost account of this king. The names of Brian’s sons and grandson were not among the Irish names already in common use in Iceland, but are given in forms recognisably close to the Irish. Their names are not taken up in the later literature, nor among the general public; this suggests that if there were indeed a **Brjáns saga* it did not have wide currency. It is also notable that the proposed lost saga drew on a single approach to the Clontarf battle, seemingly because the author had no access to accounts less favourable to Brian. If there was a *Brjáns saga* it was either based on a written account, or was derived from a singularly laudatory, and specific, oral tradition.

Whether there was a Norse **Brjáns saga* or whether the author of *Njáls saga* had access to a version of the *Cogadh*, he had his sources, oral or written, to hand from the start, or at least during revision of his work, for the Clontarf episodes are carefully prepared for (Hamer 2014). The saga starts and ends with major battles each of which features a banner with supernatural attributes, and a powerful queen-mother. The first battle prefigures in a pagan context the Christian ending at the battle of Clontarf (*Njáls saga*, 18–19). Intermediate events, like the burning of the hero Njáll and his family, are preceded by supernatural portents, and those depicted in the embedded poetry have a general similarity to those found in the prose text.

Njáls saga includes the account of Brian at the end of a long and complex text, and depicts him as not only a hero and a great king but one who acts in justice and mercy in a specifically Christian context. How much of this might have been contained, and why, in the postulated **Brjáns saga* has not been fully explored, as the debate has given more weight to its possible historicity and time of writing. The Brian of the saga is not the Brian depicted in Ireland in the extended part of the *Book of Rights* (Goedheer 1938, 117). In Iceland he is a monarch who rules wisely and well, the true Christian prince of the high medieval ideal, rather than, as in historical reality, the most successful of a number of kings vying for power in a society that was bounded by geography and a common understanding of law but where even the most dominant had only a transient ability to put law into action. Although Brian was acclaimed in Ireland, his reputation did not reach the level it does in *Njáls saga* either as a monarch or a saint.

Source Comparison: the Scholarly Literature

Discussion of the Battle of Clontarf has dealt mainly with the convergences and differences between the two major sources, the *Cogadh* and *Njáls saga*. For Goedheer, writing from a free-prose perspective, the Clontarf episode provided rare external sources for an examination of the historicity or otherwise of the sagas. His work remains one of the key evaluations of the material, although his conclusions are no longer generally accepted. He postulated that mutually confirming Norse and Gaelic traditions existed independently, demonstrating the reliability of each. Goedheer drew on the earlier of the two main works on *Njáls saga* by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, whose lengthy introduction to his critical edition of the saga later identified many of the written sources behind the saga, and helped to date it to within a remarkably narrow range of dates. *Njáls saga* was composed after the fall of the Commonwealth and at a time when the Norwegian king Magnús *lagabætir* ‘Law-Betterer’ was providing new codes of laws for Iceland, first in 1274 with the code known as *Járnsíða*, which Einar Ólafur Sveinsson identifies as having been used by the author of *Njáls saga*. The code was replaced in 1281 by *Jónsbók*. Einar Ólafur’s acceptance of a written Icelandic **Brjáns saga* helped to establish its place in the academic discourse. However, he wrote mainly in Icelandic and was concerned with the saga as a whole, and in consequence his work has not greatly influenced Irish analysts of the Clontarf episodes. Einar Ólafur, Goedheer and the Norwegian scholar Reidar Th. Christiansen (1931, 390–401) were writing within a long-standing debate on the extent, if any, of Irish influence on Icelandic tradition. Apparent evidence of such influence was dismissed

by proponents of the ‘book-prose’ tradition as Irish borrowings from the Norse world, rather than the reverse. The work of one major proponent of Gaelic influence, Sophus Bugge (1889–90; 1908, especially 52–77) has been largely discredited, though his writings contain relevant insights (see Ó Corráin 1998). The debate itself has persisted, and today there is an acceptance of a degree of Irish literary and folkloric influence owing to contact during the Viking Age (Chesnutt 1968, Gísli Sigurðsson 2000). The emphasis on identifying literary tradition that had been transmitted orally in this period discouraged any discussion of the possibility of later contact and transmission in the high Middle Ages. Although Alexander Bugge compiled a collection of the diplomatic records for Britain and Ireland (*Diplomatarium Norvegicum* XIX–XX 1914–15, see too *Regesta Norvegica* I 1989, esp. 312–30), little systematic work was undertaken on this later period. Further, the study of history has generally been delineated by modern national boundaries, and consequently limited attention has been paid to peripheral areas. Research in recent years has indicated the possibility of more contact than previously considered between Gaelic- and Norse-speaking areas at this period.

Donnchadh Ó Corráin has recently revived the view expressed by Sophus Bugge (1908, 5–19) that a **Brjáns saga* was composed in Dublin, in Norse. Bugge believed that it was written soon after the battle, while Ó Corráin proposes that the arrival in 1102 of Magnús *berfætr* ‘Barelegs’ inspired the composition of the *Cogadh*, to which he suggests that **Brjáns saga* was a possible diplomatic response (1998, 24–6). This view is not widely accepted, as the established dating of continuous texts in Old Norse does not accommodate the composition of a fully-fledged saga at this period. Moreover, the text does not show the Irish literary or orthographical features that might be expected of a Dublin composition (though Ó Corráin suggests two minor ones). The most recent full-length study of the reign of Brian bóruma by Ní Mhaonaigh covers both the Norse and Irish texts, and suggests that the *Cogadh* was known in the West Norse world, not in the version found in the surviving full-length manuscript, but still one favourable to Brian. She points out that several manuscripts of the text circulated in Ireland, some of them adapted to the position of a particular dynasty (Ní Mhaonaigh 2007, 83–90; see too Casey 2013, Downham 2015, 2017).

Njáls saga: Parallels with the *Cogadh*

The supernatural portents surrounding the Battle in each tradition have general similarities. Goedheer identifies many of the Irish parallels, and

others may be found throughout both Norse and other literatures. In the Icelandic saga Brian is presented without the genealogical background we could expect in a saga about a significant figure: he has nothing to live up to or to disgrace. His introduction may seem clumsy at first reading, but it reflects the terse and elegant approach adopted by the writer, for Brian's role is saint, not ancestor to any of the audience. There is no interest in what happens to his kingdom after his death, nor any of the drama relating to his succession found in the *Cogadh*. Brian is depicted much like the eponymous hero Njáll, wise, elderly, Christian, but also with the kingly power to change things for the better. He is also similar to Njáll in having three sons, a foster-son and a troublesome (though in his case former) wife.

According to the *Cogadh* the Leinster king Máel Mórdha, who does not appear in the Norse sources, is incited to fight Brian, his over-king, by his sister Gormfhlaith, Brian's wife. In *Njáls saga* Gormfhlaith (Kormlǫðr) is consumed by hatred of her former husband Brian, and incites her son by an earlier marriage, Sigtryggr, to do battle with him. To gain him allies she offers herself as marital bait to both Sigurðr of Orkney and to one Bróðir, a Viking who is based on the Isle of Man and together with his foster-brother commands thirty ships. Sigurðr's entourage includes many of the burners of Njáll, fifteen of whom are to die at Clontarf. Their reluctant leader Flosi stays behind with Sigurðr's brother-in-law, Earl Gilli, in the Hebrides. The allies duly arrive, and portents, delays and a parley with the rider of a dapple-grey horse occur.¹ The battle takes place, in the *Cogadh* with much detail and hyperbole in contrast to the relatively crisp account in the saga. The day is Good Friday, according to *Njáls saga* and other sources, though not the *Cogadh*. This was a good time for portentous events, for the fight of good against evil and the triumph of light over dark. In this year Easter fell on 25 April, the latest date possible. Given the symbolism of the aged king dying at evening and the heathens being defeated on the day of Christ's crucifixion, the Norse writers could be expected to have incorporated, had they known of it through other Irish sources, the information that the defeated had been given the greatest possible amount of time to repent. The *Annals of Loch Cé* note the importance of the date and the fact that 'little Easter', Low Sunday a week later, occurred in summer, that is, after 1 May.

Sigtryggr does not take part according to the *Cogadh*, but shuts Dublin against the battle, while in *Njáls saga* he flees during the onslaught,

¹ *Njáls saga*, 449 and footnote; see too Hudson 2003, 259. Neither the identity of the rider nor the colour of the horse (*apalgrá*) has been satisfactorily explained, though an envoy, Óðinn, or Death as in Revelation 6:8 have all been suggested.

breaking his side's line. In the *Cogadh* Brian's ally Mael Sechnaill, king of Míde, withdraws at the last minute and does not participate in the battle. He is not mentioned in *Njáls saga*, where the closest parallel is a figure not known to Irish sources, Bróðir's foster-brother Óspakr. Before the battle he changes sides, flees to Brian's court at Kantaraborg (Ceann Coradh) and becomes a Christian. During the battle Brian's sons Murchadh (Margaðr) and Donnchadh (Dungaðr) fight bravely and are slain, but in the *Cogadh*, as is historically accurate, only Murchadh dies. In both accounts Brian does not fight himself; the Irish text implies that his age prevents him, while in *Njáls saga* we are told that he will not fight on Good Friday. In *Njáls saga* (and the *Annals of Loch Cé*) he dies while at prayer. In both Irish and Norse sources he has a brother or other near kinsman active in the battle, a grandson or foster-son. In both Norse and Irish texts he has an attendant with him when he is killed by Brodar (Bróðir) at the close of the battle.

The battle takes place between dawn and dusk, and the incoming tide assists Brian's forces to sweep their opponents into the sea. Stephen Harrison suggests that the battle occurred closer to Dublin than has previously been thought, and that the fleeing Norsemen were caught by the tide surging into the River Tolka (personal communication, July 2016). Adémar de Chabannes in the mid-eleventh century notes an occasion when Norse men, women and children were drowned, as might occur if the tide cut off escape routes for both participants and onlookers. After Brian's death and the attendant supernatural events, the author of *Njáls saga* resumes the account of the retribution visited on those who had taken part in the burning of Njáll and the eventual reconciliation of the main characters, while the *Cogadh* continues with a brief account of the burial of Brian and the political aftermath.

Characters and their names

The characters' names are rendered in Norse in a manner that reproduces their sound rather than the Irish orthography. Kormlǫðr (Gormfhlaith) is depicted in the Norse saga as more duplicitous than in the Irish text. As the mother of an adult son, her marital attractions are presumably in her diplomatic contacts and family relations rather than her reproductive potential. While recalling Gunnhildr, the sexually ruthless mother of Norway's King Haraldr *gráfeldr* 'Greycloak' at the beginning of *Njáls saga*, she also reflects the thrice-married Icelander Hallgerðr, who refuses to prevent or actively engineers the death of her husbands. Kormlǫðr attracts the Vikings Óspakr 'the unwise one', who is known for his wisdom and appears to have been concocted for the purpose of the saga; and Bróðir, his

unbrotherly foster-brother (or brother, according to *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*), a renegade deacon who has turned to paganism. Óspakr is a fairly common Norse name, and Brodar is a known if uncommon Irish name. Bróðir is not recorded elsewhere as a Norse personal name, and appears to have been chosen for the proximity of sound and because of its irony. In the *Cogadh* Brodar is slain. Bróðir is named as the slayer of Brian in both *Njáls saga* and *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, and in the Norse texts this saint-killer and religious turncoat is given an extended and grisly death reserved for heretics, by being pierced in the gut and led around a tree until his entrails unwind.² In an interesting contrast, which may suggest where the *Njáls saga* author derived his knowledge of the incident, Brian's heroic son Murchadh loses his entrails in the *Cogadh*, in combat with a Norseman. He manages to survive until the following day and make a godly end (*Cogadh*, 194–97, see too cxii).

The *Cogadh* makes no mention of Brian's son Tadc either before or during the Battle of Clontarf. Yet in *Njáls saga* he appears as Brian's attendant (Taðkr) in place of Latean of the *Cogadh*, is injured while trying to defend the king, and is then the first person healed by Brian. Tadc was the grandfather of Magnús berfœttr's host Muirchertach, the presumed patron of the *Cogadh*. It seems that he was simply absent when the battle took place; this was apparently known to the author of the saga, who also knew of his genealogical significance, and so presents him as too young to fight but as having a non-military yet noble role. This is an artistic compromise, as the historical figure, according to the *Annals of Loch Cé* and other sources, was old enough to defeat his brother Donnchadh in battle later in 1014. Tadc appears in the later Ua Briain panegyric the *Caithréim Thoirdealbhaigh*, and also, as Ní Mhaonaigh points out, during the aftermath of Clontarf in the *Leabhar Oiris*, another partisan work on the battles of Brian bóruma, where he is again said to be in battle in 1015 (*Leabhar Oiris* 1904, 92, 101). He was killed by Donnchadh's forces in 1023. Ní Mhaonaigh (1995, 373–74) suggests that his early death rendered him a relatively insignificant figure in the Ua Briain lineage, and that his descendants linked themselves to Brian's son Murchad and grandson Tairdelbach who died at Clontarf. Casey, however, argues that at least one recension of the *Cogadh* text may have been put together by

² This may be ultimately derived from the milder death of Judas in Acts 1:18, who fell and split his belly open so that his guts poured out, see Ó Corráin 1998, 25–26. The motif is also found in the *fornaldarsaga Orms þátr Stórolfssonar*, although in that case the victim is a sympathetic character and the executioner a brutal giant.

supporters of Donnchadh rather than the descendants of his half-brother Tadc, and that the surviving manuscript tradition has been reworked to favour Donnchadh's descendants (Casey 2013, 157–58). In either event, Tadc was father and grandfather of the two most prominent Ua Briain kings, and his appearance in *Njáls saga* indicates knowledge of this family.

Donnchadh lost his right hand in the later encounter in 1014, though this did not end his warrior career, and in old age he went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. While none of this is referred to in the *Cogadh*, the loss of his hand may have been known to the Norse author and transposed to Tadc, who loses his hand defending Brian. His name is given in *Njáls saga* as Taðkr, followed by the gloss *þann kollu vér Tann* 'whom we call Tann', which to a Norse ear would sound like the accusative of a form of which the nominative would be *Taðr. Neither Taðr nor Taðkr is found elsewhere in Norse literature, and it may be that the phrase was originally a verbal aside made because someone with this Gaelic name was present at a reading of a relevant source. Since *tann* is the root form of *tönn* 'tooth', it may even be a nickname ('Taðkr, whom we call toothy').

Another figure of interest is Kerþjálfaðr, the son of a former enemy of Brian's, whom he had raised as a foster-son and loved more than his own sons. This figure is taken to be Brian's grandson Tairdelbach, the son of Murchadh (Margaðr). Ó Corráin has pointed out that the Irish name may have been rendered Kerþjálfaðr due to a misreading of 't' for the similarly formed 'c' in insular script. Similarly, the spelling of the English Canterbury, the centre of the cult of Thomas à Becket, may have led to Brian's base at Ceann Coradh being read as Kantaraborg rather than Kankaraborg (Ó Corráin 1998, 448–49; Ní Mhaonaigh 2007, 90; see however Hudson 2003, 251–52). Orthographical confusion might strengthen the case for the story having been read aloud, with an oral translation. However, the name Kerþjálfaðr may also have been adapted to contain within it the name Þjálfi 'the well-trained one', a name borne by one of Þórr's companions, said to be the swiftest of runners, in the *Gylfaginning* section of *Snorra Edda*. Kerþjálfaðr chases the fleeing Norse forces at Clontarf, but spares one, Þorsteinn Síðu-Hallsson, who stoops to tie his shoes, because, he tells the Irishman, his home is in Iceland and he will not get there that night. There is also a figure called Úlfr hræða, brother to Brian. Ní Mhaonaigh suggests that this name, meaning 'Troublesome Wolf', is a calque on Cú Duilig, 'hard, intractable hound', Brian's half-brother and one of his three designated protectors (Ní Mhaonaigh 2007, 89–90).

Apart from those who took part in the battle or the instigation of it, the otherwise unknown Earl Gilli of the Hebrides appears in *Njáls saga* as

resident on 'Kola', possibly the Isle of Coll (the land of which was later largely owned by the abbey of Iona, one of the centres of Norse-Gaelic contacts in the Diocese of the *Suðreyjar*). He entertains Flosi, and on the night after the battle hears in a dream one of the two embedded poems (*Njáls saga*, 459–50). When first introduced Gilli is married to Sigurðr's sister, who has the rare Norse name Nereiðr (*Njáls saga*, 224). In the account of events leading up to the battle, his wife is again said to be a sister of Sigurðr of Orkney, but now bears the rare Irish name Forbhflaith (*hann átti Hvarfløðu* 'he was married to *Hvarflaða' (*Njáls saga*, 440); see Ó Corráin 1998, 23). It seems that either Gilli married two of Sigurðr's sisters successively, which would have been frowned on under canon law in the writer's time, or that this is a discrepancy which escaped the author's attention. The earl's name is the Irish *gille* 'servant'. It is unusual but not unique (there was an eleventh-century Bishop Gille in Brian's port of Limerick) to find it without attribution to either a saint or to Christ, as in King Haraldr *Gillikristr* 'Servant of Christ'.

Given that the names are remarkably similar in Irish and Norse, and in view of the fact that the Clontarf episode had no further influence on Icelandic narratives, a written source that was not widely known appears likely, coexisting with oral tradition. Within the time between the historical event in 1014 and the composition of *Njáls saga* c.1280 there is only one brief period in which stories from Ireland are likely to have been transmitted orally to the Norse world and added to traditions retained there from the time of the battle itself.

Early Twelfth-Century Contacts

Icelanders who fought at Clontarf may have been remembered in poetry and prose, but it is not necessary to assume with Goedheer that accurate accounts were retained of this battle in a distant land. Of the burners of Njáll and his family only Flosi is really of genealogical significance, and he did not fight at Clontarf. There was a chance to revitalise this oral tradition just eighty-eight years after the battle, when any family traditions retold in either Iceland or Norway had reached merely the third or fourth generation. In 1102–03 King Magnús berfœttr was a guest at the court of Brian's great-grandson Muirchertach. From the saga it appears that they spent the winter at Muirchertach's base at Ceann Coradh on the west bank of the Shannon, which is described as being in Kunnaktir (Connacht) west of the Shannon. It is inconceivable that those present would not have shared their accounts of the battle and of Muirchertach's famous ancestor. Among Magnús's entourage were Orkney Islanders, Hebrideans and the inevitable

Icelandic poet, in this case Gísl Illugason. Some stories certainly went the other way, from the Norse to the Irish world, during that winter sojourn. As Christiansen (1931, 131–71, 401–06) points out, Magnús's own fame was preserved in Gaelic, most particularly in two ballads about his journeys west. As his visits made an impact in the Gaelic world, the stories that he and his followers told about their own ancestors' deeds must have had some effect.

Neither Magnús nor his immediate entourage appears to have had any linguistic prowess—it seems they were killed later in 1103 because they could not communicate with the local warriors—but a king who ruled Dublin as Muirchertach did would have had access to interpreters. Getting it wrong is the gist of the brief account of the poet Gísl and his companions at Muirchertach's court found in *Gísls þáttir Illugason* (333–34),³ but it can be surmised that interpretation was normally the work of professionals.

The storytelling and multilingual milieu that resulted included an additional element. Also present at Muirchertach's court that winter was the Anglo-Norman Arnulf of Montgomery, who came to forge an alliance with Muirchertach and, in consequence of the meeting, also with Magnús (Power 2005, 16–17). Swift (2016) suggests that the *Cogadh* contains elements similar to those of *chansons de geste*. It also contains some words that need no professional interpreter. There is a brief Norse conversation: *Faras Domnall? i. cait ita Domnall? . . . Sund a niding*, which Todd renders in the style of his day: “Where is Domhnall?” . . . “Here, thou reptile” (*Cogadh*, 174–75), though the Norse *níðingr* ‘coward, despicable man’ is the word used. There are also three words of English which would provide no insuperable difficulty to a Norman overlord in the scene where Brodar comes across Brian at prayer: *Cing, cing . . . Nó, nó, acht príst, príst, ar Brodar* “King, king,” [said the companion], “No, no, but priest, priest, said Brodar” (*Cogadh*, 202–03).

The Poetry

There are two poems in this section of *Njáls saga*, both of indeterminate age. One, a single *dróttkvætt* stanza, is recited to Earl Gilli in a dream, telling him of the battle, the death of Sigurðr, and ending: *Brján fell ok helt velli* ‘Brian fell and held the field’ (*Njáls saga*, 460, see Jesch 1998, 164). In the context of the saga it refers to both his physical victory and his overcoming of the powers of evil, but did not necessarily have both connotations when first composed.

³ It is in the L-Version only of *Jóns saga helga*, and is printed as a separate *þáttir* in Íslenzk fornrit XV.

The skilful interweaving of Norse and Irish supernatural themes in the poem known as *Darraðarljóð* may owe something to the winter meeting of 1102–03 (*Njáls saga*, 460, see Jesch 1998, 165–68). The action is set in Caithness, where a group of unknown women ride up to a weaving shed in which the heads, guts and swords of men make up the loom and its contents, and they chant this poem as they work. The bloody weavers comprise one of a number of visions set in the north-western world; others are experienced in the Faroes, and further events occur at Good Friday services in Iceland. There are partial parallels in Ireland to the weavers of *Darraðarljóð*. According to the Ua Briain panegyric *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* military forces on their way to the Battle of Disert O’Dea in 1318 encounter the ‘Washer at the bloody ford’, a hag who cleans piles of heads and limbs (*Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* 1929, I 104, translation II 93–94). Goedheer emphasises the similarities, but the image is not the same, and neither figure matches the Morrigan of older Irish literature. It is possible that they developed independently out of the common experience of the carnage of battle.

The information given in *Darraðarljóð* appears to clash with the prose account. It speaks of a tragedy that the Irish will never recover from, which is rather extreme considering that Brian was elderly when he died. Russell Poole (1991) regards the poem as contemporary with the battle, but it is possible, as others have suggested, that it may have been composed about later, or earlier, battles, or that the Battle of Clontarf was less one-sided than the Irish and Norse prose accounts indicate. John Hines (2002, 4–6) argues that the *ungr konungr* ‘young king’ referred to is Sigtryggr of Dublin, who escaped death at Clontarf either by keeping out of the battle entirely (the *Cogadh*) or leading the flight from it (*Njáls saga*). The poem, Hines argues, was composed towards the end of his reign, giving him a more heroic, and more sympathetic, representation (see too Ní Mhaonaigh 2007, 91–95). If it was composed for a different occasion, its fine dramatic style and sense of foreboding lent itself to being appropriated to describe this major battle.

Whatever passed across the linguistic divides at Muirchertach’s court in 1102–03, it is likely that memories of the Irish battle were at the least reinforced. The Icelander who wrote *Orkneyinga saga* in about 1200 may have used Orcadian local traditions from Magnús’s visit to Ireland a century earlier, though his short account of the battle concentrates on the death of Sigurðr of Orkney. From an Irish perspective, exposure to alternative Norse traditions, including possibly the two poems, may have led Muirchertach, especially after the death of Magnús later in 1103 and the

loss of his maritime support, to commission the laudatory work on his ancestor, the *Cogadh*, a work which bestows reflected glory on Muirchertach.

Icelandic Family Considerations

While there were continuing contacts between the often warring nobles of Norway and the magnates of the Isles (see McDonald 1997, 2007, Beuermann 1998, Woolf 2003, Power 2005), Magnús's visit provides a 'stepping stone' between the events of 1014 and the works written a century and more later. His ally Muirchertach is well-represented in the thirteenth-century accounts of the Norwegian kings, *Heimskringla* (1941–51, II 201–37), *Fagrskinna* and *Morkinskinna*, the closely related compilations which trace the royal lines up to 1177, and the earlier *Sverris saga*.

Snorri Sturluson, author of *Heimskringla*, had personal links to the immediate descendants of Magnús berfœttr. His elderly foster-father, Jón Loptsson, from the literary centre of Oddi in southern Iceland, had Sæmundr fróði 'the Wise' as his paternal grandfather. Jón's maternal grandfather was Magnús berfœttr, and Jón, who was born in 1124, had been raised at the Norwegian royal residence of Konungahella, where he is said to have been at the age of eleven. He returned to Norway at least once in later life, and was proud of his royal connections (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, III 288, 395; see Whaley 1991, 79). As a child he may have known Magnús's son Sigurðr (d.1130), who accompanied his father on the expeditions to the west as a boy, and also Magnús's presumed son from Ireland, Haraldr gilli (d.1136), whom Snorri describes in some detail, including his speaking Norse with difficulty (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, III 267). Haraldr, like Magnús, is said to wear on occasion a Gaelic style of dress, which Jón may have seen or heard of. As well as these kings and their entourages, Jón may also have encountered, or known descriptions of, Haraldr's son Eysteinn who came from the Gaelic west in 1142 (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, III 331). Snorri, writing over two centuries after Clontarf, thus had a connection with the traditions concerning Magnús berfœttr through the accounts of Magnús's grandson, Snorri's foster-father. Stories about the time Magnús spent in Ireland provided the opportunity for fortified accounts of the Battle of Clontarf to come within the storytelling milieu of Oddi. Continual recounting of and writing about these matters had the potential in turn to influence those writers who came after Snorri, including his literary nephews.

Ireland was known about as well in a general way. Irish and Hebridean ancestors took part, willingly or unwillingly, in the settlement of Iceland, as recorded in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*. A number of popular

male names, including Njáll, were of Gaelic origin, as were some place-names. There was some knowledge of Ireland in Iceland in the mid- to late thirteenth century, although there was no longer much direct contact, as far as is known (Helgi Guðmundsson 1967, 73–77, Chesnutt 1968, Jesch 1987). The overwintering of Magnús and his entourage in 1102–03 may have provided stepping stones to the survival of some information about Brian in thirteenth-century Iceland, along with stories of Magnús himself and his encounter with Muirchertach.

On a literary reading of the final chapters of *Njáls saga*, there emerges the question why a writer in late thirteenth-century Iceland should include in such detail the story of the last days of a dead king in a distant land. He had no descendants in Iceland and no obvious patron. Moreover, Brian is one of those kings who, as is observed of King Óláfr helgi, had to earn his sainthood: he did not merely acquire it by virtue of his kingship (Skórzewska 2011, 330), and there is no information other than general comment on how he did this. He had no personal link to Iceland, nor to Irish antecedents of Icelanders of the Settlement period. Even given the contact in the time of Magnús berfœttr, the question arises why a version of events favourable to the Ua Briain dynasty was followed. In the period when *Njáls saga* was composed there was again some interest in Ireland, but the contacts were not with the declining Ua Briain, with their heartland in the south-west, but with Connacht's Ua Conchobhair dynasty in the west. Were the subject of Clontarf to be raised, and if there were bilingual contexts to raise it in, other sources could be proposed. Connacht accounts, like the opening sequence of the *Annals of Loch Cé*, are much more measured about Brian's character (Hennessey 1871, 12–15). They place more emphasis on matters like his violation, thirty-seven years before Clontarf, of the sanctuary of Scatterry Island in the Shannon estuary, and the execution there of Ívarr, king of Limerick, and his sons. In the *Cogadh* Brian recounts that he was visited the night before Clontarf by the family fetch Oebhinn, who informs him that he will die. More dramatically, in the *Annals of Loch Cé* his seneschal and that of his subordinate Uí Fhigheinte king, who had also been involved in the killings on Scatterry Island, are both visited in their sleep by clerics including Saint Senán, the patron of Scatterry Island, and informed that on the next day reparations for the violation will be required.

