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THE PROSIMETRUM OF THE ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR

AESTHETIC AND NARRATIVE EFFECTS

*Edited by Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, Stefanie Gropper,
Judy Quinn and Alexander Wilson*



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Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, Stefanie Gropper, Judy Quinn
and Alexander Wilson

The *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum – An Introduction

The prosimetric nature of the medieval Icelandic saga is today acknowledged as one of the hallmarks of the genre.¹ With the exception of translations of continental texts that produced the *riddarasögur* [chivalric romances], *postulasögur* [lives of apostles] and *heilagra manna sögur* [lives of saints], quotation of verse within a prose narrative is a characteristic of all the genres of the Icelandic saga: the *konungasögur* [kings' sagas], *Íslendingasögur* [sagas of Icelanders], *samtíðarsögur* [contemporary sagas], *biskupasögur* [sagas of Icelandic bishops] and *fornaldarsögur* [legendary sagas].

Relatively little research has been undertaken on the distinctive prosimetric style and aesthetic of different saga genres, however. A basic distinction has been identified that in historiographic literature, such as the *konungasögur*, verse quotation is usually deployed to authenticate the prose narrative – functioning as a supportive, supplementary voice in the text – while in the *Íslendingasögur*, most of the stanzas are spoken in a manner that widens the spectrum of intradiegetic voices and complicates the narrative voice, as well as enhancing characterisation. While we query how useful this binary is, the distinction has gained currency in contemporary scholarship, with the terms “authenticating” and “situational” often occurring in the analysis of prosimetrum.²

Across different national academic traditions and across the centuries, scholarship on medieval Icelandic sagas has been principally concerned with different aspects of the prose narrative of each work, with the quoted verses usually set to one side and discussed separately in the context of poetic traditions. As a result of the dominant focus of saga scholarship on the study of prose narrative, the inte-

1 For an overview of research on the prosimetrum of the *Íslendingasögur*, see Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, Gropper, Quinn, Wills and Wilson, “Investigating the *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum”, and the introductions to Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, and Males, *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Literature*.

2 See especially Whaley, “Skalds and Situational Verses in *Heimskringla*”.

Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, University of Iceland

Stefanie Gropper, University of Tübingen

Judy Quinn, University of Cambridge

Alexander Wilson, University of Leicester

gral role played by verse in almost all of the *Íslendingasögur* has often been overlooked or discounted as an inconvenience: quoted verse has either been regarded as redundant to the course of the narrative, or awkward because it contradicts the prose narrative or impedes its flow. In addition, other complications in the tradition have tended to be ignored. For instance, manuscript versions of particular sagas often differ in their preservation of quoted verse; some present more and some present fewer stanzas, while in a number of cases there are variant versions of particular stanzas. A number of case studies have shown the variance of prose and verse in manuscript transmission and the consequences of it for the meaning of the text.³ To the extent that verse from the sagas has been studied, it has generally been in the context of establishing the authenticity (or otherwise) of poetry attributed to figures in the sagas and postulating possible dates for their composition. Such preoccupations have tended to relegate the examination of the literary effects of verse quotation to the background, a situation which our project, “The *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum” (ÍSP), addresses in relation to one saga genre, although a thoroughgoing cross-genre approach remains to be done.⁴

It is only recently that the prosimetrum of the *Íslendingasögur* has attracted more attention,⁵ with a strong focus on developing a timeline for the development of the genre in relation to the verses contained in the texts. Previously, this aspect was discussed in relation to oral transmission and the question of whether or not whole poems or single stanzas were accompanied by contextualising prose.⁶ Recent studies profit from previous research of a more general nature about skaldic poetry, its cultural function and its relation to narrative texts, as does our own project. These include Guðrún Nordal’s book on skaldic poetry in the thir-

³ For example, see Poole, “Variants and Variability in the Text of Egill’s *Höfuðlausn*”; Guðrún Nordal, “The Dialogue between Audience and Text”; Quinn and Lethbridge (ed.), *Creating the Medieval Saga*; and Lethbridge and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (ed.), *New Studies in the Manuscript Transmission of Njáls saga*.

⁴ The project “The *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum” was principally undertaken at the Universities of Tübingen and Cambridge from April 2020 to March 2023. It was supported by a bilateral grant funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [AH/T012757/1] and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft [GR 3613/5–1]. The project’s database, designed and maintained by Tarrin Wills, is available online (<https://gefin.ku.dk/q.php?p=isp>) [last accessed 20 February 2024].

⁵ In recent years, see especially Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, and Males, *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Literature*.

⁶ For example, see Wolf, “Zur Rolle der visur in der altnordischen Prosa”; von See, “Skaldenstrophe und Sagaprosa”; Harris, “The Prosimetrum of Icelandic Saga and some Relatives”; Marold, “The Relation between Verses and Prose in *Bjarnar saga*”; and Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition*.

teenth century and her numerous articles on skaldic poetry in the *Íslendingasögur*,⁷ Annette Lassen's work on mythology and on the *fornaldarsögur*,⁸ Heather O'Donoghue's books on *Kormáks saga* and the poetics of saga narrative,⁹ Alison Finlay's research on the poets' sagas,¹⁰ and Kate Heslop's writings about skaldic performance and mediality.¹¹

This research demonstrates that there are a number of other aspects which provide the basis for a more holistic approach to the study of saga prosimetrum, and these form the basis for our project. The main focus of our project is the interaction between prose and verse in extant texts and its variation, its *variance* and *mouvance*.¹² Whereas scholars such as Margaret Clunies Ross and Mikael Males concentrate on questions of dating and literary history,¹³ we are more interested in the aesthetic side of prosimetrum, foregrounding the creativity of saga narrators in their experimentation with literary form.

Drawing on evidence from all twenty six of the prosimetric *Íslendingasögur*, we collected data relating to the function of quoted verse in saga narrative, since that was an established focus of scholarship.¹⁴ We extended our enquiry into other formal aspects of the relation between prose and verse that had been investigated in previous scholarship,¹⁵ and developed the exploration of literary effects

7 See Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, “The Art of Poetry and the Sagas of Icelanders”, “The Dialogue between Audience and Text”, and “*Ars metrica* and the Composition of *Egils saga*”.

8 See Lassen, *Øjet og blindheden*, and Lassen, Ney and Ármann Jakobsson, *The Legendary Sagas*.

9 See O'Donoghue, *The Genesis of a Saga Narrative*, and O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*.

10 See Finlay, “Skalds, Troubadours and Sagas”, and Finlay, “Interpretation or Over-Interpretation”.

11 See Heslop, *Viking Mediologies*, and Heslop, “Hearing Voices”.

12 Paul Zumthor characterizes the instability of medieval textual transmission, or *mouvance*, as an “interplay between variant readings and reworkings”; see Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, 44. Bernard Cerquiglini suggests that such variance means analysis of medieval texts should proceed from a “comparative, not archaeological” foundation, because “archaeology reduces something that derives its meaning from difference into something that is just one”; see Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant*, 44. For the use of digital humanities to represent the *mouvance* of medieval texts more accurately, see Jänicke and Wisely, “Visualizing *Mouvance*”.

13 See Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, and Males, *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Literature*.

14 For example, see Magerøy, “Skaldestrofer som retardasjonsmiddel i Íslendingesogene”; Bjarni Einarsson, “On the Rôle of Verse in Saga-Literature”; Guðrún Ingólfsdóttir, “Um hlutverk vísna í Íslendingasögum”; and Marold, “The Relation between Verse and Prose in *Bjarnar saga*”.

15 See Harris, “The Prosimetrum of Old Icelandic Saga and some Relatives”; Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas*; Meulengracht Sørensen, “The Prosimetrum Form 1”; Tulinius, “The Prosimetrum Form 2”; and O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*.

arising from the difference between narrators quoting stanzas themselves and stanzas presented as being “performed” by saga characters.¹⁶

A year after we started our project, we held our first workshop where we discussed our methods of textual analysis and data collection, as well as our initial findings and our objectives, with members of our advisory board. A major topic was the possible advantages of the combination of quantitative and qualitative search results. The rich potential of investigating the aesthetic dimension of prosimetric texts and questions of narratology came to the forefront during these discussions. At the second workshop, a year later, again with the help of our advisory board, we revised the categories of data collection and discussed the consistency of our textual analysis. We also followed up interesting observations that we wanted to pursue through in-depth case studies, and some of these examples are discussed in our collaborative article of 2022.¹⁷ Our final workshop gave us the opportunity to explore the aesthetic and narrative effects of prosimetry in the *Íslendingasögur*, with the papers presented at the workshop and subsequent discussions forming the basis for the essays in this volume. The essays address aspects of prosimetric aesthetics from different theoretical and methodological points of view, and demonstrate the wide variety of prosimetric styles that are evident across the corpus of *Íslendingasögur*.

During the course of our project, several key concepts and themes emerged as being critical to our understanding of and approach to prosimetry in the *Íslendingasögur*. A critical aspect of our methodology has been the use of quantitative data to analyse the prosimetric *Íslendingasögur* as a corpus, rather than considering the prosimetric aesthetics of each saga in isolation. Until recently, comparative analysis of prosimetry in the *Íslendingasögur* has focused on the subgenre of *skáldasögur* (sagas of poets), which narrate the lives of renowned poets and thus foreground poetic quotation in their narratives.¹⁸ The ÍSP database, which will be described in more detail below, allows us to make broader connections across the genre as a whole, including texts that feature less poetry or where the poetry is apparently more tangential to narrative events. As a result, we have been able to identify patterns in the use of certain metres and a speaker’s gender, patterns of how poetry is quoted by the narrative voice, and network

¹⁶ As previously shown in Glauser, “The Speaking Bodies of Saga Texts”; Heslop, “Hearing Voices”; and Heslop, *Viking Mediologies*.

¹⁷ Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, Gropper, Quinn, Wills and Wilson, “Investigating the *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetry”, 66–72.

¹⁸ On this point, however, see Alison Finlay’s essay in this volume, which investigates the poetry mentioned, but not quoted, in this subgenre of sagas.

analysis of poets and their audiences, among other things.¹⁹ This analysis is invaluable for expanding our knowledge of how poetry is used in these texts, and also establishes a strong foundation for our qualitative analysis of prosimetrum, both across the genre and in individual sagas.

As many sagas, including the prosimetric *Íslendingasögur*, are extant in multiple versions, we have incorporated manuscript variance as an integral part of our data collection. Our database tracks variation in the content of stanzas, including common emendations by editors, as well as the inquit (i.e. introductory sentences) used to frame the poetry in the prose. By marking where stanzas are quoted in only some versions of a saga, we can further nuance our analysis of how poetry is used as a structuring tool in these narratives. This subject is addressed especially in the essays by Stefanie Gropper and Annette Lassen in this volume, where they investigate prosimetric variation across the redactions of *Njáls saga* and *Egils saga* respectively. A related article by Stefanie Gropper, which focuses on the inclusion of poetry in some instances of the Unnr episode in *Njáls saga*, is also forthcoming.²⁰

Certain narratological concepts have also been influential in guiding our approach to the narrative effects that prosimetrum can generate for saga audiences. The notion that introducing complex skaldic stanzas into saga prose can have the effect of retarding narrative progression – that is, slowing down the speed at which the audience can process the narrative by making them switch between different interpretive strategies for poetry and prose – has previously been discussed by scholars.²¹ Stefanie Gropper’s aforementioned article on the poetry spoken by Unnr in some versions of *Njáls saga* expands on these ideas by incorporating the concept of focalisation, showing how the inclusion of Unnr’s poetry encourages the audience to spend more time contemplating the events of the saga from her perspective. The concept of diegetic level has also been important for our consideration of the different aesthetic and narrative functions that stanzas serve when quoted by the narrative voice or recited by characters in the story. By distinguishing between verse quoted on the intradiegetic and extradiegetic levels – that is, the levels of the storyworld and of narration – we found a surprising number of examples that incorporate both intradiegetic reference to performance and extradiegetic quotation of the stanza, which reveals the active role played by the narrative voice of the

19 For an initial overview of these case studies, see Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, Gropper, Quinn, Wills and Wilson, “Investigating the *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum”, 66–73.

20 Gropper, “Unnr’s Story”.

21 For example, see Magerøy, “Skaldestrofer som retardasjonsmiddel i Íslendingesogene”.

sagas in curating poetry.²² Our collaborative article of 2022 includes a case study on this subject, while Alexander Wilson investigates this aspect of poetic quotation in more detail in a forthcoming article.²³

Because saga prosimetrum invariably involves the juxtaposition of poetry and prose, we have found it useful to consider where the differences across these media engender productive literary engagement by audiences. In her recent publication *The Creativity Paradox*, Judy Quinn uses the concept of paradox to characterise the interplay between literary forms in prosimetric episodes as “a discourse that is playful and invites interaction between literal understanding and imagination”.²⁴ Paradox can be a powerful tool for understanding saga prosimetrum: it allows us to see how the divergent elements of skaldic verse are accentuated, not resolved, by their reconfiguration within the conventions of saga prose, and opens a window into the creative processes of saga writers. Similarly, Alexander Wilson investigates the potential for artful dissonance between poetry and prose in an essay on the encoding of dissonant perspectives on vengeance across these media in *Heiðarvíga saga*.²⁵

Finally, the notion of interiority has emerged as a critical aspect of the study of prosimetrum. Our project emphasises not only skaldic poetry’s various ways of communicating thoughts and emotions, but also its artifice as a medium and its carefully considered use of linguistic and literary convention, which necessarily affect its capacity to communicate interiority. The contributions in this volume by Kate Heslop and Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir build on this understanding, with a focus on the narrative strategies that prosimetrum offered saga writers to convey interiority, emotion, and sensibility.

The ÍSP database presents a comprehensive collection of quantitative data on the features of all 722 stanzas in the corpus of *Íslendingasögur*.²⁶ This includes over two hundred data points for each stanza, detailing aspects such as the stanza’s speaker and its audience, the context of the utterance, the stanza’s relation to surrounding prose, whether or not the recitation of the stanza prompts action as well as the wide range of syntactic and rhetorical features of each quoted stanza. The main objective of the database is to facilitate complex quantitative analysis

22 On the role played by the narrative voice in curating poetic quotation, see Quinn, “Ok er þetta upphaf”.

23 Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, Gropper, Quinn, Wills and Wilson, “Investigating the *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum”, 68–70; Wilson, “Authenticating Voices?”.

24 Quinn, *The Creativity Paradox*, 26.

25 Wilson, “Dissonance in the Prosimetrum of *Heiðarvíga saga*”.

26 On the design of the database, see Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, Gropper, Quinn, Wills and Wilson, “Investigating the *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum”, 54–61.

of features observed in the prosimetrum of the sagas, laying the groundwork for qualitative exploration.²⁷ The data was collected saga by saga, with each poetic instance treated as a prosimetric episode, and data categories underwent further testing at our three project workshops. Characters relevant to the prosimetric episodes, like speakers, addressees, and audience members, are interconnected through a networked “table of persons”, facilitating social network analysis. Details such as gender, age, and social status, including the classification of speakers as paranormal beings, are recorded in each instance. The database facilitates diverse analytical inquiries, allowing searches to unveil correlations and relationships among specific sub-categories (of which there are over three hundred). Accordingly, this dataset enables initial quantitative examination of prosimetric elements, paving the way for deeper qualitative analysis. As many of the essays in this volume demonstrate, the database affords scholars the opportunity to move beyond case studies to explore larger generic patterns across the corpus. It is our hope that the research presented here stimulates further work that continues to exploit the rich potential of the ÍSP database.

To preface the essays in the collection, Guðrún Nordal considers the development of saga prosimetrum in the context of learned interest in the skaldic art across the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Iceland. Guðrún proposes that the stanzas quoted in any given text present what she terms an authorial signature, one that can reveal a great deal about the author’s cultural background and their aesthetic interests. The way in which quoted stanzas are integral to the aesthetic of saga prosimetrum is then taken up by Stefanie Gropper in her essay on *Njáls saga*, where she explores the transmission history of the work and how it demonstrates the active engagement of scribes who added in the margins of their texts stanzas that in other witnesses were drawn into the body of the saga prosimetrum. The polyphony of prosimetric voices in the *Íslendingasögur*, she notes, is a distinguishing feature of the genre. By comparing the recensions, as represented in the two principal editions of *Njáls saga*, she shows how complex the aesthetic interaction between prose and verse can be, while the editorial history of the saga underlines just how challenging the active quality of the prosimetric dynamic can be for editors and readers alike. Querying the objectivity of conventional terminology which has designated some stanzas as “additional”, Stefanie casts doubt on the usefulness of seeking a single, fixed, “authorial” version of a saga, focusing instead on the aesthetic choices that are revealed by differing con-

27 Tarrin Wills designed the database to be compatible with related projects, such as the Kenning Lexicon Project (University of Kiel: <https://kenninglexicon.org>) [last accessed 20 February 2024] and the international Skaldic Project (<https://skaldic.org>) [last accessed 20 February 2024].

figurations of saga prosimetrum across recensions. By tracking the narrative implications of the additional stanzas preserved in one recension, she reveals how its emphasis on familial matters is distinct from the sense of political foreboding that is to the fore in another recension.

The extent of prosimetric variation across witnesses of an individual saga is also the focus of Annette Lassen's essay, which analyses the distribution of verses in the A, B and C redactions of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. Whereas manuscripts of *Njáls saga* preserve just one long poem, the anonymous *Darraðarljóð*, manuscripts of *Egils saga* together preserve three whole poems attributed to Egill Skalla-Grímsson, his *Höfuðlausn*, *Sonatorrek*, and *Arinbjarnarkviða* – though no manuscript records them all – as well as a substantial number of *lausavísur* attributed to him. The variation in preservation leads Annette to hypothesise that readers of the saga may not necessarily have memorised and known Egill's poems, as has often been supposed. Through a detailed survey of the distribution of verses and poems quoted in each of the three redactions of the saga, she profiles the interests of each compiler along with the different emphases in the characterisation of Egill in each case.

In her essay, Kate Heslop explores the complex interplay between saga poetry, narrative voice, and manuscript variation in the *Íslendingasögur*, particularly in relation to the *Máhlíðingavísur* as quoted in *Eyrbyggja saga*. Starting from Meulengracht Sørensen's concept of saga verse as a "voice of the past", Kate argues against viewing the sagas through a purely formalist lens of poetry versus prose, advocating instead for a nuanced reading that promotes appreciation of the sagas' innovative narrative style and their role as early narrative experiments. By applying to the medieval saga a model derived from generative grammar, traditionally used for modern novelistic fiction, Kate reveals how variations in tense, deixis and voice across manuscripts illuminate the sagas' narrative strategies and challenge conventional notions of authorship. The analysis highlights the sagas' narrative depth as a result of collective creation rather than the singular vision of an identifiable author. The conclusion suggests a shift in perspective from viewing stanzas merely as historical echoes to recognizing them as part of a narrative ecosystem enriched by manuscript diversity, suggesting that, similar to contemporary print culture, saga creation is a distributed process involving multiple agents. This decentres the concept of a single author, proposing instead a collective model of narrative production.

Judy Quinn examines the complexity of prosimetric rhythm within the sagas. She emphasises the varied density and distribution of quoted stanzas across the corpus, suggesting that this variability indicates experimentation with narrative forms by saga authors. Her focus is on key areas including the staging of stanzas as responses to questions, their role as concluding remarks in scenes, and instan-

ces when verse casts a shadow over yet to be narrated storylines. Judy observes that conversations in verse are rare in the sagas, often comprising brief exchanges, which suggests a deliberate avoidance of extended poetic dialogues in the prosimetrum of the *Íslendingasögur*. Conversely, she highlights that nearly half of all verse quotations are prompted by questions from prose-speaking characters, underscoring this technique as a preferred method for integrating stanzas within the saga prosimetrum. This pattern supports a narrative strategy where poetry is integrated into the prose through interactive dialogue, contributing to the narrative's overall rhythm. Additionally, Judy offers an in-depth discussion on the diverting effect of certain stanzas on readers, specifically analysing a stanza from *Gísla saga*, and concludes that prosimetric rhythm operates at two tempos: the tempo of composition as the narrator crafts the intervals of prose between stanzas and the resonant space around their staging, and the tempo of the audience's apprehension of prosimetric complexity.

In her essay, Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir problematises the generally held opinion that one of the functions of saga poetry is to reveal the interiority or inner thoughts and feelings of the poets. Based on the results generated using a cross-tabular search in the ÍSP database, she presents a more differentiated picture of the function and presentation of emotion in skaldic verse. Her examples and case studies reveal a layered perspective on emotions in the stanzas and demonstrate the diverse roles played by emotive poetry in the prosimetrum of the *Íslendingasögur*. Emotive expressions in saga poetry and prosimetrum act not only as reflections of the poet's inner world, but also as a performative emotional display, complicating the dichotomy between "inner" and "outer" expressions. Saga poets typically use emotion words to describe others rather than directly expressing their personal feelings, which suggests that the poet's interiority is more often implied rather than explicitly revealed. Her analysis illustrates the subtle complexity of emotional expression within the prosimetric structure of the sagas. The multifaceted functions of verse, conveyed through various modalities within a unified literary framework, elevate the stanzas' emotive significance beyond mere expressions of interiority.

Alexander Wilson analyses how the distinct qualities of saga prose and skaldic verse could be artfully juxtaposed to create complex depictions of life in early medieval Iceland. He considers some theoretical aspects of space, before outlining how skaldic poetry and saga prose generally construct space in different ways. In his case study of *Víga-Glúms saga*, he shows how the intertwining of poetry and prose complicates and enriches the saga. While verse and prose both represent common concerns, such as the association of land and identity and the importance of one's property, they express spatial concerns in distinct, often contrary ways. Their differences can be understood productively as introducing significant, but

not irresolvable, tensions into the narrative, which motivate interpretive engagements with the text. Alex suggests that such formal dissonance was not antithetical to the artistic intentions of the saga writer, but afforded the interpretive potential of how poetry and prose configure space differently. The juxtaposition of media enables productive friction between their distinct communicative modes to emerge in the saga, which creates conflict and complexity on various levels of the text.

The final two essays in the volume are linked by their focus on absences in saga prosimetrum, with Heather O'Donoghue tackling the thorny issue of poetry being quoted in situations where no one is there to hear it. For Heather, the representation of poetry as direct speech is a significant departure from the *Íslendingasögur's* naturalistic style, and one that approaches implausibility when complex poetry appears to be spoken spontaneously with no audience present. Her analysis thus draws on the concepts of storyworld and diegesis to make sense of who this poetry is being spoken for: if it provokes no response within the world of the saga, despite being spoken by its characters, is it meant instead to be heard by the text's own audience? Heather focuses on examples from *Grettis saga* and *Gísla saga*, demonstrating how the absence, and in some cases the apparently forced creation, of audiences for their poetry provide avenues for these poets to express their interiority to the extradiegetic audience. She demonstrates how this expression contributes to the depiction of the intense experiences they undergo in their isolation as outlaws, linking up neatly with Brynja's study.

In the final essay, Alison Finlay takes a different tack in addressing the notable absence of poetry where we might expect to find it quoted – what she terms “anti-prosimetrum”, meaning references to poems that are not cited in the sagas, and which in some cases may never have existed. Her focus is on the poetry mentioned, but not quoted, in the *skáldasögur*, such as the unnamed poems said to be recited by Gunnlaugr and Hrafn for King Óláfr sönski, or the elusive named poems (*Kolluvísur*, *Eykindilsvísur* and *Daggeisli*) of *Bjarnar saga*, which are never cited explicitly in the text. Alison situates these references within the trope of skalds competing via their poetic performance, highlighting their intertextual resonances with episodes in the *konungasögur*, and argues that the dubious existence of these phantom poems is less important than their usefulness for staging conflict between skalds. In her analysis, Alison also questions the assumption that the term *vísur* [verses] must refer to a stable poem by an individual, and speculates whether it may also have encompassed open-ended collections or assemblages of stanzas, perhaps compiled incrementally over time and produced through collective effort.

Variety of form, experimentation and distributed creativity are accordingly revealed as being intrinsic to the development of the prosimetric genre of the *Íslendingasögur*, whose complex transmission we must extrapolate from extant manuscript witnesses, which so often are of a much later date than the one at

which we assume any given saga first assumed literary form. Manuscript evidence often exposes the heuristic mechanics of prosimetric formation, as is shown by a leaf of *Möðruvallabók* with space left for the first stanza of one of Egill's poems, but which was never written in (Fig. 2), or a leaf of the *Reykjabók* text of *Njáls saga*, where a stanza by Skarpheðinn is written in the margin, with a fine line of red ink indicating where it should be “spoken” within the saga text (Fig. 1). The scribe of AM 556 a 4to, writing more than a century later, is more liberal with the use of red ink in pointing up the many stanzas spoken by Gísli during a particularly dense phase of prosimetric narration in *Gisla saga Súrssonar* (Fig. 3). In many cases, the writing of saga prosimetrum makes no graphic distinction between the text of prose and the text of poetry: an example of the visual seamlessness of saga prosimetrum is the seventh chapter of *Víga-Glúms saga* in *Möðruvallabók* (Fig. 6), the important fourteenth-century compilation of *Íslendingasögur*, which also preserves *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* and *Kormáks saga*. Writing the text of the latter, the scribe heavily abbreviated the inquit to each quoted stanza – “þa. q. k. v.” standing for the many instances when Kormákr recited a verse (“þá qvað Kormákr vísu”) – revealing how habituated both scribe and reader must have been to the integration of stanzas into saga narrative (Fig. 4). On this and many other leaves of saga prosimetrum, however, a paratextual marker (“v”) indicates the presence of a stanza in the body of the text, a signal of sorts that the text is polyvocal. While we are probably always at one or more removes from the first iteration of a literary work when we read manuscript texts of the *Íslendingasögur*, in some senses we are also present as prosimetric form takes shape before our eyes.

We are grateful to Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Reykjavík, and Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen, for permission to reproduce images of manuscripts in their collections. We would also like to express our gratitude here to Tarrin Wills for his generous contribution to our project through his technical expertise designing the ÍSP database; to the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for funding our project; and the University of Tübingen, Newnham College and the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse & Celtic at the University of Cambridge for supporting our work in various ways. We also want to thank Laura Burlon for her professional care in the production of this book.

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Unless specified otherwise, all references to saga poetry and their English translations within this volume are drawn from *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, the fifth volume in the Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages series, published in 2023. This volume, edited by Margaret Clunies Ross, Kari Ellen Gade and Tarrin

Wills, is abbreviated throughout as SkP V. Each stanza is named and numbered according to the standardisation used by SkP, with page references to the print edition of the poetry included. References to saga prose are derived primarily from the Íslenzk fornrit editions, published by Hið íslenzka fornritafélag. These are abbreviated as ÍF, followed by the series number and page reference. Because many of the contributions in this volume commonly refer to influential studies of saga prosimetrum, individual bibliographies are not printed with each essay; instead, the volume contains a consolidated bibliography at its conclusion. The bibliography includes the abbreviations for references to works in the SkP and ÍF series, as well as any other print editions and translations, including those also referenced using in-text abbreviations. All other references are given in footnotes, with references given in full in the bibliography.

Guðrún Nordal

Preface – Skaldic Verse as an Authorial Signature

Anonymity is a distinct characteristic of the *Íslendingasögur* (the sagas of Icelanders). None of them is attributed to an author in the medieval manuscripts, and it is not until the nineteenth century, with an emphasis on the original composition of an individual author, that scholars began their search for *the author* of a saga and the so-called original version of the text.¹ The anachronistic quest for the one and only original author distracted our attention from the significant and meaningful remaking and creative reshaping of saga-texts in the first period of their textual transmission, that is, in the manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – and indeed, over an even longer span of time. The recognised authors in the *Íslendingasögur* are, by contrast, the poets – the named poets in the *konungasaga* (kings’ saga) tradition, who were identified by medieval scholars in the context of the study of *grammatica* and *computus* (two of the disciplines in medieval schools), which were oriented towards chronology.² The lives of some of the recognized court poets from the tenth and eleventh centuries became the subject matter of the *skáldasögur* (sagas of poets), which have commonly been considered among the earliest sagas.³

Yet the sagas were not committed to writing as a single, definitive act. They were written over a long period of time, more than 150 years (ca 1230–1400), and the variance that is characteristic of their transmission, individually and collectively, shows

1 See, for example, the attribution of *Egils saga* to Snorri Sturluson in Sigurður Nordal, introduction to ÍF II, lxx–xcv. This attribution is generally taken for granted, even though it is by no means certain; see Guðrún Nordal, “*Ars metrica* and the Composition of *Egil’s Saga*”. *Egils saga* was printed under Snorri Sturluson’s name in 2002 in a modern Icelandic edition: see *Snorri Sturluson: Ritsafn*, ed. Helgi Bernóðsson, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Örnólfur Thorsson. On critical issues arising from the anonymity of the sagas, see the essays in Rösli and Gropper (ed.), *In Search of the Culprit*.

2 These identifications are witnessed by texts of *Snorra Edda* and *The Third and Fourth Grammatical Treatises*. See further Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 19–40; Ryder Patzuk-Russell, *The Development of Education in Medieval Iceland*; and Lars Lönnroth, “The Transformation of Literary Genres in Iceland from Orality to Literacy”, 341–342.

3 See, for instance, Vésteinn Ólason, “Íslendinga sögur og þættir”, 39–44, and Margaret Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, as well as various essays discussing aspects of the sagas of poets in Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas*. The exact dating of each of the *skáldasögur* remains unclear.

Guðrún Nordal, Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies

how the genre and its individual sagas developed over time and how audiences interacted with texts. The same principle applies to all the other genres of the peoples in the north: the *konungasögur*, *Íslendingasögur*, *fornaldarsögur* (legendary sagas), and even the sagas which were written about near-contemporary events, such as *Sturlunga saga* and the *biskupasögur* (bishops' sagas).

The texts of the kings' sagas and of *Snorra Edda*, none of them preserved in a manuscript from the time they were first thought to have been written down, were constantly modified and their aesthetics revised from as early as the first part of the thirteenth century, when we believe *Egils saga* and possibly the other *skáldasögur* were written, until at least the end of the fourteenth century.⁴ The scholarly attitude to the verses included in these texts changed gradually. The way skaldic poetics shifted is revealed by the different versions of *Snorra Edda*, particularly the section *Skáldskaparmál* (the language of poetry), which is preserved in six different manuscripts from ca 1300–1400, and their different, individual interaction in the manuscripts with the learned poetic treatises in the *Third* and *Fourth Grammatical Treatises*. Snorri judged his citations in *Snorra Edda* by applying a chronological yardstick, distinguishing between the *hofuðskáld* of the past and contemporary practitioners, while Óláfr Þórðarson used an aesthetic one in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, written only a few decades later.⁵

While the use of verse in the *Íslendingasögur* may not have been an essential part of the genre, the inclusion and choice of verse represents a conscious choice on the part of authors that was determined by the historical characters at the heart of the sagas and the context within which each saga was created. Similarly, we can follow the transformation of *Landnámabók*, a text closely linked to some of the *Íslendingasögur* (though which way round the influence goes is not conclusive). Similarly, we can see how new material was being incorporated into a text, as the witnesses of *Sturlunga saga* indicate, with two distinct versions existing from the fourteenth century; and the same phenomenon is apparent in the transmission of the *biskupasögur* and, of course, the *fornaldarsögur* – texts with which the *Íslendingasögur* interact in one way or another. It is a complex picture, but it is the only one that exists. The transmission of the *Íslendingasögur*, as well as the verse quoted in the texts, appears to have been subject to the same kind of rewriting.

In her essay in this volume, Annette Lassen analyses the versions of *Egils saga* in detail, and I will just note here that a comparison of the earliest fragment

⁴ See, for example, Guðrún Nordal, “*Ars metrica* and the Composition of *Egil's Saga*”, and Guðrún Nordal, “The Art of Poetry and the Sagas of Icelanders”.

⁵ See Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 83–86.

of *Egils saga*, the theta-fragment (AM 162 A θ fol.) from the middle of the thirteenth century, to the text written a century later in the manuscript *Möðruvallabók* (which is the main text in our modern editions of all the eleven sagas it contains) reveals clear stylistic developments, as the text is abbreviated and contracted. It has become more common in recent years to note variation within the manuscript transmission of sagas, but it has proved more difficult to take full account of that variance in the analysis of each saga.⁶ It is important to map the variation, and now, after the enormous work that has gone into the edition of the verse of the *Íslendingasögur* in the fifth volume of the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, we may have the ability to do so.

This task, however, is neither easy nor straightforward. We cannot always compare different versions of a saga text. Sometimes a saga is preserved in only one manuscript from before 1400, or even before the Reformation, and in some cases, like *Vápnfirðinga saga* or indeed *Heiðarvíga saga*, only in later paper manuscripts that are copies of older, now-lost parchment manuscripts. These later copies, particularly the so-called academic transcriptions, are obviously of great interest, because they are sometimes the only witnesses that exist of a now-lost medieval manuscript, and thus often serve as the foundation for modern editions of the texts.⁷

The *Íslendingasögur* are not conventionally preceded by a prologue, and thus we do not have first-hand knowledge of the attitudes of any of the writers. Instead, I would propose that the stanzas quoted within a saga can serve as a kind of authorial signature to the text: a most revealing generic fingerprint.⁸ By choosing the *prosimetric* form, the author exposes their cultural background and their aesthetic standpoint. The skaldic art form was studied extensively in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in most parts of Iceland, except for in the north-east and east of the country, by laymen and clergy alike, both in reference to the indigenous poetic tradition and in the framework of Latin grammatical learning.⁹ *Snorra Edda* and the *Third Grammatical Treatise* refer to a large number of poets and stanzas that are unknown from other sources, but which were obviously fa-

⁶ See, however, the contributions by Annette Lassen and Stefanie Gropper in this volume on *Egils saga* and *Njáls saga* respectively.

⁷ Soffía Guðný Guðmundsdóttir is currently writing her doctoral thesis at the University of Iceland on the textual history of *Arons saga* (“*Arons saga Hjörleifssonar* – tilurð, varðveisla og viðfangsefni”). Her work demonstrates how the later tradition is illuminating for the way in which the saga has been edited and understood.

⁸ See also Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, 51–76.

⁹ Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 41–72.

miliar to audiences of these texts in the thirteenth century.¹⁰ Skaldic stanzas were part of the sophisticated interpretative tradition that flourished in this period, exemplified by the manuscript tradition of *Snorra Edda* and the grammatical treatises. Moreover, the study of skaldic verse changed dramatically over the period during which the *Íslendingasögur* were written. The metrical form, analysed and defined by Snorri Sturluson in his *Edda*, had been simplified by the middle of the fourteenth century, and the *edduregla*, or the order or rules of poetry, as it was dubbed by the Benedictine monks Árni Jónsson and Arngrímur Brandsson in their fourteenth-century poems about Guðmundr góði, was disparaged.¹¹ Some of the formal characteristics, such as alliteration and rhyme, would certainly be upheld for centuries to come, but the kenning system and the complex syntactical structure was, for the most part, abandoned – as we can also see in the verse in later sagas, such as *Víglundar saga*. The *rímur* tradition arose at the same time, taking over the role previously held by skaldic poetry. Simultaneously, however, academic study of the language of poetry and religious metaphors thrived, as we can see in the adaption of Latin grammatical treatises, such as those by Alexander de Villa Dei and Eberhard Bethune in the *Fourth Grammatical Treatise*, preserved only in the famous *Snorra Edda* manuscript Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol.) from ca 1350. The writer of the treatise chose religious examples – only eleven out of the sixty-two cited by known poets – which provided the student with hermeneutic tools with which to analyse religious imagery.¹² These sources document the constant development of skaldic poetics and the methods that also left their traces in the prosimetrum of the *Íslendingasögur*.

The authors who made extensive and elaborate use of skaldic stanzas in sagas would most likely have been aware of the importance of skaldic poetry within this learned framework, where new scholarly approaches to poetry and the awareness of poetic ambiguity opened up new interpretative possibilities.¹³ In other words, the background to the writing of the *Íslendingasögur* changed from the 1230s to the end of the fourteenth century – and different versions of sagas, even if they represent the same work, are often strikingly different in their use of verse quotations. We see such a transformation in the *skáldasögur*, such as *Hallfreðar saga* and *Fóstbræðra saga*, which were set down in writing not only on one occasion, but adapted to and incorporated within the two different *konunga-*

10 See Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, 34–35.

11 Árni Jónsson and Arngrímur Brandsson each composed a *Guðmundardrápa*, editions of which are forthcoming in volume IV of the Skaldic Project series.

12 See *Den tredje og fjerde grammatiske afhandling*, ed. Björn Magnússon Ólsen.

13 Some of these new possibilities are discussed in Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, Gropper, Quinn, Wills, and Wilson, “Investigating the *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum”.

sögur of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr inn helgi in the fourteenth century.¹⁴ The same can be said of sections of *Laxdæla saga* and *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa*, parts of which were inserted into compilations of kings' sagas in the fourteenth century, or the different versions of *Njáls saga* in the fourteenth century (as is discussed in Stefanie Gropper's essay in the present volume).¹⁵ These adaptations affect the way we interpret the prose text and the verses embedded in the narrative, because these adapted versions are quite often the only complete texts of the sagas that are preserved.

The authors of the four great thirteenth-century sagas (i.e. all preserved in thirteenth-century fragments) – *Egils saga*, *Laxdæla saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, and *Njáls saga* – not only treat skaldic verse in a different way to that of the writers of kings' sagas, but vary among themselves in their practices, which indicates shifting ideas about the application of skaldic verse within a saga text and within the same cultural milieu – possibly even within the same family. *Egils saga* relates the life of the turbulent court poet Egill Skalla-Grímsson, whose poetic voice, despite its power and originality, is never heard in the kings' sagas. The earliest manuscripts of *Egils saga* unveil different attitudes to the citation of his verse, particularly with reference to the longer poems (*Sonatorrek*, *Arinbjarnarkviða*, and *Höfuðlausn*).¹⁶ *Egils saga* resides on the boundaries between, on one hand, the kings' sagas and the legendary sagas (the saga is preserved in an early fourteenth century manuscript with *Örvar-Odds saga*), and on the other, the emerging genre of the sagas of Icelanders, if such a discrete genre exists.¹⁷ Although the authenticity of some of it has been disputed, Egill's verse is generally thought to have been composed in the tenth century.¹⁸ The chosen metre of a stanza is even impregnated with meaning, as I have shown in a study on the metrics of *Egils*

14 *Hallfreðar saga* is preserved as a narrative thread in several sections of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, where it is interwoven with the life of Hallfreðr's patron Óláfr Tryggvason. *Fóstbræðra saga* is found interwoven into *Óláfs saga helga* in different sections.

15 See also the contributions in Lethbridge and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (ed.), *New Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of Njáls saga*.

16 For example, see the theta-fragment (AM 162 A 0 fol.), and the three main manuscripts of the saga, the Wolfenbüttel manuscript (ca 1350), AM 132 fol. (Möðruvallabók, dated to 1330–70), and Ketilsbók (a seventeenth-century transcription of a medieval vellum). For a detailed discussion and references, see Guðrún Nordal, "Ars metrica and the Composition of Egil's Saga". See also Annette Lassen's contribution in this volume.

17 Margaret Clunies Ross argues that saga literature is mixed in terms of genre, with some sub-genres less mixed than others. See Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga*, 95.

18 This has been the fate of especially the longer poems, such as *Höfuðlausn*; see Jón Helgason, "Höfuðlausnarhjal", and Bjarni Einarsson, *Litterære forudsætninger for Egils saga*, 15–19.

saga.¹⁹ The comparative scarcity of skaldic verse in *Laxdæla saga* suggests that the author is not looking for cultural associations in the world of Icelandic indigenous traditions, but rather to foreign models, and that they are speaking to an audience that appreciated these imported narratives and courtly literature – possibly a female audience in the wife and the mother-in-law of Sturla Þórðarson at Sælingdalstunga, as I have suggested.²⁰ The poetry in the saga is simple by intent, not because of the author’s lack of skaldic knowledge; and it was probably composed at the same time as the saga. The author, or editors, of *Njáls saga* choose yet another approach, mixing what seems to have been the authorised canon (judging by the majority of manuscript witnesses) with additional occasional stanzas. The audience of the saga seems to have made its reaction known through different versions right from the beginning of manuscript transmission, with the earliest extant fragment probably only twenty years or so after the initial writing of the saga.²¹

The verse in *Eyrbyggja saga*, on the other hand, consists of a carefully chosen body of poetry, which often favours sequences of verse rather than occasional *lausavísur*. The inclusion of praise poems by known poets for Snorri goði Þorgrímsson contributes to his aristocratic portrayal in the saga. The author of the saga uses skaldic verse as source material to substantiate Snorri goði Þorgrímsson’s actions, but also to create ambiguity and suspicion.²² Ambiguity is a conscious narrative technique in the saga and supports the portrayal of the main protagonist. The two first stanzas in *Eyrbyggja saga* set the tone (*Eb* 1 and 2, SkP V, 409–411). They are from *Illugadrápa* by Oddr skáld, which is said to be about Illugi svarti, the father of Gunnlaugr ormstunga. The two stanzas focus on Illugi’s dispute with Þorgrímr Kjallaksson and his son, who became Snorri goði’s second father-in-law. The stanzas do not describe the killings, but the second stanza highlights Snorri’s negotiation skills at the *alþingi* (general assembly): “Snorri kœmi griðum við seggi; þat forráð fyrða gørdisk frægt” [Snorri achieved a truce between men; that leadership of men became famous] (*Eb* 2, SkP V, 411). This scene marks Snorri’s rise as a leading chieftain in the district, and the verses drawn from a named poem by a known poet in the tradition of the kings’ sagas serve to elevate his social standing.

19 See Guðrún Nordal, “*Ars metrica* and the Composition of *Egil’s Saga*”.

20 See Guðrún Nordal, “Double-Endings in Medieval Saga Literature”.

21 We might even speculate that the earliest form of the text did not contain any verse quotation in the first ninety-nine chapters of the saga.

22 For a brief discussion of the poetry in *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga*, see Guðrún Nordal, “The Art of Poetry and the Sagas of Icelanders”.

The next stanzas quoted are from the so-called *Máhlíðingavísur*, which Þórarinn svarti, nephew of Arnkell Þórólfsson, composes about the killing at Fróðá of Þorbjörn digri, the husband of Þuríðr Barkardóttir, Snorri's sister.²³ Again, the author introduces formal poetry from the skaldic canon in the context of Snorri's family: a poem by a known poet outside the saga. The imagery is bloody and gives the impression that the peaceful Þórarinn is revelling in the killings. There is a dissonance between the description of Þórarinn in the prose and his own words about the killings; he is said to be worried about the fighting and the violence, but he describes the conflict without hesitation, and even reminisces about old battles. His words in the prose seem to contradict the verses, in the same way as Gunnarr's battle stanzas in some of the manuscripts of *Njáls saga* contradict his voiced apathy for killings. Are these two men actually uninterested in battle? Are we not supposed to believe the words they are saying in the prose? The stanzas introduce ambiguity into the narrative and complicate the character description of both men.²⁴

Þórarinn never mentions Snorri in his *Máhlíðingavísur*, but it is likely that he refers to him on two occasions in the poem (in *Eb* 7 and 14, SkP V [ÞMáhl *Máv* 5 and 12]). There is, however, a direct reference to his sister Þuríðr Barkardóttir. Arnkell encourages him to stop regretting his act and notes that Þuríðr, the widow, is not grieving. In the penultimate stanza of the sequence, there is a reference to the happy widow at Fróðá, which is the first direct description of Þuríðr in the saga: “Skalat ǫldrukkin ekkja, hoppfögr, skoppa af því” [The ale-drunk widow, pretty in the dance, shall not mock because of this] (*Eb* 17, SkP V, 438).

The description of the merry widow at Fróðá, dancing, even *skoppandi* [jumping around], evokes the image of a decadent woman. It seems she is acting flipantly in Þórarinn's opinion. The half-rhyme in the first line between “ǫldrukkin” [ale-drunk] and “ekcja” [widow] binds the sound elements together. The poet contrasts the tipsy, beautiful woman with the bloody corpses on the battlefield in the rest of the stanza. This is not the final image in the saga of Þuríðr, who connects three pivotal episodes in *Eyrbyggja saga*: the *Máhlíðingavísur*; the prosimetrum narrative about Björn Breiðvíkingakappi wooing her, offending her brother; and the events of the Fróðárundur. The love verses by Björn Breiðvíkingakappi are

²³ On the *Máhlíðingavísur*, see the essays in this volume by Kate Heslop and Judy Quinn, as well as Judy Quinn, “Þuríðr Barkardóttir and the Poetry of *Eyrbyggja saga*”.

²⁴ A number of studies have shown that the inclusion of skaldic verse in saga prose introduces competition between the prominent poetic voices of the characters who speak stanzas and the narrative voice of the prose. See Quinn, “Ok þetta er upphaf” and *The Creativity Paradox*; Glauser, “The Speaking Bodies of Saga Texts”; Heslop, “Hearing Voices”; Wilson, “Let the Right Skald In” and “Dissonant Voices in the Prosimetrum of *Heiðarvíga saga*”.

powerful and reveal a different Þuríðr, one who is shown to be more reflective, beautiful, and sincere (*Eb* 29 and 30, *SkP* V, 461–463). Again, the author offers two points of view by juxtaposing the stanzas about her, as her lover Björn has a different perspective.

The description of Þuríðr in the saga is drawn in powerful strokes in the poetry, but the third episode, which describes Björn's exit from the saga, where there is no verse, succeeds in heightening the description even further. The mythic portrayal of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi at the end of the saga enhances the portrayal of Þuríðr. He is portrayed as the grand old hero and poet who is admired by all and keeps around him a gathering of twelve advisers, just like King Arthur (*ÍF* IV, 178). Snorri goði compares him to the heroic Gunnarr Hámundarson (*ÍF* IV, 133) when they have their encounter, while Björn only calls him a *bóndi* (farmer) in return. Nor is Þuríðr left up in the air with an illegitimate child, like Hallgerðr Höskuldsdóttir, the wife of Gunnarr, because Björn sends her and her son three objects from another world – the promised land in the west. The boy gets a sword, but she a ring, a token of their holy union.

Njáls saga contains rich material for comparison, which is explored in detail in Stefanie Gropper's essay in this volume. The so-called additional stanzas in *Njáls sagas* are not in *Möðruvallabók*, the manuscript witness most widely used in editions of the work. They are all cited in the first ninety-nine chapters, in the so-called **Gunnars saga*, the pagan part of the saga. Some of the stanzas focus on women; the first three are spoken by Unnr Marðardóttir, and two of Skarphéðinn's stanzas focus on Hallgerðr, serving to highlight her dishonour and demise in society and the author's contempt for her.²⁵ The stanzas in **Gunnars saga* are thought to have been composed late, most likely in the thirteenth century,²⁶ and for this reason, the additional verses have been considered secondary in relation to others in *Njáls saga*. The dating of the stanzas, however, is less significant than the actual quotation of the verse in the early manuscripts. The original text of *Njáls saga* remains elusive, yet it seems that the wording of some of the additional stanzas is lifted from the prose text, and thus the stanzas must postdate the prose. The most striking example is Skarphéðinn's stanza spoken at Grjótá, where the prose text is apparently the cue for the choice of words in the stanza. This derisive stanza was favoured by the writers of some manuscripts.²⁷ The writer of the oldest fragment of *Njáls saga*, the delta-manuscript – the so-called Þormóðsbók, written slightly ear-

25 On the so-called additional stanzas of *Njáls saga*, see Guðrún Nordal, "Attraction of Opposites", as well as Stefanie Gropper's contribution in this volume.

26 See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, introduction to *ÍF* XII, xliv and Jón Helgason, introduction to *Njáls saga*, i–xix.

27 See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of Njálssaga*, 22–23.

lier than Reykjabók – does not include some of these verses in the section on Gunnarr’s chieftaincy and death, except for two stanzas by Skarpheðinn spoken after the death of Gunnarr Hámundarson, one about Hrappr (*Nj* 33, SkP V, 1262) and another one at Grjótá, describing Hallgerðr (*Nj* 32, SkP V, 1261). Some of the words in the latter stanza – “hornkerling eða púta” [cast-out hag or a whore] – also occur in Skarpheðinn’s comment in prose after the stanza is recited: “Ekki munu mega orð þín því að þú ert annaðhvort hornkerling eða púta” [Your words have no weight because you are either a cast-out hag or a whore].²⁸

Some of the additional stanzas are an early testimony to the reception of *Njáls saga*, highlighting those instances in the text where the manuscript writer was perhaps responding to an audience response that a stanza was missing, or where it was appropriate to reiterate the message, as in the above example, where Skarpheðinn’s views on Hallgerðr are brought home ruthlessly. Here, we are at the borderline between oral and literary traditions.

The poetic profile of *Njáls saga* is of great interest, not only the additional stanzas, but also the stanzas that are preserved in all the manuscripts. The saga provides clues to the perception of skaldic verse at the end of the thirteenth century and underscores the importance of judging the sagas in their correct manuscript context. The citation of verse in **Gunnars saga* shifts the balance of the narrative to the first part of *Njáls saga*, whereas the religious polemic in the opening poetic sequence in *Möðruvallabók* sets the tone for the religiously charged second part of the saga in that manuscript. The two main parts of the saga are different in content, religious settings, and narrative mode. The Christian part of the saga appears to have been fixed – particularly the conversion section, which is mirrored in other sources – whereas the pagan part lent itself to revisions. Only thirteen occasional stanzas and the poem *Darraðarljóð* are cited in the second half of the saga, and these are preserved in all manuscripts of the saga.²⁹ Three supernatural occurrences, each containing a stanza, punctuate ominous tidings in the saga, before and after the burning at Bergþórshváll, and all of them are associated with Flosi, the leader of the burners. These three stanzas are couched in Christian symbolism, underscoring the religious note struck in the conversion section. The first stanza is cited before the burning at Bergþórshváll, when Hildiglúmr Runólfsson sights a black man riding a grey horse with a burning torch in his hand, shouting a verse: “Eldrs í endum, eitr í miðju” [Fire is in the ends, poison in the middle] (*Nj* 42, SkP V, 1277). The directions are ominous: the man rides from the west to the east, calling

²⁸ *Brennu-Njáls saga: Texti Reykjabókar*, ed. Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, 148–149. This edition is in modern Icelandic. All translations of Old Norse prose are my own unless otherwise noted.

²⁹ See Quinn, “*Darraðarljóð* and *Njáls saga*”.

Flosi's name.³⁰ After the burning, Flosi sleeps badly and dreams of Járngrímr, who steps out of the cliffs of Lómagnúpr. He calls out the names of the burners, one after the other, predicting the order in which they will be killed by Kári. Járngrímr recites a stanza before he disappears. The imagery in the verse is striking. Kári is described in a kenning as “Herði-Þundr höggorma” [a strengthening-Þundr ≤ Óðinn> of vipers [WARRIOR]] (*Nj* 46, SkP V, 1285), as the killer of serpents, a poignant juxtaposition of the burners and the devil in the Garden of Eden. The kenning hints at the imagery in the previous stanza, of the deadly poison (*eitr*) of the serpent. The third supernatural stanza, and the last in the saga, is recited to Gilli jarl in a dream in the Hebrides, coinciding with the Battle at Clontarf, where many of the burners were killed fighting on the wrong side (see *Nj* 64, SkP V, 1313). The heavens open, and blood rains on the fighters. Gilli tells the dream to Flosi, and it is said that “þeir Flosi ok jarl tǫluðu mart um draum þenna” (ÍF XII, 460) [Flosi and the earl talked a great deal about this dream]. The Battle of Clontarf itself is preceded by the ominous *Darraðarljóð* (*Nj* 53–63 [Anon *Darr* 1–11], SkP V, 1299–1313).

The verse in the second part of *Njáls saga* is unusual, and the chain of religious and ominous stanzas from the conversion section to the end of the saga is broken only by nine stanzas attributed to Kári Sǫlmundarson. Kári's stanzas recall the verses of Gunnarr and Skarpheðinn in the so-called **Gunnars saga*; they are personal and uttered at crucial points, often in association with his killings. The first stanza is spoken after the burning at Bergþórshváll, when Kári speaks of his grief. A persistent theme in Kári's stanzas is the emphasis on *minni* [memory], as remembering past events spurs on his actions. The last two lines are as follows: “emk at mínu meiniminnigr – Níal inni” [I am mindful of my hurt – [they burned] Njáll indoors] (*Nj* 45, SkP V, 1284).³¹ The internal rhyme in the last two lines brings home its context, flirting with the metrical rhythm of *dunhent*. In this stanza “minnigr” rhymes with “inni”, inside the burning hall at the farm of Bergþórshváll. Kári's actions are driven by his memory, by remembering the past. The same rhyme is echoed in Gizurr Þorvaldsson's stanza after the burning of Flugumýri in the contemporary saga *Sturlunga saga* (verse 132, 99). To the very end of *Njáls saga*, the tragedy of Bergþórshváll is invoked in Kári's poetic utterances, which keep alive the memory of the dead, while his actual deeds fulfil his obligation of vengeance.

The dialogue between the audience and the changing text of *Njáls saga*, as well as other sagas, in the fourteenth century throws into relief the active interest

³⁰ See Allen's discussion of these happenings in Allen, *Fire and Iron*, 155–163.

³¹ See also Quinn, *The Creativity Paradox*, 30–32, for an analysis of Kári's stanza along similar lines.

taken by the community in the representation and interpretation of saga characters and in remembering the past. There are equally arresting cases in the later sagas as well, such as the stanzas by Helga Bárðardóttir and Hetta the trollwoman in *Bárðar saga* (*Bárð* 1–4, SkP V, 19–26). These verses have a learned character, containing information about the landscape on land and at sea: Helga’s first stanza lists a number of placenames, and Hetta has information about the best fishing grounds. The complex characteristics of skaldic verse, the intricacies of its diction and metre, imply that the citation of verse in a prose narrative is never straightforward, but lends ambiguity to the narrative, demands interpretation, and challenges the reader and listener to take a stand.

Stefanie Gropper

Stanzas in the Margin: *Njáls saga* as Prosimetric Narrative

As one of the most famous *Íslendingasögur* [sagas of Icelanders], *Njáls saga* is generally regarded as one of the best representatives of medieval Icelandic storytelling.¹ Although there are many reasons to praise *Njáls saga* as one of the most important narratives of the Icelandic Middle Ages, its stanzas and its prosimetric texture are rarely mentioned among the criteria for its quality. This holds true not only for *Njáls saga*, but for scholarship about the *Íslendingasögur* in general; when it comes to characterisations of the *Íslendingasögur*, stanzas play only a minor part. In this essay, I will look at the stanzas in *Njáls saga* as an integral aesthetic part of the narrative. In order to demonstrate the creative interaction between verse and prose, I will compare two recensions of the saga that existed alongside one another in the fourteenth century.

Many literary analyses and interpretations of sagas that concern themselves with the relationship of the text to its context focus on the prose account, since stanzas do not fit well with the notion that the sagas are a realistic genre, or that they are “creating a feeling of reality”.² This notion of “realism”, however, refers to what is told in the saga and how the saga’s storyworld might mirror the conditions of the text-external world. Although Vésteinn Ólason explains how fantastical elements can be woven into the realistic fabric of a saga narrative, he does not mention stanza quotation. When Vésteinn notes that it “is important to distinguish between what might be characterized as social and psychological realism on the one hand and realism in the descriptions of events on the other”,³ he refers to elements within the plot, but not to the narratorial mode. The prose of the *Íslendingasögur* usually contains a large proportion of direct speech or reported speech, considered a “proportionally prominent characteristic of the *Íslendingasögur*”,⁴ and which is thus part of the sagas’ supposed realism, a “sign of [their]

1 See, for example, Sigurður Nordal, *Litteraturhistorie*; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Njáls saga*; Lönnroth, *Njáls saga*; Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, SkP V. I wish to thank Alexander Wilson and Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir for their valuable suggestions to improve this article.

2 Sävborg, “Style”, 119. On the sagas as a realistic genre, see Vésteinn Ólason, “The Icelandic Saga as a Kind of Literature”.

3 Vésteinn Ólason, “The Icelandic Saga as a Kind of Literature”, 44.

4 Sävborg, “Style”, 118.

Stefanie Gropper, University of Tübingen

being an imitation, conscious or unconscious, of oral narrative”⁵. That stanzas are also presented as direct speech, albeit as a different mode of speaking, does not come into the discussion of the sagas’ apparent realism or their imitation of orality.

Prosimetric specifics of the *Íslendingasögur*

In the *Íslendingasögur*, stanzas are quoted on many different occasions, and sometimes in rather strange settings.⁶ A modern reader might be reminded of an opera when a character speaks a stanza while fighting for his life, as with Gunnarr Hámundarson in *Njáls saga* (KG, 366; *Nj* 26, SkP V, 1251),⁷ or even while dying, as with Gísli Súrsson in *Gísli saga* (ÍF VI, 114; *Gísl* 40, SkP V, 616). Sometimes, a stanza is spoken into the void, as a soliloquy with nobody else present, as with some of the verses spoken by Gísli and Grettir speak as outlaws (ÍF VI, 94–96; *Gísl* 25–27, SkP V, 588–592 and ÍF VII, 177; *Gr* 45, SkP V, 742), or by Helga Barðardóttir when she expresses her homesickness in *Bárðar saga* (ÍF XIII, 122; *Bárð* 2, SkP V, 22). As Judy Quinn argues in her comprehensive introduction to the prosimetry of the *Íslendingasögur*, verse quotation in the sagas constitutes a “creativity paradox”, with the juxtaposition of verse and prose in seemingly impossible situations creating a playful discourse that invites the audience to engage.⁸ Some stanzas are spoken by paranormal beings or even non-human objects, such as a cloak in *Laxdæla saga* (ÍF V, 198; *Laxd* 5, SkP V, 1203).⁹ Stanzas can be spoken either on the intradiegetic level by a character in the saga, or they can be quoted by the narrative voice on the extradiegetic level.¹⁰ These extradiegetic stanzas can be attributed either to a saga character or to a poet who is not part of the saga’s diegesis, but is referred to as a witness or corroborator of what has been told. While many stanzas are clearly attributed to a character or entity in a saga, it is not always clear who actually speaks

5 Vésteinn Ólason, “The Icelandic Saga as a Kind of Literature”, 34.

6 The setting of many stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* is much less clear than it might seem at a first glance; see Glauser, “Gelegenheitsdichtung”.

7 In the ÍF edition, the stanza is printed in the *viðbætir* (appendix) as st. 24 (ÍF XII, 477).

8 Quinn, *The Creativity Paradox*, 26.

9 Further examples of unusual settings can be found in the ÍSP database (<https://gefin.ku.dk/q.php?p=isp>) [last accessed 20 February 2024].

10 Joseph Harris argues that the “two main types, or poles, of verse usage in sagas are the evidential and the dramatic”, where “verse cited in evidence is part of the ‘telling’ (although its authority derives from a poet, who is not the saga’s narrator), while ‘showing’ puts the verses in the mouth of a poet on the scene”. See Harris, “The Prosimetry of Icelandic Saga and Some Relatives”, 142.

or quotes the stanza. As a result, stanza quotation can often lead to a conflict of voices, creating narrative confusion or even a counter-narrative.¹¹

The polyphony of voices in the prosimetricum of the *Íslendingasögur* is the most obvious generic difference to the *konungasögur* [kings' sagas], which mainly contain stanzas attributed to well-known professional court skalds. With the exception of the protagonists in the subgenre of *skáldasögur* [sagas of poets], many of the characters who speak stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* are not known poets, and quite often are not even historical persons. Many studies of prosimetricum have dealt with this difference between the saga genres, and came to the conclusion that despite the differences prosimetricum was a literary mode from the very beginning of Old Norse-Icelandic literature.¹² Questions about the age and authenticity of the stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* are still a major concern in scholarship, since in many cases there are doubts over when the stanzas were composed and by whom. In the *Íslendingasögur*, stanzas are considered to be quoted less as corroborating sources and more as narrative devices that achieve the impression of immediacy and instantaneity, fresh subjectivity, and emotional intensity.¹³ They can be used to deepen the portrait of a character, to slow down the pace of the narrative, or to foreshadow future events.¹⁴

There is a vast difference between the *Íslendingasögur* when it comes to the number of stanzas that they contain. While Margaret Clunies Ross sees a relationship between the age of a saga and the number of stanzas in it,¹⁵ Guðrún Nordal links “the subject matter of the sagas of Icelanders and their use of skaldic poetry to the same cultural milieu that fostered the study of skaldic poetry and the writing of the kings' sagas”.¹⁶ As she suggests, the discussion of poetry and the interest in poetry, witnessed in the manuscripts of the *Prose Edda* and the grammatical, or rather poetic, treatises, may have sparked increased inclusion of poetry in later or “non-classical” *Íslendingasögur*, such as *Njáls saga*.¹⁷ Guðrún also argues that in this period, the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the presentation of poetry shifts from a primarily historical to an aesthetic perspective.¹⁸

11 See Glauser, “Gelegenheitsdichtung”.

12 See Meulengracht Sørensen, “The Prosimetricum Form 1”; Males, *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Literature*; Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*.

13 See Glauser, “Gelegenheitsdichtung”, 687.

14 See Marold, “Lausavísur”, and the essay by Heather O’Donoghue in this volume.

15 Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, 13.

16 Guðrún Nordal, “Skaldic Poetics and the Making of the Sagas of Icelanders”, 126; see also Guðrún Nordal, “The Art of Poetry and the Sagas of Icelanders”.

17 Guðrún Nordal, “Tilbrigði um Njálu”, 65; see also Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, 21.

18 Guðrún Nordal, “Attraction of Opposites”, 214.

As Heather O'Donoghue points out, poetry creates a wide range of artistic effects in saga narratives and contributes to the interplay between the historical and fictional mode in individual texts.¹⁹ Although the stanzas are presented as direct speech, they represent a completely different mode of expression, far removed from everyday speech and from the language of the prose narrative. The aesthetic of saga narrative plays with the contrast between the seemingly clear, direct prose and the enigmatic, obscure skaldic verse.²⁰ In this chapter, I will look at the skaldic stanzas in *Njáls saga* as an essential component of the text in order to compare the narrative aesthetic in two versions of the saga.

Njáls saga and its stanzas

Njáls saga is one of the best-preserved Icelandic sagas with some sixty to seventy manuscripts or fragments, about one third of which are dated to the medieval period.²¹ The unusually large number of manuscript witnesses testifies to the popularity of *Njáls saga*, which evidently had a very productive reception history. The number of manuscripts and their complicated relations have made editions difficult.²² Although the “*Njáls saga*” manuscripts are commonly divided into three chief recensions – X, Y, and Z – a large number of manuscripts contain a mixed text, meaning it is very difficult to establish a stemma of their textual relations.²³ The five oldest extant manuscripts were written in the first half or around the middle of the fourteenth century.²⁴ Reykjabók (AM 468 4to), Kálfalækjarbók (AM 133 fol.) and Þormóðsbók (AM 162 B 8 fol.) all belong to the X group of manuscripts, which contains about twice as many stanzas as the other two manuscript groups, Y and Z. Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol.) represents the Y group, while Gráskinna (GKS 2870, 4to) belongs to the Z group. Although, in his opinion, both X and Y are very close to the presumed original text of “*Njáls saga*”, Einar Ól. Sveinsson chose Möðruvallabók, and thus a representative of the Y group, as the basis for his 1954 edition. Eighty years earlier, Konráð Gíslason had used Reykjabók, and thus a representative of the X group, as the main manuscript for his 1875 edition.²⁵

19 See O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*.

20 See Glauser, “Gelegenheitsdichtung”.

21 See Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, “Introduction”, xvi.

22 For the history of editions, see Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir and Lethbridge, “Whose *Njála*?”.

23 See Hall and Zeevaert, “*Njáls saga* Stemmas”.

24 See Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir and Lethbridge, “Whose *Njála*?”., 2.

25 In 2004, Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson published an edition of Reykjabók in modernised orthography, but this edition is not widely referenced.

Einar Ól. Sveinsson's edition became the standard edition used by scholars, and since then – that is, for the last seventy years – the additional stanzas have been relegated to the appendix, “even though they belong to the first stage in the transmission of the saga”.²⁶ The choice of one version as the “best” or standard version on which all scholarship relies is not only a philological decision, but also the selection of a single codified version of the past. Yet the *Íslendingasögur* are characterised by their variance, in the sense that these texts represent “diverse versions of the past”,²⁷ and *Njáls saga* is no exception. Einar Ól. Sveinsson chose the version that he viewed as closest to the presumed original of *Njáls saga*, but as Guðrún Nordal remarks, this does not represent the preference of the fourteenth century, when most of the preserved manuscripts were written: ten of the thirteen manuscripts or fragments from the fourteenth century belong to the X recension.²⁸ When Einar Ól. Sveinsson examined all the manuscripts, he came to the conclusion that the variance of “*Njáls saga*” was to be found on the micro- rather than the macro-level of the text – apart from the different number of stanzas across recensions.²⁹ As R. D. Fulk notes in his introduction to the most recent edition of the stanzas in *Njáls saga*, “the poetry in [*Njáls saga*] is heterogeneous in nature and presents some unusual complexities and problems of analysis”.³⁰ All in all, sixty-four stanzas have been preserved as a part of *Njáls saga*, but no manuscript contains all of them – and no manuscript preserves the complete saga without any lacunae.