The narrative of the Battle of Clontarf has a wider, more European perspective than this specifically Irish dimension. A Scandinavian audience aware of the story of Brian could draw parallels with their own circumstances and traditions. The idealised Brian provides an equivalent

to his saintly near-contemporary King Óláfr of Norway, killed in 1030 while trying to reclaim his kingdom. Both early eleventh-century kings were subjects of later Norse literature: Óláfr had been written about by Snorri Sturluson among others, who ensured that his reputation was known across northern Europe. Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga* even refers to the death of Sigurðr of Orkney in *Brjánsorrusta*, the Battle of Clontarf (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, II 160). Óláfr's cult had grown rapidly, with the aid of skaldic panegyrics and a full-blown narrative (Lindow 2008). Brian's conduct and experience is in many ways similar to that of Óláfr, the antecedent of Magnús lagabætir, the king in whose reign *Njáls saga* was written, and suggests that the author had the saga of the Norwegian king in mind while composing this part of *Njáls saga*. The night before his death Óláfr experiences a dream of his predecessor King Óláfr Tryggvason and a ladder to heaven. This biblically-based vision is rather more edifying than Brian's sighting of the family fairy-woman in the *Cogadh*. He sees nothing in *Njáls saga*, where grisly portents are experienced at night by others. More pertinently, in *Njáls saga* a noble heathen, Óspakr, leaves his foster-brother and changes sides, receiving baptism. In *Óláfs saga helga* two brothers are converted to Christianity and join the king shortly before the battle (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, II 353–54). The Norwegian king has with him his fifteen-year-old half-brother, Haraldr, who insists on fighting. Brian's foster-son Kerþjálfaðr (his grandson Toirdhelbach) performs glorious deeds in the battle; in the Irish account he is killed (aged fifteen) but in *Njáls saga* apparently survives. So, in *Óláfs saga*, does Haraldr, the ancestor of the Norwegian kings of the thirteenth century, who dies years later in battle at Stamford Bridge.

Of particular interest is Þórir hundr, Óláfr's former retainer but now one of the three enemies who kill the king on the battlefield (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, II 385). He then starts to lay out the body, and as he does so blood runs down his arm and heals his injured hand. This parallels the description of the dying Brian's blood falling on and reattaching the severed hand of Taðkr (Tadc). Þórir, healed by the king's blood, which represents the blood shed by Christ on the Cross, becomes an early witness to Óláfr's sanctity (387). *Njáls saga* also possibly alludes to the cognomen of Þórir hundr in Snorri's *Óláfs saga* when the fleeing Hrafn prays to Saint Peter, who had denied Christ three times: *Runnit hefir hundr þinn, Pétr postoli, tysvar til Róms ok mundi renna it þriðja sinn, ef þú leyfðir* 'Twice your dog (*hundr*) has run to Rome, Apostle Peter, and will do so a third time if you permit', and is spared death (*Njáls saga*, 452). The theme of triple mercy reappears in *Njáls saga* where the king, Brian, forgives offences

three times. This is a Christ-like attribute (as Christ forgives Simon Peter's triple betrayal), but also one that must have had specific resonance for the late-thirteenth-century Icelandic audience where the king was now the source of law.

These parallels suggest that an audience hearing both sagas would make the connection between two saintly kings defeating the forces of heathendom. Moreover, reading this section of *Njáls saga* through the earlier *Óláfs saga helga* indicates ways in which sources regarding the Battle of Clontarf and the death of Brian have been adapted for contemporary literary purposes.

Norwegian Court Tradition

It is necessary to explore why, when and how transmission from one vernacular language to another may have occurred. Textual transmission suggests that there was interest in the subject during the period in which the texts were written, perhaps prompting comparison with contemporaneous events which may in turn have influenced the manner of their writing. In some cases a text may pass from one language to another with almost word-for-word correspondence, and in others the text has been substantially adapted to fulfil a new purpose. A saga as finely written and complex as *Njáls saga*, drawing as it does on numerous sources, contains internal parallels that would engage a thirteenth-century audience in conversation, many of them summarised by Lars Lönnroth (1976, 26–36). There are also many points that would be of contemporary interest in the milieu of the author and might even suggest his identity (Lönnroth 1976, 179–84, 200–03).

There were three known points of contact through which material could be transmitted easily between the two cultural and linguistic areas in question. One was through church contacts at the level of the archdiocese, and those of the abbeys of Iona in the Hebrides and Rushen on Man with their counterparts in Norway. Another was the court of the earls of Orkney, while a third was the larger Norwegian court, frequented by literary and political Icelanders in search of patronage, where cultured warriors and clerics from the Northern and Western Isles could hear stories that could be memorised and taken home. The Norwegian monarch Magnús lagabætir (1263–80) was the surviving and legitimate son of Hákon *gamli* 'the Old' (1217–63). Hákon was the supposed posthumous son of a short-lived Hákon (d. 1202), son of Sverrir (1177–1202), who was the supposed son of Sigurðr (1136–55), son of Haraldr gilli (1130–36). Haraldr gilli was a supposed posthumous son of Magnús berfœttr, conceived on the second

western expedition. There were therefore genealogical links, albeit tenuous, back to Magnús berfœttr, whose father Óláfr kyrri was the son of Haraldr harðráði, who had fought at Stiklastaðir beside his maternal half-brother Óláfr helgi (the Saint), the *rex perpetuus* of Norway.

The minor kings of the twelfth-century and their numerous offspring, often illegitimate and posthumous, are usually considered of limited interest, but establishing a firm succession was a matter of significance in the following century. Magnús lagabætir was himself crowned in his father's lifetime, to ensure there was no doubt, and in turn he appointed his two sons to succeed him. In terms of the dynastic line the thirteenth-century kings were regarded as descended from Haraldr gilli by blood and Óláfr helgi, their collateral relative, by *regalitas*. According to Snorri Sturluson, Haraldr gilli was regarded as a saint for a time following his assassination in 1136. This did not receive formal church approval, not least because Haraldr had ordered the hanging of the bishop of Stavanger in 1135, and according to Snorri had died after a drinking bout while in bed with his mistress. According to the Danish historian and cleric Saxo Grammaticus, writing c.1200, he was the source of all Norway's woes, and his brief reign led to many years of internal warfare between his descendants. However, his status at the Norwegian court may have been higher than either Snorri or Saxo suggests. The intriguing suggestion has also been made (by Alex Woolf in an unpublished lecture in 2016) that Haraldr gilli may have been a member of the Ua Briain family through his mother.

Haraldr's western-born son Eysteinn is also to some degree relevant.⁴ In Norway he was venerated as a saint after his execution in 1157. He had a presumed posthumous son, also named Eysteinn, who led a short-lived bid for power in the 1170s. On the younger Eysteinn's death without heirs his followers largely attached themselves to, and therefore gave legitimacy to, his presumed cousin Sverrir, the most successful of the twelfth-century kings, and the grandfather of Hákon Hákonarson, father of Magnús lagabætir. The cults of Haraldr gilli and Eysteinn, described by Margaret Cormack (1993), may have been short-lived and local, but centred on kings of the successful dynastic line, both of them of Gaelic origin, who also claimed relationship with the much greater Óláfr, king and martyr. This background may have helped to shape the presentation by

⁴ Woolf has further suggested that he too might also have been of the Ua Briain dynasty through his mother, though the sagas suggest that Eysteinn was partly Hebridean. By this period Ua Briain power was diminished and concentrated in the south.

the author of *Njáls saga* of another saintly king, one who died in Ireland at much the same period as Óláfr, and also in battle.

The author of *Njáls saga* knew the Norwegian court, at first-hand or by repute. It had its own sources relating to Ireland, which represented it as a land of saints as well as battles. St Sunniva, reportedly an Irish princess who died with her companions on the Norwegian coast in the late eleventh century, was venerated in Bergen. She was known through the *Acta sanctorum in Selio*, written in about 1170, which was used by the monk Oddr Snorrason in his Latin Life of Óláfr Tryggvason (see Andersson 2003). The Old Norwegian *Konungs skuggsjá* 'The King's Mirror', usually dated to the reign of Hákon Hákonarson, contains a section on Ireland and its wonders. One episode may have helped to shape the depiction of Brian as the ideal wise king who combines justice with mercy, by giving a reverse example: there was once a king of Tara who made an unjust judgement in favour of family and friends instead of righteousness. In consequence, the castle and surroundings were up-ended and the place has since been uninhabitable (*Konungs skuggsjá* 1983, 24:40–25:24).

Politics and the West

Other possible sources in mid-thirteenth-century Norway may have been oral reminiscences of those who journeyed west with Hákon in 1263 to the Gaelic world of the Hebrides, where they had some contact at a distance with Ireland. Magnús lagabætir on his succession employed Sturla Þórðarson, who was then in Norway, to write a saga of his father. Sturla had access to the recollections of witnesses, both those who had been on the naval expedition, and others like the dowager queen who would have known of it by report. The saga of Hákon Hákonarson tells of his attempt in the summer of 1263 to reassert authority in the Hebrides, in the face of pressure from Scotland's king Alexander III. Hákon's claim is reported as going back to the expeditions of Magnús berfœttr, who restored the overlordship won in the ninth century by Norway's King Haraldr hárfagri. There are numerous references in the saga to places in the Hebrides and Irish Sea area. King Hákon's interest in the west, like that of Magnús berfœttr, went beyond the Hebrides and Man, and in the course of the summer expedition Sturla recounts that a delegation arrived from Ireland seeking Hákon's help against Anglo-Norman rule, in return offering him the high-kingship. He sought, and obtained, independent confirmation of this proposal, and was keen to winter in Ireland, but was dissuaded by his counsellors. He retired to the Orkneys, where he died that December. Indications are that this offer came from Aedh Ua Conchobhair, son of

Felim, king of Connacht, who, in a rare father-son partnership, was leading resistance to Anglo-Norman rule (Lydon 1988). Aedh was married to the daughter of the Hebridean king Duggáll mac Ruairi. Duggáll's brother Aleinn accompanied her to Connacht on her marriage, but in 1263 was back in the Hebrides, and like his brother actively supporting Hákon's expedition. While the Irish understanding of high-kingship was radically different to medieval royal rule, the offer was attractive to Hákon. The *Annals of Ulster* and *Annals of Connacht* note that Hákon 'died on his way to Ireland'.

Magnús did not continue his father's conflict, but set in train the process by which the Isles were sold to Scotland under the Treaty of Perth. His seventeen-year reign is known mainly for a new code of laws for Norway, while the version adapted for Iceland, *Járnsida*, was brought to Iceland and promoted by Sturla Þórðarson. A major innovation was the understanding of the king as the source of the law, so that in consequence offences were against the Crown, and were to be addressed publicly by force of royal power rather than by the offended party and his supporters. Magnús, who has not attracted much modern interest, was an administrator, not a fighter, personally devout, monogamous and keen to ensure future royal rule through legitimacy and male primogeniture (for a summary of his reign see Westergaard-Nielsen 1971). He engaged with the model of kingship within Christendom, and from a saga perspective was perhaps a little dull. Sturla, on a later visit to Norway in 1278, was commissioned to write a saga of Magnús, but only a fragment, and some excerpts embedded in the annals, have survived.

Transmission Opportunities

The translation of French vernacular literature into Old Norse, whether in Norway or Iceland, has been studied in some detail. To turn to another vernacular language, we can see a degree of bilinguality among people of religious or aristocratic status in the Norse-Gaelic world. Work on possible connections between Gaelic and Norse traditions has concentrated largely on the Viking Age and transmission in oral form, and although transmission in the later period has been suggested (Chesnutt 1968, Jesch 1987, Power 2013), it has been less closely investigated. This is in part because there is little evidence of direct contact between Ireland and Iceland during the period of saga writing. However, when the possibility of transmission through Norway is explored, the field becomes wider.

If there was ever a written translation of the climax of the *Cogadh*, the Battle at Clontarf, we might expect some reference to the source, for the

act of translating would presumably have been a cause of pride for scribe and patron alike. However, if the relevant part was read with a running translation supplied orally, it is the contents of this performance rather than the source that would have been remembered. There are two means by which translation, written or oral, could be effected: indirectly through Latin, or directly from one vernacular language to the other.

The large archdiocese of Trondheim included the diocese of the Isle of Man and the *Suðreyjar* (the Hebrides; see Woolf 2003), where most people spoke Gaelic rather than Norse. Throughout the early thirteenth century visits were made by Manx and Hebridean religious and secular leaders to the Norwegian court. The laymen were unlikely to be fluent in Latin, but appear to have been at ease in the Norse language, as they were in the Gaelic they needed at home and for dealings in Ireland. In the twelfth century King Eysteinn Haraldsson, who came to Norway as an adult, appears to have had no difficulty communicating in Norse. Thirteenth-century *Suðreyingar* who appear to be bilingual include Óláfr Guðrøðarson, ruler of Lewis, who tried to defraud a party of Icelanders including the bishop-elect Guðmundr in 1202 on Canna; the Hebrideans who went to Norway seeking help in 1224 and 1226; the same Óláfr, now king of Man, who sought help from Norway in 1229 and sailed back with a fleet of mixed Norwegian and Hebridean militia; the Norway-based Hebridean leader on this expedition, Óspakr, who appears to be the same Óspakr who led an earlier Hebridean expedition in 1210; two kings of Man who spent time at the Norwegian court; the Hebridean cousins Jón Dungaðarson (Eoghan of Lorne) and Duggáll mac Ruairi (Ruðrason), who went to Norway in 1247 seeking appointment as kings in the Isles, returned to Norway in 1253 and later met with Hákon on his 1263 expedition; Duggáll's brother Aleinn; and Duggáll's son Eiríkr, who sailed from Norway home to the Hebrides on Hákon's own ship. There is also the otherwise unknown Hebridean Sigurðr who was sent by Hákon to find out more about the Irish offer of high-kingship (Beuermann 1998, McDonald 1997 and 2007, Power 2005). As mentioned earlier, *Jóns saga helga*, the hagiography of an Icelandic bishop, refers to a brief conversation that takes place in 1102 at the court of Muirchertach Ua Briain. The words are garbled and incomplete but they indicate a verbal ploy which is still current. This could have been used at any time, or times, when both languages were in play. They were recorded before the meaning of the words was entirely lost, and they may refer to Muirchertach himself, albeit as a literary conceit rather than a historical reality (Power 2000). The incidents indicate that Hebridean leaders had a lifestyle which allowed for cultural niceties (see Sellar 1966,

2000, McDonald 1995, Beuermann 1998, 2011), and moved in a world of family alliances and mercenary activity in Ireland, while also managing linguistically in Norway when occasion demanded. It is also possible that Jarl Gizurr Þorvaldsson, whom Einar Ólafur Sveinsson suggested was known to the author of *Njáls saga*, wintered in the Hebrides in 1257 with his old acquaintance from the Norwegian court Duggáll mac Ruairi (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1954, c–cxii, esp. cvi–cvii; see *Sturlunga saga*, II 524). While the link between Orkney and Iceland was more significant (Almqvist 1978–79, 1991, Jesch 2005), the degree of Hebridean contact with the court and religious houses of Norway reveals this as an alternative route for the sharing of information.

It is not necessarily the case that those who were bilingual at this period could read, let alone write, both tongues, though some clerics may have been tri-lingually literate. But hearing something read aloud in a running translation from a text in another language would have posed no more difficulty than simultaneous translation does today, at least once the reader had become familiar with an accepted pronunciation and writing style. There is no reason why a person literate in Irish and competent in Norse, with the means to own or borrow a manuscript, might not read aloud in Norway from an Irish text, providing a translation as he went: indeed, such practice mirrors the reading of Latin texts in such settings. The rendering of Irish personal names in Norse in a manner that reproduces their sound rather than the Irish orthography suggests that they were *heard* as spoken by someone who knew the correct pronunciation rather than copied from one written text to another.

Where could this occur? The court seems better suited than a monastic context to the themes of the Clontarf episode, and to the echoes from the saga of the royal predecessor of Magnús lagabætir, the saintly Óláfr Haraldsson. His role in bringing law to Norway is echoed by the presentation of Brian as a just and merciful exemplum of royal power, who came from a land that, like Norway, stood at the ends of Christendom, yet had the attributes and rightful governance that Christianity provided. Óláfr helgi is not an isolated example of royal sanctity and death in a righteous cause, but is complemented by the Irish king Brian, who like him is a just king to whom law and good rule are attributed. The contemporary king has accepted the role of law-maker and source of legal retribution, further increasing the hold of Christendom, and the old heathen law of the blood feud is dismissed.

Were there people who could have read an Irish text to this audience? Apart from anonymous clerics, we know of one person with the education

and the opportunity. As mentioned earlier, Hákon Hákonarson's most enthusiastic Hebridean supporter in 1263 was Duggáll [Dufgall] mac Ruairi, the father-in-law of Aedh Ua Conchobhair of Connacht. Duggáll never submitted to Scotland at the Treaty of Perth, but died in 1268, his end marked in the annals of Iceland, Loch Cé and Connacht. His brother Aleinn, who continued the family line, submitted to Scotland. Duggáll's son Eiríkr acted in the Hebrides on behalf of Magnús after Hákon's death, then at the Treaty of Perth in 1265 took advantage of a clause which he may have composed, and removed with all his goods to Norway. Here he pursued a diplomatic career at the court at which the Icelander Sturla composed his sagas of Hákon and later Magnús. Eiríkr died in 1287 (*Árna saga biskups* 1998, 170–71).

Eiríkr's chosen career indicates a literate man, and his background indicates one rich enough to buy or commission a manuscript of at least part of the *Cogadh*. His entourage must have included people from his native land (possibly one named Tadc?), some of whom, like his uncle Aleinn, may have spent time with his sister in Connacht and the Cistercian abbey at Boyle where the *Annals of Loch Cé* were later compiled. If a copy of the relevant part of the *Cogadh* were in the possession of someone who could read it, such as a member of this entourage or even Eiríkr himself, the Clontarf portion would have been of interest at the Norwegian court. Magnús's Danish queen had literary tastes, and there were people who had been on the 1263 expedition. There may have been other less prominent families, some with literate clerics in their midst, who similarly crossed the ocean and the linguistic barriers of the time, and could similarly have undertaken the reading and translation. The timespan is limited for Hebridean patronage of a work for the Norwegian court, but it tallies with the period of composition of *Njáls saga*.

The author of *Njáls saga* was not necessarily present himself during a reading, for he could have relied on the account of someone who had been there and had memorised what they had heard, in the manner frequently adopted by oral storytellers. Hamer (2014) favours the authorship of this saga by a monastic writer, for whom the skill of memorising and repeating texts, whether heard or read, was essential, and was constantly practised in those orders that followed the Benedictine (including Cistercian) rule. Whoever the author was, and whether he heard the Irish text himself or received it from someone who had, he then reworked it and elevated Muirchertach's Ua Brian ancestor from the hero of a secular story to one on a par with St Óláfr. The author does this while moving the narrative of *Njáls saga* from its Icelandic to its international focus.

Conclusion

A reading of the end of *Njáls saga* indicates a knowledge of Irish accounts of the Battle of Clontarf, especially the closing scenes of the *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaibh*. There has long been a belief that the author of the Icelandic saga used as one of his sources a lost saga of Brian, though opinions diverge on what this contained and what its sources were. It is proposed here that, while the circulation of oral tradition in Iceland and Norway is acknowledged, the main source is the Irish work itself, retold in translation, rather than a lost Icelandic saga.

There were opportunities in the Norse world for renewal and extension of the oral record during the overwintering of Norway's King Magnús berfœttr and his followers at the court of Muirchertach Ó Briain in 1102–03. Another opportunity to acquire further information on Brian and the Battle arose during the 1263 campaign of Hákon Hákonarson. On the earlier occasion it would have been common knowledge that Muirchertach was the grandson of Tadc, and probably that Tadc was not himself present at the battle of Clontarf. During the later period, most contact was with the Connacht Ua Conchobhair dynasty, but the leading figures of the Ua Briain dynasty, Muirchertach and his father Tairdelbach, son of Tadc, would have been known. The main source of information is sympathetic to the Ua Briain, and the obvious text is the final section of the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gaillaibh*. This may have been one of the slightly different textual variations that are known to have existed. Otherwise a strong alternative source must be surmised for the inclusion in the narrative of Brian's son Tadc.

Given the difference of language and the lack of evidence of a patron who might commission a translation in Iceland, this paper proposes that the account was read and verbally translated at the Norwegian court. Here there was an understandable interest in this battle in which Norsemen took part, and which mirrored a recent expedition to western lands by a long-reigning and recently deceased monarch. This reading was heard and memorised by the author of *Njáls saga* or one of his informants. Not every detail was recalled or used: for example, Gormflaith is said not to have been the mother of Brian's sons, when she was in fact the mother of one of them. The saga author reworked the material and included elements from oral sources and from other written works, especially Snorri Sturluson's *Óláfs saga helga*. This enabled him to depict the rule of law as most fully manifest within Christendom and under a Christian monarch. Brian, like Óláfr, defeats paganism and disorder, and, though he dies in the process, his blood, like that of Óláfr, mirrors the healing blood of Christ.

An Icelander who had attended, or heard accounts of, the court of King Magnús and observed the attention given to constructing the new laws for the Norwegian domains may have considered that the giving up of his nation's independence had its benefits, in that after years of internal violence it brought laws backed by royal enforcement. While its passage across the North Atlantic to Iceland can now only be surmised in the light of the possible context, this international perspective adds to the subtle and complex study of redemption, law and society presented by *Njáls saga*.

Note: Thanks are due to staff at the libraries of the University of Nottingham and National University of Ireland, Galway, especially in Special Collections; to the Moore Institute of NUI Galway for a 2017 Fellowship; to those who heard and commented on this paper in draft, especially Clare Downham and Judith Jesch; to the editors of *Saga-Book* for editorial comments; and to the late Donnchadh Ó Corráin for fruitful disagreement.

Bibliography

- Adémar de Chabannes 1897. *Chronicum Aquitanicum et Francicum*. Ed. Jules Chavanon. <https://archive.org/stream/chronique00aduoft#page/176/mode/2up>
- Almqvist, Bo 1978–79. ‘Scandinavian and Celtic Folklore Contacts in the Earldom of Orkney’. *Saga-Book* XX: 1–2, 80–105.
- Almqvist, Bo 1991. *Viking Ale: Studies on Folklore Contacts between the Northern and the Western World*. Ed. Éibhlín Ní Dhuibhne-Almqvist and Séamus Ó Catháin.
- Andersson, Theodore M., trans., 2003. *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason. Oddr Snorrason*. *Islandica* LII.
- Árna saga biskups 1998. In *Biskupa saga* III. Ed. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir. Íslenzk fornrit XVII, 1–212.
- Beuermann, Ian 1998. *Man amongst Kings and Bishops*.
- Beuermann, Ian 2011. ‘Conclusion: The long adaptation of Pagan and Christian ideologies of Rulership’. In *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages. Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*. Ed. Gro Steinsland et al., 367–85.
- Bugge, Alexander, ed. and trans., 1905. *Caithréim Chellacháin Cháisil: the Victorious Career of Cellachan of Cashel, or the Wars between the Irishmen and the Norsemen in the middle of the 10th century*.
- Bugge, Sophus 1889–90. *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*.
- Bugge, Sophus 1908. *Norsk sagaskrivning og sagafortælling i Irland*.
- Caithréim Thoirdehalhaigh 1929. Ed. Standish Hayes O’Grady with Robin Flower.
- Casey, Denis 2013. ‘A reconsideration of the authorship and transmission of *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh*’. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 113 C, 1–23.

- Chesnutt, Michael 1968. 'An Unsolved Problem in Old Norse-Icelandic Literary History'. *Mediaeval Scandinavia* I, 122–37.
- Christiansen, Reidar Th. 1931. *The Vikings and Viking Wars in Irish and Gaelic Tradition*.
- Cogadh = Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh, The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* 1867. Ed. J. H. Todd.
- Cormack, Margaret 1993. 'Saints and Sinners: Reflections on Death in some Icelandic sagas'. *Gripla* VIII, 187–218.
- Diplomatarium Norvegicum XIX–XX* 1915. Ed. Alexander Bugge.
- Downham, Clare 2014. 'The "annalistic section" of *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*'. *Peritia* 24–25, 141–72.
- Downham, Clare 2015. 'Stylistic Contrast and Narrative Function in *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*'. *Irish Historical Studies* 39, 553–72.
- Downham, Clare 2017. 'Scottish Affairs and the Political Context of *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*'. In *Traversing the Inner Seas. Contacts and Continuity in and around Scotland, the Hebrides, and the North of Ireland*. Ed. Christian Cooijmans, 86–107.
- Duffy, Seán 2014. *Brian boru and The Battle of Clontarf*.
- Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1935. *Um Njálu*.
- Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1954. 'Formáli'. In *Njáls saga*, v–clxiii.
- Gísli Sigurðsson 2000. *Gaelic Influence in Iceland*.
- Gísls þáttir Illugasonar*. In *Biskupa sögur* I, 2003. Edited by Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson and Peter Foote. Íslenzk fornrit XV, 317–35.
- Goedheer, A. J. 1938. *Irish and Norse Traditions about the Battle of Clontarf*.
- Hamer, Andrew 2014. *Njáls saga and its Christian Background: A Study of Narrative Method*.
- Heimskringla* I–III 1941–51. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI–XXVIII.
- Helgi Guðmundsson 1967. *Um Kjalnesinga sögu*. *Studia Islandica* XXVI.
- Hennessey, William M., ed., 1871. *The Annals of Loch Cé*.
- Hines, John 2002. *Old-Norse Sources for Gaelic History*. Quiggin Pamphlets on the Sources of Medieval Gaelic History 5.
- Hudson, Benjamin 2003. 'Brjáns saga'. *Medium Ævum* LLL1, 242–68.
- Jesch, Judith 1987. 'Early Christians in Iceland—a Case Study'. *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 3, 117–36.
- Jesch, Judith 1998. 'Herfid's Song on the Battle of Clontarf (1014)' and '*Daradarljóð* (11th or 12th century)'. In *The Triumph Tree: Scotland's Earliest Poetry, 550–1350*. Ed. Thomas Owen Clancy, 164–68.
- Jesch, Judith 2005. 'The literature of medieval Orkney'. In 'The World of Orkneyinga Saga'. Ed. O. Owen. *The Orcadian*, 11–24.
- Konungs skuggsjá* 1983. Ed. Ludvig Holm-Olsen.
- Leabhar Oiris* 1904. Ed. R. I. Best. In 'The Leabhar Oiris', *Eriu* I, 74–109.
- Lehmann, Karl and Hans Schnorr von Carolsfeld 1883. *Die Njáls saga insbesondere in ihren juristischen Bestandtheilen. Ein kritischer Beitrag zur altnordischen Rechts- und Literaturgeschichte*.