Although Reykjabók is the oldest extant manuscript, the majority of its stanzas are thought to be “additional”. Einar Ól. Sveinsson considered only those stanzas that are common to all three recensions as belonging to the presumed original, and regarded what he called the *aukavísur* (“additional stanzas”) in manuscripts of the X recension as a later interpolation. Only twenty-three *lausavísur* [individual stanzas] are common to all manuscripts, in addition to the eleven stanzas of the poem *Darraðarljóð* (*Nj* 53–63, SkP V, 1299–1312), which is quoted in the last part of the saga. These stanzas and the poem are thus considered to have been part of the first written or “authorial” version of the saga.³¹ Fulk notes that the remaining thirty stanzas “can be explained plausibly only as additions to the text made within a few

26 Guðrún Nordal, “Attraction of Opposites”, 227.

27 Glauser, “The Speaking Bodies of Saga Texts”, 21.

28 See Guðrún Nordal, “Tilbrigði um *Njálu*”, 63.

29 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, “Um handrit *Njáls sögu*”, 121. On the variance between the manuscripts, see also Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir and Lethbridge, “Whose *Njála*?”, 8–10.

30 Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, SkP V, 1206.

31 Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, SkP V, 1210.

years of its composition”.³² As with Einar Ól. Sveinsson and other preceding scholars, Fulk is led to this conclusion because these stanzas appear only in a selection of manuscripts, none of which contains all the additional stanzas.

In some of these stanzas the content and sometimes also the wording closely resembles the prose that they replace which also has been considered as evidence for a later date of composition on the basis of what is said in the pre-existing prose.³³ Because of their supposed later composition, these stanzas are usually regarded as inferior to the other stanzas, even though they are preserved in some of the earliest manuscripts of *Njáls saga*.³⁴ As Guðrún Nordal notes, the fact that the additional stanzas were not limited to only a few manuscripts proves that they must have been important for a large number of people receiving the saga and possibly contributing to its transmission.³⁵ The co-existence of different recensions, of versions within these recensions, and of manuscripts containing a conflation of different recensions indicates that a common understanding about the “identity” of the saga did not prevent there being different opinions on the narrative aesthetics of the saga and whether it should contain more or less poetry.³⁶ The question thus has less to do with whether the stanzas are “original” or “added later” than with aesthetic choices and different ways of representing the narrative.³⁷ It is interesting, however, that the postmedieval tradition seems to have preferred a version based containing the additional stanzas.³⁸

With the exception of *Darraðarljóð*, the poetry has not played an important role in analyses and interpretations of *Njáls saga*.³⁹ Most discussions of poetry in the saga concern the date and the possible functions of the additional stanzas. It has been emphasised that all these stanzas appear in the first part of the saga, the so-called “Gunnars saga”, ending in chapter 99 immediately before the Christianisation of Iceland, which is considered to be a structural turning point in the saga.⁴⁰

32 Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, SkP V, 1210.

33 See Guðrún Nordal, “Attraction of Opposites”, 225; Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, 168; Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, SkP V, 1211.

34 See Guðrún Nordal, “Attraction of Opposites”, 225.

35 Guðrún Nordal, “Tilbrigði um Njálu”, 74.

36 On the question of a text’s identity in a transmission history characterised by variance, see Müller, “Aufführung – Autor – Werk”.

37 See Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir and Lethbridge, “Whose *Njála*?”, 12.

38 See Margrét Eggertsdóttir, “The Postmedieval Production and Dissemination of *Njáls saga* Manuscripts”.

39 For an interpretation of the poem in the context of *Njáls saga*, see Quinn, “*Darraðarljóð* and *Njáls saga*”.

40 See Guðrún Nordal, “Skaldic Poetics and the Making of the Sagas of Icelanders”, 134; Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, 169.

Fulk suggests that the stanzas were added in the first part of the saga to mend “a defect, since skaldic verse is deployed regularly in saga prose”.⁴¹ Since most of these stanzas are spoken by major characters, namely Gunnarr Hámundarson and Skarpheðinn Njálsson, according to some scholars the additional stanzas may have been intended to change and modify the depiction of these characters.⁴²

While these are all valid and plausible suggestions for the stanzas’ function, scholars have only looked at the additional stanzas as a separate corpus.⁴³ Thoughts and deliberation about their positioning and function in the saga thus did not include those stanzas that are considered to be an “original” part of the text. As Guðrún Nordal points out, however, the additional stanzas supplemented a text that already contained poetry as an integral part of the narrative.⁴⁴ We must therefore take all the stanzas into consideration if we are to understand the narrative and aesthetic function of the poetry in *Njáls saga*. We also have to keep in mind that no manuscript contains all the additional stanzas; as Guðrún Nordal has pointed out, the choice of stanzas in a particular manuscript may therefore stand as an authorial signature to indicate the cultural background behind the aesthetic standpoint of a text.⁴⁵ Medieval poetics indicate that medieval writers and audiences “looked for a richness of textual development based on a broad range of available modes of expression”.⁴⁶ The existence of different versions of the same story are witnesses to this development and to a conscious choice of a certain mode of expression, such as the decision to include poetry in the narrative. In the following section, I will compare the narrative and aesthetic preferences in two versions of *Njáls saga* as represented in Einar Ól. Sveinsson’s edition from 1954 [= ÍF XII] and in Konráð Gíslason’s edition from 1875 [= KG]. I do not wish to make any claim as to which edition represents a more original or a better text; rather, I aim to show how these different representations of the same story emphasise different aspects of the narrative and give certain characters an especially distinct voice, which results in a different narrative and aesthetic focus.

41 Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, SkP V, 1211.

42 See, for example, Guðrún Nordal, “Skaldic Poetics and the Making of the Sagas of Icelanders”, 134; Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, 20; and the essay by Guðrún Nordal in this volume.

43 An exception, however, is Guðrún Nordal, “Tilbrigði um Njálu”.

44 Guðrún Nordal, “Tilbrigði um Njálu”, 60.

45 Guðrún Nordal, “The Art of Poetry and the Sagas of Icelanders”, 237; Guðrún Nordal, “Skaldic Poetics and the Making of the Sagas of Icelanders”, 127; and the essay by Guðrún Nordal in this volume.

46 Murphy, “The Arts of Poetry and Prose”, 66.

The prosimetrum in Einar Ól. Sveinsson's edition (ÍF XII)

Einar Ól. Sveinsson chose *Möðruvallabók* as the basis for his edition, the largest and best-known medieval Icelandic manuscript to contain *Íslendingasögur*. *Möðruvallabók* was written in the middle of the fourteenth century, and it is relatively well preserved and legible. In its present form, it contains eleven *Íslendingasögur*:⁴⁷ *Njáls saga*, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, *Finnboga saga ramma*, *Bandamanna saga*, *Kormáks saga*, *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Qlkofra saga* (or *Qlkofra þáttur*), *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, *Laxdæla saga* (including *Bolla þáttur*), and *Fóstbræðra saga*. With the exception of *Finnboga saga ramma* and *Qlkofra þáttur*, all these texts contain stanzas, albeit only very few in some sagas, with a higher number in others. Since *Möðruvallabók* is in many cases the only medieval manuscript to preserve a complete or nearly complete text, it has served as the main manuscript in the editions of all these sagas, except *Bandamanna saga*.⁴⁸ The style and diction of *Möðruvallabók* have thus to a large extent formed our opinions on the characteristics of the *Íslendingasögur*, even though the manuscript may have individual traits that are not necessarily representative for the *Íslendingasögur* preserved elsewhere.

However, in *Möðruvallabók* there are three lacunae in *Njáls saga* which Einar Ól. Sveinsson mainly filled from *Reykjabók*, that is with text deriving from a manuscript from the X group. In some places he “orðalaust” [silently] deviates from *Reykjabók* as well and uses manuscripts from the Z group when they agree against *Reykjabók*.⁴⁹ This means that although Einar Ól. Sveinsson's edition is based on *Möðruvallabók*, it is actually a mixture from three different groups of manuscripts.⁵⁰

In ÍF XII, *Njáls saga* contains twenty-three *lausavísur* and the complete poem *Darraðarljóð* (*Nj* 53–63, SkP V, 1299–1312). The eleven stanzas of that poem, as well as four of the *lausavísur*, are not in *dróttkvætt*, but in eddic metres. Most of

47 It is possible that the manuscript was not finished and that it was originally intended to consist of two volumes; see Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, “*Möðruvallabók*”.

48 The following Íslenzk fornrit editions are based on *Möðruvallabók*: *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (ÍF II), *Finnboga saga* (ÍF XIV), *Kormáks saga* (ÍF VIII), *Víga-Glúms saga* (ÍF IX), *Droplaugarsona saga* (ÍF XI), *Qlkofra þáttur* (ÍF XI), *Hallfreðar saga* (ÍF VIII), *Laxdæla saga* and *Bolla þáttur* (ÍF V), *Fóstbræðra saga* (ÍF VI).

49 See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, introduction to ÍF XII, clvii.

50 Einar Ól. Sveinsson explains his methods in the introduction to his edition; see ÍF XII, clvii. The lacunae correspond to pages 5–69² (ch. 1 – beginning of ch. 25); 129⁷–132²⁰ (second part of ch. 50 – first part of ch. 51); 200²¹–204¹⁸ (second part of ch. 82 – first part of ch. 84).

the stanzas in ÍF XII are spoken by minor characters or quoted anonymously, with some of the characters mentioned nowhere else.⁵¹ The only major character who speaks stanzas while alive is Kári Sǫlmundarson (six stanzas), whereas the two stanzas attributed to Gunnarr Hámundarson and Skarpheðinn Njálsson are quoted after their death. The majority of the stanzas are in the second half of the saga, with some clusters in chapter 102 (six stanzas related to the conversion of Iceland), chapter 145 (four stanzas relating to the lawsuit over the *brenna* [burning]), and chapter 157 (eleven stanzas of *Darraðarljóð* and a single *lausavísa*, all relating to the battle in which the Irish king Brian died).

In the first stanza of ÍF XII in chapter 12 (*Nj* 4, SkP V, 1225), there is an emphasis on paranormal powers interfering with human interaction. Ósvífr and his men are on their way to seek revenge for Þorvaldr, Hallgerðr's first husband, whom she had killed by her foster-father, her uncle Svanr á Svanshóli. Before they arrive, Svanr has a vision:

Nú tók Svanr til orða ok geispaði mjök: “Nú sækja at fylgjur Ósvífrs.” Þá spratt Þjóstólfr upp ok tók øxi sína. Svanr mælti: “Gakk þú út með mér. Lítils mun við þurfa.” Síðan gengu þeir út báðir. Svanr tók geitskinn eitt ok vafði um höfuð sér og mælti:

Verði þoka
ok verði skrípi
ok undr mikil þllum þeim,
sem eptir þér sækja.

Nú er frá því at segja at þeir Ósvífr riðu á hálsinn ok menn hans; þá kom þoka mikil í móti þeim. (ÍF XII, 37–38)

[Just then Svan had a yawning attack and declared, “Osvif’s fetches are coming this way.” Thjostolf leaped up and took his axe. Svan said, “Come outside with me. We’re not in great need.” They both went outside. Svan took a goatskin and wrapped it around his head and said,

Let there be fog,
And let there be monsters,
And weird sights to those
Who pursue you.

To return to Osvif and his men: they were riding over the ridge and a great fog came toward them.] (CSI *Nj*, 16–17)

As is to be expected, Ósvífr does not manage to avenge his son because he and his men become lost in the bad weather conditions for which they blame Svanr. The

51 Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, SkP V, 1213–1219.

stanza enhances the mystery introduced by Svanr's vision. Seen in the context of the whole saga, this stanza lays the foundation for the later poetry quoted in ÍF XII. Spoken in the eddic metre *málahátt*, it relates a (for a saga, very typical) situation – the attempted killing of a man, a planned revenge to be executed – to something paranormal, thus signifying events that go beyond the scene to which the stanza refers. It is the starting point for the long line of conflicts that arise from Hallgerðr's marital conflicts; at the same time, it reflects a situation out of the characters' control. Ósvífr and his men cannot control the weather; they can only attempt to react to it as best as possible.

The second stanza in ÍF XII ties in with the first one by also relating to marital problems, but from a different perspective (*Nj* 12, SkP V, 1235). In chapter 34, Þórhildr, a servant at Hallgerðr and Gunnarr's wedding, notices her husband looking desirously at the bride's daughter. She becomes angry and speaks a *kviðlingr* to him: “‘Era gapriplar góðir, gægr er þér í augum, Þráinn’, segir hon” (ÍF XII, 89) [“Thrain”, she said, “This gaping is not good, Your eyes are all agog”] (CSI *Nj*, 39). Just as the poetic syntax runs over the borders of its metre – the address “Þráinn” is edited as part of the prose account – the signification of the verse goes beyond the borders of the scene. The narrative context implies that, like the previous verse, this stanza refers to an event relating to Hallgerðr and functions as a foreshadowing of escalating conflicts within her latest marriage. Both stanzas are spoken by minor characters who will play no further role in the saga. The stanzas thus interrupt the main narrative and introduce elements of dangerous imponderability and unpredictability. They create the outlines of a counter-narrative to the main story, which focuses on how Njáll attempts, with wisdom and moderation, to control difficult situations and to reign in feuds by mediating between the affected parties.

There are only two more stanzas in the first half of the saga in ÍF XII, both of which relate to Gunnarr's death. In chapter 77, the narrator quotes a verse by the otherwise unknown Þorkell *elfaraskáld* (*Nj* 27, SkP V, 1253). The stanza is a typical instance of skaldic praise poetry, which highlights Gunnarr's heroic defence in his last fight and sums up the number of men he wounded or killed. It marks the tragic ending of the feud, because – as Njáll remarks in the following chapter – Gunnarr's death cannot be prosecuted, because he was made an outlaw (ÍF XII, 89). At the same time, the stanza, the first full *dróttkvætt* stanza in recension Y, marks a turning point in the narrative. After Gunnarr's death, his family is torn apart: one son, Hogni, takes over the farm and stays there with Gunnarr's mother Rannveig, while the other, Grani, leaves with their mother Hallgerðr to move to Grjótá. In what follows, the two brothers are on opposing sides during the events that lead to the burning of Njáll's family.

The subject of Þorkell's stanza is resumed shortly afterwards, when Skarpheðinn and Gunnarr's son Høgni sit next to Gunnarr's gravemound one evening:

Tunglskin var bjart, en stundum dró fyrir. Þeim sýndisk haugrinn opinn, ok hafði Gunnarr snúizk í hauginum ok sá í móti tunglinu; þeir þóttusk sjá fjögur ljós sjá brenna í hauginum, ok bar hvergi skugga á. Þeir sá, at Gunnarr var kátligr ok með gleðimóti miklu. Hann kvað vísu ok svá hátt, at þó mátti heyra gørla, þó at þeir væri firr. (ÍF XII, 192–193)

[The moon was shining brightly, though occasionally dimmed by clouds. It appeared to them that the mound was open, and that Gunnar had turned around to look at the moon. They thought that they saw four lights burning in the mound, and that there were no shadows. They saw that Gunnar was happy and had a very cheerful look. He recited a verse so loudly that they could hear it clearly, even at a distance.] (CSI *Nj*, 91)

In this eerie situation, Gunnarr speaks his only stanza in ÍF XII, which presents him as a proud warrior who would rather have died than surrendered (*Nj* 29, SkP V, 1256). The verse slows down the pace of the narrative and emphasises the turning point of the action. By calling himself “faðir Høgna” [Høgni's father], Gunnarr takes up the topic of family, and with its setting, spoken from the gravemound, it refers back to the paranormal aspects of the first two stanzas in ÍF XII (*Nj* 4, SkP V, 1225 and *Nj* 12, SkP V, 1235). The stanza points to Høgni as Gunnarr's heir and successor, who has found an ally in Skarpheðinn as Gunnarr had in Skarpheðinn's father Njáll.

Before the Christianisation process (chapters 100–105), there are thus only four stanzas inserted into the narrative within ÍF XII, all of which contain some kind of paranormal aspect, except the extradiegetic stanza praising Gunnarr.⁵² These stanzas are spaced out in the narrative, and the first two consist only of four lines in *málaháttir* metre and two lines in *dróttkvætt* metre respectively, meaning the poetry in this part of the saga does not stand out particularly. Nevertheless, these stanzas are interlinked by their imagery and establish a thematic arch that returns in the second part of the saga, where it features much more prominently.

52 After Gunnarr's stanza and the conversion episode, there is one further small poetic utterance in chapter 88, where Þráinn Sigfússon helps a man to escape from Jarl Hákon's persecution. The ditty “látum geisa Gamminn, / gerrat Þráinn vægja” [let's make Gamminn [‘the Vulture’] rage; Þráinn does not yield] (*Nj* 31, SkP V, 1260) is spoken by Þórhildr skáldkona's husband, thus tying back to her (half-)stanza from the beginning of *Njáls saga*. Neither Konráð Gíslason (KG, 442) nor Fulk in his introduction count these lines as poetry, though the stanza is edited by Fulk in SkP. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, however, quotes the lines as poetry in his edition (ÍF XII, 220), as does Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson; see Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, *Brennu-Njálssaga*, 90.

In chapter 102, the fragile settlement between Njáll and Lýtingr, who had killed Njáll's son Hǫskuldr, is immediately followed by a cluster of six stanzas (*Nj* 36–41, SkP V, 1267–1275)⁵³. The chapter begins with the report of the killings performed for the sake of Christianisation. It also lists the people who take the new faith, among them Njáll and his family, and those who do not, among them Njáll's enemies. All stanzas quoted in this chapter are also part of the narratives about the Christianisation process in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta* and *Kristni saga*. As in other sources, the decision for the conversion is based on rational considerations and is meant as an agreement between the divided parts of the population, but it becomes clear that this is a fragile agreement: “Þóttusk heiðnir menn mjök sviknir vera, en þó var í lög leidd trúan ok allir menn kristnir gǫrvir hér á landi” (ÍF XII, 272) [The heathens considered that they had been greatly deceived, but the new law took effect and everybody became Christian here in the land] (CSI *Nj*, 128). The density of stanzas in this chapter emphasises the importance of these events in Icelandic history by illustrating the confusion and the rift among the Icelandic people – a rift that runs parallel to the line drawn by the feud with stanzas representing both sides of the religious struggle, both the supporters and opponents of the new faith. The conversion is marked as a turning point in Icelandic history, as well as in the narrative, by linking it to the parties within the new feud following Gunnarr's death.

As in the first part of the saga, the stanzas in the latter parts of the narrative again emphasise dark and mysterious aspects foreboding situations out of the characters' control. In chapter 124, when an old woman predicts the burning of Bergþórshváll, Skarpheðinn laughs at her. At the beginning of the following chapter, however, Hildiglúmr Runólfsson has a rather strange experience on a Sunday night. He sees a man on a grey horse with a torch in his hand:

Hann bar skjótt yfir, ok fór hann hart; hann hafði loganda brand í hendi. Hann reið svá nær honum, at hann mátti gǫrta sjá hann; honum sýndisk hann svartr sem bik ok heyrði, at hann kvað vísu með mikilli raust:

Ek ríð hesti
 hélugbarða,
 úrigtoppa,
 ills valdanda.
 Eldr er í endum,
 eitr er í miðju;
 svá er um Flosa ráð

⁵³ *Nj* 36 is also quoted in *Kristni saga (Kristni 2)*, and will thus be edited in SkP IV (*Poetry on Icelandic History*). As of now, the SkP edition of the stanza has not been published.

sem fari kefli,
ok svá er um Flosa ráð
sem fari kefli.

Þá þótti honum hann skjóta brandinum austr til fjallanna, ok þótti honum hlaupa upp eldr svá mikill, at hann þóttisk ekki sjá til fjallanna fyrir. Honum sýndisk sjá maðr riða austr undir eldinn ok hvarf þar. (ÍF XII, 320–321)

[The man passed quickly by, and was travelling furiously; he was carrying a flaming torch in his hand. He rode so close that Hildiglum saw him clearly. He was black as pitch and Hildiglum heard him speak this verse in a loud voice:

I ride a horse
with hoarfrost mane and dripping forelocks,
bringing evil;
the torch ends burn,
the middle brings bane;
Flosi's plans
are like a flung torch;
Flosi's plans
are like a flung torch.

Then it seemed to Hildiglum that the man threw the torch at the mountains in the east, and that such a great flame sprang up that he could no longer see the mountains. He thought he saw the man ride east and disappear in the flames.] (CSI *Nj*, 151–152)

When the boy tells his father about the experience, Runólfr explains that Hildiglúmr has seen “gandreið, ok er þat jávallt fyrir stórtíðendum” (ÍF XII, 321) [a witch-ride; it always occurs before great events] (CSI *Nj*, 152). This stanza, in the eddic metre *fornyrðislag* (*Nj* 42, SkP V, 1277), takes up the aspects of mystery that had been invoked by the stanzas in the first half of the saga. Conversion has not resulted in a brighter and more hopeful future, but has led to a feeling of uncertainty. The man on horseback carrying a torch in his hand and foreboding something terrible reminds us of the horsemen of the apocalypse. Flosi's firebrand, mentioned in the stanza, causes the burning of Bergþórshváll with Njáll and his family only a short time later. Although the burning was intended as the culmination and cruel ending of a long-lasting feud, it turns into a nightmare for everybody involved, as a cluster of five stanzas (*Nj* 43–47, SkP V, 1279–1286) related to the burning illustrates. In chapter 130, while the farm is still burning, Flosi and his companions, the Sigfússynir, discover that Njáll's son-in-law Kári Sölmundarson has escaped from the fire. Flosi becomes aware that this might have dire consequences, as more people will die or lose their fortune as a result. Then Móðólfr Ketilsson, one of Flosi's supporters, speaks a praising stanza about the burning and

the Sigfússynir (*Nj* 43, SkP V, 1279).⁵⁴ Flosi, however, immediately rejects the praise, “því at þat er engi frami” (ÍF XII, 336) [for there’s no glory in that] (CSI *Nj*, 159). Flosi and the other men then approach the house from which flames and smoke still arise: “Þar heyrðu þeir í eldinum niðri, at kveðin var vísa” (ÍF XII, 336) [Then they heard, from down in the embers, this verse being spoken] (CSI *Nj*, 159). The stanza contains dark sounds and expressions, as for example in the kenning “Gunnr galdrs Iðja” [the Gunnr <valkyrie> of the magic chant of Iði <giant> [GOLD > WOMAN]] (*Nj* 44, SkP V, 1280), which is dominated by the dark vowels -u- and -a-, and which paints an image of the battle that imbues the valkyrie with the eerie chant of a sorceress. Although there are several translations and interpretations of this stanza, R. D. Fulk suggests that the second half still remains a problem because of its “incoherent syntax and disagreements among the mss, and yet the poetic form in most mss has not obviously been corrupted”.⁵⁵ Thus the enigmatic stanza adds a mysterious atmosphere to the scene. Flosi and his men attribute this stanza to Skarpheðinn, although they are not sure whether he is dead or alive. There are interesting parallels between this stanza, which is the only one attributed to Skarpheðinn in ÍF XII, and Gunnarr’s stanza in the first half of the saga (*Nj* 29, SkP V, 1256). Gunnarr speaks his posthumous stanza from his gravemound, where Skarpheðinn and Gunnarr’s son Högni are listening. This stanza marks the starting point of the vengeance taken for Gunnarr. In the later case, Flosi and Gunnarr’s son Grani hear a stanza emerging from Skarpheðinn’s “mound” in the destroyed house. This stanza denotes another catalyst for revenge, with Flosi and Grani soon to be prosecuted for their actions.

The gloomy, apocalyptic atmosphere evoked by the stanzas spoken by the horseman and Skarpheðinn continues in the following verses. Kári Sölmundarson reports in a stanza that he has not been able to sleep since the burning (*Nj* 45, SkP V, 1284), which has evidently traumatised him: “Engra manna gat Kári jafnopt sem Njáls ok Skarpheðins. Aldrei ámælti hann óvinum sínum, ok aldrei heitaðisk hann við þá” (ÍF XII, 346) [Kari spoke of no one as often as he did of Njal and Skarpheðin. He never spoke ill of his enemies, and he never made threats against them] (CSI *Nj*, 164). This traumatisation is also the subject of Kári’s second stanza, spoken in chapter 135, where he expresses his guilt for having escaped the fire (*Nj* 47, SkP V, 1286). But neither is his opponent Flosi able to enjoy his triumph after the burning. In chapter 133, Flosi dreams of a man called Járngrímr, who speaks a stanza to him in which he predicts that people will see many skulls on the ground, that a battle is growing in the mountains, and that the limbs of men will become bloody (*Nj* 46, SkP V, 1285). Both dream and stanza parallel the scene in

54 For a detailed interpretation of this stanza, see Quinn, *The Creativity Paradox*, 29.

55 Fulk, notes to *Nj* 44, SkP V, 1280.

which Hildiglúmr Runólfsson sees the horseman speaking the stanza foreshadowing the burning.

The next cluster consists of three stanzas (*Nj* 48–50, SkP V, 1288–1291) spoken in chapter 145 by Kári Sölmundarson at the *alþingi*, during the law-suit over the burning. Kári has a hard time at court, and is unwilling to accept the settlement because he is afraid he will not get a fair offer. In his first two stanzas, he rebukes Skapti Þóroddsson's insult that he ran away from the burning by recalling events when Skapti behaved cowardly. In the second half of his third stanza, he declares that the burning will have terrible consequences: “Nú mun bergs í björgum | baugs hnykkjondum þykkja | lyngs at loknu þingi | ljóts annan veg þjóta” [Now there will seem to pullers of the rock of the ugly ring of heather [SERPENT > GOLD > GENEROUS MEN] [that there is] howling a different way in the mountains when the assembly is concluded] (*Nj* 50, SkP V, 1291). The “howling a different way in the mountains” again picks up on the horseman, who vanished into a mountain after speaking the stanza to Hildiglúmr, and Járngrímr, who emerges from inside a mountain before speaking his verse to Flosi. Kári's three stanzas are met with laughter as is the satirical half-stanza spoken by Snorri goði in response (*Nj* 51, SkP V, 1293). Although this seems to ease the tension at the assembly, peace does not last long. Despite a sentence being reached at the assembly, the case is not completely resolved, since the killing of Kári's son Þórðr is not included in the agreement.

The focus in the last part of the saga is thus on Kári Sölmundarson and his dangerous, but ultimately successful, pursuit of vengeance against the burners of Njáll and his family. Kári undertakes this mission at considerable risk to himself, but always keeps the upper hand in violent encounters, even when he is outnumbered. His pursuit of the burners leads him and his companions to the Orkney islands. In chapter 155, they are outside Sigurðr jarl's court on Christmas day when they hear Gunnarr Lambason talking about the burning and making fun of Skarpheðinn. Kári rushes in with his sword drawn and speaks a stanza (*Nj* 52, SkP V, 1294) that reflects his rage and in which he fiercely disputes Gunnarr's deceit. Gunnarr's prose account is corrected by a skaldic stanza spoken by an eyewitness to the events; the narrator thus uses Kári's stanza as an authenticating device, even though the stanza is spoken intradiegetically.⁵⁶

In chapter 157, Sigurðr jarl, together with fifteen of the men involved in the burning, fights at the Battle of Clontarf in Ireland. During this battle, a man called Dörruðr has a frightening vision in Scotland, in which he sees twelve men riding

⁵⁶ On the potential documentary function of intradiegetically quoted stanzas, see Wilson, “Authenticating Voices?”

to a house, again picking up on the image of the apocalyptic horsemen. When he looks through the window, he sees women weaving a fabric made from guts, men's body parts, and weapons. These women speak a poem of eleven stanzas in the first-person plural, in which they identify themselves as valkyries. Their weaving represents the performance of war while they chant the song of battle.⁵⁷ While the eighth stanza of the poem predicts that “munu Írar | angr um bíða, | þats aldri mun | ýtum fyrnask” [the Irish will endure grief which will never be forgotten by men] (*Nj* 60, SkP V, 1309), the specifics of the battle remain mysterious and obscure. The poem does not mention any names of the persons involved in the battle, but its seventh stanza predicts that those people will rule the lands “es útskaga | áðr of byggðu” [who beforehand settled the outlying headlands] (*Nj* 59, SkP V, 1308): a dark prediction for an uncertain future. The last stanza again picks up on the image of the horseman: “Ríðum hestum | hart út berum, | brugðnum sverðum, | á brott heðan” [Let us ride out hard on bare-backed horses with drawn swords away from here] (*Nj* 63, SkP V, 1312).

The poem is the mysterious, foreboding culmination of what has been hinted at in almost all the previous stanzas in recension Y of *Njáls saga*. As Judy Quinn has observed, “the motif of the loud noise of battle that is figured in *Darraðarljóð* as the clanging weaving of battle fate is found in numerous verses quoted within the saga”.⁵⁸ The apocalyptic mood evoked by the poem is confirmed by similar but less spectacular visions and experiences that are reported from the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and the Orkneys. In the Hebrides, Gilli jarl has a dream of a man speaking a stanza (*Nj* 64, SkP V, 1313) in which he claims to have witnessed a battle in Ireland; he reports that Sigurðr jarl and King Brjánn fell in the battle. This last stanza finally ties the previous events back to a specific event, the Battle of Clontarf. Like Kári's stanza at Sigurðr jarl's court, this is an authenticating *dróttkvætt* stanza, but the situation here is even more complex, since the speaker is an intradiegetic figure in a nested narrative. The skaldic authentication itself must therefore be corroborated by the prose account of one of the survivors. The narrative thus uses stanzas within the diegesis as an authentication of events, despite the speakers' subjective standpoints from inside the events.

The saga contains only two more chapters after this last stanza, giving the impression that the events around the battle and the dark poetry associated with it have had some kind of cleansing effect and opened the way to lasting peace, or at least a closure to its narrative. Despite the apocalyptic battle descriptions, *Darraðarljóð* offers an optimistic silver lining: its fourth (*Nj* 56, SkP V, 1313) and tenth

57 Quinn, “*Darraðarljóð* and *Njáls saga*”, 302.

58 Quinn, “*Darraðarljóð* and *Njáls saga*”, 311.

stanza (*Nj* 62, SkP V, 1304) mention a young king (*ungr konungr*, *ungan konung*), who is protected by the valkyries and will not lose his life in the battle. As Judy Quinn points out, while the identity of this young king remains a mystery, Flosi and Kári are the only figures at the conclusion of *Njáls saga* who have not lost their lives in the events during and after the burning.⁵⁹ Neither has taken part in the Battle of Clontarf, and both have been on cleansing pilgrimages to Rome. They finally settle their dispute and affirm their agreement with Kári marrying Flosi's niece. This marriage is the starting point for a new and promising generation.

From the perspective of poetry, the emphasis in ÍF XII is clearly on the second half of *Njáls saga*, with its sequence of mysterious, dark stanzas that all point to a frightful and violent outcome. Although there are only a few stanzas in the first half of this version of the saga, they lay the ground for this pattern of tying individual experiences into an overarching thread of terrifying events, affecting society as a whole, leading from Gunnar's death via the burning to the Battle of Clontarf, presented as the climactic battle before the beginning of a new era.

The notion that the poetry in ÍF XII links the events of the plot to a broader view of history is supported by the stanzas all being either spoken by minor characters or quoted anonymously. Some characters are mentioned nowhere else but in *Njáls saga*, such as Þórhildr skáldkona, Þorkell elfaraskáld, or Þráinn Sigfússon.⁶⁰ Snorri goði is well-known from many other texts, including poetry composed about him, but he himself is not known as a skald; the half-stanza he speaks in *Njáls saga* is the only poetry attributed to him.⁶¹ The only major characters who speak poetry are Gunnarr Hámundarson, Skarpheðinn Njálsson, and Kári Sölmundarson. Gunnarr and Skarpheðinn speak one stanza each, both after they are already dead, while Kári appears suddenly in chapter 84 and supports Njáll's sons Helgi and Grímr in a fight against some vikings off the Scottish coast. He is introduced as an anonymous hero arriving with his fleet:

Í þessu varð þeim litið til hafs. Sjá þeir þar skip fara sunnan fyrir nesit ok váru eigi færi en tíu; þeir róa mikinn ok stefna at þangat; er þar skjöldr við skjöld. En á því skipi, er fyrst fór, stóð maðr við siglu; sá var í silkitreyju ok hafði gyldan hjálm, en hárit bæði mikit ok fagrt; sjá maðr hafði spjót gullrekit í hendi. (ÍF XII, 203)

[J]ust then they looked out to sea. They saw ships coming from the south around a headland, no fewer than ten. They were rowing hard and heading straight toward them, with shield after shield along the sides. At the mast of the ship which was out front stood a man; he was

⁵⁹ Quinn, "Darráðarljóð and *Njáls saga*", 312.

⁶⁰ Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, SkP V, 1217.

⁶¹ Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, SkP V, 1219.

wearing a silk tunic and had a gilded helmet on his head, and his hair was thick and fair. This man was holding a gold-inlaid spear in his hand.] (CSI *Nj*, 96)

Kári introduces himself and claims to come “ór Suðreyjum” (ÍF XII, 204) [from the Hebrides] (CSI *Nj*, 96). The narrator says nothing of his family, nor any kind of information typically used to introduce a new character to the saga. Kári is described only as the stereotypical knight in shining armour, so to say; looking forward to *Darraðarljóð*, it is plausible to interpret him as the *ungr konungr* [young king] (*Nj* 56, SkP V, 1313) coming with his people from the *útskaga* [headlands] (*Nj* 59, SkP V, 1308) to rule over the land. He accompanies Helgi and Grímr to Iceland and marries Njáll’s daughter Helga. From then on, he is involved in the feud as part of the group around Njál’s sons, but he does not play a prominent role until he escapes from the burning. As with his unexpected first arrival, he rises like a phoenix from the ashes to take on the revenge for the burning. His mission takes him away from Iceland, back to the headlands of the Scottish isles, and from there as a pilgrim to Rome. He returns to Iceland endowed with fame and great fortune, ready for a new beginning.

The structure of the poetry in ÍF XII develops from a mysterious beginning to a yet more mysterious and melancholy ending, but nevertheless the arrival of the young king in *Darraðarljóð* could be understood as a hint to the silver lining that is suggested in the following two chapters that conclude the narrative. While the prose tells the suspenseful story of a feud starting between two families that becomes increasingly impossible to control, the poetry creates a counternarrative that entrenches the plot in broader social and political issues. The recurring dark, unnerving images in the poetry and phrases could be seen as a reflection of a general social and political situation with an uncertain future, where things can easily get out of control.

The prosimetrum in the Reykjabók version of *Njál’s saga*, as represented in KG

Although the thirty so-called “additional stanzas” are held to constitute the main difference between recensions X and Y of *Njál’s saga*, the reality suggested by the manuscripts is more difficult, since none of the preserved manuscripts contains all these additional stanzas.⁶² In some cases, the number of stanzas is due to the

⁶² A table with the distribution of the ‘additional’ stanzas in the different versions can be found in Guðrún Nordal, “Tilbrigði um Njálu”, 62, and in Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, SkP V, 1212.

incomplete status of a manuscript; in other cases, we must suppose that a deliberate decision was made to include a stanza. In the following section, I will look at the prosimetric profile of Reykjabók (AM 468, 4to), the oldest extant manuscript of *Njáls saga*, dated to 1300–1325.⁶³ Although it is not complete anymore in its present state, as there are two leaves missing, the “disposition of the *Njáls saga* text at the end of the manuscript . . . lends weight to the supposition that *Njáls saga* was the sole text in this book from the start”.⁶⁴ Reykjabók contains twenty-seven of the *aukavísur* or additional stanzas, more than any of the other earliest manuscripts.⁶⁵

Only the first ten of the additional stanzas are integrated into the main text of Reykjabók; the others are either written in the margins or at the end of the saga on a then-empty leaf (see the example in Fig. 1).⁶⁶ In order to differentiate these seventeen stanzas from the additional stanzas that have been integrated, Beeke Stegman refers to them as “added stanzas”.⁶⁷ She has confirmed – as earlier scholars suggested – that these stanzas were written by a different hand than that which wrote the main text, and has also shown that both scribes collaborated closely; the main scribe left blank space for initials and rubrics, but not for the stanzas.⁶⁸ Unlike Einar Ól. Sveinsson, who argued this was due to a change of exemplars,⁶⁹ Stegman suggests there must therefore have been a deliberate decision not to integrate these seventeen stanzas into the main text.

With this layout, Reykjabók has a special position within the *Njáls saga* manuscripts, since it allows the readers and their audience to choose whether to include the stanzas.⁷⁰ Both Lars Lönnroth and Stefka Eriksen have compared the layout of *Njáls saga* as preserved in Möðruvallabók and Reykjabók, and demonstrated how initials and chapter divisions have an impact on the meaning of the

63 See Guðrún Nordal, “Attraction of Opposites”, esp. 218–219.

64 Lethbridge, “Hvorki glansar gull á mér”, 59.

65 Stegman, “Collaborative Manuscript Production and the Case of Reykjabók”, 28. The missing three additional stanzas in Reykjabók are *Nj* 13–14 (SkP V, 1237–1238) and *Nj* 28 (SkP V, 1255).

66 The stanzas integrated into the main text are *Nj* 1–3 (SkP V, 1220–1223) and *Nj* 5–11 (SkP V, 1225–1233). In the margins are *Nj* 18–26 (SkP V, 1243–1251), *Nj* 30 (SkP V, 1259), *Nj* 32 (SkP V, 1261), and *Nj* 35 (SkP V, 1265). The stanzas at the end of the saga are *Nj* 15–17 (SkP V, 1239–1242) and *Nj* 33–34 (SkP V, 1262–1264).

67 Stegman, “Collaborative Manuscript Production and the Case of Reykjabók”, 29.

68 Stegman, “Collaborative Manuscript Production and the Case of Reykjabók”, 45.

69 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, “Um handrit Njáls sögu”, 142.

70 Stegman refers to Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, who made a similar suggestion at a conference in Copenhagen in 2015; see Stegman, “Collaborative Manuscript Production and the Case of Reykjabók”, 48.

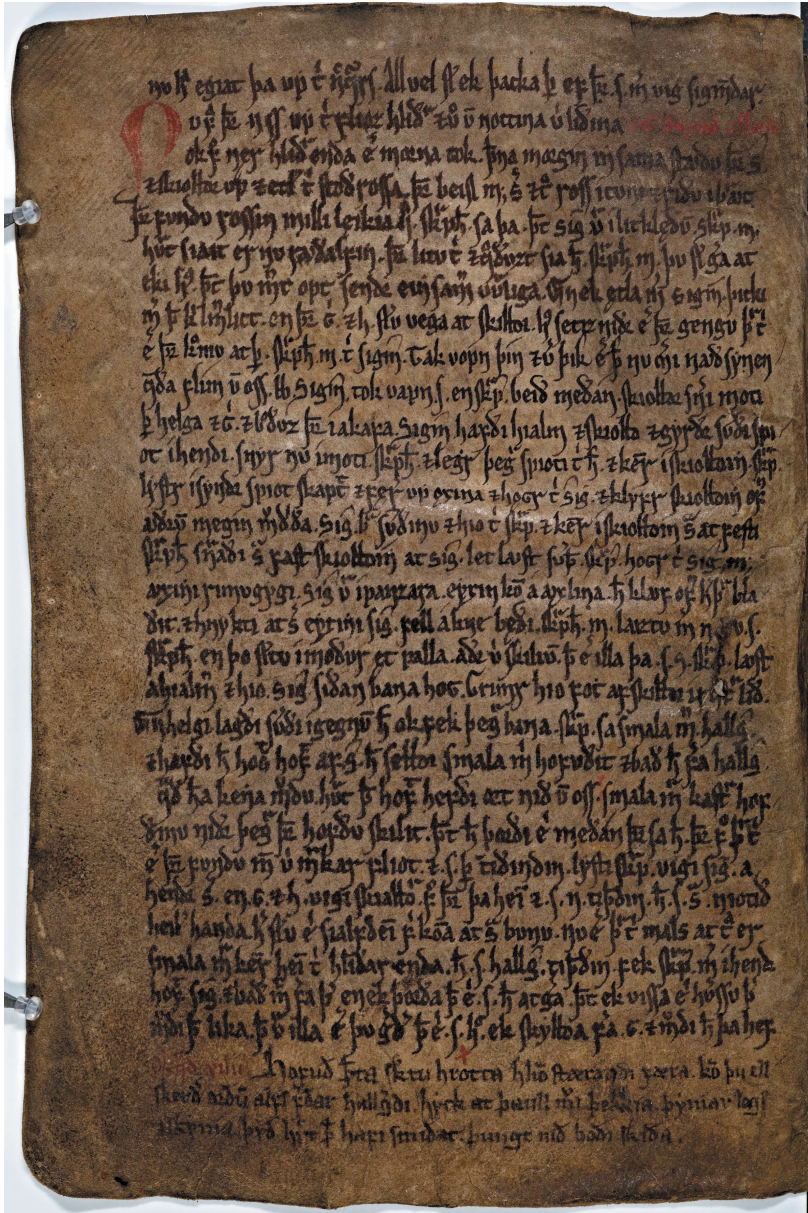


Figure 1: The text on the page belongs to chapter 45 of *Njáls saga*. A stanza spoken by Skarphéðinn Njáls (Nj 19) is written in the lower margin. The inquit is written in red ink, and a red vertical hairline in line 22 marks where the stanza is to be inserted. Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 468 4to (Reykjábók), f. 24v.

text, but they did not take into account the layout of the poetry.⁷¹ In the following, I will thus focus on the interaction between the poetry and the prose in *Reykjabók*, paying special attention to the different possibilities offered by the added stanzas. All references will be to Konráð Gíslason's edition, being aware that in some instances he emended the text from other manuscripts.

As can be seen in the analysis of ÍF XII the poetry can tell a story of its own. Stanzas introduce the viewpoints of different speakers, add emotional reactions, different perspectives, new details or even new topics. They are like stumblestones or breakwaters built into the flow of the narrative, forcing the audience to slow down and pay closer attention to what is said – in the prose as well as in the stanza. Poetry tends to retard the pace of narration and highlight certain aspects of the narrative, that may not seem as important or striking in the prose. In ÍF XII, the stanzas are concentrated in the second half of the saga so that the narrative continues at a slower pace after the Christianisation. In *Reykjabók*, however, stanzas are inserted right from the beginning, so that the whole narrative is slower than in ÍF XII with more pauses for reflection.

The additional stanzas are spread in clusters over the first half of the saga. The first three stanzas (*Nj* 1–3, SkP V, 1220–1223) are inserted into the main text in chapter 7, when Unnr Marðardóttir goes to see her father at the *þing*.⁷² She tells him that she wants to get divorced because her husband is unable to fulfil his marital duties. Mǫrðr thanks his daughter for her open words, and instructs her how to divorce herself in a legally correct way from her husband. In KG, this episode is narrated in almost exactly the same words as in ÍF XII, except that Unnr's answers are rendered in verse. Although the verse corresponds to the answers in the prose, the different rhetorical mode emphasises the importance of these answers in the narrative. Unnr's voice is made especially distinct in the poetic mode, with its different pace, rhythm, rhyme, and diction, and the stanzas create more space for Unnr as a character. As a result, the focus is less on Mǫrðr's questions than on Unnr's answers. While Unnr's answers consists of rather short and direct sentences in the prose account, she is able to elaborate on her inner con-

71 Lönroth, "Structural Divisions in the *Njála* Manuscripts"; Eriksen, "Medieval Page-turners".

72 In the ÍF edition, the episode featuring Unnr does not contain any stanzas, but at the beginning of the saga in *Möðruvallabók*, the main manuscript of the Y recension, there is a lacuna that could have contained the first seven of the additional stanzas, although it does not seem likely; see Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, SkP V, 1208. For an interpretation of these stanzas, see Guðrún Nordal, "Tilbrigði um *Njálu*", and Margrét Eggertsdóttir, "The Postmedieval Production and Dissemination of *Njáls saga* Manuscripts".

flict in the stanzas. She appears more insecure and vulnerable, and the accusations against her husband are more ambiguous than in the prose narrative.⁷³

In both versions, the dialogue between Unnr and her father is important for future developments in the plot, when Unnr later wants to get her dowry back from Hrútr, and turns to Gunnarr for legal help. But whereas the prose focuses on the legal and familial aspects of the unlucky marriage, Unnr's stanzas emphasise external forces that are out of her control, such public opinion, gossip, and possible sorcery that caused her husband's physical condition. The topic of marital problems and the aspect of magic link Unnr's stanzas to Svanr's stanza in chapter 12 (*Nj* 4, SkP V, 1225), which is the first stanza in ÍF XII, as well as to Þórhildr *skáldkona's* stanza in chapter 34 (*Nj* 12, SkP V, 1235).

In between Svanr and Þórhildr stanzas, *Reykjabók* contains seven stanzas spoken by Gunnarr Hámundarson (*Nj* 5–11, SkP V, 1225–1233), with all but the last verse part of a dialogue. Although they hardly contain any new information compared to the surrounding prose, these stanzas nevertheless direct attention to particular aspects of the saga or introduce new nuances into the narrative. In chapter 23, Gunnarr – disguised as Heðinn – visits Hrútr's house in accordance with the plan that Njáll outlined for him in great detail. Njáll not only explains what Gunnarr has to do, but he also describes the reactions Gunnarr has to expect from his opponent and how he has to answer them (KG, 82–90; ÍF XII, 59–65).

While in ÍF XII, none of the dialogue that Njáll had described in his plan is repeated, in KG, Gunnarr and Hrútr have a short conversation. Njáll's plan aims at making Hrútr believe that Gunnarr used a wrong legal formula. Before the decisive legal formula, Gunnarr speaks two stanzas (*Nj* 5–6, SkP V, 1225–1227). Thus, he is given a more active role in contrast to ÍF XII where he appears merely as Njáll's mouthpiece. The stanzas like a spotlight, highlight this scene, in which everything depends on a distinct flaw in Gunnarr's quotation of the legal formula. This greater narrative focus enhanced by the stanzas means that Gunnarr and Hrútr are thus framed as opponents going head-to-head with one another, while in ÍF XII, the real competition is between the legal specialists Njáll and Hrútr, despite Njáll's physical absence in this scene.

Gunnarr's next five stanzas in chapters 24 and 30 present a more violent side of him. Refusing help from Njáll, who wants to settle the case legally, Gunnarr challenges Hrútr to a duel. His first stanza (*Nj* 7, SkP V, 1228) is a repetition of what is said in the previous prose, but the poetic mode gives his challenge, and thus the choice for violence over legal mediation, greater emphasis. After Hrútr declines the challenge and pays money instead, Gunnarr speaks his next stanza

73 For a more detailed analysis of this passage, see Gropper, "Unnr's Story".

(*Nj* 8, SkP V, 1230). The verses substitute the responses assigned to Gunnarr in the other version, but place more emphasis on the vindicative aspect of his legal claim to this money. Both stanzas strengthen the impression established earlier that Gunnarr does not want to be dependent upon Njáll's advice. The combative aspect of challenging and fighting others is also the subject of the three stanzas in chapter 30. In the first of these, Gunnarr praises his brother as a brave and enduring warrior (*Nj* 9, SkP V, 1231), while the following two stanzas bracket the report of how Gunnarr obtains the famous spear that accompanies him for the rest of his life, and which will be inherited by the person who avenges him (*Nj* 10–11, SkP V, 1232–1233).

Although the stanzas contain the same information as the prose, they emphasise narrative elements and motifs that are important later in the saga and are not quite as clear in the prose. In between the cluster of stanzas spoken by Gunnarr and another large cluster of additional stanzas in chapter 43, the non-additional stanza spoken by Þórhildr *skáldkona* at Gunnarr's and Hallgerðr's wedding picks up the topic of marital problems mentioned in Unnr's stanzas (*Nj* 12, SkP V, 1235). The series of killings caused by the animosity between Hallgerðr and Bergþóra then escalates, moving from slaves to relatives, but from this point, Reykjabók differs from other manuscripts of recension X, which contain two stanzas spoken by Skarpheðinn in chapters 40 and 43 in discussions with his father (*Nj* 13–14, SkP V, 1237–1238). While the stanzas convey the same information communicated the prose version, in his verse, Skarpheðinn appears more vigorous and more eager to fight. These two stanzas are missing in Reykjabók, where the next cluster of stanzas follows in chapter 44 (*Nj* 15–17, SkP V, 1239–1242). The texts of these stanzas are written down at the end of the saga, but the main text mentions only that Sigmundur Lambason quoted three stanzas at Hallgerðr's request, mocking Njáll and his sons as "skegglauß" and "taðskegglingar" (KG, 85; cf. ÍF XII, 113) [beardless *and* dung-beardlings] (CSI *Nj*, 52). The verses, which are optative for the reader and their audience, enhance the insults mentioned in the prose by rendering them as an escalating line of *níðvísur* [deeply insulting verses].

In Reykjabók, all but two of the subsequent additional stanzas are written in the margins of the main text, with red marks indicating where the stanza is supposed to be inserted. They thus do not replace the prose, but offer a poetic alternative or supplement to it. The first of these stanzas is attributed to Skarpheðinn in chapter 44 (*Nj* 18, SkP V, 1243). He and his brothers attempt to leave the house in secret to seek revenge for Þórðr, even though Njáll and Gunnarr have settled the case peacefully. Njáll notices their departure and asks about their plans (KG, 190; ÍF XII, 115). Skarpheðinn's answer hides their real intention by using metaphors of farming and fishing. In the marginal stanza, Skarpheðinn also refers to

the search for sheep, but increases the obfuscation of their real intentions by using *kenningar*:

Eru umgerðis jarðar,
 auðs varpandi, sauða
 eisu einkar fúsir
 optveitendur leita.
 Þeir hafa, seima særir,
 smíðendur drafníða
 – geystr vinnk geira róstu –
 grasbítar skyn lítit.

Varpandi auðs, optveitendur eisu umgerðis jarðar eru einkar fúsir leita sauða. Þeir grasbítar, smíðendur drafníða, hafa lítit skyn, særir seima; vinnk geystr róstu geira.

[Flinger of wealth [GENEROUS MAN = Njáll], frequent givers of the flame of the encircler of the earth [SEA > GOLD > GENEROUS MEN = the sons of Njáll] are exceedingly eager to look for sheep. These grass-biters [SHEEP], crafters of trash-insults, have little sense, wonder of gold [GENEROUS MAN = Njáll]; I shall achieve, enraged, the tumult of spears [BATTLE.] (Nj 18, SkP V, 1243)

Despite the increased ambiguity, however, it is made more obvious than in the prose that their true intention is violence. The stanza emphasises the eagerness to look for sheep (*eru einkar fúsir leita sauða*), which are then described in negative images as “crafters of trash-insults” (*smíðendur drafníða*) with “little sense” (*lítit skyn*). Skarpheðinn then declares that he is enraged (*geystr*) and wants to strive for a battle. The stanza highlights the point where the feud cannot be controlled and reined in by Njáll in the same way as he managed with the earlier killings.

Skarpheðinn’s next stanza is inserted after the brothers take their vengeance in chapter 45 (*Nj* 19, SkP V, 1244). He cuts off Sigmundur’s head and commands Hallgerðr’s shepherd to take it back to her (KG, 197; ÍF XII, 117). Without adding new information, the stanza increases the tension of the scene. Standing out from the prose narration it with its artificial mode of speech, it functions as an aesthetic marker for the dramatic importance of this scene. Together with the previous stanza, it highlights the beginning of the path to the inevitable catastrophic climax. The poetic perspective then switches to Gunnarr, who, in chapter 54, prepares with his brother for an attack. In a fierce battle, Gunnarr successfully defends himself and kills Skammkell (KG, 245–247; ÍF XII, 137–138). The prose does not contain any dialogue, but before Gunnarr’s final blow, there is a red mark signalling a stanza by Gunnarr in which he insults Skammkell and predicts his death (*Nj* 20, SkP V, 1245). As in an opera, the stanza interrupts the dramatic action, and like Skarpheðinn’s stanza previously, it marks the beginning of the road towards catastrophe.

The ensuing stanzas indicate that the two families, which started out as friends and political allies, are becoming enemies in an escalating confrontation. In chapter 59, Gunnarr participates in a horse-fight that turns into a fight between the horse-owners. Skarpheðinn is among the spectators, and comments that it is braver to fight with weapons (KG, 272; ÍF XII, 151). In the stanza written in the margin (*Nj* 21, SkP V, 1246), he predicts his own involvement in a fight. The following five stanzas up to the climactic fight at Hlíðarendi are all spoken by Gunnarr (*Nj* 22–26, SkP V, 1247–1251). In chapter 62, when Gunnar and his companions ride home from the horse-fight, the situation is still dangerous, but Gunnarr becomes tired and falls asleep. Afterwards, he reports his dream about a pack of wolves that attacks further along the way, but which he and his companions manage to ward off (KG, 283; ÍF XII, 155–156). The stanza written in the margin repeats the contents of the dream, but adds that Gunnarr despite being confident to win the battle fears to have too few men with him: “þykkjumk riðinn fámennr brott ór Tungu” [I find that I have ridden with too little support away from Bræðratunga] (*Nj* 22, SkP V, 1247). In the following chapter, the men are indeed attacked by Þorgeirr, who threatens to send Gunnarr’s head to his wife. Gunnarr’s answer is repeated in a marginal stanza, which demonstrates his rhetorical as well as physical and mental superiority (*Nj* 23, SkP V, 1248). At the same time the stanza picks up on the motif of wives as inciters of dissent and thereby underlines the importance of a good marital relationship; it also refers back to Skarpheðinn’s earlier stanza when he had Sigmundur’s head sent to Hallgerðr: “skalt færa Hallgerði þetta höfuð” [you shall take this head to Hallgerðr] (*Nj* 19, SkP V, 1244). Now it is the head of Hallgerðr’s husband that is at stake: “ef reið leygs Rínar skal ráða höfði mínu” [if the chariot of the flame of the Rhine <river> [GOLD > WOMAN] shall have control of my head] (*Nj* 23, SkP V, 1248). In chapter 72, Gunnarr and his brother Kolskeggr fight again with Þorgeirr and his men, who are unable to defeat them (KG, 332–335; ÍF XII, 175–176). Kolskeggr wants to prosecute their opponents, but Gunnarr answers that they soon will run out of money with which to compensate all their killings. In the margin, there are two stanzas attributed to Gunnarr, which rephrase his answers to Kolskeggr; they convey no new information, but emphasise the high number of lives that the feud has cost so far (*Nj* 24–25, SkP V, 1249–1250). They thus indicate the proximity of this scene to the final escalation of the feud.

In chapter 77, when Hallgerðr, in the most critical situation, refuses to give Gunnarr a string of her hair with which to repair his bow, commenting that she does not care how long he will be able to defend himself, he answers with a proverbial phrase: “hefir hværr til sins agætis nakkvat’ segir gunnarr ‘ok skal þik þessa eigi lengi biðja” (KG, 366; cf. ÍF XII, 189) [“Everyone has some mark of distinction,” said Gunnarr, “and I won’t ask you again”] (CSI *Nj*, 90). In the marginal stanza, Gunnarr repeats this answer, but adds that she destroys his honour: “Sága

sveigar drepr niðr sóma mínum” [the Sága <goddess> of the headdress [WOMAN = Hallgerðr] destroys my honour] (*Nj* 26, SkP V, 1251). This stanza, the last spoken by Gunnarr while he is alive, links back to the subject of Unnr’s initial stanzas about her marital problems, which will cause mockery and thus destroy her honour: “satt er, at sék við spotti” [it is true that I am on my guard against ridicule] (*Nj* 1, SkP V, 1220). With this scene, the feud that started as a quarrel between the wives of two friends and close allies is brought to a close. After Gunnarr has been killed, Kálfalækjarbók (AM 133 fol.) of recension X complements Þorkell elfarskáld’s praise of Gunnarr (*Nj* 27, SkP V, 1253) with a stanza attributed to Þormóðr Ólafsson, in which he again praises Gunnarr’s defence in his last fight (*Nj* 28, SkP V, 1255). Reykjabók, however, does not include this stanza.

After Gunnarr speaks his last stanza from his gravemound, chapter 79 reports that Skarpheðinn and Gunnarr’s son Hogni ride to Oddi, where Hogni kills Þorgeirr as revenge for his father (KG, 376; ÍF XII, 195). From there, they ride to Hof, where Skarpheðinn reports their killings to Mǫrðr. This information is repeated in a stanza written in the margin and attributed to Skarpheðinn (*Nj* 30, SkP V, 1259). As a retardation in this highly dramatic scene, it gives special emphasis to these killings which will later turn out to be the beginning of a new feud that will culminate with the burning of Njáll’s family. In Reykjabók, Skarpheðinn’s answer before the stanza is reported by the narrator, while after the stanza he speaks directly. With the stanza the narrator hands the power of speaking over to Skarpheðinn whose strong voice indicates that he is now taking the lead and responsibility for his family.

Skarpheðinn’s leading position is underlined by his last four stanzas (*Nj* 32–35, SkP V, 1261–1265), which he speaks during several confrontations. In chapter 91, he has an altercation with Hallgerðr and calls her “annathvort hornkerling eða púta” (KG, 465; cf. ÍF XII, 228) [either a cast-off hag or a whore] (CSI *Nj*, 109). In the marginal stanza, Skarpheðinn uses the same words (*Nj* 32, SkP V, 1261), and – as with Sigmundur Lambason’s stanzas about Njáll and his sons in chapter 44 (*Nj* 15–17, SkP V, 1239–1242) – the poetic mode turns the insult into formal *níð*. The word “hornkerling” [cast-off hag], used in both the prose and the verse, is the same expression that Hallgerðr directed at Bergþóra in their first encounter in chapter 35. The stanza highlights the insult and ties various similar events in the saga together. It also draws attention to Hallgerðr’s subsequent promise to avenge these words, which again reminds us of her behaviour towards both her first husband and Gunnarr. In the next chapter, the intensity and violence increase. During the battle at Markarfljót, Kári Sölmundarson praises Skarpheðinn for having killed Þráinn, but Skarpheðinn retorts that Kári’s part of the work remains to be done. Inquits in the margin refer to two stanzas attributed to Skarpheðinn, which are copied at the end

of the saga (*Nj* 33–34, *SkP* V, 1262–1264). Both stanzas repeat and intensify his prose answers, with their inclusion highlighting how little Skarpheðinn can rely on his companions, and how much depends on his great strength. But the stanzas also underline his admonition that Kári do his work – a foreshadowing of Kári’s role after the burning, when it falls on him to seek revenge for the loss of his entire family.

In chapter 99, Skarpheðinn – against his brothers’ wishes – agrees to a settlement with Lýtingr, who wants take revenge for his relative Þráinn. When even Njáll criticises his son for not having killed Lýtingr, Skarpheðinn answers “telju vér ekki á fõður várn” (*KG*, 525; cf. *ÍF* XII, 255) [let’s not blame our father] (*CSI Nj*, 121), implying that it is rather him who should be blamed. The marginal stanza here repeats this answer, but adds that grief will result from this (*Nj* 35, *SkP* V, 1265). Like the stanzas before, this one highlights Skarpheðinn’s feelings of guilt and his pessimistic view for a bad outcome.

Recension X subsequently continues with the same stanzas as recension Y and its representation in *ÍF* XII, but the additional stanzas have an impact on the perception not only of the stanzas in the second half of the saga, but on the saga’s poetic profile in general. In contrast to the foreboding outlook on social and political issues conveyed in the non-additional stanzas, these verses place an emphasis on familial issues, highlighting the responsibilities of individuals for the destiny of their families.⁷⁴ In the prosimetric context of recension X, Kári’s stanzas (*Nj* 45, *SkP* V, 1284; *Nj* 47–50, *SkP* V, 1286–1291; *Nj* 52, *SkP* V, 1294) become a continuation of Gunnarr’s and Skarpheðinn’s poetry. In the earlier part, Gunnarr speaks the majority of stanzas as he takes on the responsibility for his family and the fights related to the feud. After his death, Skarpheðinn takes over poetic pre-eminence in the saga. He takes care of Gunnarr’s son by helping him gain revenge, and assumes the responsibility for his own family in the fights leading up to the burning. After Skarpheðinn’s death, Kári takes over as the one responsible for seeking revenge; this is already hinted at in Skarpheðinn’s stanzas in chapter 92 in which he admonishes Kári to do his part of the work. Since the additional stanzas echo their prose contexts for the most part, they do not actually give new information about the speakers, but they deepen their characterisation by giving Gunnarr and Skarpheðinn a stronger voice in the narrative and a more independent standing. By slowing down the narrative pace, the verses highlight certain scenes and force the audience to contemplate their impact on the development of the plot. At the

⁷⁴ This confirms Stefka Eriksen’s observation that the saga preserved in Reykjabók “inspires an interpretation that balances the responsibilities of two kin-groups for a revenge series in an honor-based society”, in contrast to Möðruvallabók’s focus on Skarpheðinn and Höskuldr; see Eriksen, “Medieval Page-turners”, 171.

same time, the poetry links rather distant elements – in poetry as well as in prose – to the overarching themes and aesthetics that span the whole narrative.

Conclusion

Each of the edited versions of *Njáls saga* represents a prosimetric narrative with its individual aesthetic profile. Reykjabók as represented in KG intertwines the poetic profile of the text edited in ÍF XII with a new line of poetry. In both cases, the stanzas draw attention to certain aspects of the narrative and connect otherwise disparate elements to steer interpretation of the saga in directions that might appear less important if one were to concentrate only on the prose narrative. They link individual concerns with wider social and political anxieties, and introduce mysterious, uncontrollable forces into a narrative in which the main character, Njáll, attempts to rein in conflicts and dangerous situations through reason and strategy. As stumbling stones in the narrative flow, the stanzas function as aesthetic markers, spotlighting key scenes as important and forcing the audience to pay close attention to the details of the story.

Reykjabók, however, presents a special case, with seventeen of its stanzas copied in the margin or at the end of the text. This manuscript offers its readers and their audiences a choice over whether they want to include stanzas and, if so, which scenes or themes they want to emphasise. Usually, stanzas are not laid out distinctively in manuscripts, but are integrated into the prose, making it more difficult to skip a stanza during a performance. In a sense, Reykjabók mirrors the complex transmission of the saga, which existed in several versions in simultaneous circulation; it contains a mixture of possible versions, representing the complex literary system in Iceland at the turn of the fourteenth century with a rich and differentiated generic repertoire. In Reykjabók, the audience could choose between versions of the narrative that emphasise its sociopolitical, familial, or individual and heroic aspects.⁷⁵ The additional stanzas associated with Unnr and Gunnarr link the introductory part of *Njáls saga* closer to the main plot, in that they draw attention to the fact that Gunnarr becomes Njáll's friend through asking him for legal advice, thus placing emphasis on the importance of family, friends, and allies. From then on, it is up to the reader and their audience which stanzas they choose to include. The verses in the margins suggest that each performance could produce a slightly different version, probably depending on and in interaction with the audience present. As Judy Quinn remarks, different

⁷⁵ See also Guðrún Nordal, "Tilbrigði um Njálu".

audiences might have known different versions of the saga and demanded the inclusion of certain verse.⁷⁶ While editions try to extract a text common to most manuscripts and fix it as “the” saga, the manuscripts were more flexible and left it open to their readers or performers and their audiences to produce an impromptu version suited for their specific situation, their context and their aesthetic preferences – and this also affected the inclusion of poetry.

⁷⁶ Quinn, “Orality, Textuality and Performance”, 88.

Annette Lassen

The Variance in the Distribution of Verses in the A, B, and C redactions of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* and Its Impact on Our Reading

Introduction

Egils saga, as is well-known, is thought to be one of the oldest *Íslendingasögur*. The oldest fragment is from ca 1250 (AM 162 A 0 fol), the oldest fragment of any saga in this genre. Egill is also one of the most renowned skalds in the sagas, with six long poems attributed to him (*Aðalsteinsdrápa*, *Höfuðlausn*, *Sonatorrek*, *Arinbjarnarkviða*, *Skjaldardrápa*, and *Berudrápa*), along with a number of *lausavísur*. Finally, Egill is one of the most complex characters of the *Íslendingasögur*: he is avaricious, stingy, violent, and confrontational, and yet he is also soft and emotional.¹ To a significant degree, this conflicting portrait is painted through Egill's stanzas and poems.²

The saga is transmitted in three redactions, named A, B, and C. The A redaction is best represented by Möðruvallabók, AM 132 fol. (Reykjavík), dated to ca 1350, B primarily by the Wolfenbüttel codex (Herzog August Bibliothek, WolfAug 9 10 4to), dated to ca 1330–1370, and C by the so-called Ketilsbækur, AM 462 4to (Reykjavík) and AM 453 4to (Copenhagen), dated to the seventeenth century. The redactions show significant differences in their distribution of *lausavísur* and of the three long poems included in printed editions of the saga: *Höfuðlausn*, *Arinbjarnarkviða*, and *Sonatorrek*.³ However, in a study of the manuscript transmission of the

1 The anthology *Egil, the Viking Poet*, ed. by Laurence de Looze et al., covers a variety of topics in connection with *Egils saga*, and includes an annotated bibliography of the saga.

2 See Clunies Ross' extensive introduction to *Eg*, SkP V, 152–162, which discusses the bibliography of Egill and the transmission of verses in the different redactions of the saga.