- Lindow, John 2008. 'St Olaf and the Skalds'. In *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*. Ed. Thomas duBois, 103–27.
- Lönnroth, Lars 1976. *Njáls saga: A Critical Introduction*.
- Lydon, James 1988. 'Lordship and Crown: Llywelyn of Wales and O'Connor of Connacht'. In *The British Isles 1100–1500*. Ed. R. R. Davies, 48–63.
- Mac Carthy, B., ed. and trans., 1892. *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus No. 830, Texts, Translations and Indices*.
- McDonald, R. Andrew 1995. 'Images of Hebridean Lordship in the Late Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries: the Seal of Raonall Mac Sorley'. *Scottish Historical Review* 74, 129–43.
- McDonald, R. Andrew 1997. *The Kingdom of the Isles: Scotland's South-west Seaboard c. 1100–1336*.
- McDonald, R. Andrew 2007. *Manx kingship in its Irish Sea setting 1187–1229: King Rognvaldr and the Crovan Dynasty*.
- McGettigan, Darren 2014. *The Battle of Clontarf—Good Friday 1014*.
- Ní Mhaonaigh, Máire 1995. 'Cogad Gáedhel re Gallaib: Some Dating Considerations'. *Peritia* 9, 355–77.
- Ní Mhaonaigh, Máire 2007. *Brian boru: Ireland's greatest King?*
- Ní Mhaonaigh, Máire 2012. 'A neglected account of the battle of Clontarf'. *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 59, 143–68.
- Ní Úrdail, Meidhbhín, ed. and trans., 2011. *Cath Chluana Tarbh: the Battle of Clontarf*.
- Njáls saga = Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954. Ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit XII.
- Ó Corráin, Donnchadh 1972. *Ireland before the Normans*.
- Ó Corráin, Donnchadh 1998. 'Viking Ireland: Afterthoughts'. In *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*. Ed. H. B. Clarke, M. Ní Mhaonaigh and R. Ó Floinn, 421–52.
- Ó Corráin, Donnchadh 2015. 'Vikings in Ireland: the Catastrophe'. In *The Vikings in Ireland and Beyond: before and after the Battle of Clontarf*. Ed. Howard B. Clarke and Ruth Johnson, 485–98.
- Orkneyinga saga* 1965. Ed. Finnboði Guðmundsson. Íslenzk fornrit XXXIV.
- Poole, Russell 1991. *Viking Poems on War and Peace. A Study in Skaldic Narrative*.
- Power, Rosemary 2000. 'Cursing the King: An Irish Conversation in *Jóns saga helga*'. *Saga-Book* XXV, 310–13.
- Power, Rosemary 2005. 'Meeting in Norway: Norse-Gaelic relations in the Kingdom of Man and the Isles, 1090–1270'. *Saga-Book* XXIX, 5–66.
- Power, Rosemary 2013. 'Norse-Gaelic contacts: genres and transmission'. *Journal of the North Atlantic*, Special Volume 4, 19–25.
- Regesta Norvegica* I 1989.
- Ryan, John 1938. 'The Battle of Clontarf'. *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 68, 1–50.
- Sellar, David 1966. 'The origins and ancestry of Somerled'. *Scottish Historical Review* 45, 123–42.
- Sellar, David 2000. 'Hebridean Sea-kings: the Successors of Somerled, 1164–

- 1316'. In *Alba: Celtic Scotland in the Medieval Era*. Ed. E. J. Cowan and R. A. McDonald, 187–218.
- Skórzewska, Joanna 2011. 'Family Matters? The *Cultus* of the Scandinavian Royal Martyrs'. In *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages. Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*. Ed. Gro Steinsland et al., 329–65.
- Sturlunga saga* 1946. Ed. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn.
- Swift, Catherine 2015. 'Celtic berserkers and feeble steersmen: Hiberno-Scandinavian military culture in Middle Irish Literature'. In *The Vikings in Ireland and Beyond: before and after the Battle of Clontarf*. Ed. Howard B. Clarke and Ruth Johnson, 451–69.
- Swift, Catherine 2016. 'Chivalry, Saracens and the *chansons de geste* of Brian Boru'. *Medieval Dublin* XV, 119–40.
- Swift, Catherine 2017. 'Hunting for the genetic legacy of Brian Boru in Irish historical sources'. *Medieval Dublin* XVI, 62–81.
- Westergaard-Nielsen, C., ed., 1971. *Skálholtsbók eldri. Jónsbók. Manuscript No. 351 Fol. in the Arnarnagnæan Collection*. Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile IX.
- Whaley, Diana 1991. *Heimskringla: An Introduction*.
- Woolf, Alex 2003. 'The diocese of Suðreyjar'. In *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537*. Ed. Steinar Imsen, 71–82.

FIGURA IN *NJÁLS SAGA*

BY HEATHER O'DONOGHUE
University of Oxford

*The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies delivered at
University College London on 2 March 2018.*

ON 27 MAY 1980, URSULA DRONKE gave the Dorothea Coke lecture on 'The role of sexual themes in *Njáls saga*' (Dronke 1981). It made a huge impression on me. It is a wonderful example of the results of bringing a highly refined literary sensibility, and a deep knowledge of Old Norse literature, to a literary masterpiece. But what compelled me so much were the implications of the word 'theme'. Themes in narrative don't just happen—they are the result of authorial choice. They have to be created, or at least, developed. They are part of the apparatus of fictionality.¹

I suppose that very few of us any longer imagine that family sagas such as *Njáls saga* simply record 'what happened'—and I think we all recognise the literary skill with which the author has managed a very complex narrative. But it still seems natural to read family sagas as dominated by characters and events with some basis in historical actuality, operating in the plausible social dynamics of a real-world setting with naturalistic causality and motive. Themed narrative, however, transcends this. The implications of Ursula Dronke's lecture—the authorial creation of theme as a narrative element above and beyond the construction of a naturalistic storyline—have stayed with me. I hope today to extend still further our appreciation of the literary artistry of the author of *Njáls saga*, a text admired more for its spare narrative style than for its rhetorical artifice.

Saga-writers tend not to avail themselves of the techniques which Wayne C. Booth (1983) called 'the rhetoric of fiction': telling us what characters are thinking, playing with chronology, intervening in the narrative, setting scenes with detailed description, and so on. But in what follows, I want to demonstrate the deployment in *Njáls saga* of what is clearly a rhetorical

¹ I'm not sure that the term 'theme' was being used in any very technical sense in that lecture, although what some critics call 'thematics' was, in 1980, undergoing an interesting revival after a period of dormancy. It may be that nowadays such a tricky term would have been done away with altogether, and the lecture entitled 'The Role of the Sexual in *Njáls saga*'. See Sollers 1993.

device, a literary technique which, following Erich Auerbach, but with some significant caveats, I will provisionally term ‘figura’. According to Auerbach, ‘figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events, the first of which signifies not only itself, but also the second’ (1959, 53). Figural interpretation is of course associated primarily with biblical typology—the prefiguring of events in the New Testament by events in the Old Testament, a technique vividly evident for example in the cycles of medieval Mystery plays (see Woolf 1957). I will not be at all concerned with the theological application of this technique (and I leave entirely open the possibility that the saga author developed his own use of figura from the practices of biblical exegesis). But for our purposes, a key aspect of Auerbach’s ‘figura’ is that—as opposed to symbol, or allegory—the two events, or figures, in each pair both have what he calls ‘historicity’ in equal measure. In relation to *Njáls saga*, I take ‘historicity’ to mean having actuality in the *diegesis*, or storyworld—in other words, that the two events or figures ‘actually’ take place or exist in the narrative; that one of them does not simply stand for, or evoke, an abstract concept. In what follows, I shall propose a carefully crafted figural relationship between the episode in which Hildigunnr spreads Hǫskuldr’s bloody cloak over Flosi’s shoulders, and the action of the poem *Darraðarljóð*, quoted as part of a narrative event towards the end of the saga.

As Carol J. Clover (1986, 141) has rightly asserted, ‘the encounter between Hildigunnr and Flosi in chapter 116 of *Njáls saga* is surely one of the most vividly emotional scenes in all of saga literature’. In spite of its remarkable emotional charge, however, several details in the way the scene is narrated are puzzling. Nevertheless, the scene itself forms a compelling narrative climax whilst being seamlessly integrated into the narrative flow of the saga. By contrast, the inclusion, towards the end of the saga, of the Eddic-style poem known as *Darraðarljóð* has a distinctly disruptive effect. The author of *Njáls saga* does not systematically incorporate verses into his narrative, and even amongst sagas which do so, the quotation of a whole poem, or sequence of stanzas, is unusual (see O’Donoghue 2005). Further, the quotation of Eddic-style verse, with its characteristically supernatural, or anonymous speakers, is a feature of *fornaldarsögur* and *samtíðarsögur*; not family sagas (see Quinn 1987). *Darraðarljóð* is introduced into the saga narrative as an element in one of the portents heralding the Battle of Clontarf (see McGettigan 2013). And yet the poem, and the portent of which it forms a part, is quoted *after* the account of the battle, which is both logically odd, and runs markedly (and doubly) counter to the usually strict chronological order in which events are narrated in family sagas. The

poem itself, even though not in *dróttkvætt* metre, is difficult to interpret because of its dense and complex imagery, and it has been suggested that the events to which it refers do not even relate to the Battle of Clontarf itself, but to a different, earlier encounter between Irish and Scandinavian forces (Poole 1991, 120–25). Both of these cryptic and unsettling elements in the saga—the dramatic encounter between Hildigunnr and Flosi, on the one hand, and the weird recitation of the valkyrie verses of *Darraðarljóð* on the other—presage violent events of monumental significance and far-ranging implication within their different contexts: the burning of Njáll in the saga, and the Battle of Clontarf in early medieval history. And in both, the violence is heralded by female speech and action. I shall argue in what follows that these two narrative events, in spite of being so very different, have a quasi-figural relationship in the saga narrative, and further, that the connexions between the two are not limited to the broad parallels I’ve just outlined. I want to begin with a close reading of the episode of the encounter between Hildigunnr and Flosi, paying special attention to those aspects of the narrative which are hardest to explain simply as naturalistic representations of character and event, because they imply that the saga author had another purpose in mind.

When Flosi Þórðarson hears that the sons of Njáll have killed Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði, we are told that he is both distressed and angry. Without demur or consultation he at once assumes responsibility for taking over the case against the Njálssons. Flosi’s niece Hildigunnr was Hǫskuldr’s wife, and it was Flosi himself who arranged the marriage, but he is not a blood relative of the dead man, and William Ian Miller (2014, 201) raises a question he calls ‘troubling’: ‘Why is it’, he asks, ‘that everyone looks to [Flosi] as the man who will be responsible for taking action over the death of Hǫskuldr?’ Miller himself argues that it is simply because Flosi has emerged as a natural leader in the kin group, and certainly Hildigunnr is shown to be expecting his visit to her, and indeed making what prove to be controversial preparations for his arrival. Before he sets off, Flosi prudently consults Runólfr Úlfsson, whom he describes as *sannorðr ok kominn nær frétt* ‘truthful, and with close knowledge’, and Runólfr warns him to follow a course which will result in the least trouble—presumably, a legal settlement at the Althing. Flosi accepts this advice, but with an important reservation: *nema til verra dragi um en vera skyldi* ‘unless things take more of a turn for the worse than they should’. It is thus assumed that the duty of taking action over the death of Hǫskuldr should fall to Flosi, but—and this is a crucial distinction—not necessarily that he will go for blood vengeance. Flosi himself leaves this possibility open—in other

words, the saga author has created a situation in which a character, Flosi, will need to be goaded into blood vengeance. This, then, is the context of Flosi's encounter with Hildigunnr.

It is clear from Flosi's arrival that he and Hildigunnr are already at odds, and that their expectations are quite different. Her overly effusive welcome—'*Kom heill ok sæll, frændi, ok er nú fegit hjarta mitt tilkvámu þinni*' 'Be welcome and blessed, kinsman; and now my heart rejoices at your coming'—is met with a cool response from Flosi: '*Hér skal vér eta dagverð ok riða síðan*' 'We'll have a meal here and then be on our way'. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, picking up on this disparity, describes the register of her welcome as 'obviously and doubtlessly biblical' (1971, 31; see Clover 1986, 175).

Flosi also rejects two oddly problematical gestures of hospitality offered by Hildigunnr. She has ordered a high seat to be prepared for Flosi, but Flosi flings it aside and refuses to sit on it. Similarly, when he is given a towel to dry his hands, having washed them preparatory to eating, he sees that it is full of holes, and torn off at one end, and he flings that away too; in both cases the same verb in the same form—*kastaði*—is used of Flosi's action. Flosi goes on to tear a strip off Hildigunnr's tablecloth to dry his hands on, and flings that—again, *kastaði* is used—at his men, an action I shall return to in due course. Clover suggests that Hildigunnr 'assails [Flosi] with mnemonics from the moment he walks through the door', arguing that the empty high seat is a visual reminder of Hǫskuldr's absence, which she is hoping Flosi will fill, and the towel full of holes 'one of the most venerable and widespread emblemata of widowhood . . . meant to represent the torn fabric of her, and by extension, Flosi's, family now that Hǫskuldr has been slain'.² Both offerings would therefore symbolically designate Flosi as the one to deal with the case, but Flosi unambiguously rejects them—even though, as we have seen from his consultation with Runólfr, he has already accepted legal responsibility.

When Hildigunnr asks Flosi how he will follow up the case, and what assistance he is prepared to give her, Flosi, following Runólfr's advice, advises that he will take the legal route, prosecuting the case to the full extent of the law, or going for an honourable settlement. Hildigunnr, however, wants blood vengeance, and asserts that had Hǫskuldr been in Flosi's position, he would have taken vengeance on Flosi's killers. We can now refine our reading of Hildigunnr's setting up of the high seat: she is

² Clover 1986, 176. See also Einar Ól.'s note to his edition of the saga (*Njáls saga*, 290, n. 7).

not simply leaving it empty, as a vivid reminder of Hǫskuldr's absence, or offering it to Flosi in the hope that that he will fill the gap Hǫskuldr's death has left, but further, literally—physically—trying to put him in Hǫskuldr's position. Flosi's own response—he says that she has no need to mock him by offering the high seat to him, since he is neither king nor earl—suggests that, as with her inappropriately fulsome (and therefore eloquently needy) welcome to him, he feels that Hildigunnr is trying too hard to flatter him into helping her. But his violent rebuttal of the high seat may additionally be understood by the saga audience as his first rebuttal of the role of blood avenger. We do not need to assume that Flosi himself recognises the import of Hildigunnr's hospitality. It may simply be that her symbolic offerings function as dramatic irony: they are a message to the saga audience. Flosi's response to the invitation to the high seat—apparently, that its inappropriateness mocks him—confirms that his understanding of her gesture might be different from ours.

What, then, of the rejection of the towel? As we have seen, Clover sees the towel itself as symbolic of Hildigunnr's widowhood and the damage done to her family. But with its holes perhaps evoking Hǫskuldr's wounds—we are told that although Skarpheðinn struck the first blow, all the attackers joined in—it must surely not only recall Hǫskuldr's death but also prefigure the histrionic heart of the episode, Hildigunnr's dramatic production of the actual cloak Hǫskuldr was wearing when he was killed. When Hildigunnr produces that cloak, originally a gift from Flosi and thus intensifying Flosi's obligation, she puts it round Flosi's shoulders. This time she succeeds in putting Flosi in Hǫskuldr's position, and very shockingly.

Between the two rejected offers, the rejected offer of the high seat and the rejected offer of the holed and ragged towel, we are told that Hildigunnr and Flosi have a protracted private conversation, preceded by some unexplained but chillingly cold laughter from Hildigunnr. Miller (2014, 205) wonders if she is bent on finding out from Flosi whether he will accept the duty of blood vengeance, given that he has failed to take the high-seat hint.³ But in characteristic saga style, we are not told the upshot of the whispered conversation; this technique is what I have elsewhere dubbed a 'conspicuous silence', where the saga author purposefully draws our attention to something which is not articulated in the narrative (O'Donoghue, forthcoming). Having rejected the towel, Flosi tears a strip off the tablecloth to use as a towel instead. It is now that Hildigunnr puts on what is clearly a performance of grief, and publicly demands of

³ Miller also speculates, perhaps less persuasively, that the two may be hatching a collusive plan.

Flosi what he can do for her. He gives his legalistic answer, which is so disappointing to her, and she declares that Hǫskuldr would have taken vengeance if he were in Flosi's position, following this up by wrapping Flosi in Hǫskuldr's bloody cloak.

Both Clover and Miller see Hildigunnr's actions as part of a performance—'a ritual with a big R', as Miller puts it (2014, 202). Clover, whilst drawing on Miller's suggestion of a literary topos of a 'bloody token' ritual going back to Old Testament precedents, further argues that this ritual, especially as enacted here by Hildigunnr, may have had its roots in a 'real-life practice' of mourning and lamentation.⁴ But the best symbols in literature are surely multivalent. Thus for example, in a helpful list of earlier scholars' interpretations of the holed towel, Clover draws our attention to Einar Ólafur's parallel with an episode in *Guðmundar saga Arasonar*, in which Bishop Guðmundur is served a meal on a tablecloth full of holes. Guðmundur draws a witty and self-deprecating parallel with the future course of his own career: 'my bishopric will fare accordingly: it will be full of holes'.⁵ Einar Ólafur's point is a straightforward one: 'Both Guðmundur and Flosi interpret [a] torn cloth symbolically' (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1971, 37). I would only pause here to note that the holes in the towel are not the same as its torn edge: the towel is both holed *and* torn, and I will argue that that these two kinds of damage have separate but cumulative significances. I want also to emphasise how surprising it is to establish a symbolic relationship between the ragged towel which is a mundane, even squalid domestic object, and the cloak, which is a particularly fine one.

As we have seen, the cloak was a present from Flosi to Hǫskuldr, who was wearing it when he was killed by the Njálssons. It is described by the saga author as *skarlatsskikkj[a]*, *ok váru á hløð í skaut ofan* 'a scarlet cloak, and it was all decorated down the front' (*Njáls saga*, 279). It is puzzling that what seems to be a very high-status garment was being worn by Hǫskuldr to do routine farm work, not on some special occasion. And then there's the detail of the torn edge of the towel, which Flosi replicates by tearing the tablecloth, and flinging it at his men just as he flung away the towel itself. We learn of a strip of fabric being detached—and thrown aside—in chapter 31 of *Vatnsdæla saga*, when a man dressed in notably fine clothes gets the hem of his garment muddy, and rather than remaining mud-spattered, profligately cuts off the bottom few inches of the fabric and throws it away. It is not, of course, a very exact parallel, but there is still a little more to say about it.

⁴ Clover 1986, 176. See further Miller 1982 and 1983.

⁵ Clover 1986, 177, referencing Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1971, 37.

The garment which trailed in the mud in *Vatnsdæla saga* is described as *slæður af góðu klæði* (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 84)—*slæður* being a plural noun to denote some sort of formal clothing, here described as being made from fine fabric. Significantly enough, *slæður* also occurs further on in *Njáls saga*—in another hard-to-read scene—to denote the controversial garment which Njáll adds to the compensation pile when a precarious settlement has been reached with Flosi and his allies. That *slæður* might have been a sexually ambiguous garment is not even hinted at in any of its other occurrences in saga literature,⁶ but Njáll's strange unwillingness to own up to having donated it, Flosi's offence at its inclusion and the string of sexual insults which subsequently erupts, suggest that this might well be the case. It may be relevant to recall here the decorative trim on Hǫskuldr's cloak, designated by the term *hlað*. The word is translated in Cleasby-Vigfusson as 'lace', a tempting connexion given the importance of holes in the cloak, but this may be misleading.⁷ It is certainly the case that the word *hlað* is often used as an element in a skaldic kenning for a woman, or as an element in a woman's name, as, for example, in the name of Egill's wife's mother in *Egils saga*: Þóra hlaðhǫnd (*hlað*-sleeve, or -hand). Cleasby-Vigfusson suggests that this naming practice is due to *hlað* being an element in female dress, but I would argue that it must be just as much to do with women being responsible for the production of this kind of fabric decoration. In stanza 26 of *Guðrúnarkviða ǫnnur*, for example, women engage in *hlað*-weaving (*Eddukvæði* 2014, II 358). And valkyries weaving fabric is the central premise of *Darraðarljóð*. I will come back to this persistent set of associations in *Njáls saga*.

It could be argued that the *slæður* derail the settlement because those present in the narrative scene make the link between this garment—particularly expensive *silki**slæður*—and Hǫskuldr's valuable gift from Flosi, which he was wearing (somewhat improbably, remember) when he was murdered. Its addition to the pile might then be tactless, rather than deliberately provocative. As long ago as 1992, Judith Jesch, while endorsing what she termed the 'usual explanation' that the addition of the controversial garment implied a sexual insult, pointed out that it would remind Flosi of Hildigunnr's use of Hǫskuldr's cloak in the whetting scene (Jesch 1992, 72–73). It is clear at the very least that cloaks are inflammatory objects in this saga, and can powerfully propel events in the narrative.

After the murder, Hǫskuldr's cloak has been retrieved by Hildigunnr and packed away in a chest, still covered in the blood she had wiped from her

⁶ For example, Arinbjörn's gift to Egill in chapter 67 of *Egils saga*.

⁷ See rather Falk 1919, 32–35.

husband's corpse. She now uses it, successfully at last, to incite Flosi to blood vengeance. As Miller notes, the fact that Flosi gave Hǫskuldr the cloak perhaps carries with it implications of Flosi's obligations towards Hǫskuldr, in that it 'obliges the giver to warrant his gift'.⁸ And as I have argued, it is also used by Hildigunnr to put Flosi in Hǫskuldr's position when she dresses him in her dead husband's cloak, giving dramatic and symbolic life to Hildigunnr's assertion that Hǫskuldr would have avenged Flosi *if he had been in Flosi's position*.

However, there is no doubt that the most dramatic aspect of Hǫskuldr's cloak is the blood which rains down from it—*dunði þá blóðit* 'the blood then rained down'—when Hildigunnr unwraps it, showering Flosi. This brings me (at last) to the inclusion in the saga of the mysterious poem *Darraðarljóð*, which, in so far as we can interpret its cryptic imagery, also involves women presaging and/or causing death, the tearing of cloth, and blood raining down from a piece of fabric.

Blood rain is not a singular occurrence in Old Norse literature. One celebrated example is the shower which falls on Þorgunna and her hay in chapter 51 of *Eyrbyggja saga*. In *Njáls saga* itself we are told of several occurrences of blood rain. In chapter 156 boiling blood is said to have rained down on Bróðir and his men before the battle of Clontarf, and that though they used their shields as umbrellas, many were burned. After the battle—and after the saga author quotes the poem *Darraðarljóð*—it is said that a certain priest's vestments became bloody. Before the burning, Njall has a vision of his table and food covered in blood (chapter 127), and much earlier in the saga, in chapter 72, blood appears on Gunnarr's halberd. All of these bloody visions presage death and violence. John S. P. Tatlock (1914) has shown that blood rain was a widespread phenomenon in many medieval texts, and occurs as a portent in Homer and Hesiod. However, I want to focus on the stranger occurrence of blood raining down from a piece of fabric.

According to *Njáls saga*, on the morning of the battle, portents of the coming slaughter were seen in various places, and were in various forms. As I have noted, these portents are rather oddly recounted after the narrative of the battle itself. The first to be mentioned is said to have happened in Caithness in Scotland, as a man called Ðorruðr (his name almost certainly a back-formation from a mention in the poem of the *vef darraðar*, a difficult phrase which has given us the name of the poem itself) sees twelve

⁸ Miller 2014, 204. Miller sets out further possibilities still: for example, that giving back the cloak might somehow imply that Flosi was not a worthy man to accept a gift from, thus challenging him to prove otherwise by exacting vengeance.

people (interestingly, not yet specified as women) ride into a woman's room. Inside the room, *Þorruðr* can make out twelve women weaving at a gruesome loom: the loom weights are men's heads, and the fabric is woven from men's intestines. He hears them speaking (or chanting) verses: the poem itself, usually known as *Darraðarljóð*.⁹

Margaret Clunies Ross's literal translation of the difficult opening lines demonstrates a remarkable similarity to what *Hildigunnr* does with *Höskuldr*'s cloak: 'the swinging cloud of the warp-beam is widely thrown [or spread] in anticipation of slaughter-fall; it rains with blood' (1998, 114). Here, the kenning 'cloud of the warp-beam' designates a piece of fabric: the base word of the kenning, 'cloud' can be generalised to suggest any (more or less) two-dimensional covering object (like a cloud) which through the determinant, 'warp-beam', is associated with a weaving loom, thus denoting a piece of cloth. The word-play is obvious: to use the word 'cloud' in association with (blood) rain is strikingly appropriate, and here the blood rains down because the valkyries have fashioned the fabric of bloody body parts.

In the saga, then, *Hildigunnr* enacts in a naturalistic manner the eerie opening of *Darraðarljóð*—she spreads the bloody cloak in anticipation and indeed furtherance of *Flosi*'s slaughterous revenge. *Hildigunnr*'s name is a compound of two of the valkyrie names in *Darraðarljóð*, *Hildir* and *Gunnr*, though whether her name suggested the names in the poem, or vice versa, I cannot say. Finally, we learn from the saga prose that having sung their song, the valkyries tear the cloth down from the loom and rip it apart, so that each is left holding one fragment, which of course recalls *Flosi*'s strange action in tearing off a strip of tablecloth to dry his hands on, having rejected the torn towel.

In a very insightful and illuminating article exploring links between weaving and women's laments, Fabienne Michelet (2002) calls weaving the 'voix féminine métaphorique' (metaphorical female voice), arguing that in Eddic verse and in *Völsunga saga* women's voices are ignored except when they are used for lament or for whetting, but that weaving can be a way of relaying the female voice through a material symbol. We see, for instance, *Guðrún* in *Guðrúnarkviða önnur* creating images of warfare by weaving with *Þóra Hákonardóttir*, or *Brynhildir*, observed by *Sigurðr* as she works images of his own heroic deeds into her tapestry: both produce the feminine equivalent of textual memorialisation. Of course, in *Njáls saga* *Hildigunnr* is in no way responsible for the manufacture

⁹ For an interesting discussion of the women's room, or *dyngja*, and strange happenings in it, see Bek-Pedersen 2008.

of Hǫskuldr's cloak, although her action in spreading it over Flosi may be seen as a version of, or an alternative to, her verbal whetting—and in fact a more effective stimulus to action. But at this point I want to explore the tearing of fabric, an action fraught with possible symbolic meanings.

As Michelet notes, when, in *Vǫlsunga saga*, Brynhildr finds out that she should have been married to Sigurðr, she angrily *sló sinn borða svá at sundr gekk* 'struck her tapestry so [hard] that it tore apart' (Finch 1965, 54). Michelet argues persuasively that Brynhildr's action here symbolises her violent refusal to remain in union with her husband Gunnarr, suggesting that a woman making cloth is a sign of her acceptance of marital status and domesticity, and further, the weaving itself is figuring the function of the wife as the agent of the knitting together of two families—the peace-weaver. In tearing the fabric she has made, Brynhildr rejects all this. Indeed, if we understand the torn fabric to be the material depicting Sigurðr's heroic deeds, it is clear that Brynhildr is symbolically destroying Sigurðr himself, effectively, as Michelet (2002, 77) puts it, signing Sigurðr's death warrant. Finally, Michelet suggests, given the association of weaving and fate, we may read Brynhildr's destruction of her fabric as a gesture symbolising her attempted refusal of what fate has decreed for her.¹⁰ This brings us back to Flosi's tearing of the hand towel—might his action be a sign to the saga audience of his resistance to blood vengeance? Or perhaps Flosi is echoing the valkyries' tearing of the cloth in the prose context of the saga's quotation of *Darraðarljóð*, going along with what fate has decreed even though he does not yet recognise this.

It is impossible not to suppose that Hildigunnr, with her valkyrie name, and the valkyries of *Darraðarljóð*, are in a figural relationship, and that the two fabrics from which blood rains down are similarly connected. Indeed, one might reasonably suppose that one has inspired the creation of the other, although it is possible that the saga author simply knew two separate but similar episodes, and recognising the similarity boldly put them together in his narrative. I think it is possible too to see the saga author elaborating this basic figural relationship. To return for a moment to biblical typology, for example, it is indisputable that Abraham's son Isaac, the sacrificed son, is an Old Testament figure of the New Testament Christ. But in visual representations of the sacrifice of Isaac, he is depicted carrying the kindling wood for his own sacrifice on one shoulder—not a significant element in the biblical account—just as Christ carried his own Cross. Quite evidently, the medieval artist is

¹⁰ For another discussion of the relationship between weaving and fate, see Bek-Pedersen 2009.

purposefully elaborating and deepening the figural relationship here.¹¹ Is this not what we can see happening—to a quite extraordinary extent—in *Njáls saga*? While the fundamental resemblance between Hildigunnr and the valkyries, and between the two bloody cloths, is striking without any elaboration, yet we can discern a mass of echoes, some faint, some arresting, both underpinning and extending this basic similarity.