3 According to Clunies Ross' introduction to *Eg*, SkP V, 152, there are some "anomalies in the preservation of Egill's poetry, particularly when it is compared to the output of other Icelandic skalds whose poetry was recorded both in their own sagas and in the sagas of the kings they served", since no court poetry by Egill has been preserved in the *konungasögur*. Apart from *Egils saga*, Egill's poetry is also known from *Skáldskaparmál* in Snorri's *Edda* and from *The Third Grammatical Treatise*. See Guðrún Nordal, "Ars metrica and the Composition of *Egil's Saga*", 41–42. According to Guðrún, "Egil's poetry is cited nine times in *Snorra Edda* (Codex Regius version), but in seven of

Annette Lassen, University of Copenhagen

long poems and the *lausavísur* of the saga, followed by a discussion of their implication for modern editions, Margaret Clunies Ross showed in 2010 that the transmission of the *lausavísur* is much more consistent across the three redactions than the transmission of the long poems, which led her to argue that the long poems probably did not originally form a part of the saga.⁴

Until recently, the existing editions of *Egils saga* were based almost entirely on Möðruvallabók's version of the A redaction – with the addition of the missing poems *Höfuðlausn*, *Arinbjarnarkviða*, and *Sonatorrek*. In the 1950s, Jón Helgason envisioned and made preparations for an edition of all three redactions, which he was not able to complete. In 2001, Möðruvallabók's text of the A redaction appeared in *Editiones Arnamagnæanæ*, edited by Bjarni Einarsson according to Jón Helgason's plans. In 2006, the C redaction appeared in the same series, edited by Michael Chesnutt. The B redaction is still wanting, but preparations have been undertaken by Michael Chesnutt and Jonna Louis-Jensen for the edition, which will hopefully appear in the near future. A version of the B redaction as it appears in *Wolfenbüttelbók* is available online in a transcription by Fabian Schwabe.⁵

Several studies have been conducted on the prosimetrum found in Old Norse-Icelandic literature. In 1974, Bjarni Einarsson, in his article titled “On the Rôle of Verse in Saga Literature”, analysed the usage of stanzas in the *konungasögur*. He concluded that stanzas were utilized either as evidence or for aesthetic purposes, including the use of poetry in dialogues. Bjarni observed that dialogue involving verse recitation was integral to the plot and could not be excluded without affecting the narrative; conversely, stanzas quoted as evidence could be omitted without impacting the plot. In the *Íslendingasögur*, he found that the majority of stanzas were quoted for entertainment or aesthetic purposes (with *Fóstbræðra saga* being a notable exception).⁶

In 1993, Bjarne Fidjestøl examined how Snorri Sturluson incorporated skaldic stanzas into the prose of *Heimskringla*. The starting point for Fidjestøl's study was “the simple proposition that when an author fashioned the prose in which a verse is embedded, he must have had the poetry itself in his memory and mind.”⁷

these nine instances the source is one of Egil's longer poems, *Arinbjarnarkviða*, *Sonatorrek*, or *Höfuðlausn*, which may or may not have belonged to the written saga originally”.

4 Clunies Ross, “Verse and Prose in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*”, 196. Finnur Jónsson was also of this opinion; see introduction to *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, xxx.

5 See *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, ed. Schwabe.

6 Bjarni Einarsson, “On the Rôle of Verse in Saga-Literature”, 118–119, 124.

7 Fidjestøl, “Skaldic Stanzas in Saga Prose”, 256. Furthermore, in 2016, Helen F. Leslie-Jacobsen published a study on the prosimetrum of the legendary sagas (“Genre and the Prosimetra of the Old Icelandic *fornaldarsögur*”), and finally an ongoing research project, Old Norse Poetry and the

It is not uncommon, Fidjestøl stressed, for medieval authors to assume that readers or audiences were familiar with a text that is merely referred to, rather than quoted in full. In *Niðrstigningar saga*, the writer refers to Simeon's song; he quotes the first three words, then adds *usque ad finem* [to the very end].⁸ This finding led Fidjestøl to hypothesise about *Egils saga*:

A situation similar to this is perhaps to be seen in sagas when a writer quotes just the first stanza of some well-known skaldic poem. This is the case in *Egils saga*. *Möðruvallabók* is the only codex in which the *Arinbjarnarkviða* is recorded, but at the place where the poem should come in the saga, the scribe simply left an unfilled space for the opening stanza while the whole poem is written out as an appendix at the end of the work. The saga-copy in this codex omits *Höfuðlausn* altogether, and quotes only the first stanza of *Sonatorrek*, which is found in its entirety in *Kollsbók*. Whether *Sonatorrek* is recorded in a manuscript or not, it is difficult to reconcile oneself to the thought that this poem, in which one of the saga's most prominent themes – man's helplessness in the face of death – is so impressively orchestrated, was not part of the whole story of Egill as originally conceived.⁹

Contrary to Fidjestøl's view, Michael Chesnutt hypothesised that the lack of *Arinbjarnarkviða* in the saga narrative indicated that the text of the poem had simply not been available for the person who compiled the archetype, since it is known to exist only as an addition on the originally blank leaf after *Egils saga* in *Möðruvallabók*.¹⁰ If he had known the poem by heart, one could add, he could have inserted it from memory. Instead of assuming that the individual copyist of *Egils saga* and the readers of the saga were so familiar with a poem like *Höfuðlausn* or *Arinbjarnarkviða* that it was not necessary to write them down, this essay will consider *Egils saga* with the hypothesis that readers or listeners may not necessarily have memorised and known Egill's poems. The essay will give a survey of the variance in the distribution of the verses in the three redactions of *Egils saga*, and attempt to consider what effect the different distributions of verse may have had on readers.

Development of Saga Literature, at Oslo University focusing on the prosimetrum of the sagas and their genesis ought to be mentioned.

8 Fidjestøl, "Skaldic Stanzas in Saga Prose", 256.

9 Fidjestøl, "Skaldic Stanzas in Saga Prose", 256–257.

10 Chesnutt, "Tekstkritiske bemærkninger til C-redaktionen af Egils saga", 236.

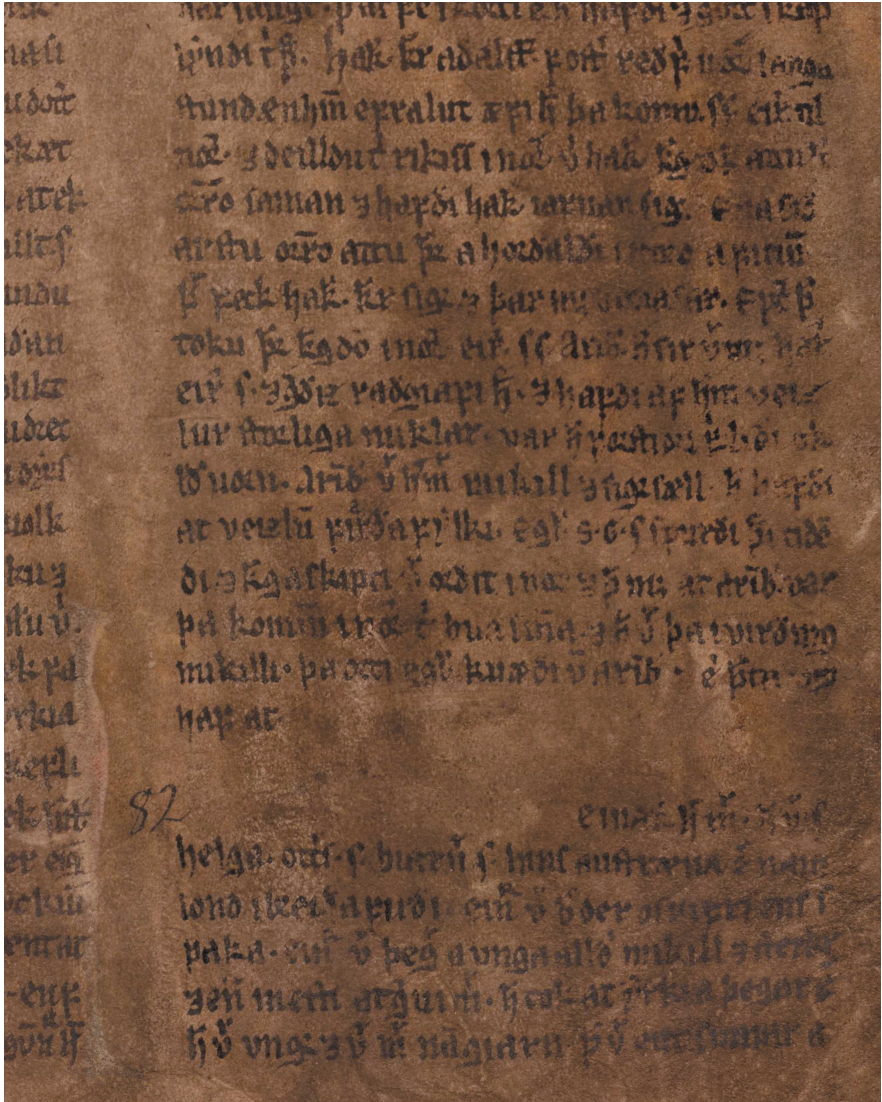


Figure 2: Space has been left after the introduction of *Arinbjarnarkviða* for the initial verse to be quoted but it has not been filled in. Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 132 fol. (Möðruvallabók), f. 95r.

The A redaction

The A redaction (A) – which, as mentioned, is best presented by Mōðruvallabók, a manuscript exclusively containing *Íslendingasögur* – is the redaction that preserves most *lausavísur* of *Egils saga*.¹¹ On the other hand, it does not preserve the two long poems *Höfuðlausn* and *Sonatorrek* as full texts, though it contains the first stanza of the latter. A is the only one of the three redactions to preserve *Arinbjarnarkviða*, even though it is written on an originally blank leaf after the saga (fol. 99v) and therefore does not form part of the actual saga. The poem, which is now defective in Mōðruvallabók – in its current state, it is largely illegible – was added by another hand than the main scribe. A has more prose text than the other two redactions: it contains the story of the shepherd Íri in chapter 83,¹² and the plan of the aged Egill to disperse his silver at the *alþingi*, whereby he wishes to cause a fight among the assembled people in order to expose their greedy nature (ch. 85, l. 42–61). A also adds a passage where the elderly Egill is scolded by a servant woman in the kitchen for being in her way; he complains in an added *lausavísa* when he leaves the place (ch. 85, l. 13–27). A is also alone in adding a sentence speculating where exactly Egill hid his treasure (ch. 85, l. 76–78).

In Mōðruvallabók, the text, both prose and verse, is laid out in two columns. Often a little “v.” (*vísa*) [verse] is added in the margin next to the line where a stanza is written. This will have made it easier for readers to orientate themselves in the text, and may also be an indication of a special interest in the poetry. The verses are most often introduced with formulas like *þá kvað Egill*. Of the six longer poems attributed to Egill in the saga, the first stanza is cited for four of them, and in one case accompanied by its refrain: *Aðalsteinsdrápa* (with the refrain), *Sonatorrek*, *Skjaldardrápa*, and *Berudrápa*.

Apart from Egill’s poetry, A also includes stanzas that are composed by another skald than Egill, namely two stanzas by Einarr *skálaglamm* which are included in neither B nor C. The A redaction in Mōðruvallabók appears to have a strong focus on Egill as a poet, which may also be detected in the main scribe’s activity, to which I will return. But according to Michael Chesnutt, who edited the C redaction of the saga and who has also prepared an edition of the B redaction, the insertion of Einarr’s stanzas is at odds with Mōðruvallabók’s focus on the skald Egill.¹³

11 Two leaves of *Egils saga*, which formed the outer pair of a quire, are also lost in M: ch. 44, l. 45 – ch. 46, l. 32, and ch. 56, ll. 124–260. See Jón Helgason, “Observations on some Manuscripts of *Egils saga*”, 41.

12 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 62–69 (ch. 83, ll. 8–41).

13 Chesnutt, “Tekstkrítiske bemærkninger til C-redaktionen af *Egils saga*”, 239.

Different scribes were at work copying *Egils saga* in Möðruvallabók. Their joint effort gives us a glimpse of the editorial intention and interest of the main scribe. The main scribe of Möðruvallabók was an active scribe, whose hand is known from a number of other manuscripts.¹⁴ In thirteen cases in *Egils saga*, the scribe left empty spaces for the verses, which were afterwards filled in by an assisting scribe. These are as follows:

- 1) Kveldúlfr's lamenting stanza about the death of Þórólfr (*Eg* 1, SkP V), which does not appear in the C redaction;
- 2–3 Egill's first and second stanzas at the *dísablót* in Atley (*Eg* 8–9, SkP V);
- 4–5 Egill's first and second stanzas at King Aðalsteinn's celebration of his victory (*Eg* 19–20, SkP V).¹⁵

At this point in the saga in Möðruvallabók, a second assisting scribe appears to have written stanza 23 (a half-stanza), which is Egill's first stanza about Ásgerðr.¹⁶ The same scribe also added the introductory words: "Láttu mik nú heyra. Egill sagði at hann hefði þetta fyrir skemstu kveðit."¹⁷ ['Now let me hear.' Egill said that he had composed this a short while ago], with the initial line of dialogue spoken by Egill's friend Arinbjörn as part of the preceding conversation between the men.¹⁸ The first assisting scribe then takes over again:

- 6) Egill's second stanza about Ásgerðr (*Eg* 24, SkP V);
- 7) A stanza in which Egill expresses gratitude to King Eiríkr for granting him his head (*Eg* 56, SkP V);
- 8) Egill's reply to King Aðalsteinn's question about how things went between him and Eiríkr (*Eg* 57, SkP V);
- 9) Egill's reply to a question posed by Arinbjörn's sister Gyða (*Eg* 58, SkP V);
- 10) A stanza in which Egill accepts a duel with the berserker Ljótr to save Gyða and her household (*Eg* 60, SkP V);
- 11) A stanza in which Egill boasts of his victory over Atli inn skammi (*Eg* 64, SkP V);
- 12) A stanza in which Egill claims he is unafraid of enemies (*Eg* 71, SkP V);

¹⁴ Bjarni Einarsson, introduction to *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, xxvi–xxvii.

¹⁵ *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 34 (ch. 24, ll. 10–17 = *Eg* 1, SkP V); 61–62 (ch. 44, ll. 20–27 and 36–43 = *Eg* 8–9, SkP V); and 86–87 (ch. 55, ll. 53–60 and 71–78 = *Eg* 19–20, SkP V).

¹⁶ As Bjarni Einarsson notes, however, Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen disputes whether the hand belongs to another scribe. See Leeuw van Weenen, *A Grammar of Möðruvallabók*, 22; Bjarni Einarsson, introduction to *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, xxviii.

¹⁷ *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 90 (ch. 56, ll. 14–17).

¹⁸ All English translations in this essay are my own unless otherwise noted.

- 13) The first stanza of *Sonatorrek* (*Eg* 72 [Egill *St* 1], SkP V), where the assisting scribe has also written the introductory words “Ok er þetta upphaf kvæðis” [And this is the beginning of the poem].¹⁹

Even though the A redaction does not quote Egill’s long poems, it gives samples of four of them. The A redaction quotes the first stanza of Egill’s *Skjaldardrápa* (*Eg* 126, SkP V, 376), introduced by the words: “Síðan orti Egill drápu ok er þetta upphaf at” [Then Egill composed a *drápa* and this is the beginning of it].²⁰ At the corresponding place in B and C, it says: “Eptir þat orti Egill [C: Egill orti drápu] um skjaldargjöfina” [after this Egill composed a *drápa* about the shield gift]²¹ – but neither B nor C quotes the stanza. The A redaction also has the first stanza of *Berudrápa* (*Eg* 128, SkP V, 380), which is likewise found in neither B nor C. A introduces Egill’s recitation of his long poem *Höfuðlausn* with the words “En er kóngur hafði þetta mælt gekk Egill fyrir kóng ok hóf upp kvæði ok fekk þegar hljóð” [But when the king had said this, Egill went and stood before the king and began reciting the poem, and immediately he received silence],²² but neither the poem nor any of its stanzas are quoted.

One may wonder whether the introductory words “Ok er þetta upphaf kvæðis” [and this is the beginning of the poem] and “er þetta upphaf at” [and this is the beginning], introducing the quoted stanzas from *Sonatorrek* and *Skjaldardrápa*, would have been necessary had the readers or listeners, or a majority of them, known the poem by heart, as Fidjestøl surmised that they might have.

In A, a passage in connection with the battle at Limafjörður has been added. Here, Egill is told that his friend Arinbjörn has died, after which the saga reports “þá kvað hann” [then he recited].²³ The stanza in which Egill expresses his loss is preserved only in A. It has been questioned whether the stanza even refers to Arinbjörn, or whether it may instead have been originally composed about King Aðalsteinn (regardless of the poet’s actual identity). Be that as it may, the literary intention in the scene is obvious, according to Michael Chesnutt. Egill’s close friendship with Arinbjörn is a theme that runs throughout the saga; the reason

¹⁹ *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 90–91 (ch. 56, ll. 20–27 = *Eg* 24, SkP V); 118 (ch. 61, ll. 15–22 = *Eg* 56, SkP V); 118 (ch. 61, ll. 31–38 = *Eg* 57, SkP V); 118–119 (ch. 64, ll. 26–33 = *Eg* 58, SkP V); 124 (ch. 64, ll. 89–96 = *Eg* 60, SkP V); 128 (ch. 65, ll. 70–77 = *Eg* 64, SkP V); 140 (ch. 73, ll. 9–16 = *Eg* 71, SkP V); and 149 (ch. 78, ll. 76–83 = *Eg* 72 [Egill *St* 1], SkP V).

²⁰ *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 151 (ch. 78).

²¹ AM 458 4to [B redaction], 72v; variant from *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar III: C-redaktionen*, ed. Chesnutt, 151 (ch. 58).

²² *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 117 (ch. 60).

²³ *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 151 (ch. 78).

why it surfaces here may have to do with the new and growing friendship between Egill and Einarr *skálaglamm*.²⁴ The scribe of *Möðruvallabók* even quotes two stanzas by Einarr *skálaglamm*, which, as Chesnutt notes, diverges from the saga's strong focus on Egill as a poet. These two stanzas (*Eg* 124–125, *SkP* V, 372–374) are notably not copied in either B or C.²⁵ The function of the scene and the stanza in the A redaction is thus to commemorate the close friendship between Egill and Arinbjörn poetically, which also appears consonant with the decision to append a copy of *Arinbjarnarkviða* to the end of the saga (even though the *kviða* is copied by another scribe).

On three occasions where the main scribe of *Möðruvallabók* (M) left a blank space where he intended a *lausavísa* to be copied, the copying was never completed. As a response to Eiríkr *blóðøx*'s threat, the main scribe of the text in M writes “þá kvað Egill” [then Egill said],²⁶ but the *lausavísa* has not been copied. This is also the case when Egill, in ch. 78, has received the good news that Arinbjörn has returned to his estate in Norway and is on good terms with king Haraldr *gráfeldr*. The scribe writes “þá orti Egill kvæði um Arinbjörn, er þetta upphaf at” [then Egill composed a poem about Arinbjörn, and this is the beginning].²⁷

24 See Chesnutt, “Tekstkritiske bemærkninger til C-redaktionen af Egils saga”, 239: “Egills nære venskab med Arinbjörn har været et gennemgående tema i sagaen; tanken om det er på dette sted måske direkte fremkaldt ved beretningen om det gryende venskab med Einarr. Det gamle venskab skal ihukommes i en lyrisk efterskrift, hvor den sørgende skjald fremsiger et (angiveligt) mindevers. At det er arketydens forfatter, der har tilføjet episoden, synes at fremgå af den fornyede anvendelse af *konunga ævi* eller en deraf flydende kilde. [. . .] Sagaen omtaler flere andre skjalde end Egill, men der citeres aldrig så meget som en linje af deres digtning undtagen her. Egils saga er jo netop helt og holdent skjalden Egills saga, og optagelsen af Einarrs strofer er et brud på et kompositorisk princip (de spredte vers lagt i munden på Kveldúlfr, den kokette jarlsdatter m.fl. er en anden sag; deres angivelige ophavspersoner havde aldrig fremsagt kvad for hverken konger eller stormænd)” [Egill’s close friendship with Arinbjörn has been a recurring theme in the saga; the idea of it is perhaps directly evoked here by the account of the budding friendship with Einarr. The old friendship is remembered in a lyrical postscript in which the mourning skald recites a (supposedly) commemorative verse. That it is the writer of the archetype who has added the episode seems to be evident from the renewed use of *konunga ævi*, or a source flowing from it. [. . .] The saga mentions several skalds other than Egill, but not so much as a line of their poetry is quoted, except here. *Egils saga* is, after all, entirely the saga of the skald Egill, and the inclusion of Einarr’s stanzas is a breach of a compositional principle (the scattered verses put into the mouths of Kveldúlfr, the coquettish earl’s daughter, and others are another matter; their alleged authors had never recited poems to either kings or great men)].

25 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 152 (ch. 78).

26 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 115 (ch. 59).

27 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 150 (ch. 78).

Blank space has been left for a stanza, which, according to Bjarni Einarsson, would fit a stanza composed in *kviðuhátttr*.²⁸ The third time that this occurs is in ch. 75, when Egill is in Vermaland. The intended stanza is introduced with “þá kvað Egill” [then Egill said],²⁹ but again, nothing has been copied. In all three cases, no stanzas are preserved in the corresponding sections of the B or C redactions.

Bjarni Einarsson suggests that the close co-operation between the scribes suggests that they all lived where Möðruvallabók was written, and he notes that we cannot know whether the different scribes had independent originals of the stanzas they copied.³⁰ But their co-operation in the copying of stanzas raises the question: did different traditions of Egill’s stanzas and poems exist, which different scribes would have accessed via different manuscripts? There is reason to believe this was the case. Quires with collections of Egill’s poetry may have existed, similarly to the pamphlets of eddic poems that Gustav Lindblad argued existed prior to Snorri’s *Edda* and the Codex Regius of the eddic poems.³¹ The organisation of *Egils saga* in A and the treatment of stanzas in Möðruvallabók shows, as Michael Chesnutt argues, that the redactor had an interest in the skaldic tradition.³² According to Chesnutt, it appears that when the stanzas of his exemplar were of unsatisfying quality, the main scribe left empty spaces for assisting scribes to fill out.³³ But a special interest in skaldic poetry is not the general rule of Möðruvallabók. As Guðrún Nordal points out, “it is noteworthy that there is a tendency [in Möðruvallabók] to preserve less verse than we find in other manuscripts from the same period”.³⁴

28 Bjarni Einarsson, introduction to *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, xxix.

29 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 142 (ch. 75).

30 Bjarni Einarsson, introduction to *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, xxix.

31 Lindblad, *Studier i Codex regius av Äldre Eddan*; Jón Helgason, *Skjaldevers*, 29; Chesnutt, “Tekstkritiske bemærkninger til C-redaktionen af Egils saga”, 243.

32 Clunies Ross also makes this argument in her article on prosimetrum in *Egils saga*. See Clunies Ross, “Verse and Prose in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*”, 195: “There is a significantly greater emphasis in the A redaction text of Möðruvallabók on Egill’s poetic and courtly reputation, and this is created in part by the inclusion of the two shield-poem-fragments, the greater focus on Egill’s relationship with Arinbjörn, the two verses by Einarr, and the narrative that explains why all these verses were composed.”

33 The text of M is not the original A text; see Chesnutt, “Tekstkritiske bemærkninger til C-redaktionen af Egils saga”, 241. According to Chesnutt, it can be ruled out that Einarr *skáláglamm*’s stanzas were written in M’s original.

34 Guðrún Nordal, “*Ars metrica* and the Composition of *Egils Saga*”, 41.

The B redaction

The principal representative of the B redaction (B) is the Wolfenbüttel codex (W), but this manuscript has lacunae corresponding to passages in A.³⁵ According to Jón Helgason, the lost text of W can be sought in younger manuscripts. AM 463 4to and AM 560 d 4to are useful here, even though the latter lacks the end of the saga (from ch. 85, l. 36).³⁶ According to Jón Helgason, the missing text of the Wolfenbüttel codex is provided in AM 458 4to,³⁷ which preserves two passages of otherwise unknown texts of B (ch. 8, l. 17 – ch. 11, l. 26; and ch. 70, l. 9 – ch. 81, l. 62),³⁸ and Upps UB R 698, which contains the end of the saga following the B redaction. In this essay, I use W as the primary representative of the B redaction, but reference these last two manuscripts where W has lacunae.

The B redaction is generally characterised by a tendency to abbreviate, and leaves out a number of episodes preserved in the A redaction. These include the narration of the battle at Limafjörður (which forms the context for *Eg* 123, SkP V); the passage about Íri and the ambush planned by Steinarr at Einkunnir; Egill's conversation with the kitchen maid; Egill's plan to disperse silver from the law-rock at the *alþingi*; and information about the springs and potholes where Egill's treasure may lie concealed.³⁹

Regarding the longer poems, both A and B introduce the first stanza of *Höfuðlausn* in a similar way (“En er kóngur hafði þetta mælt gekk Egill fyrir kóng ok hóf upp kvæði ok fekk þegar hljóð” [But when the king had said that, Egill went before him and began reciting the poem, and he received silence immediately]), but B adds the rubric “hér hefr Höfuðlausn”⁴⁰ [here Höfuðlausn begins], which is then immediately followed by the poem, a total of twenty stanzas.⁴¹ The main manu-

³⁵ See *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 9–16 (ch. 7, l. 1 – ch. 11, l. 14); 134–167 (ch. 70, l. 9 – ch. 82, l. 11); and 178–199 (ch. 85, l. 7 to the end of the saga).

³⁶ Jón Helgason, “Observations on some Manuscripts of *Egils saga*”, 14.

³⁷ The manuscript contains, however, a contaminated text of *Egils saga*, as the end of the saga follows A; see Jón Helgason, “Observations on some Manuscripts of *Egils saga*”, 24. The fragment AM 162 v fol. also belongs to the B class.

³⁸ Jón Helgason, “Observations on some Manuscripts of *Egils saga*”, 46.

³⁹ Cf. *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 147–148 (ch. 78, ll. 27–41); 170–173 (ch. 83, ll. 8–41); 178–180 (ch. 85, ll. 13–27); 180–182 (ch. 85, ll. 42–61); and 183 (ch. 85, ll. 76–78).

⁴⁰ WolfAug 9 10 4to [B redaction], 49r.

⁴¹ There are significant differences in the ordering of the stanzas in the B and C redaction. In Wolfenbüttelbók, neither *Hfl* 4 nor 19 is included; the ordering of *Hfl* 9 and 10 is reversed; the *helmingar* [half-stanzas] of *Hfl* 13, 16, and 18 are presented as standalone stanzas or rearranged into different full stanzas; and *Hfl* 14 is placed after *Hfl* 16 and before *Hfl* 20–21. The numbering

script of the B redaction, *Wolfenbüttelbók*, has a lacuna where *Sonatorrek* should appear; however, the missing text of this redaction can be found in the manuscript AM 458 4to. Here, the introduction and prose context of the poem – “Egill settisk upp ok tók til at kveða ok þetta er upphaf at” [Egill sat up and began to recite and this is the beginning of the poem]⁴² – is reminiscent of the A redaction; in both these redactions, only the first stanza of *Sonatorrek* is copied. Unlike in A, *Arinbjarnarkviða* is not appended to the end of the saga in the B redaction. Nor does B give a sample of *Skjaldardrápa*; at the corresponding place in the saga, B says only “Eptir þat orti Egill um skjaldargjöfina” [after this, Egill composed a poem about the gift of the shield].⁴³ As mentioned above, this is also true for *Berudrápa*, which B does not quote.

The C redaction

The principal representatives of the C redaction (C) are the so-called *Ketilsbækur* (AM 453 4to and AM 462 4to), written by Árni Magnússon’s maternal grandfather Ketill Jörundsson of Hvammur, who copied the whole saga.⁴⁴ Like B, C contains *Höfuðlausn* at the appropriate place in the saga narrative. The saga says that “gekk Egill fyrir hann ok hóf upp kvæðit ok kvað, en honum gafsk þegar hljóð ok er þetta upphaf kvæðis þessa” [Egill went before him [King Eiríkr] and began reciting the poem, and he received silence immediately, and this is the beginning of the poem],⁴⁵ whereupon twenty stanzas of *Höfuðlausn* follow. As aforementioned, the C redaction is the only one of the three to preserve *Sonatorrek* in its entirety.⁴⁶

According to Michael Chesnutt, the C redaction is of lesser importance for the textual and literary history of *Egils saga* than both A and B. According to Chesnutt, the language has been modernised, but, more importantly, it is presumably a contaminated text (that is, the text is based not on a single original, but on two

of the stanzas here follows that used in the Skaldic Project edition (see *Eg* 34–54, SkP V, 240–265), which prioritises the ordering of the C redaction.

42 AM 458 4to [B redaction], 71v.

43 AM 458 4to [B redaction], 72v.

44 Of the two, AM 462 4to is quite defective, but the missing text has been added and inserted into the manuscript at a later point in time.

45 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar III: C-redaktionen*, ed. Chesnutt, 103 (ch. 40).

46 Apart from Egill’s long poems, C has some prose additions of its own: a reply by Úlfr, remarks about Egill by the earls’ men, and an expansion of Tungu-Oddr’s speech. See Chesnutt, “Tekstkrítiske bemærkninger til C-redaktionen af Egils saga”, 243.

or more texts belonging to different branches of the stemma).⁴⁷ The oldest fragment of the redaction is dated to the fifteenth century, and the majority of the text is only preserved in seventeenth-century manuscripts. *Höfuðlausn* is preserved in a fragment from the fifteenth century that preserves a text of C (AM 162 ε fol.), and Michael Chesnutt suggests it is likely that both *Höfuðlausn* and *Sonatorrek* were added to the C redaction in the late Middle Ages.⁴⁸ Regardless of when the poems were added, C is the only redaction in which *Sonatorrek* is preserved, and in which readers and listeners have been able to read and hear both *Höfuðlausn* and *Sonatorrek* in their entirety and as a part of the saga narrative, that is, without having to add them from other sources, whether oral or written.

Verse and Prose in A, B, and C

Table 1 gives an overview of the stanzas in the three redactions of *Egils saga* and how they are woven into the prose. When Bjarni Einarsson assessed the stanzas in the *konungasögur* and the *Íslendingasögur* in 1974, he concluded that stanzas are either quoted as evidence or are woven into the dialogue.⁴⁹ According to Bjarni Einarsson, recitations in verse, presented with formulas like “Þá kvað N.N. [vísu]” [then N.N. recited [a verse]], cannot be omitted without altering the narrative because they form part of the plot, whereas it is possible to omit stanzas quoted as evidence, presented with formulas like “Þess getr N.N.” [this N.N. mentions], “Svá segir N.N.” [thus N.N. says], “Sem N.N. segir” [as N.N. says], without affecting the plot.

The prosimetric system in all three redactions of *Egils saga* is fairly simple. First of all, there are no stanzas quoted as evidence, which one might perhaps have expected due to the saga’s close connection to *konungasögur*.⁵⁰ The vast majority of stanzas are recited within dialogues which are framed as part of the plot. The following examples are all taken from A:

47 Chesnutt, “Tekstkritiske bemærkninger til C-redaktionen af Egils saga”, 229.

48 Chesnutt, “Tekstkritiske bemærkninger til C-redaktionen af Egils saga”, 243.

49 Bjarni Einarsson, “On the Rôle of Verse in Saga-Literature”, 119.

50 There are, however, several instances of the narrative voice curating only specific stanzas to be quoted in the saga, through formulas like “þetta er upphaf kvæðis” [this is the beginning of the poem] or “þetta er stef í” [this is the refrain in it]. Research from the ÍSP project has recently suggested that such stanzas complicate the dichotomy between ‘authenticating’ and ‘situational’ verses (or those quoted as ‘evidence’ or as ‘entertainment / dialogue’), especially in cases where stanzas are given a performance context in the prose, but where the poetry itself is then introduced as being quoted by the narrative voice. See Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir et al., “Investigating the Íslendingasögur as Prosimetrum”, 68–70; Wilson, “Authenticating Voices?”.

- *N.N. kvað vísu* (19 occurrences)
- *orti N.N. vísu / drápu* (3 occurrences)
- *N.N. kvað / kvað N.N. / þá kvað N.N.* (31 occurrences)
- *ok enn kvað hann* (2 occurrences)

There are only slight differences in the wording of the inquit introducing stanzas between the three redactions, which are hardly worth noting here.