Hǫskuldr's cloak echoes backwards and forwards in the narrative of *Njáls saga*. The ragged towel Hildigunnr produces figures that cloak full of its holes, a connexion perhaps reinforced by association with the cloak and a discarded strip of fabric in *Vatnsdæla saga*. We do not know whether Flosi appreciates the symbolism or not, because, characteristically, the saga author leaves ambiguous Flosi's unspoken response: he may simply throw away the towel because he believes Hildigunnr has not shown him enough respect in providing such a shabby item. But the link is evident to us. At this point I would like to return to the disparity between the shabby towel and a valuable decorated cloak. We have here a good example of 'heterogeneous ideas . . . yoked . . . together', as Samuel Johnson described the figurative language of the metaphysical poets. It is interesting that yoked heterogeneity has been cited as one of the distinctive aesthetics of the skaldic kenning.¹² Further, we might note the stylistic and generic heterogeneity of the prose account of the whetting scene with its apparently naturalistic human characters, and the weird valkyrie verses of *Darraðarljóð*.

Thus, to recap, the unexpectedly grand cloak in which Hǫskuldr was murdered is recalled in the towel full of holes which Flosi is offered by Hildigunnr, and rejects. Flosi rips the towel, and similarly Dǫrruðr's valkyries rip their bloody cloth. Remarkably enough, there is even an oblique echo of Hildigunnr's presentation of the bloody cloak when Hróðný Hǫskuldsdóttir (the mother of Njáll's illegitimate son Hǫskuldr) incites her brother Ingjaldr *not* to take vengeance on Njáll and his sons, but rather, to help him: she produces the bloody and holed cap that this other Hǫskuldr was wearing when he was killed. These might be labelled intratextual references, knitting together the strands of the narrative through thematic, rather than causal, connections. But we have seen intertextual references too. In *Vatnsdæla saga* a strip of cloth is removed from the edge of a cloak, which for a saga audience—as for us—might well have reinforced the figural relationship of the cloak, the towel and the tablecloth in *Njáls saga*. Women rip fateful fabrics in the

¹¹ Rosemary Woolf (1957) details a number of these purposeful re-workings.

¹² See, for instance, Margaret Clunies Ross 2012, lxxxv.

Poetic Edda, and the valkyrie figure Brynhildr, like Hildigunnr, utters a chilling laugh in two Eddic poems when she successfully incites the murder of Sigurðr (*Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* 9; *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 30). More faintly, but clearly discernible, there is a sinister relationship between women, weaving and violence in a number of other sagas. The familial violence in *Gísla saga* is presaged when a man overhears what is being said in a women's weaving room. And even if it is only in one late manuscript of *Laxdoela saga* that Guðrún, having incited Bolli to kill Kjartan, acidly remarks that women and men may spend their mornings very differently—she has been weaving cloth while he has been out killing Kjartan—the association is clear (see Bek-Pedersen 2008, 172–74). I wonder too, if Guðrún's celebrated answer to the question of whom she loved most—'*Þeim var ek verst, er ek unna mest*' 'I was worst to him I loved the most'—is an oblique nod to the strange ambivalence of valkyries, who have been understood as taking as lovers their favourites to whom they decree death on the battlefield.¹³

It was customary, in pre-postmodern times, to praise literary texts for polished surfaces, homogeneous registers and smoothly motivated causalities. But in *Njáls saga* it has always paid to pay attention to what doesn't run smoothly: what doesn't fit, isn't explained, seems disjointed. This brings me back to the heterogeneous yoking I mentioned earlier. It is surely significant, for instance—but perhaps the subject of a whole other lecture—that Hildigunnr's biblical register, evident in her effusive welcome to Flosi, is dramatically reprised in the Christian formulae of her formal whetting calling for blood vengeance and the death of Hǫskuldr's killers: '*Skýt ek því til guðs ok goðra manna, at ek særi þik fyrir alla krapta Krists þíns . . .*' 'I call on God and good men that I swear by all the powers of your Christ . . .' (291). Similarly, in *Laxdæla saga*, the quasi-martyrdom of Kjartan is enacted while Guðrún, the Brynhildr figure in the saga's version of the underlying story, is weaving, like a valkyrie, having precipitated Bolli's death. William Miller (2014, 203) remarks in passing an intriguing connexion between the bloody cloak and saints' relics. Perhaps even more intriguingly, he traces what he calls the 'bloody token ritual' to an Old Testament story. In Judges 19, as Miller recounts, we read

an appalling tale that leads to a performance of the [bloody-token] ritual, when a Levite cuts up his gang-raped and murdered concubine into twelve pieces and sends her parts out to all Israel to summon them to exterminate the tribe of the perpetrators.

¹³ *Laxdæla saga* 1934, 228. For the most exhaustive study of valkyries in Old Norse tradition, and more widely, see Egeler 2011.

Although Miller does not make the connexion, I think we may see this vile story as the source of what happens to the bloody weaving in *Njáls saga*—for the twelve valkyries each take a piece of the cloth and six ride north, and six south.

So even though family saga narrative may be bare of very many of the rhetorical devices of fiction, when it comes to the use of figura and allusion it far exceeds the austere narrative style which has sometimes been attributed to it. It is evident that the author of *Njáls saga* was well able to yoke together very disparate kinds of material to produce a daring and elaborate example of something very close to what Auerbach called figura, and that further, saga writers could and did draw on a rich and varied body of material in their creation of a reverberant network of allusions.

Bibliography

- Auerbach, Erich 1959. 'Figura'. In *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*. Trans. Ralph Mannheim.
- Bek-Pedersen, Karen 2008. 'Weaving Swords and Rolling Heads: A Peculiar Space in Old Norse Tradition'. In *Space and Time in Europe: East and West, Past and Present*. Ed. M. Mencej, 167–80.
- Bek-Pedersen, Karen 2009. 'Fate and Weaving: Justification of a Metaphor'. *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5, 23–39.
- Booth, Wayne C. 1983. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2nd edition.
- Clover, Carol J. 1986. 'Hildigunnr's lament'. In *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*. Ed. John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, 141–83.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret 1998. *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820*.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret 2012. 'General Introduction'. In *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c.1035*. Ed. Diana Whaley. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1, xiii–xciii.
- Dronke, Ursula 1981. *The Role of Sexual Themes in Njáls saga*. *Eddukvæði* 2014. Ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason.
- Egeler, Matthias 2011. *Walküren, Bodbs, Sirenen. Gedanken zur religionsgeschichtlichen Anbindung Nordwesteuropas an den mediterranen Raum*.
- Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1971. *Njáls saga. A Literary Masterpiece*. Trans. Paul Schach.
- Falk, Hjalmar 1919. *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde: mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Terminologie*.
- Finch, R. G., ed. and trans., 1965. *The Saga of the Volsungs*.
- Jesch, Judith 1992. "'Good men" and peace in *Njáls saga*'. In *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njáls saga*. Ed. John Hines and Desmond Slay, 64–82.
- Laxdæla saga* 1934. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit V.
- McGettigan, Darren 2013. *The Battle of Clontarf: Good Friday 1014*.

- Michelet, Fabienne 2002. 'La plainte et le tissage: voix et action des personnages féminins dans les poèmes Eddaiques de l'Islande médiévale'. *Equinoxe* 23, 67–79.
- Miller, William Ian 1982. 'Justifying Skarpheðinn: Politics and Pretext in the Icelandic Bloodfeud'. *Scandinavian Studies* 55, 316–44.
- Miller, William Ian 1983. 'Choosing the Avenger: Some Aspects of the Bloodfeud in Medieval Iceland and England'. *Law and History Review* 1 (2), 159–204.
- Miller, William Ian 2014. 'Why is Your Axe Bloody?': A Reading of *Njals Saga*. *Njals saga = Brennu-Njals saga* 1954. Ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit XII.
- O'Donoghue, Heather 2005. *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*.
- O'Donoghue, Heather forthcoming. *Narrative in the Icelandic Sagas: Meanings of Time in Old Norse Literature*.
- Poole, Russell 1991. *Viking Poems on War and Peace*.
- Quinn, Judy 1987. 'The use of eddic poetry in the Contemporary Sagas'. *Frá Suðlegri Strönd* 3, 54–72.
- Sollers, Werner, ed., 1993. *The Return of Thematic Criticism*.
- Tatlock, John S. P. 1914. 'Some Mediaeval Cases of Blood Rain'. *Classical Philology* 9, 442–47.
- Vatnsdæla saga* 1939. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit VIII.
- Woolf, Rosemary 1957. 'The Effect of Typology on the English Mediaeval Plays of Abraham and Isaac'. *Speculum* 32(4), 805–25.

REVIEWS

SKALDIC POETRY OF THE SCANDINAVIAN MIDDLE AGES III. POETRY FROM TREATISES ON POETICS. Edited by KARI ELLEN GADE and EDITH MAROLD. *Brepols*. Turnhout, 2017. clii + 1359 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-51894-7.

Poetry from Treatises on Poetics is one of two new instalments (the other being *Poetry in fornaldarsögur*) from the collaborative Skaldic Project, which will eventually see the publication of the entire, re-edited skaldic corpus. As the volume editors note in their Introduction, stanzas cited in the poetic treatises represent an exceptionally diverse corpus, not only in terms of metre and style, as we would expect, but also in their subject-matter: royal panegyrics and descriptions of battle, sea-voyages and other aspects of courtly life sit side-by-side with eulogies to Christ, the Virgin Mary and other holy figures; ekphrastic works detailing the myths and legends of pre-Christian Scandinavia are interposed with laments about the sorrows caused by love or by leaving one's home. There is a sizable section devoted to the *pulur*, versified lists of poetic terms, along with a number of riddles, snippets of gnomic wisdom and a scurrilous lampoon or two. Spanning a period of just under half a century of poetic composition, the edition functions as an impressive snapshot of the sheer variety of the skaldic corpus.

Perhaps even more so than in other volumes in the series the work of the editors is key to making the stanzas presented in this volume accessible. As noted in the Introduction, most of the stanzas are cited in the poetic treatises with little information about their historical context or original circumstances of composition. Chosen as a means of illustrating specific (and often obscure) aspects of metre, diction, grammar or rhetoric, many of the stanzas are incomplete and can be somewhat disorientating when presented without the explanatory prose context from which they have been taken; a good critical apparatus is therefore essential, and the volume's editors certainly rise to the challenge. Particularly useful is the contextual information provided for stanzas cited in the grammatical treatises: each stanza from the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, for example, is accompanied by an explanation of the Latin term it illustrates in the treatise, along with any extra comments made by the Old Norse author himself. Contextual information is also given for stanzas found in *Snorra Edda*, the *Fourth Grammatical Treatise* and other works, accompanied by references to all major editions of these texts. As with other volumes in the series, a comprehensive introduction provides useful background on the poetic treatises and their authors, along with sections on metre, poetic diction and the unique role of *Snorra Edda* as a source for Old Norse mythology. Editions of individual stanzas likewise follow the format established in other volumes: each stanza is accompanied by a prose word-order, English translation, list of manuscript variants, details of previous editions, prose context, and extensive notes on the linguistic, metrical and lexicographical aspects of the verse, as well as interpretative issues or questions.

Despite the editors' attempts to provide as much contextual information as possible, it can be frustrating at times to read stanzas that hint at a back-story now lost to us. In a stanza cited in *Snorra Edda* as an illustration of a head-kennening, a poet identified only as 'Bjarni ...ason' describes the stabbing-out of a man's eyes, his *merki bráa* 'stars of the eyelashes' (p. 21). Is Bjarni commemorating the blinding of the Norwegian King Magnús inn blindi? And whom is he referring to in another fragment as the *ægir mætihjól's mergheims* 'frightener of the meeting wheel of the marrow-world [BONE > TORTURE-WHEEL > EXECUTIONER]' (p. 24)? Who is being tortured, and why? The editors note Sveinbjörn Egilsson's suggestion that the victim may be Sigurðr slembidjárn, but given the lack of contextual information in *Snorra Edda* can only conclude that the stanzas 'possibly have to do with the twelfth-century Norwegian civil wars' (pp. 20–21). A similar lack of information hangs around three intriguing but fragmentary stanzas from the poem known as *Norðrsetudrápa* 'Drápa of the Northern Settlement', attributed to one 'Sveinn' (pp. 398–401). The Northern Settlement of the title likely refers to the hunting grounds to the north of the Western Settlement in Greenland, and the poet's evocative description of that land's fearsome winter weather gives us a tantalising—but frustratingly incomplete—glimpse of what may once have been an entire corpus of poetry from the very edges of the Northern world.

This unfortunate lack of information is, of course, a quirk of the stanzas' preservation in the poetic treatises and not the fault of the modern editors. In other cases, a lack of historical or narrative context helps to foreground the innovative, witty and often downright bizarre poetic language that presumably led to the stanzas' preservation in those treatises in the first place. Despite the incomplete nature of the poetic record, there are many joys to be discovered here. Kennings emerge as tiny gems of artistry, as in Úlfr Uggason's description of Þórr's flashing eye as his *innmáni ennis* 'interior-moon of the forehead' (p. 412), or Elífr kúlñasveinn's kenning for angels, the *ferð hróts heims* 'host of the roof of the world' (pp. 130–01). A fragmentary stanza by Einarr Skúlason evokes the bleak beauty of Iceland as he sails away from its snow-covered coast (p. 160):

Harðr hefr ǫrt frá jörðu
 élvindr—svana strindar
 blakkr lætr í sog sökkva
 snægrund—skipi hrundit.

The strong storm-wind has pushed the ship quickly away from the shore; the steed of the land of swans [SEA > SHIP] makes the snow-ground [= Iceland] sink into the sea.

Kennings for domestic subjects rarely seen in the more well-known stanzas of the kings' and family sagas also provide an unexpected source of delight, as when Eyólfur Brúnason sardonically describes a pair of expensive Norwegian shoes as the *austrænar snekkjur ilja* 'eastern warships of footsoles' (p. 183), or when an unnamed speaker in *Bjarkamál in fornu* explodes in anger: 'Svá skalk hann kyrkja sem inn kámleita / véli viðbjarnar veggja aldinna' 'Thus I shall throttle him like

the dark betrayer of the wood-bear of old walls [MOUSE > CAT]' (p. 505). And who can fail to enjoy the gleefully derogatory people-kennings in this anonymous stanza from *Laufás Edda*?

Ok óþokkaðr okkar
ostmýgir brauðgýgi;
bjúgr elr sorg um saurga
saupstríðir flot-Gríði.

And the disliked oppressor of cheese [MAN] bemoans the ogress of bread [WOMAN]; the bent tormentor of buttermilk [MAN] harbours grief about the filthy Gríðr <giantess> of fat [WOMAN] (p. 642).

The edition's close attention to linguistic rather than narrative detail also encourages the reader to notice unusual words and phrases, such as the surprising use of the Arabic loan-world *sultan* 'sultan' (p. 563) in an anonymous stanza from the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, or two sea-kennings based on the Middle English-derived *baldrekr* 'baldric' (pp. 171–72). Most importantly, the volume demonstrates the impressive range of metres available to the skalds, displayed not only in the *claves metricae Hátalykill inn forni* 'Old Key to Verse-forms' and *Hátatal* 'Enumeration of Verse-Forms', but in numerous fragmentary and one-off stanzas as well.

As the citations above demonstrate, the editors follow the somewhat clunky manner of explaining kennings established in the previous volumes. For this reason, translations are generally clear in meaning but visually unattractive on the page. It is also unfortunate that the decision to group stanzas according to the nature of their source-texts has led to works by the same poet being scattered across the series' many volumes. *Skáldskaparmál* in particular contains many verses attributed to skalds known from the kings' and family sagas; it would be useful to be able to read, for example, Hallvarðr háreksblesi's *Knútsdrápa* (pp. 230–40) in the context of the other sequences composed for King Knútr inn ríki (edited in volume I), or Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's *Hákonardrápa* (pp. 212–25) together with Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla* and Tindr Hallkelsson's *Hákonardrápa* (also in volume I), with which it shares numerous themes and points of language. This arrangement also means that the helpful biographies of the skalds occur only once in the series rather than in every volume containing their works. This is no doubt due to considerations of space and cost, but it seems particularly strange not to have the biography of Óláfr hvítaskáld Þórðarson, author of the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, included in a volume that draws so heavily on his work. Nevertheless, the scale of the skaldic corpus makes it difficult to think of any method of arranging the verses that would not present similar difficulties; this is why the project website (<http://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk>) is such a useful resource, unconstrained as it is by the linear format of the printed book. Minor quibbles aside, however, it cannot be denied that the volume offers a valuable and exciting addition to the series and to the field of Old Norse studies in general.

ERIN MICHELLE GOERES
University College London

EDDIC, SKALDIC AND BEYOND. POETIC VARIETY IN MEDIEVAL ICELAND AND NORWAY. Edited by MARTIN CHASE. *Fordham University Press*. New York, 2014. x + 283 pp. ISBN 978-0-8232-5781-2.

This handsome volume contains essays on various aspects of Old Norse textual culture, by two women and nine men, arising from two separate symposia at Fordham University. As the title promises, it ranges widely, including contributions on *rímur*, ballads, late medieval religious poetry, and even a non-poetic text, the prose translations of Old French *lais* known as *Strengleikar*. Up-to-date, accessible studies of individual works in these genres—as opposed to brief mentions in surveys—are still thin on the ground, so the volume’s breadth of coverage is very welcome. Its center of gravity is nonetheless clearly skaldic poetry, to which six essays are devoted; poetry in eddic metres, by contrast, is discussed only in Russell Poole’s essay on *Merlínússpá* and Hannah Burrows’s piece on the riddles of *Hervarar saga*. Chase’s introduction aims to deconstruct the distinction made in my previous sentence. He briefly canvases the history of the terms ‘eddic’ and ‘skaldic’, the fluidity of their boundaries and the shifts in critical taste between them. The interesting asymmetry that, unlike ‘skaldic’, the term ‘eddic’ primarily refers to the poems of a single manuscript, Gks 2365 4to, suggests a codicological criterion for genre that could have been unpacked in relation to two manuscript collections discussed by his contributors, the *Prose Edda* and *Strengleikar*. Jón Helgason’s definition of eddic and skaldic poetry in *Norges og Islands digtning*, quoted by Chase, concludes by saying that while the former is anonymous, the latter tends to be ascribed to named authors. Given that almost all the volume’s contributors are interested in authorship, it is somewhat surprising that Chase does not follow this point up. Authorship versus anonymity is after all a fact of the medieval transmission of skaldic and eddic poetry, and seems to be linked to the different kinds of authority the two modes tend to conjure up. The eddic mode is (largely) that of cultural memory, shared by audience and poet alike, its traditionality signalled by the use of the ancestral metre *fornyrðislag*, while the skaldic mode (usually) claims the authority of the autopsy, guaranteed by the named speaker of ‘news that stays news’; a similar dynamic could be in play between the anonymous ‘common knowledge’ of the sagas of Icelanders versus authored translations, tied to a particular source, such as *Strengleikar* or *Tristrams saga* (or indeed *Merlínússpá*). Chase’s own view on the genre question is that both ‘more subcategories’ and ‘a sharper definition of the two overarching categories’ (p. 5) are needed, but as it turns out, few of the volume’s contributors engage with the eddic/skaldic issue. Chase’s second instance of blurred lines is the mismatch between Icelandic *miðaldir* and European Middle Ages. He suggests that Icelandic literary histories regard ‘medieval’ texts, which in a wider European context would be called ‘late medieval’, as ‘neither conventionally “skaldic” nor “eddic”, nor indeed distinctively Nordic’ (p. 8), and thus undeserving of attention; the frontier with the early modern period is also permeable owing to Iceland’s long-lived manuscript culture. Questions of chronology and dating animate several contributions (Abram, Males, Stavnem, Acker), and a number of other pieces valuably explore the ‘undervalued materials’ (Shaun Hughes, p. 9) of fourteenth-century and later poetry.

Russell Poole explores the sources of Gunnlaugr Leifsson's *Merlinússpá*, a thirteenth-century poetic translation and adaptation of the *Prophetiae Merlini* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. He suggests that Guðmundr Arason gave impetus to the project, against the backdrop of competition between ecclesiastical and secular authority; some of Gunnlaugr's kennings imply he modelled Merlinús on Guðmundr. Close textual analysis reveals Gunnlaugr's use of a range of additional English historiographical sources, evidently already available in Iceland by this time either in their own right or in the form of commentaries on the *Prophetiae Merlini*.

Ingvil Brügger Budal investigates 'The Genesis of *Strengleikar*', and concludes that the *Strengleikar* collection could not have come into being in Norway, where there were insufficient Old French manuscripts and speakers (especially considering the collection's internal variation, suggestive of multiple translation campaigns). Budal proposes instead that the precursors to the extant collection were translated in England, where manuscripts, French speakers and libraries were abundant. She lists a number of Norwegian clerics who stayed in Reading and Oxford in the late thirteenth century, but shies away from identifying any of them as the translators. An important element of Budal's study, which is based on her 2009 University of Bergen dissertation, is its careful reconstruction of the complex redactional process that yielded DG 4–7 (and the interestingly shaped Icelandic fragment AM 666b 4to, used as stiffening for the mitre of the Bishop of Skálholt). *Inter alia* she uses analyses of alliterative frequency across all the *Strengleikar* texts to argue that the first four to five texts of the collection form a separate 'Guigemar-group'. As far as I can see, this metric is strongly biased by the high concentration of alliterating phrases in the brief remarks added by the redactors at the beginning and end of each tale, which means that shorter tales have a higher proportion of alliterations than longer ones. Budal accounts for this bias only impressionistically, but further statistical analysis, perhaps using a technique such as linear regression, could clarify this issue.

Christopher Abram, in the first of three articles devoted to the *Prose Edda*, asks how much of it is actually 'post-pagan . . . skaldic mythology'. He argues that Einar Skúlason's *Óxarflokkur*, which describes a decorated axe using gold-kennings based on the names of goddesses, pulls together mythological references from earlier poets. It becomes in turn a source text, he suggests, for the anonymous compiler of a *þula* of *Asynjur heiti*, a textual quarry mined by Snorri for the section on names for Freyja in *Gylfaginning*. Abram is correct that nothing can be deduced about twelfth-century attitudes to paganism from the prevalence of mythological kennings in Einar's poetry, but does 'skaldic mythology' automatically switch into 'real' mythology once we cross back over the boundary of Conversion? To put it another way, when does reception of myth stop and myth proper begin?

Mikael Males uses Bjarni Einarsson's (debatable) distinction between 'dramatic' and 'corroborative' skaldic quotations in saga narrative to argue that many 'dramatic' stanzas, especially *lausavísur*, are late compositions which later authors have antiqued with the help of the *Prose Edda*, whether by generating new kenning-types from its narratives (following Roberta Frank, he sees *arnar leirr*

‘eagle’s mud’ as one of these), copying its idiosyncratic interpretations of archaic words, or simply using its stanzas as models. He gives no examples of the third process, and it remains unclear how it would be distinguished in practice from oral traditional referentiality; *ofljóst*, which he regards as rooted in *grammatica* and thus proof positive of the late date of Grettir’s *Ævikviða*, in fact occurs often in early poetry (e.g. *Háleygjatal*).

Kevin Wanner offers a well-informed and subtle analysis of the depiction of God’s grace in *Háttatal* and the relationship between accidental and essential qualifications for kingship in this poem, focusing especially on its puzzling twelfth stanza where Hákon is praised as king by the grace of God, despite Snorri’s own clear preference for Hákon’s rival Skúli. He concludes that Snorri’s Augustinian view of history allows him to finesse a difficult political situation, both admitting that God has chosen Hákon to be king, and hoping that he regrets his decision!

Rolf Stavnem analyses two poems on Óláfr Tryggvason: an autobiographical stanza by Skúli Þorsteinsson on the Battle of Svölðr, quoted first in Oddr munkr’s Olaf-saga, and Hallar-Steinn’s twelfth-century *drápa* on Óláfr, *Reksteffa*, quoted in the prosimetrum of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* and also preserved without accompanying prose in Bergsbók. Stavnem distances himself from the reductiveness of the ‘dramatic vs. corroborative’ distinction, and offers an acute case study of the effect of prose context on the meaning of the stanzas. Even though Hallar-Steinn composed his poem some two hundred years after the event, Stavnem suggests that medieval audiences are unlikely to have perceived it as any less credible than contemporary poetry as a source of evidence, because of the way it is framed by the saga.

Rory McTurk, in an essay on the verse of *Ragnars saga lóðbrokar* entitled ‘*Rattus rattus* as a beast of battle?’, makes a brave effort to avoid emendation in a single *helmingr*, preserved in only one manuscript. He points out that metrical looseness, especially as regards internal rhyme and syllable count, is characteristic of *Ragnars saga*’s verses; is this a concrete instance of the blurring of the eddic/skaldic boundary, as *dróttkvætt* falls back into mere alliterative verse? Nonetheless, this particular *helmingr*’s perfect storm of irregularities in rhyme, alliteration, syllable count and kenning construction does suggest corruption, even if the rat McTurk identifies in the kenning *blár hríðr veggja* ‘black ox of walls’ (*Ragnars saga* v. 12) is ‘contextually appropriate’ to Eirekr’s death on a bed of spear-points, safely out of reach of *Rattus rattus*.

Hannah Burrows suggests a range of contexts for the riddles of *Hervarar saga*, known as *Heiðreks gátur*. Her piece poses many questions, not all of which it has space to answer, but it also makes a number of stimulating suggestions as to the interpretive frames within which the riddles can be viewed: as nascent natural scientific discourse, witty entertainment, kenning-like ingenuity or quasi-gnomic wisdom.

Martin Chase introduces the reader to a fascinating body of poetry little known outside a limited group of mostly Icelandic specialists, the devotional poetry of late medieval and early modern (pre-Reformation) Iceland. His article aims to open this material up for further work; as he observes, there is much to be done. To this

end, he offers a useful set of scholarly tools: a survey of the manuscripts containing this poetry and the (limited) secondary literature on it; a list of the poems slated for inclusion in the third volume of Jón Helgason's *Íslensk miðaldakvæði* (it never appeared); and a discussion of five of the poems, in some cases with quotations of illustrative stanzas.

Paul Acker's 'Love and death in the Icelandic ballad' sets out by posing the question of how 'medieval' the ballads are: does their treatment of love and death align with that in a medieval genre such as eddic poetry, for example? The body of the article consists of two close readings, a comparison of *Gunnars kvæði* and *Njáls saga* intended to demonstrate the former's 'woman's focus' (p. 152) (as Gunnarr's transgression is judged more severely than that of Hallgerðr), and a reading of *Tristrams kvæði*, which he dates to the fifteenth century. An edition (from Vésteinn Ólason's *Sagnadansar*) and original translation of *Gunnars kvæði* is appended.

Finally, Shaun Hughes offers learned insight into seventeenth-century Icelandic literary culture in a discussion of the *rimur* poet Steinunn Finnsdóttir and her *Snækongs rimur*. His article has three appendices (on Steinunn's family, on the fairy-tale *Snjáskvæði* that was her source and a catalogue of her works), and the reader is well-advised to glean contextual information there before embarking on the article itself. Hughes analyses *Snækongs rimur* in terms of gender construction and argues that the concluding marriage of Hrafn and Ölöf/Snær subverts heteronormativity and turns the narrative back towards the 'sodomitical relations' implicit in Hrafn's gaze at King Snær. Gender play certainly enables Steinunn to heighten narrative tension and gesture at forbidden sexual relations (rife in seventeenth-century Iceland, as Appendix I makes clear).

This is a collection of thought-provoking pieces, the best of which not only raise our consciousness of unjustly neglected works and genres, but also carry out insightful analyses of them. As such it is a great credit to its editor, while its pleasing physical form, attractive cover illustration (dragon-slaying from *Íslenska Teiknibókin*) and generally accurate proofing (I noted only a handful of errors, mainly in quotations from languages other than English, although Hughes's article has a notably high rate of typos) say good things for Fordham University Press.

KATE HESLOP

University of California, Berkeley

THE SAINTS IN OLD NORSE AND EARLY MODERN ICELANDIC POETRY. By KIRSTEN WOLF and NATALIE M. VAN DEUSEN. *Toronto Old Norse and Icelandic Series* 10. *University of Toronto Press*. Toronto, 2017. xi + 363 pp. ISBN 978-1-4875-0074-0.

When I reviewed Kirsten Wolf's enormously useful *The Legends of the Saints in Old Norse-Icelandic Prose* (Toronto, 2013) a few years ago, the only quibbles I had were that the book lacks a contextualising introduction and that it deals only with hagiographical works in prose. Little did I know that she and Natalie Van Deusen were already at work on the present volume, a complementary companion to its

predecessor that resolves the latter of these issues and presents a comprehensive bibliography of hagiographical poetry in Old Norse and Early Modern Icelandic. ('Devotional' here refers to devotional poems that are not primarily hagiographical but mention saints—a bibliography of the devotional poems that do not remain to be compiled.) With these two books, we now have a comprehensive, current bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic hagiography.

The stated intention of *The Legends of the Saints* was to provide an updated version of 'The Lives of the Saints in Old Norse Prose: A Handlist', by Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Ole Widding and L. K. Shook, C.S.B. The 'Handlist' appeared in *Mediaeval Studies* 25 (1963), 294–337, preceded by the introductory 'On a Handlist of Saints' Lives in Old Norse', by Hans Bekker-Nielsen, in *Mediaeval Studies* 24 (1963), 323–34, and was a ground-breaking resource for Old Norse-Icelandic hagiographical research. The same can be said of the two recent volumes that reflect the half-century of hagiographical study this resource facilitated. The 768 pages of the combined volumes compared against the forty-three of the 'Handlist' show just how productive scholarship has been since 1963.

The Saints in Old Norse and Early Modern Icelandic Poetry, like *The Legends of the Saints in Old Norse-Icelandic Prose* (and like the 'Handlist'), is a purely bibliographical work: it lists comprehensively all of the known hagiographical and devotional poems, the manuscripts in which they occur and most of the editions, translations and scholarly studies of them. As in *The Legends of the Saints*, the bibliographical material is organised under the names of saints (with the addition of 'Cross, The Holy'), which are listed alphabetically. Under the saint's-name headings, individual poems are listed chronologically 'where possible'. As a further organisational principle, poems that mention a saint in only a few stanzas are listed at the end of an entry and begin a new chronology, though the point of transition is not noted. The titles are listed consecutively, and one needs to be aware of the presumed dating of the poems in order to know where the list changes from primary to secondary references. This system works well for a hagiographer looking for poems on a particular saint, but less well for the literary scholar interested in bibliographical material on a specific poem. Bibliography on the important poem *Ljómur*, for example, is to be found under St Anne or St John the Evangelist; on *Harmsól*, under 'Mary the Blessed Virgin', Mary Magdalen or St Peter; *Niðurstigningsvísur* is likewise listed under St Peter; and for *Lilja*, one must page through the long entry to item 63 (second sequence) under 'Mary the Blessed Virgin'. One thus needs to know something about a poem's content in order to locate it. This can be awkward even for someone already familiar with the material (it took me quite a bit of flipping through the book to find *Ljómur*, for example), and will certainly be troublesome for someone new to the field. This could easily be remedied by the inclusion of a simple alphabetical index of titles and incipits (the book does have an index of manuscripts).

The editors note that the bibliographical material does not presume to be exhaustive, but as far as I can see, it comes very close. While the Christian skaldic poems are now available in the recent collection edited by Margaret Clunies Ross (*Poetry on Christian Subjects*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages

7, Turnhout, 2007), much of the large corpus of hagiographical and devotional poetry composed in Iceland at the end of the Middle Ages remains unedited. Jón Helgason's magisterial *Íslensk miðaldakvæði* (Copenhagen, 1936 and 1938) presents excellent texts but was never completed; Jón Þorkelsson's *Kvæðasafn* (Reykjavík, 1922–27) is less reliable, and neither provides commentary beyond textual notes. This means that many of these poems need to be edited or re-edited, and all of them merit interpretive and contextualising study. The manuscript tradition of the late-medieval poems is complex: the 'catholic' content of many of them made them ineligible for printing by the Lutheran-controlled press at Hólar (the only one in Iceland), but their popularity ensured that they continued to be copied and circulated—some of them well into the nineteenth century, making them excellent subjects for reception studies. The manuscript information presented in *The Saints in Old Norse* is a ready-made launch pad for the aspiring editor or dissertator. Sifting through the boxes in the Landsbókasafn is bound to yield a few more, but one can find here all the currently known witnesses of a text.

If the publication of this book has resolved one of my quibbles with *The Legends of the Saints*, the other remains unaddressed: apart from the brief but informative preface, *The Saints in Old Norse* likewise lacks a contextualising introduction. It is unfair to complain about what a book does not do, and especially in the case of one like this that does so much. I appreciate that *The Saints in Old Norse* is meant to be a bibliography and not a literary-historical study. Nevertheless, the authors are so eminently qualified to write such an introduction that it is hard not to be disappointed that they have not. One can hope that, as with Bekker-Nielsen's 'On a Handlist', an introduction will eventually be published separately. The predictable efflorescence of hagiographical study in the wake of *The Legends of the Saints* is already well underway (the past year has seen conference sessions and symposia on Old Norse hagiography from Kalamazoo to Turin), and I look forward to what will follow from *The Saints in Old Norse and Early Modern Icelandic Poetry*.

MARTIN CHASE
Fordham University

AUÐNARÓÐAL. BARÁTTAN UM ÍSLAND 1096–1281. By SVERRIR JAKOBSSON. *Sögufélag*. Reykjavík, 2016. 337 pp. ISBN 978-9935-466-10-5.

In his memoirs *Úti í heimi* (1949), Dr Jón Stefánsson, who taught Icelandic and other Nordic languages for a time at King's College, London, paid tribute to Professor W. P. Ker. He wrote: 'perhaps his brilliance was greatest in his writings about the Sagas of Icelanders and *Sturlunga saga*; he knew *Sturlunga saga* almost by heart, and he regarded Sturla Þórðarson as exceeding by far all the writers who had written of their tumultuous times in a comparable manner' (p. 146). Sverrir Jakobsson recounts in the foreword to his book *Auðnaróðal* that he was given the 1946 edition of *Sturlunga saga* as a 'tooth gift' when he cut his first tooth as an infant; *Íslendinga saga* by Sturla Þórðarson is the mainstay of that saga compilation. As a boy, Sverrir heard from his father, on walks in the Laugardalur park in

Reykjavík, about the principal characters of the Sturlung Age: Jarl Gizurr, Þórðr kakali and Kolbeinn the Young, all of whom play a part in *Íslendinga saga*. He was, he says, captivated by the stories, and this book reflects his interest in all kinds of people who lived in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He intends the book to be an accessible overview of the history of the Icelanders between 1096 and 1281—from the Old Commonwealth to royal government. The book is intended for both university students and the general reader.

As Sverrir recounts, the governance of Iceland changed fundamentally between 1096, when the tithe was introduced, and 1281, when the *Jónsbók* law code took effect:

At the beginning of this period there was no state apparatus in the country: no public body with the power to collect taxes and enforce laws. All power relationships were informal and personal—with the possible exception of administrative districts run collectively by their farmers. The power of those who undertook to enforce verdicts and implement resolutions made at assemblies must in the nature of things have been grounded in their personal powers, and the respect in which they were held by others; what modern political scientists call charismatic authority. By the end of this period Icelandic society had undergone major change, with the advent of a government, with officials and an executive branch (p. 11; translation by Anna Yates).

The author sets out to describe the power struggle among the magnates, which reached its height in 1220–64, the period often called the Sturlung Age: ‘The principal objective is to recount the events of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Iceland, with the focus on the political tensions’ (p. 12). But he does not want to tell only the story of the magnates themselves; he seeks to throw light on other participants such as wives, warriors, concubines, scholars, wise women and vagabonds, as far as the sources permit and in accordance with recent studies on medieval Icelandic history.

The title of the book, *Auðnaróðal*, is taken from *Konungs skuggsjá* (*Speculum regale* or the *King’s Mirror*), where that name is used of a state in which many parties are vying for power. Sverrir divides his account into four main parts. The first, *Klerkar breyta samfélagi* (‘The Clergy change society’), recounts twelfth-century events from the introduction of the tithe, as well as the growing powers derived by the Catholic church and secular magnates from this taxation. The next section, *Samruninn* (‘Merger’), describes how individual magnates acquired control of more than one *goðorð* so that their powers embraced whole regions rather than being purely personal. The third section, *Höfðingjastéttin eyðir sjálfri sér* (‘The self-destruction of the magnate class’), describes how these trends led to increased tensions within the magnate class, and the alliances that formed among chieftains arising from shared interests and ties of family and friendship. These conflicts, which became bloody, also involved the interests of the Church and the king of Norway. The final section, *Kónsins menn* (‘The king’s men’), recounts how the king of Norway gained control of Iceland, introduced an executive authority and administration and made the Icelanders his tributaries. Icelandic society was thus subjected to a system of government similar to others in western Europe.

As Sverrir's book is conceived of as an overview, all direct citations of medieval writings are placed in endnotes, not footnotes. The bibliography's initial lists of primary sources and general books on Icelandic history in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are followed by references, under a separate heading for each section, to the main relevant secondary sources. The bibliography shows that the author has made use of a wide range of sources and is versed in new studies in Icelandic medieval history. The book's emphasis on relationships other than family ties, for instance, is consistent with the findings of research by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Auður Magnúsdóttir. Women are also allocated more space than in previous overviews, following the lead of Jenny Jochens, Agnes Arnórsdóttir, Auður Magnúsdóttir and others, who have published research on women's history in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, the framing of the book as a narrative of events offers little opportunity to discuss differing research findings or moot points, although the author clearly addresses the limitations of the primary sources.

Most of the primary sources used by Sverrir are narratives: *Íslendingabók* (the Book of Icelanders) by Ari Þorgilsson, Bishops' sagas and *Sturlunga saga*. In the past, the *Sturlunga* compilation was often alleged to be unreadable, an assessment contrary to W. P. Ker's high opinion of Sturla Þórðarson's mastery of narrative. In his book *Snorre Sturlason og Sturlungene* (1922), Fredrik Paasche undertook to liberate the drama of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Iceland from its petrification. His account is based on narrative sources similar to those of *Auðnaróðal*. Francis Bull praised Paasche's book, stating that he had simplified and reorganised the narrative of *Sturlunga saga*, adding material from other sources and omitting less important matters, thus bringing the story to life. Although it is an exaggeration to claim that the writer of the *Sturlunga* compilation randomly piled the narrative content into a rubbish heap, as was the opinion of Finnur Jónsson, Sverrir here retells the story, while reflecting the latest research and taking account of the interests of his time. It is, however, undeniable that his narrative is no less complex than *Sturlunga saga* itself, with a huge cast of characters. The index of personal and place names is sixteen-and-a-half pages long. But the author succeeds in recounting the story with the benefit of extensive knowledge and expertise.

The book begins with four maps with place-names to assist the reader. There are, however, no genealogies, such as those in the *Sturlunga saga* edition of 1946, nor tables of family and other ties as in the Svart á hvítu edition of 1988. This is a pity, as such tables are essential if the reader is to gain a good grasp of the conflicts that dominated the two centuries. At the beginning of each section is a black-and-white illustration. In view of the fact that the book is intended for the general reader as well as university students, it would have been desirable for Sögufélagið to have invested in further illustrations, in order to enhance the book's appeal for its intended readership.

ÚLFAR BRAGASON
Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum
Translated by ANNA H. YATES

ISLAND. EIN MYTHOLOGISCHER FÜHRER. By MATTHIAS EGELER. *Institut für Nordische Philologie, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität*. Munich, 2017. 330 pp. ISBN 978-3743162631.

With Iceland's tourism industry booming, the market for guide-books of all kinds and in all languages has opened up to non-traditional works that give their readers insights into more than just the best places to stay or eat. This book certainly goes far beyond such trivial matters. In his self-published travel guide, Matthias Egeler chooses an interdisciplinary approach to the geography and religious history of Iceland that takes pre-Christian myth and beliefs as its starting point. In doing so, he deviates from the many travel books and blogs that have contributed to the long history of travel literature on and inspired by Iceland, which more commonly centre their perspective on the *Íslendingasögur*.

This approach makes a lot of sense for an author whose expertise lies particularly with the pre-Christian mythology and cult practices of Scandinavia and Ireland, and with the intersections between these two cultures. Egeler has published widely on topics related to these areas, and with the present volume he ventures into the realm of popular academic writing for the wider public. This does not mean, however, that this book is not of high academic quality: Egeler strikes a good balance between an accessible tone and specific information, adding just the right amount of detail and not shying away from introducing his readers to scholarly debates and controversies.

The book is organised in forty chapters that take the reader on a journey anti-clockwise around the island, starting with the ferry passage to Seyðisfjörður in the east and ending at Papey in the south-east. The chapters can be read in sequence or individually, and are cross-referenced throughout, with their descriptive titles giving an indication of what the reader may expect in each chapter, which helps to navigate the book. Various maps, references to the Ferðakort travel map, four appendices on archaeological sites, museums, sod farms and suggestions for further reading, as well as practical information on travelling to Iceland, complete the book, rendering it a practical guide that can be used by both prospective travellers and armchair tourists. Many pictures accompany the individual chapters, but sadly most of them are in black and white and of rather poor quality (dark and with white lines running through them); it is often difficult to make out what they are meant to depict (a particularly bad example is an image of Surtshellir on p. 201). The colour images, however, are a nice touch and, in combination with descriptions of the local topography, they give an accurate representation of the wonders of the Icelandic landscape. Additionally, the preface introduces the reader not only to Icelandic history and spelling conventions, but also to the mythological sources and characters featured in the main part of the book, with comments on the specifically Icelandic nature of the myths that have been transmitted to us. This thorough background makes the book accessible to newcomers to Norse-Icelandic myth and literature, while Egeler's many references to current scholarship throughout the book might be interesting to those more familiar with the sources.

The strengths of this mythological guide lie in the multifaceted and interdisciplinary approach chosen by the author. Combining the central focus on religious

history and comparative religious studies with elements taken from historical, literary and archaeological approaches gives the book a depth often lacking in more traditional guide-books that aim to introduce their readers to a country's history, literature and myth. Two chapters that exemplify this approach particularly well are chapters 18 and 26, on Hvammur and Surtshellir respectively. Each integrates literary, mythological and archaeological sources to form a coherent whole. While other chapters are of similarly high quality (e.g. chapter 27, on Borgarnes), these two highlight the best results that the author's multidisciplinary approach can yield.

Chapter 31 on the Vestmannaeyjar provides another good example of the author's crossing of disciplinary boundaries. Egeler uses this chapter to delve deeper into the connections between the Scandinavian and Irish influences on Icelandic culture and history that are hinted at throughout the book (this connection is also explored in detail in chapter 40, on Papey). By using the story of Útgarðarloki as an example of Irish influence on Icelandic literature, Egeler draws attention to the fact that Icelanders were never 'purely Germanic', a point that is particularly important to stress in the current political climate, as right-wing extremists once again seek to abuse Norse myths and symbols for their own purposes.

While Egeler's book is certainly an interesting and rewarding read overall, there are several less positive points about it that deserve to be made. Perhaps the most prominent of these is that the connections between the places Egeler chooses and the topics he discusses in the individual chapters are often tenuous at best. For instance, in chapter 5, on Ásbyrgi, the author does not once note that the place name itself is of interest, but instead uses the valley's shape as a pretext for discussing Sleipnir, and then continuing by talking about Loki. Similarly, the reconstruction of the hall at Stöng/Þjóðveldisbær (chapter 32) is used to talk about *dvergar*, the short pillars that support the beams of a house, which leads to a discussion of the dwarves of mythology. Similarly, a single kenning in the verse Gunnar speaks from his mound is enough to make valkyries the subject of chapter 34, on Hlíðarendi. These tenuous connections between Icelandic places and mythology result in an overemphasis on the mythical dimension of the Icelandic landscape when sometimes a more thorough discussion of the sagas for which it forms the setting would have been more useful. However, it is in the context of saga episodes that the book is often at its weakest. Frequently a chapter ends either in a direct quotation from a primary source or with the retelling of one, without being brought to any kind of conclusion or any analysis being offered of the story itself. Moreover, Egeler also refers to various paranormal phenomena we encounter in the sagas, such as revenants and magic-users, as mythical beings, without distinguishing between the sources or noting their differences; this creates a false equivalence between mythical and paranormal events and characters. Clearly, the study of Icelandic literature is not the focus of this book; nonetheless, if one uses literary sources for one's argument, one needs to devote proper attention to them. Finally, some inaccurate and outdated information has made it into the book: Þjóðmenningarhúsið is now called Safnahúsið, and while the building still houses a manuscript exhibition, *Codex Regius* is no longer among the exhibited artefacts, as the exhibition that included it closed in 2013.

Overall, I wonder who the intended audience for this guide book might be. Some places, like Drekagil or Stöng, are so remote that most casually interested tourists will probably not seek them out, while those already familiar enough with Icelandic mythology, literature and history to want to drive to such isolated locations may lose interest in some of the information included in the guide, such as the excessively long quotes from and retellings of Eddic and saga narratives. The lack of analysis of many of the saga episodes means that in some instances it would be more beneficial for a reader who is specifically interested in the sources simply to pick up an anthology of translated texts instead. Thus, ultimately, the book seems to have been written less with an actual readership in mind, but rather in response to the author's own interests. While this does not detract from the academic quality of the work itself, it is certainly something to be kept in mind when recommending this guide to interested laypeople.

REBECCA MERKELBACH
University of Tübingen

THE SAGA OF THE VOLSUNGS WITH THE SAGA OF RAGNAR LOTHBROK. Translated, with Introduction, by JACKSON CRAWFORD. *Hackett*. Indianapolis, 2017. xxxiv + 147 pp. 1 genealogical table, 1 map. ISBN 9781624666339 (paperback).

The two sagas translated here, *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, are preserved in that sequence in the manuscript Ny kgl. saml. 1824b 4to (c.1400). The two sagas are linked through the person of Áslaug, the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr (major figures in *Völsunga saga*), who becomes the second wife of Ragnarr loðbrók (the protagonist of *Ragnars saga*), so that *Ragnars saga* forms a sequel to *Völsunga saga*. Previous translations of both sagas are listed by M. J. Driscoll and others in the bibliographies accessible on the internet under the title *Stories for all time*, where it can be seen that this is only the second English translation of these two sagas to be published in one volume, the first being that of Margaret Schlauch: *The saga of the Volsungs, the saga of Ragnar Lodbrok together with the lay of Kraka*, Scandinavian Classics 34 (New York, 1930). A number of separate English translations of *Völsunga saga* have appeared before, but only one of *Ragnars saga*: that of Ben Waggoner in *The Sagas of Ragnar Lodbrok* (New Haven, 2009), 1–41.

The present translation is clearly intended for newcomers to Old Norse-Icelandic literature and language: the recommended 'Further Reading' (pp. xxxi–iii) confines itself to English translations of more or less related works (including Crawford's own translation of *The Poetic Edda* (Indianapolis, 2015), reviewed in *Saga-Book* XLI (2017), 155–57) and the Viking Society's *New introduction to Old Norse*, 3 vols (2007–11). The Introduction includes a guide to the pronunciation of Old Norse (pp. xxvi–xxx), recommending reconstructed rather than Modern Icelandic pronunciation. The overall aim of the book seems to be the entirely commendable one of inspiring beginners, in which it will no doubt be wholly successful. When I refer to specialist writings in this review

this is not because I think reference should necessarily have been made to them in the book, where they might have been out of place, but rather because an awareness of them would in my view have helped to clarify and correct some of the points I shall note below.

The translation is from the normalised text of Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson's edition of *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga* (in their *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, 3 vols (Reykjavík, 1943–44), I, xvii, 1–148), which is based on Magnus Olsen's diplomatic edition of these two sagas as preserved in 1824b (Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 36 (Copenhagen, 1906–08)). Chapter numbers referred to in this review are those of Crawford's translation, which correspond to those of the 1943 edition, but differ somewhat from those of Olsen's edition. Crawford's statement on p. ix of his Introduction that *Ragnars saga* was written 'perhaps up to fifty years later' than *Völsunga saga* may be true of *Ragnars saga* as preserved in 1824b, but does not take account of the possibility, considered by Bjarni Guðnason in *Einarsbók* (ed. by Bjarni Guðnason et al. (Reykjavík, 1969), 28–37), that *Völsunga saga* was originally written as an introduction to an already existing version of *Ragnars saga* older than the one preserved in 1824b. Facing the first page of the Introduction is a family tree showing the descent of Haraldr hárfagri from Óðinn by way of Sigurðr and Brynhildr and their daughter Áslaug's marriage to Ragnarr loðbrók, but not including Borghildr, the first wife of Sigurðr's father, Sigmundur, or their sons Helgi and Hámundur. The former of these, Helgi Hundingsbani, figures prominently, if briefly, in *Völsunga saga* (chs 8–9), and surely deserves a place in the tree, even though he did not belong to it originally (see *The saga of the Volsungs*, ed. and trans. by R. G. Finch (London, 1965), xxxvi, note 7). And is it true, I wonder, that Sigurðr rides twice through a ring of fire in *Völsunga saga* (pp. xii, xiv)? Fire is certainly present when he first meets Brynhildr (in ch. 20), but does he ride through it on this occasion? J. R. R. Tolkien seems to have thought so, but is corrected on this point by his son Christopher (see J. R. R. Tolkien, *The legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London, 2009), 217–18). While agreeing with Crawford that the Dublin Viking Imhar (d. 873) is a likely historical prototype of Ívarr, son of Ragnarr loðbrók, I would question his view that, since Imhar's father is named Gofraid in Irish annals, the father cannot historically have been named Ragnarr (pp. xviii–xix). In her helpful prosopography of Vikings named in Irish chronicle records up to 1014, Clare Downham has shown that the eleventh-century information in the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* that Ímar (= Imhar) was a son of Gofraid 'cannot be relied upon' (*Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 2007), 258–59, cf. p. 16). Moreover, while the *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* ('War of the Irish against the Vikings'), written c.1100, may not be much more reliable (Downham, *Peritia* 24–25 (2013–14), 141–72), it does refer to an unnamed Viking, identifiable as a brother of Imhar, as a son of Ragnall, a name which at least shares its first syllable with *Ragnarr* (cf. Allen Mawer, *Saga-Book* VI (1909), 86, note 1; Jan de Vries, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 39 (1923), 265–66, 270, 272–73).

I am better equipped to comment in detail on the translation of *Ragnars saga* than on that of *Völsunga saga*. On the *Völsunga saga* translation I note that

Crawford gives, at the heads of relevant chapters, references to parts of the *Poetic Edda* which the author of *Völsunga saga* can be seen to have used as sources. The references are to Crawford's 2015 translation of the *Poetic Edda*, referred to above. That translation omitted *Atlamál in granlenzko* on the questionable grounds that its story is 'redundant with' that of *Atlaqviða* (Crawford 2015, xxiii). (Theodore M. Andersson in fact listed as many as thirty differences between the two poems, some of them quite substantial, in *Edda*, ed. by Robert G. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies 4 (Winnipeg, 1983), 245–47.) This seems to have had the unfortunate result that references to *Atlamál* are altogether omitted from Crawford's translation of *Völsunga saga* in chs 33–38, where echoes of *Atlamál* as well as of *Atlaqviða* are frequent. The reader who wonders what Högni is talking about in ch. 36 when he accuses Atli of starving his kinswoman to death would not be much enlightened, it is true, if given a reference to *Atlamál*, st. 57 (where it seems to be Högni's sister Guðrún who makes the accusation), since nothing is otherwise known of the incident in question (see *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, ed. by Klaus von See et al., vol. 7 (Heidelberg, 2012), 549), but such a reference would at least serve to confirm Högni's accusation as an example of the saga author's tendency, described by Crawford in his Introduction, to 'incorporate as much traditional material as possible' (p. xv). The omission of *Atlamál* from the *Poetic Edda* translation, and of references to it in the *Völsunga saga* translation, seems to me a serious one. It may be noted that *Völsunga saga*'s evident debt in ch. 22 to *Þiðreks saga af Bern* is signalled not at the heading of that chapter, but in the reference under 'Further Reading' to Edward R. Haymes's translation of *Þiðreks saga* on p. xxxii, where the chapter number is confusingly given as 23. It would have been helpful to Crawford to have at his elbow Magnus Olsen's edition of *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga* when making his translation, since Olsen is scrupulous in signalling corresponding passages between *Völsunga saga* and other works.

As for the translation of *Ragnars saga*, which contains 40 stanzas, 37 of them in a loose form of *dróttkvætt*, I shall comment here on three points in the prose of the saga, and on three in the verses. To begin with the prose, I am uneasy about Crawford's translation in ch. 6, 'he said that neither one of them was an old man or woman with second sight' (p. 97). The original here has *kvað þau ekki framvís karl ok kerlingu*. The context is that Ragnarr is here seeking to have intercourse with his wife Áslaug on their wedding night, but Áslaug asks to be excused, saying that trouble will result if she does not have her way. Before marrying Ragnarr she has been brought up and cruelly mistreated by an old man and his wife, and it is surely this couple that is referred to here: Ragnarr interprets Áslaug's anticipation of trouble as meaning that she fears this couple's dark forebodings. Crawford's translation, on the other hand, implies that the phrase 'neither one of them' refers to Ragnarr and Áslaug. The meaning is surely 'he said that the old man and his wife were not foresighted', as Schlauch (pp. 205–06) and Waggoner (p. 12) seem to recognise. Here again Olsen's edition (p. 199) would have been helpful to Crawford, in showing the way to this understanding of the passage. In ch. 8 Crawford translates *naut tvau, ok eru þat kvigendi* as 'two young steers' (p. 99). The word *naut* is most

readily understood today as meaning ‘bull’, but Fritzner’s dictionary makes it clear that in Old Norse it can refer to either a male or a female bovine animal of whatever size, though most often fully grown, and Cleasby-Vigfusson indicates (under *kvigendi*), with its reference, ‘Fas.i.253’, to Rafn’s edition of *Ragnars saga* (in *Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda*, ed. C. C. Rafn, 3 vols (Copenhagen, 1829–30), I 235–99, p. 253) that in this very instance *kvigendi* has the same meaning as *kviga*, i.e. ‘a young cow’ or ‘heifer’. The meaning should thus be: ‘two cows, and they were heifers’ (Schlauch, p. 209, has simply ‘two cows’; Waggoner, p. 13, more problematically, has ‘two cows, and they were young bulls’!). In ch. 9, where Áslaug reveals to Ragnarr her true parentage and name (he has known her up to now as Kráka), and tells him of her humble upbringing, Ragnarr, not yet believing in either her name or her parentage, says: ‘*Þessum mun ek við bregða Áslaugar órunum, er þú mælist*’, which Crawford translates as: ‘These are terrible things which you say happened to Áslaug’ (p. 102), where the emphasis seems to be more on the upbringing than on the parentage and name. The plural noun *órar* in fact means ‘fits of madness’ or ‘wild fancies’ and *at bregða e-u við* means here ‘to put forth as an example’, ‘to praise’, ‘to wonder at’, as Cleasby-Vigfusson confirms. The overall meaning is something like ‘I’m amazed at these wild Áslaug fancies of yours’, as both Schlauch (p. 214) and Waggoner (p. 16) seem to recognise.