Sometimes the inquit is followed by information about events and the progress of the story, as in the following examples:

- “Egill tók við horninu ok kvað vísu” [Egill took the drinking horn and uttered a verse] (*Eg* 8, *SkP* V, 177);
- “þá gekk Egill at borðinu ok tók um fót konungi. Hann kvað þá” [then Egill went to the table and grabbed the king’s foot. Then he said] (*Eg* 26, *SkP* V, 231)
- “ok er Egill sá þat. Þá kvað hann vísu” [and when Egill saw that, then he uttered a verse] (*Eg* 30, *SkP* V, 272);
- “Egill stóð upp ok gekk til rúms síns ok kvað” [Egill stood up and went to his place and said] (*Eg* 47, *SkP* V, 386).⁵¹

These examples, all taken from A, demonstrate how the stanzas are woven into the narrative: they function as spoken reactions to certain events in the narrative, and thus cannot be omitted without altering the plot. At some points, the prose almost appears to be written around the poetry, as the following passage, in which Egill mourns his brother Þórólfr and his unfulfilled love for Ásgerðr, indicates:

Gekk Arinbjörn til hans ok spurði hvat ógleði hans ylli. Nú þó at þú hafir fengit skaða mikinn um bróður þinn þá er þat karlmannligt at bera þat vel. Skal maðr eptir mann lifa. Eða hvat kveðr þú nú. Láttu mik nú heyra. Egill sagði at hann hefði þetta fyrir skemmstu kveðit: [. .]⁵²

[Arinbjörn went to him and asked what caused his unhappiness. ‘Even though you have now received a great loss regarding your brother, it is manly to bear that well. One person will live on after another – but what are you composing now? Now let me hear.’ Egill said that he had composed this a short while ago: [. .]

The prelude to the stanzas, in which Egill has hidden Ásgerðr’s name, shows the healing power of poetry for Egill – something that Arinbjörn is apparently aware

⁵¹ *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 61 (ch. 44), 114 (ch. 59), 123 (ch. 64), and 178 (ch. 85).

⁵² *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 90 (ch. 56).

of, which we shall return to below. The introductory prose sometimes appears to testify to an interest in or an awareness of the stanzas as poetry, which is of course not surprising, given the content of the saga; as Guðrún Nordal has noted, “*Egil’s Saga* speaks to an audience interested in poetry, and could even be said to revolve around poetry”.⁵³ In the corpus of legendary sagas, on the other hand, where the majority of stanzas are recited within prosimetric dialogue, such an awareness cannot be noted in the surrounding prose.⁵⁴ The interest in poetry in *Egils saga* can be detected in the introduction of a half-stanza from *Aðalsteinsdrápa*: “En er þetta stefit í drápunni” (followed in A by the stanza *Eg* 22, SkP V, 209).⁵⁵ This introduction is found in all three redactions. The interest in poetry may appear somewhat paradoxical, given that only C contains both *Sonatorrek* and *Höfuðlausn* as full texts. In A, the heading of chapter 60 reads: “Egill flutti kvæðit” [Egill recited the poem], and despite the fact that no poetry is quoted, the chapter ends: “þá gekk Egill fyrir hann. Ok hóf upp kvæðit. Ok kvað hátt ok fekk þegar hljóð” [then Egill went before him and began reciting the poem. And he spoke loudly and immediately he received silence].⁵⁶ In B, this is followed by the heading “Höfuðlausn Egils” [Egill’s Head Ransom],⁵⁷ followed by the poem, and in C with the words “ok er þetta upphaf kvæðis þessa” [and this is the beginning of that poem],⁵⁸ again followed by the poem.

While A does not quote *Höfuðlausn* or *Sonatorrek* in full, its interest in poetry is nevertheless visible in connection with three of the long poems (*Sonatorrek*, *Skjaldardrápa*, *Berudrápa*), where in each case it quotes an extract of the poetry and introduces it in a similar way: “ok er þetta upphaf kvæðis”⁵⁹ [and this is the beginning of the poem] (followed by one stanza of *Sonatorrek*, *Eg* 72 [St 1], SkP V, 298); “Síðan orti Egill drápu ok er þetta upphaf at”⁶⁰ [then Egill composed a *drápa* and this is the beginning of it] (followed by one stanza of *Skjaldardrápa*, *Eg* 126 [Skjalddr 1], SkP V, 376); and “Eptir um vetrinn orti Egill drápu um skjaldargjöfina er kölluð er Berudrápa. Ok er þetta upphaf at”⁶¹ [Later that winter Egill composed a *drápa* about the shield gift which is called *Berudrápa*. And this is the beginning

53 Guðrún Nordal, “*Ars metrica* and the Composition of *Egil’s Saga*”, 43.

54 The stanzas in the corpus of legendary sagas are predominantly situational verses, though a limited number of sagas have authenticating stanzas; see Lassen, “The Prosimetrum in Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* and Its Implications for Icelandic Literary History”.

55 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 88 (ch. 55).

56 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 116–117 (ch. 60).

57 AM 458 4to [B redaction], 54v.

58 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar III: C-redaktionen*, ed. Chesnutt, 102 (ch. 40–41).

59 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 149 (ch. 78).

60 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 153 (ch. 78).

61 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 154 (ch. 79).

of it] (followed by one stanza of *Berudrápa*, A: st. 57; *Eg* 128 [*Berdr* 1], SkP V, 380). Notably, the stanzas *Skjalddr* 1 and *Berdr* 1 are lacking in both B and C.

Höfuðlausn and *Sonatorrek*

The question, then, is what significance the different distribution of verses and poems has for our reading of the saga and for the presentation of its main character Egill. Let us first take a short look at *Höfuðlausn*. In the course of one night, to save his own life, Egill composes the poem, which he recites the following day before the angry gaze of the king; as a reward, Egill receives his own ugly head. Some scholars are of the opinion that in this coerced poem of praise in honour of his deadly enemy, Egill maintains an ironic distance in the poetic circumlocutions. Egill's great art in this case consists in the fact that while the poem is, on the surface, a panegyric, in reality, it is a clever and bold expression of contempt. Jón Helgason has argued that the poem *Höfuðlausn* is younger than the lifetime of Egill, but we should keep in mind that even if this were the case, medieval or post-medieval readers must have considered Egill's poems authentic, that is, as Egill's own words.⁶² The poem thus gives the reader or listener an insight into Egill's unyielding character; even when he bows, he is confrontational. This layer of interpretation disappears when the poem is not quoted.

Later in the saga, Egill composes *Sonatorrek* after his son Þoðvarr drowns. Egill lies down in his bed-closet, where he wishes to die because of sorrow. Egill's wife Ásgerðr appeals to their daughter Þorgerðr for help. Þorgerðr knows how to coax her father into regaining his zest for life by appealing to his poetic nature; in a famous scene, she lies down with her father in the bed-closet and tricks him into composing *Sonatorrek* about his loss and his sorrow – and his anger at Óðinn, who gave him the gift of poetry but also robbed him of his sons.

In *Sonatorrek*, Egill recites that Óðinn has broken their friendship and that he therefore cannot sacrifice to “bróður Vílis” [brother of Vílir] with any happiness (*Eg* 94 [*St* 23], SkP V, 323). In stanza 22, Óðinn is called “geirs dróttin” [master of the spear], “vagna rúni” [god of the wagon], and “sigrhöfundr” [giver of victory] (*Eg* 93 [*St* 22], SkP V, 322). In addition, there are kennings that refer to Óðinn and Frigg's relationship. Despite breaking their friendship, Egill notes that “Míms vinr” [Mímr's friend, i.e. Óðinn] has compensated him for the loss of his sons

62 See Jón Helgason, “Höfuðlausnarhjal”. Cf. Hofmann, “Das Reimwort *giqr*”, who argues against Jón Helgason's reading, as well as the notes by Clunies Ross to *Eg* 43 [Egill *Hfl* 10], SkP V, 251.

with a talent, namely, the aptitude for poetry (*Eg* 93 [*St* 22], *SkP* V, 322).⁶³ According to Turville-Petre, who counted the mythological references in *Sonatorrek*, Egill refers to mythological narratives around twenty times in the poem, about half of which involve Óðinn.⁶⁴ For this reason, Egill is considered by a number of scholars to be an ‘Odinic’ hero.⁶⁵ Indeed, Turville-Petre argued that the poem is an expression of Egill’s sincere relationship with Óðinn.⁶⁶ Given the presence of Óðinn in *Sonatorrek*, the poem stands in contrast with Óðinn’s absence from the prose of *Egils saga* in all three redactions. By including *Sonatorrek*, the C redaction enhances Egill’s relationship to Óðinn. However, the C redaction also contains a concluding statement about Egill: “Þykir ei meiri afreksmaðr verit hafa í fornum sið, ótíginn, en Egill Skallagríms son. Egill var prímsignaðr maðr, en blótaði aldri”⁶⁷ [In the pagan days, there does not appear to have been a greater hero not of noble birth than Egill Skallagrímsson. Egill received the *prima signatio* and never made sacrifices]. The sentence appears almost identically in B (“ok þykir ei verit hafa meiri afreksmaðr í fornum sið ótíginnna manna en Egill Skallagrímsson, hann var prímsignndr ok blótaði aldri goð”),⁶⁸ but not in A. Despite Egill’s association with heathen practices, such as his knowledge of runic magic and the *níðstǫng* [nothing-pole] that he raises against Gunnhildr and Eiríkr, these words mark him as a noble heathen. This characterisation of Egill is found in both B and C, and considered by Bjarni Einarsson to have belonged to the saga originally.⁶⁹ If *Sonatorrek* shows a genuinely pagan mindset towards Óðinn, which was Turville-Petre’s conclusion, it would contrast with the characterisation of Egill as a noble heathen. Here, one must keep in mind, however, that only C contains the complete *Sonatorrek*.

Of course, it must be noted that anger and disappointment in the pagan gods often form part of the description of noble heathens, because they describe their disappointment in the pagan gods.⁷⁰ But *Sonatorrek* is more than an expression

63 See Lassen, *Odin’s Ways*.

64 Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*, 26.

65 See, for example, North, *Pagan Words and Christian Meanings*, 153–155; Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*, 26–27; Sigurður Nordal, “Átrúnaður Egils Skallagrímssonar”, 159, 164.

66 Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*, 9.

67 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar III: C-redaktionen*, ed. Chesnutt, 163 (ch. 65).

68 Upps UB R 698 [B redaction], 51v.

69 According to Bjarni Einarsson, the sentence has a striking similarity with the description of Sveinn Ásleifarson in *Orkneyinga saga*. He argued that the writer of *Egils saga* used *Orkneyinga saga* as a model for a number of passages, which led him to the hypothesis that the words commemorating Egill had been part of the original saga. See Bjarni Einarsson, *Litterære forudsætninger for Egils saga*, 156–186.

70 See examples in Lassen, *Odin’s Ways*.

of Egill's anger at and disappointment in Óðinn. *Sonatorrek* is about Egill's loss, his grief and sorrow. In its context in the C redaction of the saga, the poem is presented as a purely personal project; it is Egill's way back to life which, incidentally, makes *Sonatorrek* sensorially modern.⁷¹ By quoting the complete poem, the redactor of C presents Egill as more sensitive than he is in both the A and B redactions, but the softer and more emotional side of Egill expressed in *Sonatorrek* is also discernible in the A and B redactions, albeit to a lesser extent, as it is evident in the dialogue between Egill and Arinbjörn and in Egill's poetry about his love for Ásgerðr, to which I will return below. In addition, A includes a stanza in which Egill expresses his sorrow of losing his friend Arinbjörn. It should also be noted, however, that Egill's sorrow in *Sonatorrek* stands in stark contrast to another scene in the saga, preserved in all three redactions, when Þorsteinn, Egill's surviving son, borrows a silk scarf, a gift from Arinbjörn, without permission.⁷² When Egill finds this out, he is enraged and utters his disappointment in a stanza in which he considers the deed a betrayal and an act of treachery, and notes that he has no need of an heir.⁷³ In no way does the stanza show a compassionate, loving attitude to his children – quite the contrary. The realisation of Egill as a grieving father is absent in both A and B, where he is instead hard and selfish – he is a father much like his own.

However, there are other *lausavísur* by Egill that provide insight into his softer emotional life. In one of the quotations above – before Egill has married Ásgerðr, in the passage where he mourns his brother and fears that his love for Ásgerðr is unrequited – Arinbjörn encourages him to express his feelings in poetic form (much like his daughter Þorgerðr does later before he composes *Sonatorrek*): “Skal maðr eftir mann lifa, eða hvat kveðr þú nú? Láttu mik nú heyra.’ Egill sagði, at hann hefði þetta fyrir skemmstu kveðit” (ÍF II, 148) [‘One person will live on after another – but what are you composing now? Now let me hear.’ Egill said that he had composed this a short while ago]. These words of Arinbjörn, after which Egill reveals his love for Ásgerðr in a verse, are present in all three redactions. In the artistic language of this stanza, and of *Sonatorrek*, Egill can express his feelings. The inclusion of *Arinbjarnarkviða* in *Möðruvallabók* also conveys Egill's grief over the death of his dear friend Arinbjörn – but the fact that the poem was later copied in full at the end of the manuscript, when the redactor originally left space for only one stanza to be quoted within the saga narrative, indicates that it was not the redactor's original intent for the entire poem to be

⁷¹ Lassen, *Isländingesagaernes verden*, [forthcoming in English translation: *The World of the Sagas of Icelanders*].

⁷² *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionen*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, 153–154 (ch. 79).

⁷³ See Guðrún Nordal, “*Ars metrica* and the Composition of *Egill's Saga*”, 49–50.

taken into account by the reader. Egill's sensitivity is thus most clearly expressed in the C redaction.

Conclusion

Even though this article only scratches the surface of the significance that can be attributed to the distribution of the many verses and poems in the three redactions of *Egils saga*, I believe it is possible to draw some conclusions about what this says for our understanding of the saga, and not least for the presentation of its main character Egill. It appears that the scribe of *Möðruvallabók* had a sincere interest in poetry, both by Egill and by others; the blank spaces left for poetry, the inclusion of Einarr *skálaglamm*'s stanzas, and the co-operation between scribes testify to that. The A redaction also quotes the opening stanzas of two of Egill's longer poems (which the B and C redaction do not) and thus offers a broader sample of Egill's poetic work, which reflects the poetic interest and editorial thought behind the A redaction. Through the inclusion of *Höfuðlausn*, the B and C redactions depict Egill as even more unyielding than he is portrayed in the A redaction. Finally, the C redaction, through the inclusion of *Sonatorrek*, both elaborates Egill's relationship to Óðinn and depicts him in a more sensitive way than either the A or B redaction does. Perhaps the insertion of *Sonatorrek* can even be said to coincide with the concluding statement about Egill as a noble heathen – and even to validate it, given its rejection of Óðinn. Furthermore, in contrast to the A and B redaction, C is the only redaction that shows Egill as a sorrowful father. The three redactions are not outright at odds with each other in their portrayal of Egill, but through their different editorial choices regarding the distribution of stanzas and poems, they emphasise his characteristics to different extents, as well as revealing the special interests of their redactors.

Table 1: Verses in *Egils saga* including their introductions in the A, B, and C redactions.

The A-redaction text is sourced from Bjarni Einarsson's edition, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar I: A-redaktionin*, Editiones Arnarnagæanæ A, 19 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2001). The B-redaction text is derived from the WolfAug 9 10 4to (Wolfenbüttel codex). In cases where W has lacunae, the text is supplemented from AM 458 4to and Upps UB R 698, as indicated in the table. The C-redaction text is taken from Michael Chesnutt's edition, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar III: C-redaktionin*, Editiones Arnarnagæanæ A, 21 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2006).

SkP identifier	A-redaction	B-redaction	C-redaction
<i>Eg</i> 1 (Kveld Lv 1)	1. K(uelld) V(lfr) q(uað) visu	1. [A 1] þa kuat Kuelldvfr uisu	Stanza lacking
<i>Eg</i> 2 (Skall Lv 1)	2. Skolu þer s(agði) hann. bera til konungs kuiðling þenna	2. [A 2] Skolo þer ok bera kongi kuiðling þenna	1. [A 2]: þjer skulud bera til kongs kvedling þenna
<i>Eg</i> 3 (Skall Lv 2)	3. þa orti hann visu þessa	3. [A 3] þa Quat Grimr uisu	2. [A 3]: þa kvad Sk(alla) Gr(ímr) visu
<i>Eg</i> 4 (Egill Lv 1)	4. þa kuað E(gill) v(isu)	4. [A 4] þa kuat Egill uisu	3. [A 4]: Þa q(vad) Eg(ill) visu
<i>Eg</i> 5 (Egill Lv 2)	5. En vm daginn epter við dryckiu k(uað) E(gill) v(isu) aðra vm bragarlaun	5. [A 5] Um daginn eptir kuat Egill uisu aðra	4. [A 5]: q(vad) Eg(ill) visu firer bragar laun
<i>Eg</i> 6 (Skall Lv 3)	6. S(kalla) G(rimr) q(uað) v(isu)	6. [A 6] tok Grimr [e]xina kongs naut ok selldi i hendr Þorolfi ok kuat uisu	5. [A 6]: Gr(ímr) leit i eggina, og selldi Þörölfе og qvad visu
<i>Eg</i> 7 (Egill Lv 3)	7. Egill q(uað) v(isu)	7. [A 7] [þa] quat Egill uisu	6. [A 7]: Þa q(vad) Egill visu
<i>Eg</i> 8 (Egill Lv 4)	8. Egill tok við horninu ok q(uað) v(isu)	8. [A 8] Egill tok við horninu ok kuat uisu	7. [A 8]: Eg(ill) tók við horninu, og qvad visu
<i>Eg</i> 9 (Egill Lv 5)	9. Egill [. . .] reist a runar ok reið a bloðinu. hann q(uað)	9. [A 9] hann [. . .] reist a runar ok reið a bloðinu ok quat uisu	8. [A 9]: Eg(ill) [. . .] reiste ä rüner, og reid ä blöðinu, og qvad visu
<i>Eg</i> 10 (Egill Lv 6)	10. Eigill stoð j dyrunum tók vid oc drack ok kuad visu	10. [A 10] Egill tok við ok drakk ok kuat uisu þessa	9. [A 10]: Eg(ill) stöð i dirunum, hann tók við horninu, og drack af, hann q(vad) þa visu

Table 1 (continued)

SkP identifier	A-redaction	B-redaction	C-redaction
<i>Eg</i> 11 (Egill Lv 7)	11. þa qvad Egill vīsu	11. [A 11] þa quat <i>Egill</i> uīsu	10. [A 11]: þä q(vad) Eg(ill) vī[su] þessa
<i>Eg</i> 12 (Egill Lv 8)	12. hann q(uað) v(īsu)	12. [A 12] en <i>Egill</i> kuat uīsu	11. [A 12]: þä q(vad) Eg(ill) vīsu
<i>Eg</i> 13 (Anon (<i>Eg</i> 1))	13. þa geck J(arls) d(otter) at rumi sinu. hon q(uað)	13. [A 13] þa gekk <i>jarls dottir</i> at sæti sinu <i>ok</i> kuat uīsu <i>til Egils</i>	12. [A 13]: þä gjeck Jalls dötter ad rüme sīnu, hūn q(vad) vīsu til Eg(ils)
<i>Eg</i> 14 (Egill Lv 9)	14. Eg(ill) tok til hennar ok setti hana niðr hia ser. hann q(uað)	14. [A 14] <i>Egill</i> tok <i>til hennar ok</i> setti <i>hana</i> niðr hia <i>ser. ok</i> quat uīsu	13. [A 14]: Eg(ill) tōk til hennar, og sette hana nidr hjä sjer, og þä q(vad) Eg(ill) vīsu
<i>Eg</i> 15 (Egill Lv 10)	15. þa q(uað) Eg(ill)	15. [A 15] þa quat <i>Egill</i> uīsu	14. [A 15]: þä q(vad) Eg(ill) vīsu
<i>Eg</i> 16 (Egill Lv 11)	16. hann q(uað)	16. [A 16] þa quat <i>Egill</i> uīsu	15. [A 16]: þä q(vad) Eg(ill) vīsu
<i>Eg</i> 17 (Egill Lv 12)	17. þa q(uað) Egill v(īsu)	17. [A 17] spenti <i>Egill</i> sinn gullhring a huara hond <i>ok</i> quat uīsu	16. [A 17]: þä q(vad) Eg(ill) vīsu
<i>Eg</i> 18 (Egill Lv 13)	18. ok enn q(uað) hann	18. [A 18] <i>ok</i> enn quat <i>hann</i>	17. [A 18]: Og enn q(vad) Eg(ill) vīsu
<i>Eg</i> 19 (Egill Lv 14)	19. lagði hann þa niðr suerðit ok hialminn ok tok við dyrs horni er honum var borit ok drack af. þa q(uað) hann	19: [A 19] <i>Egill</i> lagði þa uapn sin <i>ok</i> tok <i>uið</i> horni <i>ok</i> kneyfði af. <i>ok</i> quat uīsu	18. [A 19]: þä q(vad) Eg(ill) vīsu
<i>Eg</i> 20 (Egill Lv 15)	20. Tok Egill þaðan af at gleðiaz ok þa q(uað) hann	20. [A 20] <i>hann</i> tok þa at gleðiaz <i>ok</i> quat uīsu	19. [A 20]: þä q(vad) Eg(ill) vīsu
<i>Eg</i> 21 (Egill <i>Aðdr</i> 1)	21. þa orti Egill drapu vm Aðalst(ein) konung ok er i þui kuæði þetta [Followed by one stanza from <i>Aðalsteinsdrápa</i>]	Stanza lacking	Stanza lacking

Table 1 (continued)

SkP identifier	A-redaction	B-redaction	C-redaction
<i>Eg 22</i> (Egill <i>Aðdr 2</i>)	22. En þetta er stefit i drapunni	21. [A 22] þa orti <i>Egill</i> drapu um <i>Aðalstein kong.</i> ok er þetta stefit i	20. [A 22]: þä orte <i>Eg(ill)</i> dräpu um Adalst(ein) köng, og er þetta stefed i
<i>Eg 23</i> (Egill Lv 16)	23. <i>Eg(ill)</i> sagdi at <i>hann</i> hefði þetta firir skemztu quedit [half stanza]	22. [A 23] <i>Egill</i> sagði at <i>hann</i> hafði þetta fyrir skemztv kueðit [whole stanza]	21. [A 23]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu [half stanza]
<i>Eg 24</i> (Egill Lv 17)	24. þa q(uað) <i>Egill</i>	23. [A 24] þa <i>quat Egill uísu</i>	22. [A 24]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg 25</i> (Egill Lv 18)	25. þa kuad <i>Egill</i> visu	24. [A 25] þa <i>quat Egill uísu</i>	23. [A 25]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg 26</i> (Egill Lv 19)	26. þa kuad <i>Egill</i>	25. [A 26] þa <i>quat Egill uísu</i>	24. [A 26]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg 27</i> (Egill Lv 20)	27. þa q(uað) <i>Eg(ill)</i> v(isu)	26. [A 27] þa <i>quat Egill uísu</i>	25. [A 27]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg 28</i> (Egill Lv 21)	28. þa q(uað) <i>Eg(ill)</i>	27. [A 28] þa <i>kuat Egill uísu</i>	26. [A 28]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg 29</i> (Egill Lv 22)	29. þa q(uað) <i>Eg(ill)</i> v(isu)	28. [A 29] þa <i>quat Egill uísu</i>	27. [A 29]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg 30</i> (Egill Lv 23)	30. hann q(uað) þa	29. [A 30] þa <i>quat Egill uísu</i>	28. [A 30]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> v(ísu)
<i>Eg 31</i> (Egill Lv 24)	31. þa q(uað) <i>Egill</i> v(isu)	30. [A 31]: þa <i>quat Egill uísu</i>	29. [A 31]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg 32</i> (Egill Lv 25)	32. þa q(uað) <i>Eg(ill)</i>	31. [A 32]: þa <i>quat Egill uísu</i>	30. [A 32]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg 33</i> (Egill Lv 26)	33. þa geck <i>Eg(ill)</i> at borðinu ok tok vm fót konungi. Hann q(uað) þa	32: [A 33]: þa gekk <i>Egill</i> at borðinu ok tok um fot <i>kongi ok quat uísu</i>	31. [A 33]: <i>Eg(ill)</i> gjeck þä ad bordinu, og tók um fót könge, og q(vad) vísu

Table 1 (continued)

SkP identifier	A-redaction	B-redaction	C-redaction
<i>Eg 34</i> (Egill <i>Hfl</i> 1)	The poem <i>Höfuðlausn</i> is lacking in the A-redaction [No stanzas of the poem <i>Höfuðlausn</i> are quoted in the A-redaction, but the saga notes the performance of the poem using similar wording to the other redactions: “þa gekk Eg(ill) firer hann. ok hóf vpp kuæðit. ok kuað hátt ok feck þegar hlioð“].	33. <i>En er kongr hafði þetta mællt gekk Egill fyrir kong ok hóf upp kuæði ok fekk, þegar hlioð</i> [Followed by twenty stanzas of <i>Höfuðlausn</i> .]	32. <i>enn er köngr hafde þetta mællt, þá gjeck Eg(ill) firer hann, og hóf upp qvæ[ded], og qvad, enn hönnum gafst þegar hljöd, og er þetta upp haf qvædiz þessa</i> [Followed by twenty stanzas of <i>Höfuðlausn</i> .]
<i>Eg 56</i> (Egill Lv 27)	34. þa q(uað) Egill	53. [A 34] þa <i>quat Egill uisu</i>	52. [A 34]: þá q(vad) Eg(ill) <i>visu</i>
<i>Eg 57</i> (Egill Lv 28)	35. þa q(uað) Eg(ill)	54. [A 35] þa <i>quat Egill uisu</i>	53. [A 35]: þá q(vad) Eg(ill) <i>visu</i>
<i>Eg 58</i> (Egill Lv 29)	36. þa q(uað) hann	55. [A 36]: þa <i>quað Egill uisu</i>	54. [A 36]: hann <i>qvad þá visu</i>
<i>Eg 59</i> (Egill Lv 30)	37. ok er Egill sa þat. þa kuad hann v(isu)	56. [A 37]: <i>En er Egill sa Liot quat hann uisu</i>	55. [A 37]: <i>enn er Eg(ill) sä Ljöt, þá qvad hann visu</i>
<i>Eg 60</i> (Egill Lv 31)	38. þa k(uað) Egill	57. [A]: þa <i>quat Egill uisu</i>	56. [A 38]: þá q(vad) Eg(ill) <i>v(isu)</i>
<i>Eg 61</i> (Egill Lv 32)	39. Egill skok suerðit ok q(uað) v(isu)	58. [A 39] <i>Egill tok suerðit ok quat uisu</i>	57. [39]: Eg(ill) <i>skök sverded, og qvad visu</i>
<i>Eg 62</i> (Egill Lv 33)	40. þa q(uað) Egill	59. [A 40]: þa <i>quat Egill uisu</i>	58. [A 40]: þá q(vad) Eg(ill) <i>visu</i>
<i>Eg 63</i> (Egill Lv 34)	41. þa q(uað) Egill	60. [A 41] þa <i>quat Egill uisu</i>	59. [A 41]: þá q(vad) Eg(ill) <i>visu</i>
<i>Eg 64</i> (Egill Lv 35)	42. Siðan gekk Egill þar til er stoð foruneyti hans. þa q(uað) Egill	61. [A 42] þa gekk <i>Egill til forunauta sinna ok quat uisu</i> [Lacuna in W; now following 458]	60. [A 42]: þá gjeck Eg(ill) til <i>förunauta sinna, og q(vad) visu</i>

Table 1 (continued)

SkP identifier	A-redaction	B-redaction	C-redaction
<i>Eg</i> 65 (<i>Egill</i> Lv 36)	43. þa orti <i>Egill</i> vísu	Stanza lacking	Stanza lacking
<i>Eg</i> 66 (<i>Ármóðsd</i> Lv 1)	44. Síðan [for] m[ær]in vtar firer borðit þar er <i>Egill</i> sat. hon q(uað)	62. [A 44] þa för mærin fyrer bordid til <i>Egils</i> og kuad hun vysu	61. [A 44]: epter það för mærin, utar firer borded, það er <i>Eg(ill)</i> sat, hün kvað vísu
<i>Eg</i> 67 (<i>Egill</i> Lv 37)	45. síðan geck <i>Egill</i> til rums sins ok settiz niðr. bað þa gefa ser at drecka. þa q(uað) <i>Egill</i> við raust	63. [A 45] þa geck <i>Egill</i> til rüms syns og bad fa sier ad drecka, og kuad vysu	Stanza lacking
<i>Eg</i> 68 (<i>Egill</i> Lv 38)	46. <i>Egill</i> kneyfði af horninu i einum dryck. þa q(uað) hann	64. [A 46] hann tok vid og kuad vysu	62. [A 46]: hann tók vid, og hneifdi horninu i einum drick, þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg</i> 69 (<i>Egill</i> Lv 39)	47. þa q(uað) <i>Egill</i>	65. [A 47] þa kuad <i>Egill</i> vysu	63. [A 47]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg</i> 70 (<i>Egill</i> Lv 40)	48. þa q(uað) <i>Egill</i>	66. [A 48]: þa kuad <i>Egill</i> vysu	64. [A 48]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg</i> 71 (<i>Egill</i> Lv 41)	49. þa q(uað) <i>Egill</i> v(isu)	67. [A 49] þa quad <i>Egill</i> vysu	65. [A 49]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> vísu
<i>Eg</i> 72 (<i>Egill</i> St 1)	50. Ok er þetta upphaf kuæðis [Followed by one stanza of <i>Sonatorrek</i>]	68. [A 50]. <i>Egill</i> settist vpp og tók til ad kueda og þetta er vpphaf ad [Followed by one stanza of <i>Sonatorrek</i>]	66. [A 50] síðan höf <i>Eg(ill)</i> upp qvæded, og er þetta upphafed ä: [Followed by twenty-four stanzas of <i>Sonatorrek</i>].
<i>Eg</i> 97 (<i>Arkv</i> 1)	þa orti <i>Egill</i> kuæði vm <i>Arin</i> (iorn) [ok] er þetta vpphaf at [Space has been left after the inquit for the initial verse to be quoted but has not been filled in. <i>Arinbjarnarkviða</i> is only quoted in <i>Möðruvallabók</i> (A-redaction), in an appendix to the saga. See the final row of this table.]	The poem <i>Arinbjarnarkviða</i> is lacking in the B-redaction	The poem <i>Arinbjarnarkviða</i> is lacking in the C-redaction

Table 1 (continued)

SkP identifier	A-redaction	B-redaction	C-redaction
<i>Eg</i> 122 (Egill Lv 42)	51. Egill q(uað)	69. [A 51]: þa kuad <i>Egill</i> vysu	90. [A 51]: þä q(vad) Eg(ill) vísu
<i>Eg</i> 123 (Egill Lv 43)	52. Ok er Egill spurði fall Arinb(iarnar) þa q(uað) hann	Stanza lacking	Stanza lacking
<i>Eg</i> 124 (Eskál Lv 1b)	53. þa q(uað) Einarr [Followed by one stanza from <i>Vellekla</i>]	Stanza lacking	Stanza lacking
<i>Eg</i> 125 (Eskál Lv 2b)	54. ok en q(uað) hann [Followed by one stanza from <i>Vellekla</i>]	Stanza lacking	91. [A 54]: þä q(vad) Einar vísu [Followed by one stanza from <i>Vellekla</i>]
<i>Eg</i> 126 (Egill <i>Skjalddr</i> 1)	55. Síða<n> orti Egill drapu ok er þetta vpphaf at [Followed by one stanza from <i>Skjaldardrápa</i>]	Stanza lacking	Stanza lacking
<i>Eg</i> 127 (Egill Lv 44)	56. þa q(uað) Egill	70. [A 56]: þa vard Agli vysa ad munne	92. [A 56]: þä q(vad) Eg(ill) vísu
<i>Eg</i> 128 (Egill <i>Berdr</i> 1)	57. Epter vm vetrinn orti Egill drapu vm skiallda<r>giofina er kollut er Beru drapa. ok er þetta vpphaf at [Followed by one stanza from <i>Berudrápa</i>]	Stanza lacking [Lacuna ends. Now following W]	Stanza lacking
<i>Eg</i> 129 (Egill Lv 45)	58. þa q(uað) Egill	71. [A 58]: þa <i>quat</i> [<i>Egill</i>] <i>uisu</i> [Lacuna in W. Now following 698]	93. [A 58]: þä q(vad) Eg(ill) vísu
<i>Eg</i> 130 (Egill Lv 46)	59. þa q(uað) egill [half stanza]	72. [A 59]. Eigill sagði ad so var, þa qvad hann þetta [half stanza]	94. [A 59]: Eg(ill) sagde, ad so var þä komed, og qvad stauku eina [half stanza]
<i>Eg</i> 131 (Egill Lv 47)	60. Egill stoð vpp ok geck til rums sins ok kuað	Stanza lacking	Stanza lacking

Table 1 (continued)

SkP identifier	A-redaction	B-redaction	C-redaction
<i>Eg</i> 132 (<i>Egill</i> Lv 48)	61. þa q(uað) <i>Egill</i>	73. [A 61]: þa kuad <i>Eigill</i> stöku þessa	95. [A 61]: þä q(vad) <i>Eg(ill)</i> stauku
<i>Eg</i> 97–119 (<i>Egill Arkv</i> 1–23)	62–84. [On fol. 99v in Möðruvallabók of the A- redaction follows <i>Arinbjarnarkviða</i> , from stanza 1 to the first half of stanza 23]	–	–

Judy Quinn

“Hvat er þar frá at segja?” Prosimetric Rhythm in the *Íslendingasögur*

The density and distribution of quoted stanzas in the prosimetricum of the corpus of *Íslendingasögur* are markedly varied, suggesting that authors of sagas in the emergent genre were experimenting with form as they crafted their narratives.¹ In some cases it may be that poetry attributed to figures involved in the action of a particular saga was not in circulation, something that would have proved a constraint to the fashioning of prosimetricum, if the quotation of existing stanzas was an expectation of the genre.² Other constraints that seem to have been in operation include a strong preference by narrators to quote stanzas singly, rather than *en bloc*, and, in most cases, to avoid quoting whole poems – although that tendency seems to have diminished during saga transmission. In this essay I will examine a number of aspects of prosimetric rhythm and their effects, including when stanzas are staged as responses to questions, when stanzas are recited as the closing words of a scene and when stanzas are quoted whose content casts a shadow over yet to be narrated story lines. Narratorial choices of this kind have a significant aesthetic effect which can be better understood through the analysis of prosimetric rhythm within particular sagas as well as by examining the patterns that emerge across the corpus as a whole.