In translating the verses of *Ragnars saga* Crawford has not been able to use my edition of them in *Skaldic poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages VIII. Poetry in fornaldarsögur* (Turnhout, 2017), 617–706, which appeared in the same year as his book, and which would have allowed him to adjust his translations. In ch. 5, where Ragnarr is making his first sexual advances to Áslaug, the line ‘take his hand’, translating *á mér taka höndum* on p. 95, should read ‘put her arms around me’, ‘embrace me’ (or in context ‘him’). Although Finnur Jónsson’s understanding of who receives this particular embrace shows a contradiction between *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (BII (1915), 252) and *Lexicon poeticum* (1931) (under *taka* (10)), it is clear from both that *at taka höndum á e-m* means ‘to embrace’, ‘clasp in one’s arms’. In ch. 9, in the first of the three stanzas in which Ragnarr comments on the snake-like mark in the eye of his newborn son, Sigurðr—a sign of his descent from Sigurðr Fáfnisbani—the final couplet reads: *þeim er ormr í auga, / er annan lét svelta*, which Crawford translates: ‘the boy with the snake-eye / will be the killer of many’ (p. 103). This is a free translation which shows, among other things, that Crawford is following previous commentators in taking the lines to refer to Ragnarr’s son, Sigurðr, who comes to be known as Sigurðr ormr-i-auga, Sigurðr Snake-Eye. There is however a case for understanding the lines as referring to this Sigurðr’s ancestor and namesake, Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, and translating as follows: ‘there is a snake in the eye of him who caused another one [i.e. another snake, the dragon Fáfnir] to die’. Here *er* ‘is’ is taken as historic present (since Sigurðr Fáfnisbani is no longer alive at the time of the stanza’s recitation), and the idea of having a snake in the eye may be understood to refer to a piercing gaze, as Crawford seems to recognise in translating *Augu Sigurðar váru svá snör* as ‘Sigurð’s eyes had such a serpent-like brightness’ in ch. 30 of *Völsunga saga* (p. 61). There is ample poetic evidence to suggest that a piercing

gaze was thought of as snake-like, as the entry for *ormfránn* ‘glittering like a snake’ in *Lexicon poeticum* shows. Finally, in the difficult second half of the first stanza spoken by one of the searchers for a leader to equal Ragnarr’s sons, now deceased, in ch. 19 (p. 131), the word *sólar* in line 5 of the original is almost certainly not, as Crawford’s translation might suggest, a locative genitive meaning ‘in sunshine’, but rather the determinant in a kenning for ‘wolf’ in which the basic word is *sækitik* ‘seeking-bitch’, immediately following *sólar* ‘of the sun’ in the next line, the expression ‘seeking-bitch of the sun’ finding its explanation in the myth of the wolf Sköll pursuing the sun in Old Norse mythology, as related in *Grímnismál*, st. 39, and Snorri’s *Edda (Prologue and Gylfaginning)*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London, 2005), 14). That Crawford has understood the likely meaning of the two lines in question is however clear from his subsequent translation: ‘you’ve never killed for the wolves.’

Having said all this, I must emphasise that Crawford’s translation of both sagas reads fluently and engagingly. I would have preferred ‘as’ and ‘as if’ to ‘like’ in such phrases as ‘like hand helps hand’ (p. 82) and ‘like he’ll die of hunger’ (p. 122), and I’m not sure that ‘mooing’ is the ideal translation (pp. 112, 113) for the noise (*lát, læti*) made by the fearsome cow described in ch. 12 of *Ragnars saga* (unless an effect of comedy is intended in the original, as perhaps it is!). But reading this book has been, for me, an enjoyable and stimulating experience, as it undoubtedly will be for the audience at which it is aimed.

RORY McTURK
University of Leeds

AVALON, 66° NORD. ZU FRÜHGESCHICHTE UND REZEPTION EINES MYTHOS. By MATTHIAS EGELER. *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 95. *De Gruyter*. Berlin, 2015. ix + 590 pp. ISBN 9783110447347 (hardback), ISBN 9783110448726 (PDF), 9783110448511 (epub).

The Introduction to *Avalon, 66° Nord* opens with a lively account of the author’s hike in Iceland from the abandoned farm Vík on Héðinsfjörður, over the pass of the Víkurbyrða mountain and down across the Hvanndalur valley towards the sea, where he comes upon a green strip of land called *Ódáinsakur* ‘Field of Immortality’, which is associated with the mythological *Glæsisvellir* ‘Glittering Plains’. Scholars have repeatedly noted Celtic parallels and argued for the influence of Irish and Arthurian literature on Norse notions of the Otherworld as transmitted in the immortality motif of the Icelandic *Ódáinsakur/Glæsisvellir* complex. In his extraordinary book Matthias Egeler undertakes a study of the island of immortality as found in the *matière de Bretagne*, in Irish literature, and in its antecedents in Celtic antiquity. The aim of the study is to answer the question whether the *Ódáinsakur* and *Glæsisvellir* motifs of the sagas are rooted in and derive from the motifs of the paradisiacal Otherworld of Celtic mythology (p. 7).

Following methodological considerations in the introductory chapter, the author analyses in the second chapter the Nordic tales containing the *Ódáinsakur* and

Glæsisvellir motifs (pp. 19–112). The sources are the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus, dated around 1200, and eight *fornaldarsögur* composed in the period from shortly after 1300 to the fifteenth century. Egeler identifies the chief motifs of the *Ódáinsakr*/*Glæsisvellir* complex, the location and nature of the realm of immortality: the voyage by sea; *Ódáinsakr*; *Glæsisvellir* and its ruler Guðmundr; Guðmundr's daughters as seductresses; the fruitfulness of the realm and its designation as pagan. A summarising table of motifs indicates an uneven and dissimilar textual distribution (p. 101).

A central motif of the *Ódáinsakr*/*Glæsisvellir* complex is the sea voyage to the Otherworld, and the third chapter is devoted to literary and archaeological evidence for ship burials (pp. 113–80). The author draws on Eddic texts and Icelandic sagas in support of an Otherworld beyond the sea and adduces archaeological evidence, primarily ship burials and ship settings, to argue that both can be interpreted as references to voyages to the Otherworld. The three following chapters are devoted to a discussion of the Otherworld in the *matière de Bretagne*, including Celtic material, with its prominent Avalon motif (pp. 181–261); in Irish literature (pp. 262–383); and in the mythical Otherworld islands of classical antiquity, *inter alia* Plutarch's Chronos island (pp. 384–439). One motif in the *matière de Bretagne* is the identification of Avalon, or Apple Isle, with an Isle of Glass, evocative of *Glæsisvellir*. This occurs in French Arthurian literature and culminates in the discovery of Arthur's grave in Glastonbury Abbey, a propaganda coup staged by the monks, and the subsequent identification of Glastonbury with Avalon. Throughout Arthurian literature the immortality islands appear in ever new variation, as do similar motifs in Irish mythology. Egeler concurs with scholars who have argued for the significance of Irish literature in relation to the Arthurian material but also suggests its significance in comparative studies of the Nordic *Ódáinsakr*/*Glæsisvellir* complex.

The seventh and last chapter, devoted to religious contacts and literary exchange, opens with a summary of the findings of the previous five chapters (pp. 440–49). The author concludes his reiteration of the mythologies of the Germanic, Arthurian and (Insular) Celtic world by asking what this reveals about the cultural and religious relations between the Celtic and Germanic peoples. The chapter picks up anew the discussion of Avalon as an Otherworld isle, an island of women and an *insula pomorum*, an apple island, and recapitulates the previous findings concerning an Otherworld island of immortality in Arthurian and Irish literature. The author suggests that the similarities between the Irish land of women and the Arthurian Avalon are so close that one can argue for a concrete historical connection between these two motif complexes. Consequently, Avalon and the Irish isle of women most likely derive from common roots that originated in pre-Christian Insular Celtic mythology (p. 481).

Finally, the study returns to the book's opening paragraph, the Icelandic *Ódáinsakr* and its source in Insular Celtic mythology. The author surveys the parallels of the *Ódáinsakr*/*Glæsisvellir* motif complex in Nordic and Celtic mythology and demonstrates that the Nordic material dates to as early as the Settlement period of Iceland. Egeler confirms Wilhelm Heizmann's localisation

of the *Ódainsakr* in the Hvanndalir at the time of the Settlement. The attestation of *Hvíttramannaland* and *Írland et mikla* in *Landnámabók* and parallels in Irish literature suggest the Nordic reception of Irish notions of a land of immortality in the ocean. The Icelandic *Ódainsakr* is thus the concretisation of a common Nordic and Insular Celtic motif. At the same time, however, the *Glæsisvellir* motif attests to the impact of the *matière de Bretagne* on Nordic literature. Nonetheless, Egeler stresses that the parallels between the Nordic and Irish texts are greater than those between the Nordic and Arthurian material.

Matthias Egeler's research is based on an enormous corpus of texts in a variety of languages and a massive body of scholarship on this literature. The extraordinary heft of *Avalon, 66° Nord* results partly from the author's detailed recounting of the many narratives included in the study, not all familiar to readers, including this reviewer. For example, he discusses the relevance of the Irish *peregrinatio* with respect to the origin of the paradisiacal-island motif and its occurrence in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, the plot of which is related in great detail (pp. 285–97). This is welcome, although the recapitulations of the texts, albeit brief, in each chapter's concluding summary is unnecessary. Throughout, the author's review of pertinent scholarship is meticulous, and his analysis of the various scholarly positions on the material at hand is most useful. The volume concludes with a list of primary sources in Old Norse, Old French, Old and Middle English, Latin and Irish, and an exhaustive bibliography of secondary sources (pp. 530–84).

Avalon, 66° Nord, the study of the Nordic *Ódainsakr*/*Glæsisvellir* complex and its occurrence and permutations in Arthurian literature, Irish literature and Celtic antiquity, is a *tour de force*, and will perhaps even be the final word on the subject.

MARIANNE KALINKE

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

ISLANDS IN THE WEST. CLASSICAL MYTH AND THE MEDIEVAL NORSE AND IRISH GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATION. By MATTHIAS EGELER. *Medieval Voyaging 4. Brepols*. Turnhout, 2017. xii + 355 pp. ISBN 9782503569383.

Matthias Egeler begins his monograph on the westernmost point in Iceland, the Látrabjarg promontory in the Westfjords, directing the reader's gaze out over the 'blue, dangerous, alluring nothingness in the west' (p. 1).

The 'islands in the west' of the title are the mythological (or 'mythological') islands that so many cultures have located near the ends of the world. Rather than looking for the 'roots' of the 'myth's pedigree', the study's focus is on its 'branches and furcations', paying special attention to 'the creative, culturally specific processes of adaptation' (p. 3). Egeler describes the purpose of this exploration as attempting 'to find an answer to a specific historical question: What is the "deep history" of the three Norse otherworld concepts of the *Glæsisvellir* and the *Ódainsakr*, *Hvíttramannaland*, and *Vinland*, and how might this mythological complex have related to the Norse westward expansion into the North Atlantic?'

(p. 10). The monograph sets out to excavate this ‘deep history’ in Norse, Irish, Greek, Roman, Etruscan, Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources.

Chapter 1 begins by examining evidence for Irish reception of the classical ‘Islands of the Blessed’ in early Irish voyage literature, then analyses possible Norse borrowings from the Irish tradition. Chapter 2, running a lengthy 101 pages, considers portrayals of transmarine otherworldly islands in Greek and Roman literature and art, and possible depictions of the islands on Etruscan funerary monuments. Chapter 3 evaluates and ultimately dismisses arguments that would derive the blessed islands of Greek tradition from Egyptian, Semitic or Mesopotamian roots. Chapter 4, titled ‘Continuity, Interaction—and Westward Expansion?’, begins with a thirty-page summary of the first three chapters that adds unnecessary bulk, given that the material is already covered so thoroughly in its respective chapters, and goes on to use the examples surveyed to outline four different types of cultural contact and exchange: borrowing, adaptation, influence and quotation. I was impressed by the breadth of the material considered, and the detail with which Egeler examines the primary sources. The discussion of the Greek, Roman and Etruscan material is especially impressive—it is rare these days for a medievalist to be so conversant with the classical tradition, let alone Etruscan material culture and Mesopotamian literature. Egeler’s discussion of the localisation of islands of the blessed on specific, ‘real world’ islands is especially illuminating.

Egeler argues that classical accounts of the Islands of the Blessed and the Garden of the Hesperides influenced, via Latin Christian texts, pre-Christian Irish concepts of otherworldly, paradisaical islands, as they are described in Old and Middle Irish and Hiberno-Latin texts. In particular, he argues that the location of such islands far to the west, in the Atlantic Ocean, is a development from an earlier tendency to locate these islands in lakes, near the coastline or in the Irish Sea. According to Egeler, Scandinavians came into contact with these Irish sources during the Viking Age, and their influence is evident in depictions of otherworldly islands in several Norse texts, as well as in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus who, Egeler argues, was drawing on a now lost Icelandic saga for the account of Thorkillus’s sea voyage to the court of Guðmundr in Book 8. Egeler argues that Adam of Bremen’s description of the discovery of Vínland also reflects an awareness of the ‘Islands of the Blessed’ complex, and he speculates that the idea of paradisaical islands in the West may have influenced the westward expansion of Norse-speaking peoples in the Viking Age, though he is cautious to emphasise that on this point one can do no more than speculate.

There is much of interest in Egeler’s discussion. He examines the primary sources with admirable thoroughness, and he navigates the critical literature on medieval Irish depictions of otherworld islands and voyages with a deft hand. I am in complete agreement with him that the evidence for Ódáinsakr and Glæsisvellir as genuine pre-Christian, mythological realms is shaky at best. That said, the relative lateness of the Old Norse corpus makes it difficult to establish whether Irish narratives or motifs were borrowed or adapted by Norse speakers during the Viking Age or several centuries later. Given that one of the stated aims of the

monograph is to provide a new model for discussing inter-cultural religious contact and transfer, more attention to the difficulties of using the source material in this way would have been desirable. I will discuss two examples.

Egeler begins his discussion of the Norse reception of the Islands of the Blessed by examining the first reference to *Vínland*, in Adam of Bremen's *History of the Bishops of Hamburg*. Egeler notes Birgitta Wallace's argument that the Norse settlement in Newfoundland had contact with New Brunswick, whose climate does allow grapes to grow, and acknowledges that Fridtjof Nansen may be correct in suggesting that Adam based his report of *Vínland* on Isidore of Seville's account of the Blessed Isles in his *Etymologiae*, but demurs (pp. 69–70):

Yet that this literary-mythological equation existed and that it was being felt by educated contemporaries shines through Adam's account with such clarity that the real-world flora of New Brunswick barely affects the fundamental point that the narrative of Wine-Land was steeped in classical mythology.

Perhaps, but steeped by whom? And when? Was the association of *Vínland* with the Blessed Isles made by Norse travellers to North America c. 1000 AD, or by a highly educated German monk writing chronicles on the continent in the late eleventh century? Direct Irish influence is only likely in the former case. Furthermore, while it may be correct that the only long-term Viking settlement in North America was in Newfoundland, and thus the description of *Vínland*'s grapevines was based entirely on literary accounts, an argument relying on this will be easily overturned if archaeological evidence of other settlements is uncovered.

As Egeler points out (p. 70), it would be unwise to read everything in *Landnámabók* as historical fact, yet the two examples that he presents as evidence for Settlement Period beliefs are taken at face value. For example, *Landnámabók* relates that a man named Ari was driven off course while sailing, and arrived at *Hvítramannaland* (the 'land of the white men'), also known as *Írland et mikla* ('Ireland the greater'). He could not leave, but was baptised there. The episode states that *Hrafn Hlymreksfari* ('Limerick-Farer') was the source of this information. Egeler takes *Landnámabók*'s attribution of the text to *Hrafn* literally (pp. 70–71):

That the story of *Hvítramannaland* was first told by a man who had spent much of his life in an Irish port town corresponds to the fact that all elements of the account of *Hvítramannaland* find direct parallels in core motifs of the voyage tales of Irish literature: with its reference to *Hrafn* the Limerick-Farer, the Book of Settlements explicitly presents us with a means of transmission that is made eminently plausible by the close correspondence of *Hvítramannaland* to Irish concepts of transmarine paradises.

I am reluctant to put so much faith in the historical accuracy of this anecdote and its attribution to *Hrafn Hlymreksfari*; although there is quite a lot of Irish and potentially Irish matter in it, it seems almost too neat, possibly a self-conscious Hibernicisation. Seeing that this is an explicitly Christian version of the Islands of the Blessed, and that the earliest plausible dates for the composition of *Landnámabók* fall several centuries after Ari's alleged baptism, this account might

be a post-Conversion innovation under the influence of religious texts, rather than the accurate record of an earlier oral tradition.

The possibility should at least be addressed here that *Brandanuss saga* is *al* the source for the Hvíttramannaland episode in *Landnámabók*. This Old Norse translation of the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* is extant in fragmentary form in a thirteenth century manuscript. In its current state, *Brandanuss saga* does not include the encounter with white-clad, white-haired men, but it is highly likely that at one point it did—at the least, the existence of the translation is evidence for awareness of the trope, even if this did not make it into the Old Norse version. Egeler considers *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða* to be too late to be relevant to his argument, and therefore Régis Boyer's discussion of possible influence from the *Navigatio* on these texts does not make an appearance ('The Vinland sagas and Brendan's Navigation', *Atlantic Visions* (1989), ed. John de Courcy Ireland and David C. Sheehy); given that the relationships among these texts are still far from clear, a discussion of this material would have been a welcome, and perhaps illuminating, inclusion.

Egeler's overall thesis, that the otherworldly islands of medieval Norse and Irish literature owe much to classical accounts of the Islands of the Blessed and the Garden of Hesperides, is persuasive on the whole, even if I have some reservations about his chronology. Some criticism might be levelled at the style and editing of the book. First, I am not in the habit of policing the distance between paragraph breaks, but while reading a three-page summary of a sequence in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* I found myself eagerly hoping for one to put in an appearance. Second, thoroughness is obviously desirable, but at some points the sheer profusion of narrative detail overshadows the arguments being made about the texts. Third, although the editing of the volume is good on the whole, I note a few errors: 'loose' should be 'lose' on p. 13, 'prophecies' should be 'prophesies' on p. 111; the translation 'onto death' (*in mortem*) might be better rendered as 'unto (or into) death' on p. 198. Nevertheless, this is a useful and wide-ranging study, and one which other scholars will have to take into account; the bibliography alone is well worth having to hand. Medievalists and classicists working on voyage narratives, the circulation of literary tropes, inter-cultural religious contact, and otherworldly locations across the sea will all find much of value here.

KRISTEN MILLS
University of Oslo

THE REALITY OF THE FANTASTIC. THE MAGICAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UNIVERSE OF LATE MEDIEVAL ICELANDIC SAGA MANUSCRIPTS. By HANS JACOB ORNING. *The Viking Collection. Studies in Northern Civilization* 23. *University Press of Southern Denmark*. Odense, 2017. 387 pp. ISBN 978-87-7674-935-4.

This ambitious book, a study of saga texts preserved in the fifteenth-century Icelandic manuscript AM 343 a 4to, aims to demonstrate how 'fantastic' saga texts can be mined and used as sources for the 'realistic' or historical contexts in which

the manuscripts preserving them were produced. In several respects, the study is the logical extension of research conducted over the past couple of decades into medieval Icelandic manuscripts on the one hand, and on the other hand, saga narratives traditionally assigned to the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* genres. Scholarship on medieval Icelandic manuscripts has been characterised by an increasing emphasis on the dynamism of textual transmission (i.e. how the same narrative changes from one copy to another), as well as on manuscripts' material aspects, and the ways in which the physical context in which texts are preserved can shape how they are read and interpreted. Scholarship on the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* has striven to revise widely-held negative judgements on their literary and cultural value, and to overturn the hypothesis that they are the younger, inferior products of a period of literary decay following the thirteenth-century 'golden age' in which the *Íslendingasögur*, for example, were produced. Instead, these narratives are considered on their own terms and in the context of wider literary developments in Europe; ways in which they were a medium for the exploration of contemporary concerns or anxieties (ideological, political, social) have also been underlined.

AM 343 a 4to has been dated to 1450–75 and is held in the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies manuscript collection in Reykjavík. It contains nine *fornaldarsögur* narratives (*Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns*, *Egils saga einhenda og Ásmundar berserkjabana*, *Yngvars saga víðförla*, *Ketils saga hængs*, *Grims saga loðinkinna*, *Örvar-Odds saga*, *Áns saga bog sveigis*, *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, *Bósa saga og Herrauðs*), interspersed with five *riddarasögur* (*Samsons saga fagra*, *Flóres saga konungs og sona hans*, *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs*, *Sálus saga og Níkanórs*, *Vilmundar saga víðutan*) and one exemplum or *ævintýri* (*Perus saga meistara*). On the basis of paleographical analysis, AM 343 a 4to is one of a number of fifteenth-century manuscripts that have been associated with the farm of Möðruvellir fram in Eyjafjörður in north Iceland, which was possibly its place of production. Using this hypothesis about its origins as his starting point, Orning's specific aim in this monograph is to demonstrate that the narrative material assembled in AM 343 a 4to, despite its fantastic flavour, reflects and sheds light on the interests, social and political tensions and world-view of the immensely powerful and wealthy owner of Möðruvellir fram, the widowed Margrét Vigfúsdóttir (d. 1486). More generally, he aims to show that saga manuscripts and their contents can be used as 'historical records and as evidence of historical changes in late medieval Iceland' (p. 18), not as *romans-à-clef* for specific events, but rather as objects through which their owners or audiences engaged actively with contemporary issues.

The introductory section sets out basic premises and definitions, and the lengthy analysis that forms the bulk of the book is prefaced by a brief introduction to AM 343 a 4to, together with notes on Möðruvellir fram and Margrét, and summaries of the sagas preserved in the manuscript. Orning's methodology involves several stages, and a combination of synchronic and diachronic comparative textual analysis. The textual analysis uses the concept of centre and periphery as a guiding light and concentrates on three themes that are explored initially from a structuralist position (in the section 'Oppositions'), and then from a more flexible position

which allows for the detection of ‘counter-voices’ (in the section ‘Dynamics’). The themes are magic (which becomes more broadly ‘otherness’ as the book progresses), the political universe (more broadly, power) and social hierarchies (more broadly, order). Orning considers these topics ‘well suited for mediating the gap between text and reality’ (p. 45) and to identifying tensions, counter-voices and ‘more timeless mentalities’ (p. 38) in the narratives under discussion.

Orning begins by evaluating the world(s) of each of the sagas copied in AM 343 a 4to in extensive detail. It soon becomes clear—as might be expected—that ‘there is no simple story in AM 343a 4to as a whole’ (p. 110). At the end of Part I, following discussion of the magical, political and social aspects of the AM 343 a 4to sagas, the focus is widened to include other manuscripts; here, yet more openings for ambiguity present themselves. The section ‘The literary and historical context of AM 343 a 4to’ reviews the conclusions drawn with regard to the AM 343 a 4to narratives and the treatment of magic, politics and social order alongside material preserved in eight other fifteenth-century manuscripts associated with Möðruvellir fram. These manuscripts contain *konungasögur* and the didactic work *Konungs skuggsjá* (AM 81 a fol., AM 243 a fol.), *Íslendingasögur* (the fragmentary AM 162 A η fol. and AM 445 c II 4to), a copy of the *Jónsbók* law-code (AM 132 4to), further *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* (Holm perg 7 fol., AM 579 4to), and artists’ patterns or models (AM 673 a III 4to, *Teiknibókin*). Some aspects of the textual universe of these manuscripts are in tune with AM 343 a 4to, others less so—again, as we might expect. Overall, the heterogeneity of the manuscripts associated with Möðruvellir fram makes them ‘unsuitable for drawing straightforward conclusions about the political preferences or aims of the people living at Möðruvellir fram’, which was an ‘environment . . . exposed to literature of diverse kinds, testifying to a complex mental universe characterized by a plurality of perspectives and norms’ (p. 211). In fact, their very heterogeneity and wide geographical horizons with peripheries that have ‘the potential for positive as well as negative behaviour and capabilities’ (p. 217) chime with the ‘horizons and expectations that formed part of Margrét Vigfúsdóttir’s experienced world’ (p. 218).

Parts II and III of the analysis are much shorter than Part I and present synchronic and diachronic analysis of two further manuscripts whose contents overlap with AM 343 a 4to. The first of these, AM 471 4to, is roughly contemporaneous with AM 343 a 4to but is thought to have been produced in a less wealthy social milieu (on the farm of Hvilft in Önundarfjörður, in the West Fjords of Iceland). It preserves texts of three of the four ‘Hrafnista’ sagas (*Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, *Örvar-Odds saga*), as well as a *riddarasaga* (*Viktors saga og Blávus*) and three *Íslendingasögur* (*Þórðar saga hreðu*, *Króka-Refs saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga*). The second manuscript Orning turns to for comparative analysis, Holm perg 7 4to, was produced in the early fourteenth century and contains a shorter version of *Örvar-Odds saga*, as well as a *riddarasaga*, other *fornaldarsögur*, *Jömsvíkinga saga* and part of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. In contrast to AM 343 a 4to, Orning finds in AM 471 a greater ‘preoccupation with the dangerous periphery and the unpredictable quality of magic’, possibly reflecting ‘the contemporary historical situation of these farmers in the midst of the fishing boom in Iceland’ (p. 266). Similarly,

Orning argues that the differences between the quite distinct versions of *Örvar-Odds saga* preserved in AM 343 a 4to and in the older Holm perg 7 4to can be

interpreted as a sign that the position of the nobleman had changed distinctly in the period between writing the two manuscripts. In the mid-fifteenth century, monarchy was no longer a distant feature that could be ignored or bypassed fairly easily, but rather it had to be accepted wholesale as an institution which indeed could constrain the freedom of the nobleman. Moreover, the universe of the top-level Icelandic aristocracy had grown widely, encompassing not only Iceland and Norway, but also the rest of Scandinavia and even the whole of Europe (p. 298).

Margrét, in Orning's opinion, 'represented a nobility which defined itself in numerous ways: through its independent, Icelandic heritage, as a noble community of martial values, and by participating in a monarchy with connections to a common European political culture' (p. 299), and as such, 'it is . . . no coincidence that [AM 343 a 4to] was probably written at the behest of an elite woman at a large Icelandic estate in the mid-fifteenth century' (p. 299).