Across the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur*, the rhythm created out of prose interspersed with quoted stanzas is richly divergent. Prosimetric density – the number of stanzas per chapter or the ratio of stanzas to the number of manuscript leaves per saga – is, accordingly, far from uniform. Saga figures, generally loquacious in prose even if their style of speaking is sometimes laconic, frequently switch to verse during their conversations with other saga figures. On occasion, they are also depicted reciting their poetic compositions into the void – with no-one apparently present – with their audience the readers or listeners of the saga

1 Histograms showing the distribution of stanzas per chapter can be generated from the ÍSP database by choosing a saga from the list of TEXTS and then selecting DISTRIBUTION. The ÍSP database is accessible online (<https://gefin.ku.dk/q.php?p=isp>) [last accessed 20 February 2024].

2 There may be some cases, of course, where a stanza was specifically composed at the moment when saga prosimetricum was being crafted. Nonetheless, the attribution of stanza composition to figures from the time in which a saga is set is the generic norm.

Judy Quinn, University of Cambridge

itself.³ The same is true when the narrator quotes a stanza within the narrative: it is *rehearsed* for the saga audience but is not *heard* by figures in the saga who otherwise hear recited stanzas.⁴

As speakers shift their rhythm between prose declaration and metrical declamation, the narrator nonetheless controls the beat, conducting the story-telling through the dominant medium of prose. When saga figures perform their own poetry, they can be understood as addressing not just those at the scene but also those hearing or reading the saga who are accordingly challenged by the form to respond to the multimodal discourse. The effect on the intradiegetic audience of a recited stanza is more equivocal: according to the saga prose, more than half of the corpus of quoted stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* trigger no reaction, nor do they elicit any comment from those present at the scene of a recitation.⁵ It is only in a very small number of cases that the recitation of a stanza gives rise to any acknowledgement that the utterance was indeed poetry, which is surprising considering that a high proportion of the poetic corpus quoted in the *Íslendingasögur* is preserved within accounts of the lives of poets (*skáldasögur*).⁶ Within the confines of the genre of saga prosimetrum, words flow from the mouths of saga figures in either medium, with poetic utterance simultaneously an elevated form of expression and an unremarkable one. Furthermore, for those saga figures who are not identified as poets in the saga prose, it seems to have been the convention for their

3 See the essay by Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir in this volume for a discussion of the depiction of emotions in the prosimetric staging of stanzas spoken in solitude.

4 For a discussion of paradoxes such as these that arise from prosimetric staging, see Quinn, *The Creativity Paradox*.

5 Figures presented in this essay are derived from the ÍSP database. Out of 663 stanzas (a total that excludes the long poems quoted in *Egils saga* and *Njáls saga*), only 271 have been noted as triggering a reaction by those present at the scene, according to the saga prose; nearly 100 of these also elicit comments (whether positive or negative) on the stanza's content from those hearing the stanza. Only a handful of stanzas prompt a comment from an addressee or bystander without triggering a reaction that is significant to the plot.

6 References to saga texts are to the editions in the Íslenzk fornrit series unless otherwise indicated; references to quoted stanzas are to the editions in SkP V and follow the system of abbreviations used there. Examples of stanzas whose quality is commented on by the intradiegetic audience of the saga are: *Eg* 4 (Egill's first composition); *Gunnl* 11 (Gunnlaugr's first stanza about Helga, addressed to the poet Hallfreðr who describes it as "vel ort" [well-composed]); *Hallfr* 14 (a stanza composed in response to a challenge by King Óláfr Tryggvason, who rewards the poet with the gift of a weapon as well as praising his poetic skill); *Band* 3 (when the speaker, Ófeigr, switches into *dróttkvætt* after two previous stanzas in *fornyrðislag*) and *Nj* 5 (preserved only in the X recension), spoken by Gunnarr Hámundarson (disguised as Heðinn), who is called a poet in the response of his addressee, Hrútr Herjólfsson. For an analysis of the use of poetry in different recensions of *Njáls saga*, see Stefanie Gropper's essay in this volume.

debut as verse-makers to pass without comment from the narrator or indeed from their addressee or audience – who at least in some circumstances might be accorded the possibility of being impressed or perhaps surprised. This is despite the relatively common occurrence of quoted stanzas in the corpus in which speakers either draw attention to themselves as poets – “berk framm heið” [I bring forth poetry] (*Dpl* 1, SkP V, 136) – or imply that the audience is expected to transmit their compositions: “nú kná Jörð leiptra alnar at fregna til orða” [now the goddess of arm’s lightning [GOLD > WOMAN] may hear these words] (*Eb* 16, SkP V, 436).⁷

The easy shift from prose to verse nonetheless betrays a skilful contrivance on the part of saga authors, as they selected and staged stanzas drawn from the repertoire of poetry attributed to figures from the saga age. While the origin of at least some of the quoted stanzas might have been more recent than the era in which a given saga is set, there is little reason to doubt that saga authors were active curators of the poetic legacy they inherited. The number and range of stanzas relating to the people and events narrated in any specific saga that might have been available is, of course, impossible to estimate and there is always a risk of mounting an argument from silence when considering the possibilities: that if authors did not quote stanzas in their narratives, it was because they did not know of any. It is always possible that they did know some and chose not to use them. One clear case can be identified where we have both a substantial corpus of poetry and a prosimetric saga that makes use of much of the same poetry: the *fornaldarsaga* (legendary saga) *Völsunga saga* (NKS 1824b 4to, ca 1400) and the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda (GKS 2365 4to, ca 1270). From that material we might deduce that, at least for the author of this particular saga and at the time when they were writing, the style was for sporadic and relatively sparse single-stanza quotation which modulates, mid-saga, into a dramatized conversation in verse, of twenty-one stanzas, between two of the saga characters, Brynhildr and Sigurðr, a quotation which roughly correlates with part of the poem identified by editors of the Poetic Edda as *Sigrdrifumál*. From this evidence we might postulate that:

- single or even half-stanza quotation was the preferred standard;
- quotations were by no means evenly distributed, even though more regular quotation would have been possible;

⁷ Almost all of the prosimetric sagas in the corpus include stanzas that refer to poetic composition, performance or transmission; the exceptions are the handful of sagas with very few poetic quotations (*Eiríks saga rauða*, *Flóamanna saga*, *Laxdæla saga*, *Reykðæla saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga*). There are over a hundred stanzas in which the speaker draws attention to their being a poet or to their poetic performance in some way and nearly as many that reference the onward transmission of the poet’s words.

Translations of poetry are those presented in SkP V unless otherwise noted; translations of saga prose are my own unless otherwise noted.

- more extensive quotation was a possibility, even if the quotation in verse followed a well-developed conversation in prose between the same two figures.

Völsunga saga may be an exceptional case: the extent and range of eddic heroic poetry may very well have been different from the range and extent of poetry about Settlement-Age Icelanders; certainly the eddic mode of composition is different, especially with regard to sustained poetic narrative and the high proportion of direct speech that is characteristic of the extant corpus. Nonetheless, the evidence of *Völsunga saga* serves as a point of departure for an investigation into when and how narrators staged verse recitation within the saga form, furnishing us with the basic scenario that much more poetry than was deployed in saga prosimetrum was probably available to saga authors.⁸

Another aspect of the relationship between the texts of eddic poems and the text of *Völsunga saga* that is of interest is the significant number of stanzas that are quoted by the narrator, a proportion that is much higher than in the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur* where the vast majority of stanzas are staged as intradiegetic recitations.⁹ What the prosimetrum of both saga genres have in common, however, is for those stanzas spoken by saga figures to one another to be preceded and followed by their conversations in prose. This is generally the case across the corpus of *Íslendingasögur*, with sporadic exceptions where the occasional stanza is spoken by a figure within a dream, or by a paranormal figure or an inanimate object. Unsurprisingly, the last two entities are not represented as speaking in prose.¹⁰

⁸ In my analysis of saga prosimetrum I favour the use of the term “narrator” as it avoids ascribing agency beyond the particularity of surviving texts. In the absence of evidence that a manuscript text is the work of a named saga author, we need always to reckon with the possibility that stanzas may have been added or deleted during the manuscript transmission of saga prosimetrum.

⁹ Excluding the long quotation that parallels the text of *Sigrdrífumál*, nine out of fourteen of the remaining stanzas of *Völsunga saga* are quoted by the narrator (stanzas 1, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28–29 and 30), even though the use of first-person pronouns in the last three stanzas indicate they were not composed as statements in the third-person. The staging of stanza 24, addressed to Guðrún Gjúkadóttir (the speaker refers to Guðrún’s brother Gunnarr as “hlýri þinn”), is ambiguous as it stands in the manuscript (NKS 1824b 4to, 33v, with abbreviations expanded): “brynhildir svarar sigurðr vá at fáfni ok er þar meira vert en allt ríki Gunnars konungs svá sem kveðit er Sigurðr vá [. . .]” [Brynhild answers: Sigurðr fought Fáfnir and there is more value there than [in] all of Gunnarr’s power, just as it is recited: Sigurðr fought the dragon [. . .]]. Editors usually attribute the quotation to the narrator rather than to Brynhildr herself; see, for example, *Völsunga saga*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, 180.

In the corpus of quoted stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* (again excluding the long poems), less than eighty of the more than six hundred stanzas are staged as quoted by the narrator, with the staging of a further twenty or so equivocal (marked “uncertain” in the QUOTED BY NARRATOR category of the ÍSP database).

¹⁰ See, for example, *Nj* 64 (for a stanza spoken within a dream), *Laxd* 4 (for a stanza spoken by a very large woman crossing a lavafield), or *Eb* 32 (for a stanza spoken by a severed head).

Conversations in verse

It is relatively rare across the corpus of *Íslendingasögur* for the prosimetrum to present conversations in verse, where the flow of prose is suspended and the voice of the narrator is effectively on mute, affording saga figures the narrative space to converse together in alternating stanzas. Given the affective quality that speaking in verse is associated with in medieval Scandinavian culture, we might expect that some of the intense rivalries that mark saga society would spill over into verse duels in saga literature. While tit-for-tat stanzas and poetic dueling are evident in the plot-lines of many sagas, the prosimetric mode generally shies away from the mimetic staging of verse competitions. Across the corpus of over six-hundred *lausavísur* in the *Íslendingasögur*, there are only sixteen instances that have been identified in our database as CONVERSATIONS IN VERSE, that is, where the narrator effectively bows out and lets characters contend in verse with minimal mediation in prose (these are set out in Table 1, below). Given how many of the figures in the sagas are poets or are adept at composing poetry, there is a conspicuous absence of scenes in the corpus where these saga figures engage directly with one another, unmediated, in verse.

Table 1: Conversations in Verse in the *Íslendingasögur*.

SAGA	SPEAKERS	STANZAS
<i>Bjarnar saga Hítadælakappa</i>	Þórðr v Björn	<i>BjH</i> 14–15
<i>Egils saga Skallagrímssonar</i>	Jarl's daughter v Egill	<i>Eg</i> 13–14
<i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i>	Hólmǫngngu-Skeggi v Gísl	<i>Gísl</i> 1–2
<i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i>	Þorgrímr v Gísl	<i>Gísl</i> 8–9
<i>Grettis saga</i>	Hafliði v Grettir	<i>Gr</i> 15–16
<i>Grettis saga</i>	Sveinn v Grettir	<i>Gr</i> 36–37
<i>Grettis saga</i>	Þorbjörn ǫngul v Ásdís	<i>Gr</i> 71–72
<i>Gunnlaugs saga</i>	Gunnlaugr v Hrafn	<i>Gunnl</i> 17–18
<i>Hallfreðar saga</i>	Hallfreðr v Akkerisfrakki	<i>Hallfr</i> 5–6
<i>Harðar saga</i>	Sóti v Hörðr	<i>Harð</i> 8–9, 10–11
<i>Kormáks saga</i>	Narfi v Kormákr	<i>Korm</i> 11–12
<i>Kormáks saga</i>	Kormákr v Steingerðr	<i>Korm</i> 20–21
<i>Njáls saga</i>	Þorvaldr veili v Úlfr	<i>Nj</i> 37–38
<i>Svarfdæla saga</i>	Þorleifr (x2) v Karl in rauði	<i>Svarfd</i> 10–12
<i>Víglundar saga</i>	Ketilríðr v Þórðr bóndi	<i>Vígl</i> 18–19
<i>Víga-Glúms saga</i>	Brúsi v Einarr v Glúmr	<i>Glúm</i> 10–12

Most of the sixteen instances of conversations in verse involve a provocateur challenging the main figure of the saga (marked in bold on the table above), who is usually the respondent; most of the exchanges occur fairly early on in the saga and

work to establish the protagonist as quick-witted and conversationally agile. Even when a pair of stanzas occurs at the end of a saga, as is the case with the third pair of stanzas from *Grettis saga* in Table 1, the function and pattern is similar. After Þorbjörn ǫngull provokes the saga protagonist's mother, Ásdís Bárðardóttir, by contemptuously delivering the head of her dead son to her, she responds with a stanza praising her son's valour and ridiculing his killers, a reaction that the saga narrator endorses by noting that it was widely believed that bravery was a quality shared by mother and son alike (ÍF VII, 266). In only one instance is the interaction a three-way conversation, when, in *Víga-Glúms saga*, Brúsi and Einarr advance their versions of what happened in a skirmish, versions which are rebutted by Glúmr in the closing stage of the saga.

Significantly, in nearly half of the sixteen conversations in verse in the corpus, the stanzas quoted are less than eight lines long; see Table 2 below. In two cases the verse is referred to in the preceding prose as a *staka*, and in another a *vísuhelmingr*, terms which register that these are not full-blown poetic compositions. While most of the stanzas are in *dróttkvætt*, in five exchanges they are in other metres (mainly *fornyrðislag*), another signal that these are presented more as informal quips than as sophisticated skaldic declamations.

Table 2: Conversations in Verse by Length and Metre.

SAGA	SPEAKERS	LENGTH and METRE [poetic term used in inquit]
<i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i>	Hólmǫngu-Skeggi v Gísli	<i>Gísl</i> 1–2 2-line fornyrðislag
<i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i>	Þorgrímr v Gísli	<i>Gísl</i> 8–9 2-line
<i>Kormáks saga</i>	Narfi v Kormákr	<i>Korm</i> 11–12 2-line hnughent
<i>Kormáks saga</i>	Kormákr v Steingerðr	<i>Korm</i> 20–21 4-line
<i>Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa</i>	Þórðr v Björn	<i>BjH</i> 14–15 fornyrðislag
<i>Harðar saga</i>	Sóti v Hǫrðr	<i>Harð</i> 8–9, 10–11 fornyrðislag
<i>Hallfreðar saga</i>	Hallfreðr v Akkerisfrakki	<i>Hallfr</i> 5–6 4-line [staka]
<i>Grettis saga</i>	Sveinn v Grettir	<i>Gr</i> 36–37 4-line [staka]
<i>Víglundar saga</i>	Ketilríðr v Þórðr bóndi	<i>Vígl</i> 18–19 4-line [vísuhelmingr]
<i>Egils saga Skallagrímssonar</i>	Jarl's daughter v Egill	<i>Eg</i> 13–14
<i>Grettis saga</i>	Hafliði v Grettir	<i>Gr</i> 15–16
<i>Grettis saga</i>	Þorbjörn ǫngul v Ásdís	<i>Gr</i> 71–72
<i>Gunnlaugs saga</i>	Gunnlaugr v Hrafn	<i>Gunnl</i> 17–18
<i>Njáls saga</i>	Þorvaldr veili v Úlfr	<i>Nj</i> 37–38
<i>Svarfdæla saga</i>	Þorleifr (x2) v Karl in rauði	<i>Svarfd</i> 10–12
<i>Víga-Glúms saga</i>	Brúsi v Einarr v Glúmr	<i>Glúm</i> 10–12

Most of the *lausavísur* quoted in the *Íslendingasögur* are, however, composed in *dróttkvætt*, including the four pairings above which involve women (Steingerðr, Ásdís, Ketilríðr and a jarl’s daughter). Prose inquirers introducing quotations in *dróttkvætt* characteristically feature the verb *kveða* [to recite], as opposed to other verbs of utterance, such as *mæla* or *segja* [to say], as is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Inquirers to Conversations in Verse.

SAGA / SPEAKERS	LENGTH and METRE (if not <i>dróttkvætt</i>)	INQUIR
<i>Gísla saga</i> <i>Súrssonar</i> Hólmgröngu- Skeggi v Gíslí	<i>Gísl</i> 1–2: 2-line <i>fornyrðislag</i>	“Þá mælti Skeggi” / “Gíslí hjó [. . .] ok mælti ” (ÍF VI, 11) [then Skeggi said / Gíslí struck and said]
<i>Gísla saga</i> <i>Súrssonar</i> Þorgrímr v Gíslí	<i>Gísl</i> 8–9: 2-line	“Þorgrímr stóð seint upp [. . .] ok mælti ” / “Gíslí mælti þetta við ” (ÍF VI, 50) [Þorgrímr slowly stood up and said / Gíslí responded]
<i>Kormáks saga</i> Narfi v Kormákr	<i>Korm</i> 11–12: 2- line <i>hnughent</i>	“ok kvað þetta” / “Hann segir ” (ÍF VIII, 216) [and said this / He says]
<i>Kormáks saga</i> Kormákr v Steingerðr	<i>Korm</i> 20–21: 4- line	“Þá kvað Kormákr vísu” / “Steingerðr segir ” (ÍF VIII, 228–229) [then Kormákr recited a stanza / Steingerðr says]
<i>Hallfreðar saga</i> Hallfreðr v Akkerisfrakki	<i>Hallfr</i> 5–6: 4- line [<i>staka</i>]	“Þá kvað Hallfreðr stöku þessa” / “Ólpumaðr segir ” (ÍF VIII, 152–153) [Then Hallfreðr recited this verse / The cloaked man says]
<i>Bjarnar saga</i> <i>Hítædalakappa</i> Þórðr v Björn	<i>BjH</i> 14–15: <i>fornyrðislag</i>	“Þá kvað Þórðr vísu til Bjarnar” / “Björn kvað í móti ” (ÍF III, 148–149) [then Þórðr recited a stanza to Björn / Björn recited in response]
<i>Harðar saga</i> Sóti v Hqrðr	<i>Harð</i> 8–9, 10–11: <i>fornyrðislag</i>	“Þetta kvað Sóti” / “Hqrðr kvað ” (ÍF XIII, 41–43) [Sóti recited this / Hqrðr recited]
<i>Grettis saga</i> Sveinn v Grettir	<i>Gr</i> 36–37: 4- line [<i>staka</i>]	“[. . .] hann kvað þetta” / “Grettir heyrði stökuna” (ÍF VII, 151–152) [he recited this / Grettir heard the verse]

Table 3 (continued)

SAGA / SPEAKERS	LENGTH and METRE (if not <i>dróttkvætt</i>)	INQUIT
<i>Víglundar saga</i> Ketilríðr v Þórðr bóndi	<i>Vigl</i> 18–19: 4-line [<i>vísuhelmingr</i>]	“[. . .] ok kvað þenna vísuhelming” / “Bóndi leit til hennar ok kvað ” (ÍF XIV, 111) [and she recited this half-stanza / The farmer looked at her and recited]
<i>Egils saga</i> <i>Skallagrímssonar</i> Jarl’s daughter v Egill	<i>Eg</i> 13–14	“hon kvað vísu til Egils” / “hann kvað ” (ÍF, 2, 121) [she recited a stanza to Egill / he recited]
<i>Grettis saga</i> Hafliði v Grettir	<i>Gr</i> 15–16	“Hafliði [. . .] kvað vísu” / “Grettir stóð skjótt upp ok kvað ” (ÍF VII, 54–55) [Hafliði recited a stanza / Grettir quickly stood up and recited]
<i>Grettis saga</i> Þorbjörn ǫngull v Ásdís	<i>Gr</i> 71–72	“ǫngull kvað þá vísu” / “ kvað hon vísu” (ÍF VII, 265–266) [Þorbjörn ǫngull then recited a stanza / she recited a stanza]
<i>Gunnlaugs saga</i> Gunnlaugr v Hrafn	<i>Gunnl</i> 17–18	“þá kvað hann vísu þessa” / “Hrafn svarar ok kvað þetta” (ÍF III, 93–94) [then he recited this stanza / Hrafn responds and recited this]
<i>Njáls saga</i> Þorvaldr veili v Úlfr	<i>Nj</i> 37–38	“ok sendi orð[. . .]ok kvað til vísu þessa” / “Úlfr [[. . .]] kvað aðra vísu í móti ” (ÍF XII, 262–263) [and sent word and recited this stanza / Úlfr recited another stanza in return]
<i>Svarfdæla saga</i> Þorleifr v Karl in rauði	<i>Svarfd</i> 10–12	“Þorleifr kvað þá vísu þessa” / “Þetta heyrir Karl [. . .] ok kvað þá vísu þessa” (ÍF IX, 176–178) [Þorleifr then recited this stanza / Karl hears this and then recited this stanza]
<i>Víga-Glúms saga</i> Brúsi v Einarr v Glúmr	<i>Glúm</i> 10–12	“Þá kvað Brúsi Hallason vísu þessa” / “Einarr kvað vísu” / “Þá kvað Glúmr vísu í móti ” (ÍF IX, 94–95) [Then Brúsi recited this stanza / Einarr recited a stanza / Then Glúmr recited a stanza in response]

There appears to be a correlation between the quotation of these shorter snatches of poetry that constitute conversations in verse with more prosaic verbs of utterance used in the inquit, such as *mæla* and *segja*, although *kveða* also occurs. This pattern underscores the way in which the narrative downplays the status of conversations in verse compared with other modes of stanza recitation. Another feature of conversations in verse is the oppositional relation of the speakers, which is expressed through phrasing such as *kvað í móti*, exemplified by the inquit to BjH 15 in *Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa* (ÍF III, 148). Overall, in the conversations in verse that involve full *dróttkvætt* stanzas, the standard inquit verb is *kveða*, with *í móti* added on some occasions.

The general tendency to limit recitations to one stanza at a time is in accordance with the apparent disinclination in the genre to afford saga figures the opportunity to recite whole poems within saga narratives. The significant exception to this is the quotation of the poem in *fornyrðislag* known as *Darraðarljóð* within *Njáls saga* – although the performance of the poem is unusual since it is staged within the context of a paranormal encounter.¹¹ The continuous quotation of other whole poems that are preserved within the corpus – all by Egill Skallagrímsson – seem to have been incorporated into the genre during manuscript transmission.¹² Interestingly, none of them is in *dróttkvætt*: *Höfuðlausn* is end-rhymed *runhent*, while *Sonatorrek* and *Arinbjarnarkviða* are in *kviðuhátt*.

Stanzas quoted by the narrator

There are also some occasions on which a portion of a poem by a saga figure is quoted by a saga narrator, with the wording of inquits indicating the variety of ways in which such an excerpt could be woven into the prosimetrum:

- “En þetta er í flíminu” (ÍF III, 168–169) [And this is in the *flím*]: three stanzas from a *runhent* lampoon by Björn Hítðelakappi (BjH 26–28).¹³
- “Hann kvað flokk um Hallmund ok er þetta þar í” (ÍF VII, 184–185) [He composed a *flokkr* about Hallmundr and this is in it] and “Þá kvað hann Hallmundarkviðu ok er þetta þar í” (ÍF VII, 203–204) [Then he recited *Hallmundarkviða*, and this is in it]: two runs of stanzas in *Grettis saga*, the first by Grettir Ásmun-

11 For a discussion of this unusual prosimetric instance, see Quinn, “*Darraðarljóð* and *Njáls saga*”.

12 On the transmission of Egill’s long poems, see Annette Lassen’s essay in this volume and the Introduction to the edition of the poetry of Egill Skallagrímsson in SkP V (152–155).

13 See Alison Finlay’s essay in this volume for a discussion of Björn’s *flím*.

- darson from a poem about Hallmundr (*Gr* 46–47) and the second, in *kviðu-hátt*, by Hallmundr (*Gr* 51–56).
- “[. . .] svá sem Þormóðr orti um” (ÍF VI, 207–208) [as Þormóðr composed] and “Um þessa atburði orti Þormóðr vísur þessar” (ÍF VI, 209–210) [Þormóðr composed the following verses about this event].¹⁴ two pairs of stanzas from *Þorgeirsdrápa* by Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, quoted separately in *Fóstbrœðra saga* (*Fbr* 15–16 and 17–18).
 - “Gunnlaugr kvað þá drápuna, ok er þetta stefit í” (ÍF III, 75) [Gunnlaugr then recited a *drápa* and this is the *stef* in it] and “Ok þetta er þar” (ÍF III, 75) [And this is there too]: the *stef* and a couple of stanzas from a *drápa* by Gunnlaugr ormsunga, quoted in *Gunnlaugs saga* (*Gunnl* 6–8).
 - “Þá orti Egill drápu um Aðalstein konung, ok er i því kvæði þetta” (ÍF II, 146) [Then Egill composed a *drápa* about King Aðalsteinn and this is in that poem]: the *stef* and a stanza from a *drápa* about King Aðalsteinn by Egill Skallagrímsson, quoted in *Egils saga* (*Eg* 21–22).
 - “Hann orti þá Óláfsdrápu, ok er þetta stef í” (ÍF VIII, 194) [Then he composed *Óláfsdrápa* and this is the *stef* in it]: the *stef* from *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* by Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, quoted in *Hallfreðar saga* (*Hfr Erfól* 28).
 - “[. . .] eptir um vetrinn orti Egill drápu um skjaldargjöfina, er köllut er Berudrápa, ok er þetta upphaf at” (ÍF II, 275) [afterwards during the winter Egill composed a *drápa* about the gift of the shield and this is the beginning of it]; the first stanza of a poem called *Berudrápa* by Egill Skallagrímsson, quoted in *Egils saga* (*Eg* 128).¹⁵
 - “[. . .] ok er þetta upphaf” (ÍF VIII, 195) [and this is the beginning]: the first two lines of a poem about Jarl Eiríkr by Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, quoted in *Hallfreðar saga* (*Hallfr* 31).
 - “Þormóðr víkr á nökkut í Þorgeirsdrápu á misþokka þeirra í þessu ørindi” (ÍF VI, 152) [Þormóðr refers to the displeasure between them in this verse]; “Þessa víga getr Þormóðr í Þorgeirsdrápu” (ÍF VI, 156) [Þormóðr mentions these killings in *Þorgeirsdrápa*]; “at því er Þormóðr segir” (ÍF VI, 160) [according to what Þormóðr says]; “Þessa atburðar getr Þormóðr í Þorgeirsdrápu í

¹⁴ See the ISP database for details of the variations in the inquit across manuscripts of *Fóstbrœðra saga*; the examples given above are offered as a sample of the styles of inquits recorded in manuscripts of the saga.

¹⁵ The A-redaction of *Egils saga* includes another similar inquit to the quotation of *Eg* 126: “Síðan orti Egill drápu ok er þetta vpphaf at” (ÍF II, 272) [Then Egill composed a *drápa* and this is the beginning of it].

þessu ørendi” (ÍF VI, 186) [This event was mentioned by Þormóðr in *Þorgeirsdrápa* in this verse]; “Um þenna atburð orti Þormóðr þetta ørendi” (ÍF VI, 191) [Þormóðr composed this verse about this incident]; “svá sem Þormóðr orti um” (ÍF VI, 200) [just as Þormóðr composed]; “Um þenna atburð orti Þormóðr vísu þessa” [Þormóðr composed this verse about the incident]; “sem Þormóðr orti um” (ÍF VI, 209) [as Þormóðr composed]: eight single stanzas from *Þorgeirsdrápa* by Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, quoted separately in *Fóstbræðra saga* across many episodes of the saga (*Fbr* 5–7 and 10–14).

- “Þessa getr Þormóðr í erfídrápu Þorgeirs” (ÍF VI, 139) [Þormóðr mentions this in his funeral poem for Þorgeirr]: a stanza from an *erfídrápa* for Þorgeirr Hávarsson by Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, quoted in *Fóstbræðra saga* (*Fbr* 3).

Even in these cases, the quotations are relatively short and the inclination is to excerpt rather than insert the poem into the saga narrative. The motivation for this style of quotation is laid bare in one of the inquires in *Hallfreðar saga* (to *Hallfr* 7), when the narrator acknowledges the quotation serves to verify their prose account: “Þetta sannar Hallfreðr í kvæði því einu er hann orti um Ólaf konung” (ÍF VIII, 155) [Hallfreðr confirms this in a poem he composed about King Óláfr].¹⁶ The same verb is used in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* to introduce a corroborating stanza (*Gunnl* 21) following a prose summary of the casualties after a fight: “Þetta sannar Þórðr Kolbeinsson í kvæði því er hann orti um Gunnlaug ormstungu” (ÍF III, 101) [Þórðr Kolbeinsson confirms this in the poem he composed about Gunnlaugr ormstunga].

When stanzas are taken out of the mouths of agents in the narrative and used by the narrator to substantiate the prose account, the timing of their placement creates different opportunities for prosimetric rhythm. In *Víga-Glúms saga*, for instance, the action of an episode in chapter 25 – in which no poetry has been quoted – ends with Glúmr prevailing in a legal dispute and thereby enhancing his reputation. The narrator adds: “Um vetrinn eptir kom upp vísa, er Glúmr hafði þá nýort” (ÍF IX, 81) [During the following winter a verse began to circulate which Glúmr had recently composed]. The six-line stanza (*Glúm* 7) serves as the last word on the episode, although the impact of a minute-by-minute account, which is afforded by the quotation of stanzas by saga figures in the midst of the action, is lost here and the particularity of the scene in which Glúmr first performed the stanza is left unreported. Perhaps the reason for this staging is the highly charged discussion between saga figures which the stanza itself conjures up: in response

¹⁶ There is a substantial literature on the authenticating role of stanzas in saga prosimetry; for references, see the Introduction to this volume.

to a request for an account of his deeds from the guarding-goddess of the stronghold of wine (an unidentified woman), Glúmr adverts to current discussions between people which are no longer concerned with past murders, as he reassures a woman (presumably the same one) that the case is closed concerning the one who comforts the raven (Glúmr himself).¹⁷ To have staged the recitation “live” might have required some scene setting, something which the narrator apparently chose not even to adumbrate.