In the closing section, 'The fantastic and the real', Orning's aim is to 'situate the manuscripts and their environments in broader literary and historical contexts' (p. 303), presenting a more thorough overview of the socio-political and economic historical background of fifteenth-century Iceland. It is in the light of the historical, economic, political and social developments described, Orning argues, that the sagas in AM 343 a 4to should be read. And this is subsequently attempted, in several stages, with the focus broadening at each step. The first stage ('From text to manuscript') presents summary remarks about AM 343 a 4to as a 'compilation of stories, oppositions and dynamics' (p. 303). AM 343 a 4to, Orning states, handles 'vexed issues' and 'dilemmas' that arise when 'peoples and forces beyond our control' must be engaged with (pp. 307–08):

At the most fundamental level, these stories urged men and women to be brave—to dare to venture into the sea to get fish, to approach a rival family and propose a marriage. Translated into politics, the question is not so much whether to support or oppose kings, but where to draw the line in dealing with them . . . Questions like this were important in contemporary society, not as matters of explicit discussion, but rather as a tacit backdrop for politics and more generally for the mastery of everyday life.

The second stage ('From manuscript to textual community') discusses the 'literary milieu (Möðruvellir fram) and the probable commissioner of the manuscript (Margrét Vigfúsdóttir)' (p. 303). Here, crucially, Orning lists some of the methodological challenges that beset attempts to analyse the manuscripts associated with Möðruvellir: (1) the lack of conclusive proof that these manuscripts were all produced there, (2) the possibility that other manuscripts associated with Möðruvellir might once have existed but are now lost—we cannot know how their contents might alter the overall impression given by the extant manuscripts with regard to interplay of theme, literary motif, and cumulative meaning, (3) the inevitable uncertainty as to whether the contents of composite manuscripts were

chosen haphazardly or purposefully, (4) the uncertainty regarding the relationship between scribe, commissioner and intended audience of manuscripts, and (5) in general, the tenuous nature of relationships between literary motifs and historical issues (p. 309). The conclusions for this section emphasise the secular nature of the manuscripts associated with Möðruvellir fram, whose ‘mental universe . . . is characterized by a plurality of perspectives and norms’ (p. 312). The third stage (‘From textual community to fifteenth-century Iceland’) contextualises the fifteenth-century manuscripts in relation to Icelandic society in this period, in particular with regard to ‘two dominant views of this period’ as a ‘chaotic time’ stemming either from ‘lack of central power’ or from ‘the English presence [in Iceland]’ (p. 303). Orning argues that, in fact, society and social and political dynamics were not necessarily as chaotic as historians have assumed; he suggests that the ‘alliances and conflicts in which Margrét Vigfúsdóttir and her family became directly or indirectly enmeshed’ (p. 321) did not, for the most part, involve kings, bishops or Englishmen, but noble families of the same rank, and so the ways in which AM 343 a 4to and other Möðruvellir manuscripts explore issues of alliance, conflict and feud as they play out in centres and peripheries resonate in this context. In the last chapter, Orning applies his revisionist take on Icelandic political history to a longer time-period, arguing that ‘the late Middle Ages [in Iceland] is a period marked by more continuity from the Free State period than has been assumed’ (p. 303). ‘Support for the new monarchical conception of society’ can be found in the Möðruvellir manuscripts (p. 332), although ‘tension between kings and magnates in late medieval politics’ can also ‘be felt in the sagas in AM 343a 4to’ (p. 336).

Overall, the ideas expressed in the book are persuasive, and Orning is to be commended for this committed and creative attempt to tease ideological and socio-political historical realities out of the fantastic saga material preserved in the manuscripts under consideration. This is a complex and difficult task that demands a multi-stranded and interdisciplinary approach. The success of the present study, however, is diminished by certain shortcomings. While the synchronic and diachronic thematic analysis is a very useful method of bringing similarities and differences to light, and Orning’s close readings do reveal many intertextual resonances, the structure of the book generates a certain amount of repetition of material. Perhaps this is inevitable, but in other places, analysis has a tendency towards being rather reductive or simplistic and this might have been redressed had the secondary scholarship on which Orning builds important parts of his literary analysis been more up-to-date in some places, and engaged with to a greater degree in other places. More urgently, for a book that takes a tangible, extant object as its starting point and even *raison d’être*, it is odd not to hear more about the material aspects of the AM 343 a 4to manuscript itself. AM 343 a 4to is a compact book, comprising 110 leaves in their original binding, wooden boards that measure roughly 23 cm by 14 cm. The only hint at the book’s size is found in Orning’s statement that ‘AM 343 a 4to is the largest manuscript produced in Iceland in the late Middle Ages, containing fifteen sagas’ (p. 81). This is inaccurate, or at least ambiguously phrased: other saga manuscripts are certainly larger in terms of number of leaves and dimensions, even if they do not contain as many texts

(e.g. AM 556 a–b 4to, c.1475–1499, 134 leaves in its present, incomplete form; AM 152 fol., c.1500–1525, 201 leaves). Codicological misunderstandings seem to have occurred in other places too.

The main point here, though, is that the reader of Orning's monograph will get to the end of the study without having been able to form even a vague idea of what AM 343 a 4to looks like: there are no images, nor is the reader even directed towards the online catalogue entry for the manuscript, where summary information about codicological aspects of the manuscript is to be found (see <https://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM04-0343>). Orning is clear from the start that he is a historian and not a manuscript specialist but, especially given that digital images of the manuscript are not currently available online, it would have been useful and interesting for the reader to be told something about AM 343 a 4to's physical appearance: the condition of the support, the quire structure and the organisation of the texts throughout, and their *mise-en-page* (i.e. hierarchies of rubrics and initials), for example. More detail of what is known about the manuscript's provenance might have been interesting too: medieval and post-medieval marginalia in a number of places throughout the book provide a direct connection with past users of the manuscript and would certainly have repaid closer attention. What is the confidently-executed sketch (possibly by the scribe himself) of a creature with a bearded man's head, a dragon-like tail, and sturdy, hooved hind-legs in the bottom margin of 84v doing there? Does it have any connection with the text copied on that leaf (*Áns saga bogsveigis*)? And who tried to replicate it in the facing margin at the bottom of 85r? These visual cues have something to tell us about the context(s) in which the book was produced and used in addition to what can be gleaned from the texts themselves.

Another limitation concerns the texts that Orning is actually analysing: interpretation based on very close readings of narrative motifs and episodes as they play out in a specific manuscript context, relying on editions of texts based on manuscripts other than the one under focus (even on the premise that the edited texts are 'very similar to the one[s] in AM 343a 4to', p. 84, n. 13) is a methodological problem. The kind of granular narrative analysis that Orning undertakes unequivocally demands direct examination of the source, if only to be certain that interpretations of elements based on other (edited) textual articulations of the narrative under consideration hold. Some more information about the origins and transmission history of each of the sagas copied into AM 343 a 4to would also be useful (even if only in tabular or list form): sometimes, in the detail of Orning's textual analysis, it is easy to forget that Margrét (possibly) commissioned the production of the AM 343 a 4to manuscript, and not the writing of the sagas themselves. And Orning is not entirely clear on the related question how far it is plausible to believe that Margrét consciously selected each saga on the basis of the specific connections with her world and experiences, or the potential in these narratives for contemplating the realities of her situation. One can, however, make a strong case for showing how, once a number of texts have been copied together into a single book, it then becomes possible to read and seek out connections with the mental, political and social world of the commissioner and subsequent audience(s).

Thinking about how the combination of narratives copied into AM 343 a 4to speak with and to each other in the context of that manuscript is an illuminating (if invariably rather subjective) exercise, as is the extension of this—that is, contemplating how the interpretation(s) of these narratives is, in turn, shaped by texts copied in other manuscripts probably kept alongside AM 343 a 4to at Möðruvellir fram, and about how, cumulatively, all of this textual material might have resonated in varying ways with those who had access to the manuscripts (whether commissioner/owner, or those who listened to narratives read from them in the context of the domestic *kvöldvaka*, for example). The reality of the environments in which people live cannot but have an influence on how narratives are processed and interpreted, what narrative elements speak directly or indirectly with their readers: in order to fill out the picture (and to test Orning's hypotheses), we need more studies of late medieval Icelandic manuscripts and their contexts of production.

EMILY LETHBRIDGE

Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum

THE AGE OF THE VIKINGS. BY ANDERS WINROTH. *Princeton University Press*. Princeton, 2014. 304 pp. 24 black-and-white illustrations, 3 maps and 14 colour plates. ISBN 978-0-691-14985-1.

The Age of the Vikings appeared three years after the same author's *The Conversion of Scandinavia: Vikings, Merchants and Missionaries in the Remaking of Northern Europe* (Yale University Press; reviewed in *Saga-Book XL* (2016), 115–17). Winroth's approach is broadly comparable in both books in as much as the focus is generally thematic rather than strictly chronological. In the book under review Winroth explores Viking violence, emigration, travel, trade, lordship and kingship, farming and domestic arrangements, religion (pagan and Christian) and art and literature. A brief introduction and an epilogue bookend the eight chapters.

Perhaps it is trite to say that this is an enjoyable and informative book, but it is most certainly both. For the scholar researching and teaching in this field *The Age of the Vikings* may not include very much in the way of deep and unexpected insight. But to offer this is not the author's intention. Winroth presents a holistic view of Norse history and culture while not wholly eschewing a sense of development or change through time. Winroth's principal method is his use of the 'telling detail', which involves fleshing out the significance of, for instance, a line in a skaldic poem, a specific rune-stone or a single material object. The author's obvious talent is for integrating disparate elements into a coherent, vivid and often entertaining narrative while generally supporting his analysis with references to up-to-date academic literature. In all this one is reminded of David Rollason's *Early Medieval Europe: The Birth of Western Society* (Routledge, 2012) which proceeds from a similar thematic and pedagogic premise. The intended audience of Winroth's book is the undergraduate and the proverbial 'interested layman' who

is looking for a serious and authoritative, yet accessible, scholarly introduction to a field of study that may appear dauntingly disparate in nature. In the field of single-author surveys Winroth's book is surely the primary contender to satisfy these needs. Peter Sawyer's identically named overview (Edward Arnold, 1962) and his *Kings and Vikings: Scandinavia and Europe AD 700–1100* (Methuen, 1982) were published some three and five decades ago respectively, whilst Eric Christiansen's agreeably idiosyncratic *The Norsemen in the Viking Age* (Blackwell, 2002) for all its original insights, may not be the best first port of call for the relative newcomer. Any single-author book that purports to be a general introduction to 'the Viking Age' will inevitably attract criticism, whether relating to specific interpretations or the inclusion or exclusion of certain themes and topics. I do not consider that this is an especially useful critical perspective to adopt. A brief book of this kind will always reflect the author's main interest. There should be no duty to aim at completeness (whatever that may mean) and, as noted, Winroth's strength is in highlighting the variety and richness of the sources for this period and thus whetting the appetite for further exploration. Precisely for this reason, I feel that an opportunity has been ignored in the production of *The Age of the Vikings*, in that the reader is given only limited guidance for further study; the references and bibliography relate almost exclusively to cited sources. The inclusion of a bibliographical essay for each chapter and recommendations for further reading would have been more in the spirit of this publication (for an ideal model see Rollason's *Early Medieval Europe*, mentioned earlier, whose digital version is regularly updated).

One feature of Winroth's style is to contest what he presents as a prevailing or popular scholarly trend or opinion but which, on closer inspection, turns out not to be so prevailing or popular after all (and he received some criticism for this tendency in *The Conversion of Scandinavia*). Traces of this trait do appear in *The Age of the Vikings*, although they are hardly of much import. For instance, Winroth is surely right to claim that later Old Norse writers, like the earlier monkish chroniclers, stressed the violent and exotic nature of their 'Viking ancestors'. And undoubtedly this image of the Vikings has profoundly affected their (now) ubiquitous portrayal in popular culture. But are there still serious academics who do the same? Although Winroth does not specifically state this to be the case, one is certainly left with that sense. As a further example, the infamous and much-debated 'Blood-Eagle' may well arise from an antiquarian misinterpretation of skaldic verse by saga authors, which subsequently found its way into 'popular culture' (including, I believe, the popular current television series 'The Vikings'). I do not, however, recognise the current use of this example in serious scholarly literature. It should also be acknowledged that Roberta Frank's interesting (and in many ways persuasive) interpretation may not be the last word on this issue (see further the review by Rory McTurk of Thomas Williams, *Viking Britain: An Exploration* (p. 200 below)). One may further argue that *Beowulf*, from which Winroth on a few occasions derives examples of Viking-Age customs and attitudes, is essentially an Old English antiquarian reconstruction of a Swedish/Danish heroic age with limited or no relevance to

the topic at hand. All this is debatable, of course, and does little to detract from the overall excellence of this volume.

HAKI ANTONSSON
University College London

THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY INTO THE EARLY MEDIEVAL INSULAR WORLD. CONVERTING THE ISLES I. Edited by ROY FLECHNER and MÁIRE NÍ MHAONAIGH with ERIC CAMBRIDGE. *Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* 19. *Brepols*. Turnhout, 2016. xx + 510 pp. 9 black-and-white illustrations, 2 maps. ISBN 978-2-503-55462-4.

This is the first of two volumes to emerge from the ‘Converting the Isles Research Network’ funded by the Leverhulme Trust and based at the University of Cambridge. It brings together the latest scholarship to investigate aspects of conversion in Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland and Britain from an interdisciplinary perspective. Five major themes are included: the historiography of conversion, missions, perceptions of conversion, society and economy, and hagiography.

Useful historiographic overviews of conversion are given in papers covering Ireland (Roy Flechner), the Anglo-Saxons (Thomas Pickles), Wales (Nancy Edwards) and Scandinavia (Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide), but unfortunately not Scotland. Each paper shows how textual sources have been subject to different interpretations and how new archaeological work can transform our understanding of the conversion process. These regional overviews are complemented by three papers advocating comparative approaches. Chris Wickham explores how common issues influence religious change in different times and places and the inherent problems of interpreting conversion accounts, while highlighting the variety of heathen practices encountered by medieval missionaries. Ian Wood demonstrates that medieval missions varied greatly according to their size and purpose. Tomas Sundnes Drønen brings to bear a modern case study of conversion to show how the process can be theorised according to context, translatability of the religious message, the attitude of the converting group and as a response to crisis.

The critical evaluation of modern and medieval perceptions of conversion is central to a number of papers in this book. Colmán Etchingham’s paper is largely concerned with the date of St Patrick’s mission. He criticises modern scholarship for ‘succumbing to the temptation to turn to elements of the legend to fill the gaps’ (p. 187) but unfortunately (on p. 188) delivers the traditional factoid that Patrick was captured ‘at the age of sixteen’ (we do not know his exact age) and reports the significance of ‘the departure of the legions in 409 or 410’ from Britain (there is no primary evidence for the organised withdrawal of troops at this time). Thomas Charles Edwards explores the writings of St Patrick, Gildas and Gregory the Great to show that religious concerns changed from converting heathens to converting schismatics and semi-pagans. His discussion of the word *gens* fits well with Alex Woolf’s discussion of the word *plebs*, which shows how Gildas and early Irish writers used it to describe the masses as distinct from their spiritual superiors; it

was later borrowed into Brittonic languages to describe the community of a particular parish or mother church. The need to repudiate publicly or reformulate old beliefs as part of the process of conversion is the topic of Barbara Yorke's paper, which provides a thoughtful evaluation of the transition in beliefs and practices among the Anglo-Saxons.

The development of hagiographical narratives is a strong theme in this book. James Palmer discusses the emergence of hagiography about missionaries in seventh-century Francia and suggests that these were more influenced by the earlier *Lives* of martyrs than tends to be recognised. Alan Thacker studies the agenda behind successive early *Lives* of St Cuthbert, which were composed within a short span of time and subject to the fluidity of monastic memory. Barry Lewis shows that Brittonic hagiography was often more concerned with reforming bad Christians than converting pagans. Siân Grønlie shows that early Icelandic saints were often presented more like saga heroes rather than in accounts conforming to conventional hagiographic *topoi*. Some entertaining examples of their unifying behaviour are presented along the way.

While much of the volume is preoccupied with textual evidence, material culture is discussed in five papers concerning society and economy during conversion. Rory Naismith notes a relationship between coin usage and conversion in Britain and Scandinavia but argues against a direct link; rather, these phenomena appear in the similar situations of cultural exchange. A simple match between economic and religious change is also questioned in a joint paper by Wendy Davies and Roy Flechner. They show that evidence of economic centralisation and intensification in the early Middle Ages does not correlate directly with conversion, but that the growth of ecclesiastical institutions did have a significant impact. The economic theme is continued in Gabor Thomas's study of the evidence from Lyminge, where economic innovations appear to have preceded the monastic settlement, indicating that it was a site of secular power first. Martin Carver's analysis of Portmahomack complements the evidence from Lyminge in identifying different phases of activity. Carver argues that monastic institutions represented a stage in the transference of power between aristocratic, religious and mercantile interest groups, although there might be more scope to consider how these three categories overlapped. Orri Vésteinsson uses the evidence of material culture to discuss cultural rather than economic change, providing a thoughtful analysis of burial in Iceland. While the difficulties of differentiating pagan and Christian burial are considered, a general theory (which bears comparison with the late Roman phenomenon) is that pagan burials tended to be in marginal spaces, while Christian burials were located at the centre of settlements, suggesting a transformation of attitudes towards the dead. The decline in grave goods is presented as a phenomenon that does not link directly to conversion, but shows a trend towards the display of élite wealth and power in different ways.

The back cover of this volume identifies the impact of Christianisation as something that 'transformed not only religious beliefs and practices, but also the nature of government, the priorities of the economy, the character of kinship and gender relations'. Nevertheless, the contents of the book sometimes challenge

these perceptions, arguing that some of the transformations that have been linked to Christianity could be the result of longer-term economic, political and social trends. Another strand within the book is the presentation of religious change as a negotiation informed by practical considerations. This is an important point. I would nevertheless argue that there is more scope to consider the psychological aspects of religious change and the strategies of missionaries and hagiographers to inspire emotion in faith, which could be analysed from primary sources as well as comparative studies. Overall, this is a thought-provoking collection of papers which will deepen readers' knowledge of conversion and Christianisation in north-west Europe. I look forward to reading and learning more in the second volume of the 'Converting the Isles' project.

CLARE DOWNHAM
University of Liverpool

VIKING BRITAIN: AN EXPLORATION. By THOMAS WILLIAMS. *William Collins*. London, 2017. xxiv + 408 pp. 3 maps; multiple colour and black-and-white illustrations. ISBN 978-0-00-817193-3.

This book follows the history of the Vikings in Britain from the eighth century to the eleventh century, beginning with the landing of Norse ships in the Isle of Portland in 789 and ending rather indecisively with the death of Cnut's son Harthacnut in 1042 (dated 1041 on p. 341; see however pp. 338–39). Its tracing of the succession of kings of the house of Wessex, from Ecgerht (r. 802–39) to the accession of Edward the Confessor in 1042, gives a kind of backbone to the narrative, keeping clear the chronology of the events described, while its geographical coverage extends well beyond Wessex, touching in one way or another on all the places specified on the map of Britain on pp. xiv–xv. The author, Thomas Williams, who was the project curator for the *Vikings: Life and Legend* exhibition at the British Museum in 2014 and is now Curator of Early Medieval Coins at the Museum, draws freely here on the evidence of archaeology and coins, as well as of place-names and personal names, for the history of Viking Britain. There is much in his account that will give students of the Viking Age pause for thought. He expresses dissatisfaction with the characterisation of the Vikings as either 'raiders' or 'traders' (pp. 78–79, 203–04); evidently accepts Asser's *Life* of King Alfred as genuine (pp. 130–33), despite Alfred P. Smyth's claim in his book on Alfred (Oxford University Press, 1995) that it was a forgery (Smyth's writings are significantly absent from his references); and plays down the idea that the Danelaw was a great Viking realm stretching northwards to the Tyne from a line leading diagonally from London to near Wroxeter (pp. 187–89). The narrative, which is based for the most part on contemporary and near-contemporary written sources, is enlivened not only by evocations of medieval literature, as will be shown below, but also by fictional reimaginings of some of the events covered (notably Guthrum's baptism, pp. 180–81), and by accounts of Williams's own visits to some of the historical sites.

Part of the book's argument, as emerges in particular from chapters 3 and 5, is that the English subconsciously recognised in the Vikings characteristics they shared with them from their common Germanic heritage, not least a fascination with dragon-slaying as reflected in the stories of Beowulf and Sigurðr Völsungr. This leads Williams, who clearly shares this fascination, to punctuate his narrative with stories and quotations from Old English and Old Norse literature illustrating heroic and vengeful activity in both human and supernatural contexts. While this greatly adds to the book's readability, it is questionable whether the episodes from literature are always appropriately chosen. For instance, nearly three pages (99–101) are taken up with a retelling, by way of background to the Viking capture of York in 866, of the account in the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Ragnars saga* of how Ragnarr, the supposed father of the Viking leaders at York, acquired his nickname *loðbrók* 'Hairy-pants' (*sic*) as a result of wearing shaggy trouserwear in slaying a monstrous serpent, and so winning his first wife, Þóra, in marriage. Ragnarr loðbrók is a figure 'of indeterminate historicity', as Williams admits (p. 99), and it is hard to see the relevance of this episode to the capture of York. More relevant is the saga's account, mentioned only briefly on pp. 108–09, of how Ragnarr was put to death in a snakepit by King Ælle of Northumbria, since this, as Williams also admits, provides vengeance as a motive for the Viking aggression of 866.

With regard to the 'eagle' carved on Ælle's back in revenge for Ragnarr's death, as reported in the saga and elsewhere, Williams accepts (pp. 110–13) the widely held view, first put forward by Roberta Frank in *English Historical Review* 99 (1984), 332–43, that the idea of the 'blood-eagle' is based on a misunderstanding of Sigvatr Þórðarson's poem *Knútsdrápa* (c.1038), interpreted by Frank as meaning that Ælle's slain body provided carrion for an eagle. It is in my view more likely that the word *ari*, used in this poem and meaning 'eagle' in other contexts, is here a poetic word for 'sword', since the related word for 'eagle', *ørn*, is recorded as meaning 'sword' in poetry, so that the poem's meaning is that Ælle was attacked with a sword (see *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum*, ed. Gísli Sigurðsson et al., 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1994), II 539–41, and *Anglo-Scandinavian Cross-Currents*, ed. Inga-Stina Ewbank et al. (Norwich, 1999), 126–31. As I see it, Sigvatr's poem was indeed misunderstood, but not in the way Frank and Williams suggest.

A really surprising feature of the book is that Williams, with his obvious love of legendary embellishment, makes no mention that I can find of the story of King Alfred burning the cakes. This is all the more surprising in that he quotes from and discusses at some length (pp. 163, 176–79, 191–92) G. K. Chesterton's long poem about Alfred, *The Ballad of the White Horse*, in which the cake-burning episode plays a prominent part. The story of Alfred and the cakes first makes its appearance in the anonymous eleventh-century *Vita S. Neoti*, and also occurs, in a version adapted from that of the *Vita*, in the twelfth-century *Annals of St Neots*. Both these works present the incident as taking place in Somerset, the *Vita* specifying that it took place at Athelney. The *Annals of St Neots* add the information that Alfred was preparing a bow and arrows and other weapons when he should have been watching the cakes (see *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative*

Edition, vol. 17, ed. David Dumville and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge, 1985), 76, 125–26). The story as told in these writings marks a turning-point in Alfred's career, since he is in retreat from the Vikings in Somerset (as Williams describes, pp. 163–65), but proceeds from there to his final victory over them at Edington in Wiltshire. It finds a parallel in *Ragnars saga*, where Ragnarr's followers, bedazzled by the beauty of the woman who becomes his second wife, burn the bread they are baking. This also marks something of a turning-point, since Ragnarr's second wife, Áslaug, gives birth to sons of whom the first, Ívarr, seems to have had as a historical prototype the Viking king of Dublin, Ímar, arguably one of the leaders of the capture of York in 866 (see Clare Downham, *Viking kings of Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 2007), 6, 15–16, 21, 64–65). His career as described in the saga, along with those of his brothers, reflects the new type of Scandinavian kingship, military as opposed to tribal kingship, that emerged with the Viking Age (cf. C. P. Wormald in *The Vikings*, ed. R. T. Farrell (London, 1982), 144–48). Mention of these two instances of neglectful baking would have illustrated not so much the shared inheritance of the English and the Vikings as the likelihood that stories told in the Danelaw influenced storytelling in Scandinavia.

These few remarks should not be allowed to obscure the fact that this is a highly entertaining and stimulating book. It is at times almost too engagingly written: some readers may balk at phrases like 'a chap called Edric' (p. 136; cf. 'a chap called Liofa', p. 291), and not all readers will want to know that on one of his field trips Williams consumed 'prodigious quantities of beer and deep-fried black pudding' (p. 249). His computer seems to have let him down on p. 383, where the surname of G. A. Hight, the translator of *Grettis saga*, appears as 'High' (in note 4 to chapter 20), and much more seriously on p. 112, where a distinguished Old Norse scholar is described correctly as 'incomparable', but wrongly as 'the late'! The book is nonetheless very much to be recommended.

RORY MCTURK
University of Leeds

THE TRANSMISSION OF BEOWULF. LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND SCRIBAL BEHAVIOR. By LEONARD NEIDORF. *Myth and Poetics 2*. Cornell University Press. London and Ithaca, 2017. xx + 200 pp. ISBN 978-1-5017-0511-3.

The Old English poem *Beowulf* is preserved in a single copy, made by two scribes and dated palaeographically to the first decade of the eleventh century, or thereabouts. Neidorf's aim in this monograph is to describe and explain the corruptions suffered by the text of the poem since it was composed. The fact that only one manuscript of *Beowulf* exists makes this no simple task. In the absence of two or more independent witnesses to the poem, the success of Neidorf's project depends on a reconstruction of the linguistic and textual character of the original poem by other means.

Some recent work on *Beowulf*'s date of composition must be mentioned briefly here to explain how Neidorf copes with this problem. The idea, first advanced by

K. S. Kiernan in 1981, that the two scribes of the extant manuscript revised and augmented the poem as they received it to such an extent that they should properly be considered its authors has never had many supporters, and a great variety of evidence has since been assembled suggesting that the textual history of *Beowulf* extends back well before the Viking Age, in particular the philological-metrical evidence brought forward by R. D. Fulk and published in *A History of Old English Meter* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), to which Neidorf frequently refers. Many of Fulk's conclusions emerge from his close attention to the Old English alliterative metre, with its stability over time and its complex network of requirements and prohibitions, viewed in conjunction with the impact on metrical usage of Old English phonological and morphological developments during the Anglo-Saxon period. Fulk arrives at a relative chronology of Old English poems in which *Beowulf* is one of the most archaic. Its composition can even be assigned with some confidence to the period 685–725 because of its strict conformity, in circumstances involving secondary stress, to Kaluza's law, which defines the conditions under which metrical resolution is either compulsory or proscribed. Fulk's case for an early dating of the poem has been supported and extended by other scholars, including Neidorf, who edited and contributed to the 2014 collection *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, reviewed in *Saga-Book XXXIX* (2015), 133–37). It would thus appear that our text of *Beowulf* derives ultimately from a written archetype produced sometime between 685 and 725. These conclusions, along with the condition of the text as it appears in our one manuscript, provide the basis of Neidorf's investigation.

Chapter 1, 'Introduction', surveys fundamental principles and factors bearing on *Beowulf*'s transmission: the extant manuscript and its date; the linguistic and metrical evidence for the date of composition; the modernising efforts of scribes aiming to transpose the text from its original Anglian dialect into late West-Saxon; scribal errors and their roots in cultural and linguistic changes in the interim period, or in scribes' encounters with archaic letter-forms in the archetype; the copious evidence of scribal indifference to sense, metre and context; and the connected phenomenon of the generally 'lexemic' nature of corrupt readings.

Chapter 2, 'Language History', deals first with diachronic changes in Old English that presented difficulties for late, West-Saxonising copyists. The specialised, archaic language of poetry was not readily understood by late scribes, particularly if the exemplar was written in an Anglian dialect, as the archetypal text of *Beowulf* evidently was. Factors including scribal inattentiveness resulted, however, in the transmission of some archaisms; and in a few cases (for example *Dena* for older *Deniga*, *wina* for older *winia*), modernisation was controlled by awareness of its potentially detrimental effect on the metre—a pointer to 'an intermediate copyist, closer to the *Beowulf* poet, who apprehended metrical nuances to which later scribes were indifferent' (§49). In many cases where late West-Saxon forms appear, metre indicates that the poet used older forms, even in words which might already have been modernised in the language of ordinary speech by the time he composed *Beowulf*. For example, in *on flet teon* (l. 1036b), *teon* must be decontracted to its earlier, two-syllable form to restore the four metrical positions required in most

patterns of Old English half-line. Loss of intervocalic *h* in such words as *teon* has been dated to the seventh century, so contraction may well have been complete before the archetype was written. This, then, is one way in which the spellings of the archetype probably represent a stage of linguistic development rather later than the stage reflected, in some respects at least, by the poet's own (poetic) language. The language of verse was always more archaic than the contemporary language of ordinary speech.

Turning to dialect-transposition, Neidorf compares an early Northumbrian and a late West-Saxon copy of *Cædmon's Hymn* to show that some Anglo-Saxon scribes were capable of transposing poems from one dialect to another without doing any serious textual damage; but examples from *Beowulf* where dialectal variation evidently prevented scribal comprehension are numerous. This often resulted in the breakdown of meaning, as in the case of *siexbennum* (l. 2904), which has almost certainly replaced the Anglian smoothed form *sexbennum* 'knife-wounds' in the exemplar: *sex-* was interpreted as an error for *six-* 'six', instead of the Anglian smoothed equivalent of West-Saxon *seax-* 'knife'; or of metre, as in 842b *secga ænegum* (l. 842b), in the second word of which medial *e* has been restored analogically; *ængum*, probably the exemplar form, would not have involved any breach of metrical rules. Next Neidorf illustrates 'Trivialisation', defined in the 'Glossary of Terms' as 'the unconscious or deliberate replacement of an unfamiliar reading with a more familiar one'. Cases dealt with in this part of the book have no obvious diachronic or dialectal significance (§76). Several of them were clearly provoked by poetic words unfamiliar to the scribes, as for example *fyrena* 'sins' (l. 2250) which has fairly obviously replaced *fira* 'people'. Finally, a subsection on 'Interpolation' describes identifiable additions to the text, revealed as additions usually by the metrical problems their inclusion entails.

Chapter 3, 'Cultural Change', illustrates how ignorance of heroic, legendary traditions led the scribes into error. Thus in lines 18 and 53, the Danish *Beowulf*, son of Scyld, is an error for *Beow*, the corrupt form probably being introduced in a spirit of correction: the scribe took *Beow* as an error for the hero's name. This is what Neidorf calls 'obfuscation': the name is still a name, though the wrong one. When, however, *Eomer*, son of Offa, is corrupted to the adjective *geomor* 'mournful' (l. 1960), depriving the verse of alliteration, this is full-blown 'obliteration' because the name disappears completely from the text. Ethnonyms often suffer a similar fate; for example *Eotan* 'Jutes' is twice mistaken for the common noun *eoten* 'giant' (ll. 902, 1145). Individual words in the scribes' exemplar are sometimes broken into sequences revealing the scribes' incomprehension, as in the famous case of *Merewioingas milts* 'the good will of the Merovingian' (l. 2921), broken up in the manuscript as *mere wio ingasmilts*. Chapter 3 concludes with a survey of evidence for the circulation of heroic legend in England in the Anglo-Saxon period, which shows that traditions known to the *Beowulf* poet flourished during the seventh and eighth centuries but not later—a strong point against late composition.

Chapter 4, 'Scribal Behavior', deals directly with the approach to the text of the scribes, who are described here as 'earnest laborers who were charged with a task beyond their capabilities' (§126). They were often unable to understand the

language of their exemplars, had little or no sense of the meaning or the metre of what they were copying, and so mistook many letter-sequences for non-authorial words and introduced them into their copies. This is Neidorf's 'lexemic theory' of scribal corruption in action. Lexemic corruption is also ubiquitous in the texts of poems in the Exeter Book, the Vercelli Book and the Junius Manuscript, the other three major poetic codices. Neidorf's discussion here provides a springboard for a reasoned attack on the notion of the scribe as 'an active participant in literary creation, who took an informed interest in the sense, meter, and substance of the poems he transmitted' (§134). The theories of K. O'Brien O'Keefe, A. N. Doane, C. B. Pasternack, R. M. Liuzza, K. S. Kiernan and B. J. Muir, all of whom have put forward versions of this idea, are considered individually (and, I think, fairly) and rejected. Neidorf, it should be said, is not the only scholar to publish his doubts about such theories. But textual variation (in the case of poems surviving in more than one version) is not always the result of scribal activity. In the case of *Soul and Body I* in the Vercelli Book, a poet, not a very good one but no mere scribe, has expanded the poem as it appeared in his exemplar by adding the 40-line address of the blessed soul (ll. 127–66). *Soul and Body II*, preserved in the Exeter Book and agreeing quite closely with the first 126 lines of *Soul and Body I*, represents the poem as it was originally composed. The case for regarding lines 78–156 of *The Dream of the Rood* in the Vercelli Book as a poet's addition to a shorter original is made briefly. Here, too, a poet, no mere scribe, is clearly responsible for the addition. Other poems surviving in parallel texts (*Solomon and Saturn I*, *Cædmon's Hymn*, *Gloria I*, the *Chronicle* poems, etc.) show largely 'lexemic' corruptions, trivialisation, evidence of indifference to sense and metre and so on, which Neidorf has already illustrated from *Beowulf*.

Chapter 5, 'Conclusion', provides an account of 'linguistic regularities' in *Beowulf* as a measure of the poem's unity and a test of the theories of 'libertine scribes' (§161) criticised in the previous chapter. It emerges here that there are many linguistic indications of unity of composition, and no signs at all that the scribes who copied the poem took 'compositional liberties' with the received text (§162). Finally, the 'Appendix' examines J. R. R. Tolkien's *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell*, edited by Christopher Tolkien (HarperCollins, 2014), the publication of which post-dated Neidorf's completed draft of the book under review, where Neidorf finds many points of agreement with his own work, including the eighth-century dating of *Beowulf*, its original preservation in written form in the first half of that century, its Mercian origin and the frequency with which traditional, legendary material is corrupted in the surviving manuscript. A few disagreements with Tolkien's ideas about the transmission of the poem are recorded and explained.

There are no obvious loose ends in Neidorf's argument, though I would query his reliance on Vinaver's formulation that 'the practical aim of textual criticism' is 'the partial reconstruction of the lost original' (§33), rather than the recovery of 'the pristine original of *Beowulf* as it left the poet's pen or mouth'. This is realistic from an editorial point of view; but where should partial reconstruction stop? It is in the nature of Neidorf's project to concentrate wholly on corruptions in the text;

but it might be interesting to know what aspects of the poem's original language the scribes were able to preserve or Saxonise without generating any corruptions, if only to throw the mistakes they did make into relief, perhaps even to give clearer definition to those circumstances that defeated them. The scribes did, after all, preserve a three-hundred-year-old text sufficiently well for it to be dateable. It may be, of course, that our knowledge of late-seventh- or early-eighth-century Mercian is too limited to make possible a reconstruction of at least part of the archetypal text, but the experiment might still be worth making.

One of the valuable functions of Neidorf's book is to force us to think again about some aspects of *Beowulf's* origins and history. The 'transmission' of a traditional alliterative poem can only begin once the narrative is fixed in writing—in *Beowulf's* case, when the written archetype of the extant text was produced in the late seventh or early eighth century. The study of transmission in this context is therefore a study of writing and scribes, which is how Neidorf treats it. Still, the poem as we have it is only one particular narration of the story of Beowulf—one that happens to have been fixed in writing, for reasons unknown to us, in a particular place and time. The story itself was not the poet's invention, or at least not wholly. I think we must assume that the bones of it came to England from the European continent during the Settlement Period, carried in the heads of West Germanic poets who continued to tell the story in verse when they reached Britain. Old Norse analogues to the Beowulf story, and the entirely Scandinavian and north German subject-matter of the poem, show that its deepest roots must lie in that part of the world, but if this prehistory of the poem is accepted, it would presumably have been free of any Christian references when it was imported; these must have been added in England in the course of oral performances during the seventh or early eighth century. This is not to suggest interpolation: the Christian references are technically well integrated, though this has not prevented several well-informed scholars, among them Tolkien and Whitelock, from suggesting that lines 175–88 are interpolated. Perhaps it is now time to reconsider the integration of the Christian elements in *Beowulf* against what now seems likely to have been a background of fairly recent conversion.

Another question that Neidorf leaves aside is why the three-hundred-year-old text of an early Mercian heroic poem preserving ancient, mostly Scandinavian traditions was recopied and Saxonised (though imperfectly) in the early eleventh century. Who might have initiated the recopying, and for whose benefit? It is difficult to decide whether the question should be linked to the broader one of why so much old Anglian poetry of all kinds—biblical, hagiographical, secular—was recopied and Saxonised during the second half of the tenth century. The Junius Manuscript, the Exeter Book and the Vercelli Book may all be regarded as products of this renaissance. Some of the recopied poems are biblical paraphrases (for instance *Genesis A*, *Exodus* and *Daniel*, all in the Junius manuscript), so it seems reasonable to ask why the linguistic renovation of old works of this nature was preferred to what would appear the more convenient option of composing new poetic paraphrases of these biblical books. The same question need not be asked of *Beowulf* because, as Neidorf shows very clearly, the traditions out of which the

poem was made were no longer current in the later part of the period; but we still need to explain what its value was for those who ensured its preservation at the beginning of the eleventh century. There is just one possible explanation for this extensive conservation of older verse that seems worth mentioning here. The tenth century saw a gradual weakening of 'classical' metrical norms and a general decline in the quality of newly composed verse (see Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter*, pp. 251–68). It therefore seems likely that the composition of poetry of the technical quality of *Beowulf*, *Genesis A* and the other texts I have mentioned was no longer possible in the tenth century or later; the etiolation of the tradition had gone too far. These older poems might therefore have been preserved and renewed because their quality was recognised as superior to anything that contemporary poets were capable of producing, and were worth salvaging (as opposed to replacing), perhaps simply for their own sake, as impressive work by native poets, or perhaps even as examples that younger poets might try to emulate, now that the vigorous oral tradition that had sustained alliterative verse for centuries among the West Germanic peoples was going into decline. One is reminded of Snorri Sturluson's defence of his *Prose Edda* against the potential charge of encouraging a relapse into paganism by describing pagan mythology, poetic diction based on it and verse-forms so comprehensively: 'young poets', he says, needed to know about the myths underlying obscure skaldic poetic expressions, as well as about poetic forms, if they were to continue the skaldic tradition. The sense of a moribund or fractured tradition in need of conservation, here almost explicit, might lie behind the preservation of *Beowulf* and the other poetry I have mentioned.

After so many years in which philological and metrical approaches to the study of Old English poetry have too often been treated rather as Cinderella was by her ugly sisters, it is refreshing to read a book in which these matters take centre stage. If philology ever resumes its proper place in Old English studies, it will be thanks to books like this. Neidorf handles his difficult material with great assurance, and few scholars could match him in terms of the clarity and economy he brings to its discussion. Very much in the book's favour is the careful and conscientious attention it pays to rival hypotheses about scribal behaviour; too often in our discipline we see a nervous reluctance to measure our own hypotheses against the competition. Neidorf, to his credit, obviously understands that inhibitions of this kind are profoundly unhealthy. His study is essential reading for all future editors of Old English poems and, of course, for everyone interested in *Beowulf* and its place in literary history.

PETER ORTON

Queen Mary, University of London

VIKING SOCIETY FOR NORTHERN RESEARCH

Membership fees

(payable on 1st October annually)

Ordinary membership	£25
Student membership	£12
Ordinary membership paid by Banker's Order	£23

To pay subscriptions by credit card, please follow instructions on the Society's web page: <http://www.vsnr.org/membership/>

The Society's bank is:

The Royal Bank of Scotland

171 Tottenham Court Road

London W1P 0DL

Sorting code: 16 - 01 - 02

Account name: The Viking Society. Account number: 14324356

IBAN GB49RBOS16010214324356

Swift BIC RBOSGB21030

IBAN BIC RBOSGB2L

Please address all correspondence to:

Viking Society for Northern Research

University College London

Gower Street

London WC1E 6BT

vsnr@ucl.ac.uk

INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS TO SAGA-BOOK

1. Saga-Book is published annually in the autumn. Submissions are invited from scholars, whether members of the Viking Society or not, on topics related to the history, culture, literature, language and archaeology of Scandinavia in the Middle Ages. Articles offered will be assessed by all four editors and, where appropriate, submitted to referees of international standing external to the Society. Contributions that are accepted will normally be published within two years. Submissions may be made at any time of year.

2. Contributions should be submitted in electronic form (Word or rtf file), by email attachment addressed to a.finlay@bbk.ac.uk. They may also be submitted in paper form (two copies, on one side only of A4 paper, addressed to the editors). They should be laid out with double spacing and ample margins. They should be prepared in accordance with the *MHRA Style Guide* (<http://www.mhra.org.uk/style>) with the exceptions noted below. For the purpose of anonymous assessment, the author's name should appear only in a covering email or letter, not as a signature or heading to the contribution itself nor in the electronic file name.

3. Footnotes should be kept to a minimum. Whenever possible the material should be incorporated in the text instead, if necessary in parentheses.

4. References should be incorporated in the text unless they relate specifically to subject-matter dealt with in a note. A strictly corresponding bibliographical list should be included at the end of the article. The accuracy of both the references and the list is the author's responsibility.

5. References should be given in the form illustrated by the following examples:

— Other death omens of ill-luck are shared by Scandinavian, Orcadian and Gaelic tradition (cf. Almqvist 1974–76, 24, 29–30, 32–33).

— Anne Holtmark (1939, 78) and others have already drawn attention to this fact.

— Ninth-century Irish brooches have recently been the subject of two studies by the present author (1972; 1973–74), and the bossed penannular brooches have been fully catalogued by O. S. Johansen (1973).

— This is clear from the following sentence: *iðraðist Bolli þegar verksins ok lýsti vígi á hendi sér (Laxdæla saga 1934, 154).*

— It is stated quite plainly in *Flateyjarbok* (1860–68, I 419): *hann tok land j Syrlækjarosi.*

— There is every reason to think that this interpretation is correct (cf. *Heilagra manna sǫgur*, II 107–08).

The terms *op. cit.*, *ed. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, *ibid.* should not be used. Avoid, too, the use of *f.* and *ff.*; give precise page references.

6. The bibliographical list should be in strictly alphabetical order by the surname(s) (except in the case of Icelanders with patronymics) of the author(s) or editor(s), or, where the authorship is unknown, by the title of the work or some suitable abbreviation. Neither the name of the publisher nor the place of publication is required; nor, generally, is the name of a series.

7. Words or phrases in languages other than English cited in the paper should be italicised and any gloss enclosed in single quotation marks, e.g. *Sýrdælir* ‘men from Surnadal’. Longer quotations should be enclosed in single quotation marks, with quotations within quotations enclosed in double quotation marks. Quotations of more than three lines, quotations in prose of more than one paragraph, whatever their length (two lines of dialogue, for example), and all verse quotations, should be indented. Such quotations should not be enclosed in quotation marks, and they should not be italicised.

VIKING SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS LIST 2018

All in card covers unless noted as bound; Members/Non-Members' prices quoted in £.p. Orders should be sent to Gazelle Book Services Limited, High Town, Lancaster, LA1 4XS; email: sales@gazellebooks.co.uk. Viking Society members can claim members' reduced price when ordering from Gazelle.

In North America orders can also be sent to Roy Rukkila, Managing Editor, ACMRS, Arizona State University, P.O. Box 874402, Tempe, AZ 85287-4402, USA; email: mrts@asu.edu. Prices at <http://asu.edu/clas/acmrs/publications/mrts/vsnr.html>

EDITIONS

Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum. A Twelfth-Century Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway. Edited and translated by M. J. Driscoll. Text Series X. Second edition 2009. ISBN 978 0 903521 75 8. £6/£12.

Bandamanna saga. Edited by H. Magerøy. 1981, reprinted 2006. ISBN 978 0 903521 15 4. £6/£12.

Clemens saga. The Life of St Clement of Rome. Edited and translated by H. Carron. Text Series XVII. 2005. ISBN 978 0 903521 67 3. £4/£8.

Egils saga. Edited by Bjarni Einarsson. With notes and glossary. 2003, reprinted 2013. ISBN 978 0 903521 60 4 (bound) £12/£24; ISBN 978 0 903521 54 3 (card) £8/£16.

Fourteenth-Century Icelandic Verse on the Virgin Mary. Drápa af Mariuþrátt. Vitisvísur af Mariu. Mariuvisur I–III. Edited and translated by K. Wrightson. Text Series XIV. 2001. ISBN 978 0 903521 46 8. £2.50/£5.

The Fourth Grammatical Treatise. Edited by Margaret Clunies Ross and Jonas Wellendorf. With introduction, commentary and translation. 2014. ISBN 978 0 903521 90 1. £6/£12.

Grottasöngur. Edited and translated by C. Tolley. 2008. ISBN 978 0 903521 78 9. £4/£8.

Guta lag. The Law of the Gotlanders. Translated and edited by C. Peel. Text Series XIX. 2009. ISBN 978 0 903521 79 6. £4/£8.

Guta saga. The History of the Gotlanders. Edited and translated by C. Peel. Text Series XII. 1999. ISBN 978 0 903521 44 4. £4/£8.

Hávamál. Edited by D. A. H. Evans. With Glossary and Index compiled by A. Faulkes. Text Series VII. 1986–87, repr. 2017. ISBN 978 0 903521 95 6. £6/£12.

Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks. With notes and glossary by G. Turville-Petre. Introduction by C. Tolkien. Text Series II. 1956, repr. 2014. ISBN 978 0 903521 11 6. £5/£10.

Hrafnagaldur Óðins (Forspjallsljóð). Edited with introduction, notes and translation by A. Lassen. Text Series XX. 2011. ISBN 978 0 903521 81 9. £6/£12.

Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra. The Saga of Illugi, Gríður's Foster-son. Edited and translated by Philip Lavender. 2015. ISBN 978 0 903521 91 8. £5/£10.

Magnús Ólafsson of Laufás: Specimen Lexici Runici and Glossarium Priscæ Linguae Danicæ. Edited by A. Faulkes and Gunnlaugur Ingólfsson. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum and Viking Society for Northern Research 2010. ISBN 978 0 903521 80 2. £30/£60.

Páls leizla. The Vision of St Paul. Edited and translated by Dario Bullitta. 2017. ISBN 978 0 903521 96 3. £5/£10.

Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning. Edited by A. Faulkes. Second edition 2005. Reprinted 2018. ISBN 978 0 903521 64 2. £6/£12.

Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Skáldskaparmál. Edited by A. Faulkes. 2 vols. 1998. ISBN 978 0 903521 34 5. £12/£24.

Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Háttatal. Edited by A. Faulkes. Second edition 2007. ISBN 978 0 903521 68 0. £6/£12.

Snorri Sturluson: The Uppsala Edda. Edited by Heimir Pálsson. 2012. ISBN 978 0 903521 85 7. £6/£12.

Stories from Sagas of Kings: Halldórs þátr Snorrasonar inn fyrri, Halldórs þátr Snorrasonar inn síðari, Stúfs þátr inn meiri, Stúfs þátr inn skemmri, Völsa þátr, Brands þátr örva. With introduction, notes and glossary by A. Faulkes. Second edition 2007. ISBN 978 0 903521 72 7. £5/£10.

Two Icelandic Stories: Hreiðars þátr, Orms þátr. Edited by A. Faulkes. Text Series IV. Second edition 2011. ISBN 978 0 903521 73 4. £5/£10.

TRANSLATIONS

A History of Norway and the Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr. Translated by D. Kunin. Edited with introduction and notes by C. Phelpstead. Text Series XIII. 2001, repr. 2017. ISBN 978 0 903521 48 2. £5/£10.

Íslendingabók, Kristni saga. The Book of the Icelanders, The Story of the Conversion. Translated with introduction and notes by S. Grønlie. Text Series XVIII. 2006, reprinted 2015. ISBN 978 0 903521 71 0. £5/£10.

The Saga of Bishop Thorlak (Þorláks saga byskups). Translated with introduction and notes by Ármann Jakobsson and D. Clark. 2013. ISBN 978 0 903521 88 8. £5/£10.

Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla. I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason. Translated by A. Finlay and A. Faulkes. 2nd edition. 2016. ISBN 978 0 903521 94 9. £6/£12.

Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla II: Óláfr Haraldsson (the Saint). Translated by A. Finlay and A. Faulkes. 2014. ISBN 978 0 903521 89 5. £6/£12.

Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla III: Magnús Ólafsson to Magnús Erlingsson. Translated by A. Finlay and A. Faulkes. 2015. ISBN 978 0 903521 93 2. £6/£12.

Theodoricus Monachus: Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium. An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings. Translated and annotated by D. and I. McDougall, with introduction by P. Foote. Text Series XI. 1998, repr. 2006. ISBN 978 0 903521 40 6. £5/£10.

Three Icelandic Outlaw Sagas. The Saga of Gisli, The Saga of Grettir, The Saga of Hord. Translated by G. Johnston and A. Faulkes. Edited and introduced by A. Faulkes. 2004. ISBN 978 0 903521 66 6. £6/£12.

The Works of Sven Aggesen, Twelfth-Century Danish Historian. Translated with introduction and notes by E. Christiansen. Text Series IX. 1992. ISBN 978 0 903521 24 6. £6/£12.

TEXTBOOKS

A New Introduction to Old Norse. Part I: Grammar. By M. Barnes. Third edition. 2007. Reprinted 2018. ISBN 978 0 903521 74 1. £6/£12.

A New Introduction to Old Norse. Part II: Reader. Edited by A. Faulkes. Fifth edition. 2011. Reprinted 2018. ISBN 978 0 903521 978 83 3. £6/£12.

A New Introduction to Old Norse. Part III: Glossary and Index of Names. Compiled by A. Faulkes. Fourth edition with 2 supplements compiled by M. Barnes. 2007. ISBN 978 0 903521 70 3. £6/£12.

STUDIES

Árni Björnsson: *Wagner and the Volsungs. Icelandic Sources of der Ring des Nibelungen.* 2003. ISBN 978 0 903521 55 0. £6/£12.

W. G. Collingwood and Jón Stefánsson: *A Pilgrimage to the Saga-Steads of Iceland.* Facsimile of the original 1899 edition. Edited by Matthias Egeler. Hardback. 2015. ISBN 978 0 903521 92 5. £15/£30.

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson: *The Folk-Stories of Iceland.* Revised by Einar G. Pétursson. Translated by Benedikt Benedikz. Edited by A. Faulkes. Text Series XVI. 2003. ISBN 978 0 903521 53 6. £6/£12.

Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njáls saga. Edited by J. Hines and D. Slay. 1992. Reprinted 2016. ISBN 978 0 903521 25 3. £5/£10.

Making History. Essays on the fornaldarsögur. Edited by M. Arnold and A. Finlay. 2010. ISBN 978 0 903521 84 0. £5/£10.

Old Norse Made New. Edited by D. Clark and C. Phelpstead. 2007. ISBN 978 0 903521 76 5. £5/£10.

Ólafur Halldórsson: *Danish Kings and the Jomsvikings in the Greatest Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason.* 2000. ISBN 978 0 903521 47 5. £5/£10.

Ólafur Halldórsson: *Text by Snorri Sturluson in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta.* 2001. ISBN 978 0 903521 49 9. £5/£10.

R. Perkins: *Thor the Wind-Raiser and the Eyrarland Image.* Text Series XV. 2001. ISBN 978 0 903521 52 9. £6/£12.

N. S. Price: *The Vikings in Brittany.* 1989. Reprinted 2013. ISBN 978 0 903521 22 2 [Saga-Book XXII:6]. £5/£10.

A. S. C. Ross: *The Terfinnas and Beormas of Othhere*. Leeds 1940. Reprinted with an additional note by the author and an afterword by M. Chesnutt 1981. ISBN 978 0 903521 14 7. £1/£2.

Stefán Karlsson: *The Icelandic Language*. Translated by R. McTurk. 2004. ISBN 978 0 903521 61 1. £3/£6.

Viking Revaluations. Viking Society Centenary Symposium 14–15 May 1992. Edited by A. Faulkes and R. Perkins. 1993. ISBN 978 0 903521 28 4. £3.50/£7.

D. Whaley: *Heimskringla. An Introduction*. Text Series VIII. 1991. Reprinted 2018. ISBN 978 0 903521 23 9. £7/£14.

DOROTHEA COKE MEMORIAL LECTURES. £2/£4.

S. Brink: *Lord And Lady – Bryti And Deigja. Some Historical And Etymological Aspects Of Family, Patronage And Slavery In Early Scandinavia And Anglo-Saxon England*. 2008. ISBN 978 0903521 77 2.

A. Faulkes: *Poetical Inspiration in Old Norse and Old English Poetry*. 1997. ISBN 978 0 903521 32 1.

P. Foote: *1117 in Iceland and England*. 2003. 978 0 903521 59 8.

Guðrún Nordal: *Skaldic Versifying and Social Discrimination in Medieval Iceland*. 2003. ISBN 978 0 903521 58 1.

R. Perkins: *The Verses in Eric the Red's Saga. And Again: Norse Visits to America*. 2011. ISBN 978 0903521 87 1.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Alice Selby: *Icelandic Journal*. Edited by A. R. Taylor. 1974. ISBN 978 0 903521 04 8 [Saga-Book XIX:1]. £2.50/£5.

J. A. B. Townsend: *Index to Old-Lore Miscellany*. 1992. ISBN 978 0 903521 26 0. £1/£2.

PUBLICATIONS DISTRIBUTED BY THE VIKING SOCIETY

Ármann Jakobsson: *Í leit að konungi. Konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna*. Háskólaútgáfan. 1997. ISBN 978 9979 54 208 7. £10 (or £15 for this and the following item).

Ármann Jakobsson: *Staður í nýjum heimi. Konungasagan Morkinskinna*. Háskólaútgáfan. 1997. ISBN 978 9979 54 522 4. £10 (or £15 for this and the preceding item).

M. P. Barnes: *The Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe, Orkney*. Institution för nordiska språk, Uppsala Universitet, 1994. ISBN 978 91 506 1042 0. £27.

- M. P. Barnes and R. I. Page: *The Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions of Britain*. Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala Universitetet. 2006. ISBN 978 91 506 1853 2. £30.
- Lúðvík Ingvárrsson: *Goðorð og goðorðsmenn*. 1986. 3 volumes. £30.
- P. Foote: *The Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle in Iceland*. London Medieval Studies, UCL. 1959. £1.
- J. Young: *Letters from Iceland 1936*. By Jean Young. University of Birmingham School of English. 1992. ISBN 978 0 7044 1247 7. £2.
- The Schemers and Víga-Glúm. Bandamanna Saga and Víga-Glúms Saga*. Translated with introduction and notes by G. Johnston. Porcupine's Quill. 1999. ISBN 978 0 88984 189 5. £5.