Similarly the final act of the saga, which includes the trio of stanzas spoken by Glúmr, Brúsi and Einarr in conversation (see Table 1), includes an additional stanza by Glúmr (*Glúm* 13) which is not tethered to a precise location or time of performance: “undi Glúmr illa við málalok, sem hann kvað í vísu þeirri, er hann orti síðan” (ÍF IX, 96) [Glúmr was ill-pleased by the outcome of the case, as he said in this verse that he composed afterwards]. Once again, the stanza itself paints a broader picture than fits the prosimetric frame, as Glúmr bemoans his old age and the fact that since his fighting years are past he is no longer able to avenge the killing of a relative. The stanza’s scope – “íllts of orðit á jörð, aldr þolvar mjök skaldi” (*Glúm* 13, SkP V, 1398) [Things have turned bad on earth; old age severely curses the poet] – speaks to a more expansive retrospective on the poet’s life than the narrative scene afforded by the prose at this moment in the saga. Nonetheless the dual-track nature of prosimetric narrative allows Glúmr’s words to be reported albeit without the scene of his recitation being described. It is only in the subsequent prose – which starts as a new episode, beginning “Þat var eitt sumar [. . .]” (ÍF IX, 96) [One summer [. . .]] – that Glúmr’s old age surfaces as a subject of discussion between figures in the saga. It is by no means uncommon for topics expressed in verse to be taken up in the prose, either before or after a quotation, and whenever that happens a kind of contrapuntal rhythm is created.¹⁸ Often the exact wording is echoed across prose and verse while at other times more complex harmonies are developed across the prosimetrum, as shown in the examples discussed above. As the chronological line of the saga prose is complicated so too is the spatial sequencing, with vivid scenes depicted within stanzas suspended within the narrative, almost like framed vignettes set against a larger tableau.

Another kind of complexity – a kind of double scene – is afforded by a prosimetric example from *Gunnlaugs saga*, when an excerpt from a poem (*Gunnl* 3) is

¹⁷ The text of the stanza, in prose word order, is as follows: “Hirði-Sif virkis víns spyrr at verkum mínum; morð esat at máli manna; þau vöru forðum. Hørveig, liggr gorrva talit, þeims of hugar hrafn” (*Glúm* 7, SkP V, 1385).

¹⁸ See the category WORDING ECHOED IN PROSE in the ÍSP database: in over three hundred instances there is some echo of the stanza’s wording in the surrounding prose, although the extent of the echo varies, from the repetition of personal names to the reiteration of distinctive phrasing.

presented as both performed by the poet at the scene and recalled by the narrator in the process of crafting the narrative: “Gunnlaugr flutti fram kvæðit vel ok sköruliga; en þetta er stefit í” (ÍF III, 71) [Gunnlaugr delivered the poem well and bravely; and this is the refrain in it.] More complicated still is the quotation of an obscene stanza maliciously attributed to Kormákr (*Korm* 64), according to chapter 20 of *Kormáks saga*, and said to have been taught by him to a member of his family so that it eventually came to the attention of Steingerðr (the object of his desire), who is distressed by it. After outlining the line of transmission and categorically denying Kormákr’s authorship of it, the narrator quotes the stanza with the inquit: “En þessi var vísa” (ÍF VIII, 277) [And this was the stanza]. Immediately after the stanza is quoted, the prose continues “Steingerðr verðr nú reið mjök svá at hon vill eigi Kormák heyra nefndan” (ÍF VIII, 277–278) [Steingerðr now became very angry such that she did not wish to hear Kormákr’s name mentioned], with her reaction staged as though she had just heard the stanza being recited in front of her. The suspension of the stanza within and outside of the narrative of events duplicates its effects, with it working both as part of the storyline and as part of the narratorial commentary on the story.

The quotation of anonymous stanzas

When a stanza is quoted anonymously in saga prosimetry, the narrator necessarily becomes the reporting agent, either of excerpts from poems or of *lausavísur*.¹⁹ So it is in *Fóstbræðra saga* that anonymous stanzas are introduced by formulations such as “Um þenna atburð er þetta erindi ort” (ÍF VI, 146–147; *Fbr* 4) [This verse is composed about this incident] or “Um hræzlu Egils var þetta kveðit” (ÍF VI, 233; *Fbr* 22) [This was composed about Egill’s fear], anchored in this way to the narrative line but without being recited as part of the action. The dependence of the narrator of *Fóstbræðra saga* on transmitted poetry is signalled early on in the saga, when a stanza is spliced between the following episodes in prose despite the chronological rupture that it entails:

Þá var Þorgeirr fimmtán vetra gamall, er víg þetta varð, sem Þormóðr kvað í erfidrápu Þorgeirs: [*Fbr* 2]. Þorgeirr fór um nóttina, ok nam eigi fyrr staðar en á Hávarsstöðum. (ÍF VI, 130–131)

¹⁹ Examples of excerpts of poems include two stanzas from the poem known as *Bjarkamál* are quoted in *Fóstbræðra saga* (*Fbr* 32–33): “Þetta er upphaf að kvæðinu” (ÍF VI, 262–263) [This is the beginning of the poem]. On the use of the formulation “ok er þetta upphaf” in saga prosimetry, see Quinn, “Ok er þetta upphaf”.

[Þorgeirr was fifteen years old when this killing took place, as Þormóðr said in Þorgeirr's funeral *drápa*: [*Fbr* 2]. Þorgeirr walked all through the night, not stopping until he came to Hávarsstaðir.]

Exploiting the wording of a poetic obituary within an unfolding drama necessarily creates temporal dislocation, something the narrator downplays by quoting the stanza as though it were anonymous: a tactic that dampens the particularity.²⁰ What matters in this case is the content of the stanza – which aligns with the sequence of plot events – rather than who composed the poetry and when and where it was performed.

Similarly, the utility of an anonymous stanza celebrating how attractive to women the saga figure Ingólfr Þorsteinsson was is demonstrated by its quotation in two different sagas. A four-line verse to this effect is the only poetry quoted in *Vatnsdæla saga*, towards its end (cf. *Vatn* = *Hallfr* 1, SkP V, 873):

Ingólfr þótti konunum vænstr, svá sem kveðit var:

Allar vildu meýjar
með Ingólfi ganga,
þær es vaxnar vöru;
vesöl kvazk æ til lítíl. (ÍF VIII, 100)

[Ingólfr seemed the most handsome to women, as was recited: “All the grown-up girls wanted to go with Ingólfr; one who was too young said she was miserable.”]

The same Ingólfr flirts with the sister of Hallfreðr Óttarsson in *Hallfreðar saga*, where the stanza advertising his appeal to women is a full eight lines long, with the second *helmingr* introducing a grotesque dimension to Ingólfr's magnetism (cf. *Hallfr* 1, SkP V, 873):

“Svá vilk ok”, kvað kerling,
“með Ingólfi ganga
meðan mér tvær of tolla
tennr í efra gómi.” (ÍF VIII, 141–142)

[“I want to go with Ingólfr too”, said an old woman, “as long as two of my teeth hang from my upper gum”]

The subsequent prose describes Ingólfr's encounter with Hallfreðr's sister Valgerðr (she is presumably in the age group between the two unhappy extremes) who invites him to search for a ball he has mis-thrown during a game which she has

²⁰ For a discussion of the authorship of the poetry quoted in *Fóstbræðra saga* and the relationship of prose to verse, see Rob Fulk's introduction to his edition of *Þorgeirsdrápa* in SkP V (481–484).

caught and slipped under her cloak. The unusual transition into direct speech in a *dróttkvætt* stanza²¹ – and the ribald scene it conjures up – are not drawn into the prose narrative at all, which moves on from Ingjólfr’s womanising to Hallfreðr’s own disinclination to marry. While the shift in scene the stanza occasions is in many ways jarring, the poetic anecdote it preserves was presumably so closely associated with the story of Ingólfr that, even in a saga with no other poetry, it had to be voiced. The impression is given here of a stanza constituting the core of a memory about the past rather than of a saga narrator having the opportunity to pluck a particular stanza out of a range of possibilities in order to enliven their narratives. As such, this example runs counter to the scenario outlined at the beginning of this essay, where we can infer that saga narrators often had a broad range of poetic material to choose from and were very discriminating in what they chose and when they deployed it. Perhaps there were times when an anecdote about a Settlement-Age Icelander could hardly be told without the quotation of the stanza that had propelled its transmission.

Another anonymous stanza that encodes a memorable moment from the past is quoted in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, as saga heroes are vividly imagined as divine beings. According to the stanza, this was the opinion of onlookers when the sons of Hjalti Þórðarson arrived at the Þorskafjörðr assembly:

En er þeir komu á þingið váru þeir svá vel búnir, at menn hugðu þar væru komnir æsir. Þá var þetta kveðit. (ÍF XIII, 171–172)

[And when they came to the assembly, they were so well attired that people thought that the gods themselves had arrived. Then this verse was recited.]

Who composed the verse, and who recited it and precisely where and when that happened is less important than the glorious claim by the poet of the *dróttkvætt* stanza that “manni hugði [. . .] annat [. . .] en æsir almæri þar færi” (ÍF XIII, 171–172; *Bárð* 6) [no-one thought other than that the much-famed Æsir went there]. Sometimes anonymity may have had a more strategic purpose, such as when a stanza amounted to mockery of a saga figure. In the report of a skirmish in *Grettis saga*, a man named Þorfinnr is described as landing an axe-blow not into the back of Þorgeirr Önundarson as he intended but into the leather drinking pouch the latter was fortuitously wearing. Shaken by the gravity of what he assumes he has accomplished, Þorfinnr’s reaction is juxtaposed with the jesting within Þorgeirr’s party, who give him the nickname “flöskubak” (flask-back). A sarcastic stanza about Þorfinnr’s axe being smeared with whey (*Gr* 7) is then

21 Less than a dozen stanzas in the corpus of poetry quoted in the corpus of *Íslendingasögur* contain direct speech.

quoted by the narrator, with the inquit: “Þetta var kveðit um fundinn” (ÍF VII, 27–28) [This was composed about the attack].²² The anonymous nature of the composition contributes to the momentum of the character assassination, as the saga audience is aligned with the party of the victors in enjoying the entertainment.

As is the case with the excerpted stanzas mentioned above, quotation by the narrator affords little opportunity for a subsequent reaction by figures in the saga and the stanza usually closes the scene. Sometimes, however, the quotation prompts a discussion between figures in the saga as if they had just heard the stanza themselves. Such is the case in *Bjarnarsaga Hítðælakappa* after Björn’s lampoon is quoted, when the relative reputational damage caused by that and similar compositions is discussed by a farm-worker and Þorkell Dálksson (ÍF III, 169–170). And although only the *stef* and one stanza of Gunnlaugr’s *drápa* for King Sigtrygg silkiskegg is quoted in *Gunnlaugs saga*, the quotation by the narrator is followed by the king thanking the poet and negotiating his reward, implying that he had just heard the full poem (ÍF III, 75).²³ The mechanics of transmission that afford the saga narrator access to stanzas relevant to their story are generally occluded, except in the case of poetry that is said to have been carved in runes – of which there are a few examples in the corpus – where the artefacts themselves are depicted as initiating the circulation of the texts.²⁴

It is occasionally the case that saga narrators quote stanzas by a poet who plays no other role in the saga, as happens in *Eyrbyggja saga* with five stanzas by Þormóðr Trefilsson distributed across episodes in the saga: *Eb* 20 in chapter 26, *Eb* 26 in chapter 37, *Eb* 33 in chapter 44, *Eb* 34 in chapter 56, and *Eb* 35 in chapter 62.²⁵ Such a style of quotation affords considerable flexibility in the sequencing

22 On the strategic use of anonymous sources in saga prosimetrum, see Quinn, “Anonymity and the Textual Construction of Authority in Prosimetrum”.

23 A similar segue occurs in *Hallfreðar saga*; after the beginning of Hallfreðr’s poem for Jarl Eiríkr is quoted by the narrator, the prose then relates that the jarl rewarded Hallfreðr well for the poem and reports their subsequent conversation (ÍF VIII, 195).

24 See, for example, *Gr* 60–61 (ÍF VII, 216), where Grettir is said to have left in a church porch a bag containing a rune-stick inscribed with verses which the narrator then quotes; or *Flóam* 1 (SkP V, 476; ÍF XIII, 291), where a verse is quoted that was found carved into the stump of an oar found in Greenland.

25 Two stanzas by another figure who otherwise plays no part in the action of the saga are also quoted in chapter 17 of *Eyrbyggja saga*: the stanzas are from a poem called *Illugadrápa* by Oddr skáld and are quoted in close succession but separated by a paragraph of prose that moves the story forward (ÍF IV, 31–32). On the use of poetry in the saga, see Quinn, “Þuríðr Barkardóttir and the Poetry of *Eyrbyggja saga*”. A stanza is also quoted in *Njáls saga* by an otherwise unknown poet: “um vörn hans orti Þorkell elfaraskáld í visu þessi: [Nj 27]” (ÍF XII, 190) [Þorkell elfaraskáld composed this stanza about Gunnarr’s last stand].

and substantiation of events in the plot, although it necessitates the “sceneless” staging of poetic quotations and the consequent end-stopping of scenes since no audience is available to react to the recitation.

Conversations in verse and prose

That conversations in verse tend in many instances towards the truncated, the less stylized, even the prosaic, suggests that this is a form which was deliberately not exploited in *Íslendingasögur* prosimetrum. In almost all the instances noted in Table 1 above, the same saga figures are depicted conversing in prose, immediately or shortly before or after their poetic utterances, or frequently both before and after (though not in all cases with one another).

Table 4: Prose Dialogue around Conversations in Verse.

STANZAS	SPEAKERS	DIRECT SPEECH IN PROSE
<i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i> 8–9	Þorgrímur v Gíslí	before and after
<i>Grettis saga</i> 15–16	Hafliði v Grettir	before and after
<i>Gunnlaugs saga</i> 17–18	Gunnlaugr v Hrafn	before and after
<i>Hallfreðar saga</i> 5–6	Hallfreðr v Akkerisfrakki	before and after
<i>Kormáks saga</i> 11–12	Narfi v Kormákr	before and after
<i>Kormáks saga</i> 20–21	Kormákr v Steingerðr	before and after
<i>Svarfdæla saga</i> 10–12	Þorleifr v Karl in rauði	before and after
<i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i> 1–2	Hólmgöngu-Skeggi v Gíslí	before
<i>Grettis saga</i> 36–37	Sveinn v Grettir	before
<i>Víglundar saga</i> 18–19	Ketilríðr v Þórðr bóndi	before
<i>Harðar saga</i> 8–9, 10–11	Sóti v Hqrðr	after
<i>Njáls saga</i> 37–38	Þorvaldr veili v Úlfr	after
<i>Bjarnar saga hitdælakappa</i> 14–15	Þórðr v Björn	–
<i>Egils saga Skallagrímssonar</i> 13–14	Jarl’s daughter v Egill	–
<i>Grettis saga</i> 71–72	Þorbjörn ǫngul v Ásdís	–
<i>Víga-Glúms saga</i> 10–12	Brúsi v Einarr v Glúmr	–

On the whole, saga narrators shied away from depicting saga figures engaged in sustained poetic exchanges, preferring instead to maintain the primacy of prose with stanzas quoted singly and separately, with the prose narrator interrupting the rhythm of the poetry. The habit of separating pairs of stanzas with a prose link is particularly striking, with a dominant pattern apparent across the corpus of saga narrators interrupting the poet’s flow from one stanza to the next with an

insistent tug back towards the medium of prose: “ok enn kvað A”.²⁶ While runs of three or occasionally more stanzas sometimes follow the same “ok enn kvað A” pattern, saga narrators sometimes vary the phrasing.²⁷ Longer prose passages often occur between stanzas which although not contiguously quoted are nonetheless related: indeed nearly half the corpus of stanzas quoted in the *Íslendinga-sögur* follow this pattern, with the narrator returning intermittently to the same well.²⁸

Prosimetric conversations

A favoured technique for quoting stanzas within saga prosimetrum is for the speaker of verse to be in conversation with a prose interlocutor who asks for news. Over three hundred stanzas are prompted by a question by another saga figure, amounting to nearly half of all the verse quotations in the corpus. In some sagas, this prosimetric pattern dominates: all six of the stanzas quoted in *Droplaugarsona saga* are staged as responses to questions posed in prose, as are about a third of the stanzas quoted in *Grettis saga* and nearly a fifth of the stanzas in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, the use of this technique is associated with particular poets, with ten of the sequence of seventeen stanzas recited by Þórarinn svarti Þórólfsson prompted by a question in prose, and four of Björn

²⁶ Examples include *Band 1–2* in *Bandamanna saga* (interrupting Ófeigr Skíðason’s two stanzas); *BjH 22–23* in *Bjarnar saga hitdælakappa* (interrupting Þórðr Kolbeinsson); *Eg 17–18* in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (interrupting Einarr skálaglamm); *Eg 124–125b* (in the A and C redactions, interrupting Einarr again); *Eb 29–30* in *Eyrbyggja saga* (interrupting Björn Breiðvíkingakappi); *Gísl 6–7, 20–21, and 29–30* in *Gísli saga Súrssonar* (repeatedly interrupting pairs of stanzas by Gísli Súrsson); *Korm 2–3, 13–14 and 34–35* in *Kormáks saga* (interrupting Kormákr) and *Korm 39–40 and 49–50* (interrupting Hólmǫngu-Bersi); *Gunnl 13–14* in *Gunnlaugs saga* (interrupting Gunnlaugr); *Nj 2–3 and 33–34* in *Njáls saga* (in the X-recension interrupting Unnr Marðardóttir and then Skarpheðinn Njálsson) and *Nj 40–41* (interrupting Steinunn Refsdóttir); *Svarfd 1–2 and 16–17* in *Svarfdæla saga* (interrupting Klaufi Snækollsson) and *Vígl 10–11 and 21–22* in *Víglundar saga* (interrupting Víglundur Þorgrímsson).

²⁷ The “ok enn kvað A” phrasing is used a number of times in *Gísli saga* (*Gísl 31–33* and *34–37*), *Grettis saga* (*Gr 22–24*) and *Kormáks saga* (*Korm 31–33*). Other formulations include “Kári kvað þá vísur þrjár” (*Nj 48–50*), “ok kvað vísur þessar” (X-recension of *Njáls saga 15–17*); “segir Grettir og kvað vísur fimm” (*Gr 66–70*); or simply “Þá kvað Gísli vísur nokkrar” (*Gísl 15–18*). There are also some examples of a singular form used to introduce more than one stanza: “ok kvað vísu” (*Dpl 4–6*; *Gísl 12–14*; *Gr 57–58*).

²⁸ See the category CONTIGUOUS STANZAS: INDIRECT RELATION in the ÍSP database. See the Notes to the editions of poetry in SkP for speculation about whether or not particular groups of stanzas might once have constituted since dissected poems.

Breiðvíkingakappi's seven stanzas similarly staged. Björn first speaks in verse in chapter 29 of the saga, after his married lover, Þuríðr Barkardóttir, warns him of a possible ambush by her husband, Þóroddr (ÍF IV, 78). After reciting a melancholy reflection on his frustrated love for her (*Eb* 24), Björn takes his weapons and leaves to travel home. He is indeed ambushed and returns home bloodied, although he had managed to kill two of his assailants. His next stanza is a response to his father's wry query whether he might have encountered Þóroddr: “eða hafi þit Þóroddr fundizk?” (ÍF IV, 79). Some time later (in chapter 40), when Björn returns to Iceland after having been outlawed for the killings, he realises that he is the father of Þuríðr's young son, something he obliquely acknowledges (*Eb* 27) in response to a question from his relative, Þórðr blígr Þórlaksson, who asks what he thought of the boy: “Hvern veg leizk þér á hann? (ÍF IV, 108). His next stanza (*Eb* 28) is a response to Þórðr's follow-up question about what Björn imagines Þóroddr will have to say about which of them is the boy's father: “Hvat mun Þóroddr nú til segja, hvárr ykkar eiga mun sveininn? (ÍF IV, 108).

Björn's final trio of verses are variations on the theme of sheltering in a cave in bad weather, a predicament brought about by a magical snowstorm commissioned by Þóroddr to prevent Björn's repeated visits to Þuríðr. According to the prose of the saga, Björn recites two of them while alone in the cave (*Eb* 29 and 30), with the final stanza (*Eb* 31) staged as a response to members of his household when he eventually manages to get home: “spurðu heimamenn hann, hvar hann hefði verit um verðrin” (ÍF IV, 111) [Men on the farm asked him where he had been during the storm]. The question and answer format, which the narrator clearly favours in this sequence, is obviously not serviceable for *Eb* 29 and 30 when Björn is depicted as being alone and without an audience. That he performs his poetry notwithstanding his isolated situation (“Þá kvað Björn [. . .] Ok enn kvað hann”) might stretch plausibility were it not for the established convention within saga prosimetrum for stanzas to be woven through the prose as simultaneously reported and enacted. In the saga prose, Björn is often described as being in conversation with Þuríðr, although only one sentence of his is actually reported in the prose (ÍF IV, 108); she is nonetheless the subject or explicit or implicit addressee of most of his stanzas. More detailed is the prose reporting of his tactical conversations with Þórðr blígr (ÍF IV, 109, 118–119) and Snorri goði (ÍF IV, 134–135).

The rhythm of shifts into and out of poetry can be affected by the intensity of the interrogation a composer of stanzas is subjected to. As Table 5 below shows, the seventeen stanzas quoted in *Eyrbyggja saga* by Þórarinn svarti Þórólfsson, which are known as the *Máhlíðingavísur*, are predominantly staged as responses to questions of the “Hvat er þar frá at segja” kind. Short prose passages separate the stanzas often consisting of no more than a follow-up question or the introduc-

tion of a new questioner. In a way that is even more exaggerated than was the case with Björn, Þórarinn speaks very little in prose across the entire sequence, as the entries in the final column of the table reveal.

Table 5: Þórarinn's stanzas as responses to questions.

STANZA SPOKEN BY ÞÓRARINN	QUESTION PROMPTING THE STANZA	DIRECT SPEECH IN PROSE
<i>Eb</i> 3 (chapter 18)	[. . .] Geirríðr [. . .] spyr þá, hve farizk hefir. Þórarinn kvað þá vísu: (ÍF IV, 38) [Geirríðr asked them how it had gone. Þórarinn then recited a verse]	Direct speech by Þórarinn is reported much earlier in the chapter
<i>Eb</i> 4 (chapter 18)	Geirríðr svarar: “ Segi þér víg Þorbjarnar? ”. Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 39). [“Are you announcing the killing of Þorbjörn?” asked Geirríðr. Þórarinn replied]	–
<i>Eb</i> 5 (chapter 19)	[. . .] spyr Auðr Þórarin, hvert ráð hann ætlar fyrir sér [. . .] Þá kvað Þórarinn: (ÍF IV, 40) [Auðr asked Þórarinn what his plans were. Then Þórarinn recited]	After the stanza, Þórarinn responds in prose to advice from Geirríðr
<i>Eb</i> 6 (chapter 19)	[. . .] þá spurði Vermundr tíðenda. Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 41) [then Vermundr asked for news. Þórarinn recited]	–
<i>Eb</i> 7 (chapter 19)	“ Hvat er þar frá at segja, mágr? ” segir Vermundr. Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 42) [“What more is there to be told, kinsman?” asks Vermundr. Þórarinn recited]	–
<i>Eb</i> 8 (chapter 19)	Guðný, systir hans [. . .] mælti: “ Hefir þú nökkut varit þik nú frýjuorðinu þeira út þar? ” Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 42) [His sister, Guðný, spoke: “Did you clear yourself of their taunts out there?” Þórarinn recited]	–
<i>Eb</i> 9 (chapter 19)	Vermundr mælti: “Brátt þykki mér sem þér hafið við ázk”. Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 43) [“It seems to me you dealt with them swiftly,” Vermundr said. Þórarinn recited]	–

Table 5 (continued)

STANZA SPOKEN BY ÞÓRARINN	QUESTION PROMPTING THE STANZA	DIRECT SPEECH IN PROSE
<i>Eb</i> 10 (chapter 19)	Vermundr mælti: “ Hvárt vissu þeir nú, hvárt þú vart karlmaðr eða kona? ” Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 43) [“Have they found out yet whether you are a man or a woman?” asked Vermundr. Þórarinn recited]	–
<i>Eb</i> 11 (chapter 19)	Þá spurði Vermundr: “ Hví fórtu þá eptir þeim [. . .]? ” Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 44) [Then Vermund asked: “Why did you go after them?” Þórarinn recited]	–
<i>Eb</i> 12 (chapter 19)	[. . .] segir Vermundr [. . .] “ En hversu gáfusk þér þeir inir útlenzku menn? ” Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 45) [Vermundr says: “But how well did the foreigners serve you?” Þórarinn recited]	–
<i>Eb</i> 13 (chapter 19) ends scene	“ Bar Nagli sik eigi allvel? ” kvað Vermundr. Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 46) [“Didn’t Nagli acquit himself well?” asked Vermundr. Þórarinn recited]	In the prose after the stanza, Þórarinn responds in direct speech to a proposal by Vermundr
<i>Eb</i> 14 (chapter 19) ends scene	Ok er þeir vóru á leið komnar, kvað Þórarinn: (ÍF IV, 47) [Once they were on their way, Þórarinn recited]	–
<i>Eb</i> 15 (chapter 19)	[. . .]Jok fagnaði Arnkell þeim vel ok spyrr at tíðendum. Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 47) [Arnkell welcomed them and asked for news. Þórarinn recited]	–
<i>Eb</i> 16 (chapter 19)	[. . .]Þá mælti Arnkell: “Reizk hefir þú nú, frændi, svá hógværr maðr sem þú ert.” Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 48) [then Arnkell said, You really must have been angry, kinsman, since you are usually such a moderate man. Þórarinn recited]	–
<i>Eb</i> 17 (chapter 19)	Arnkell [. . .] ræddi opt um við Þórarin at hann skyldi vera kátr [. . .] Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 49) [Arnkell often mentioned to Þórarinn that he should cheer up. Þórarinn recited]	–

Table 5 (continued)

STANZA SPOKEN BY ÞÓRARINN	QUESTION PROMPTING THE STANZA	DIRECT SPEECH IN PROSE
<i>Eb</i> 18 (chapter 19) ends scene and episode	Þá svarar einn heimamaðr Arnkels [. . .] Þórarinn kvað: (ÍF IV, 50) [Then one of Arnkell's men replied. Þórarinn recited]	–
		[Þórarinn's direct speech is reported in the prose of ch. 20]
<i>Eb</i> 19 (chapter 22) ends scene	Ok er þeir váru á brott farnir, kvað Þórarinn vísu: (ÍF IV, 56) [When they had gone, Þórarinn recited a verse]	–

The majority of Þórarinn's stanzas are staged as responses to direct questions. Sometimes the narrator stages the question in direct speech (these are marked in bold on the Table), although sometimes the dialogic prompt is indirectly reported. *Eb* 9, for example, which is not elicited by a question, shows Þórarinn on a roll, pouring forth his responses without needing any prompting, as poetic rhythm comes to dominate the narrative. While both explicit questions and direct speech peter out somewhat over the course of the long sequence, the conversational rhythm is nonetheless sustained. It is only after *Eb* 13 that Þórarinn's stanza ends the scene and only after *Eb* 18 that one of his stanzas closes an episode (as marked in bold in the left-hand column of the Table).²⁹

The preponderance of stanzas in the prosimetric narrative creates a kind of dual-track narration, with the saga narrator maintaining the prose scaffolding for Þórarinn's poetic ruminations. So many of his *dróttkvætt* stanzas, with their intercalary clauses and multiple illocutionary acts, reach into the future as the speaker issues warnings and voices resentment that goes deeper than his often tight-lipped statements in prose. This sequence of seventeen stanzas in *Eyrbyggja saga* illustrates – in an exaggerated way – the prosimetric technique of staging stanza recitation as responses to questions, where a reiterative situation allows for the sequence to be extended beyond a single stanza. A similar reiterative pattern occurs in *Gísli*

²⁹ In the ÍSP database, the category FORMALLY ENDS SCENE is used if a stanza is the last word spoken at the place where the recitation is staged; it may be followed by a short piece of prose as long as that does not involve movement away from the location. The category FORMALLY ENDS EPISODE indicates that the following prose initiates the telling of a new stage of the narrative (or chapter).

saga Súrssonar, where most of Gísli’s stanzas about his dreams are recited in response to a question from his wife Auðr about how he has slept during his long outlawry.³⁰ As the table below shows, the sequence extends across a larger portion of the saga’s chapters than is the case with the *Máhlíðingavísur*. Throughout the chapters in which Gísli’s dreams are reported, his direct speech is also reported in prose.

Table 6: Gísli’s dream stanzas as responses to questions.

STANZA SPOKEN BY GÍSLI	QUESTION PROMPTING THE STANZA	PLACEMENT IN NARRATIVE
<i>Gísl</i> 16–19 (chapter 22)	[. . .]Jok er hann vaknar, spurði hon, hvat hann dreymði [. . .] Þa kvað Gísli vísur nökkurar (ÍF VI, 70) [and when he wakes up, she asks what he dreamt. Then Gísli recited some verses]	[four contiguous stanzas] ends scene and episode
<i>Gísl</i> 20–22 (chapter 24)	[. . .]Jok segir nú eitt sinn Auði, hvat hann dreymði, er hon spurði eftir, ok kvað þá vísur (ÍF VI, 75) [and on one occasion when Auðr asks what he dreamt, he recited these verses] Þá kvað hann enn vísu (ÍF VI, 76) [Then he recited a verse] Ok enn kvað hann (ÍF VI, 77) [And still he recited]	[3 lines of prose before <i>Gísl</i> 21] [before <i>Gísl</i> 22] ends scene and episode
<i>Gísl</i> 25–27 (chapter 30)	Ok nú vaknar hann ok kvað vísur nökkurar, eptir því sem hann dreymði (ÍF VI, 94) [And now he wakes up and recited some verses according to what he had dreamt] Ok enn kvað hann (ÍF VI, 95) [And still he recited]	[before <i>Gísl</i> 26] ends scene and episode
<i>Gísl</i> 29–38 (chapter 33)	En er hann vaknar, spyrr Auðr, hvat hann hefði dreymt. Hann segir . . . Þá kvað Gísli vísu (ÍF VI, 102) [When he wakes up, Auðr asks what he had dreamt. He says . . . Then Gísli recited a verse] Gísli kvað vísu (ÍF VI, 103) [Gísli recited a verse] Ok enn kvað hann (ÍF VI, 104) [And still he recited] Gísli kvað þá vísu (ÍF VI, 105) [Then Gísli recited a verse]	[4 lines of direct speech before <i>Gísl</i> 30] [before <i>Gísl</i> 31] [12 lines of prose, including direct speech, before <i>Gísl</i> 32]

³⁰ Nearly ninety percent of Gísli’s forty dream stanzas are staged as answers to questions; the proportion of stanzas introduced in this way across the whole saga is just over half.

Table 6 (continued)

STANZA SPOKEN BY GÍSLI	QUESTION PROMPTING THE STANZA	PLACEMENT IN NARRATIVE
	Ok enn kvað hann (ÍF VI, 105) [And still he recited]	[before <i>Gísl</i> 33]
	Ok enn kvað hann (ÍF VI, 106) [And still he recited]	[before <i>Gísl</i> 34]
	Gísli kvað vísu (ÍF VI, 107) [Gísli recited a verse]	[4 lines of prose before <i>Gísl</i> 35]
	Ok enn kvað hann vísu (ÍF VI, 107) [And still he recited a verse]	[before <i>Gísl</i> 36]
	Ok enn kvað hann (ÍF VI, 108) [And still he recited]	[before <i>Gísl</i> 37]
	Ok enn kvað hann vísu (ÍF VI, 109) [And still he recited a verse]	[before <i>Gísl</i> 38] ends scene and episode
<i>Gísl</i> 39 (chapter 34)	Þá spurði Auðr, hvat hann hafði dreymt [. . .] Gísli kvað vísu (ÍF VI, 110) [Then Auðr asked what he had dreamt. Gísli recited a verse]	

While the group of three stanzas quoted in chapter 30 do not explicitly mention Auðr as the prompt for the recitation, given the context of the other groups it might be read as implicit.

As many scholars have found, the content of Gísli's dream verses is remarkable; their staging, however, is rather repetitive.³¹ In all but Gísli's final stanza, his is the last word in a narrative episode. Many of Gísli's dream stanzas nonetheless cause considerable disruption to the narrative flow of the prose, since they advance Gísli's story into the afterlife, as he speculates about his imminent death. To some extent, the discourse of his dream-world becomes a counter or super-ordinate narrative, running parallel to his daily life which is narrated in prose. A prosimetric rhythm is thereby developed in the second part of the saga that returns again and again to his dream-world, with his haunting stanzas thrumming along as his assailants come closer to tracking him down. The repetitive nature of the inquires to the dream verses in *Gísla saga*, as well as their cumulative effect, are graphically demonstrated on leaf 68r of AM 566 a 4to (see Figure 3): Gísli is quoted reciting a stanza on line 2 (*Gísl* 31), line 11 (*Gísl* 32), line 13 (*Gísl* 33), line 16 (*Gísl* 34), line 20 (*Gísl* 35), line 23 (*Gísl* 36), line 25 (*Gísl* 37) and line 28 (*Gísl* 38), with the first letter of most verses embellished by a stroke of red ink which is still faintly visible.

³¹ For a detailed discussion of the prosimetric staging of Gísli's dream verses, see Quinn, *The Creativity Paradox*.

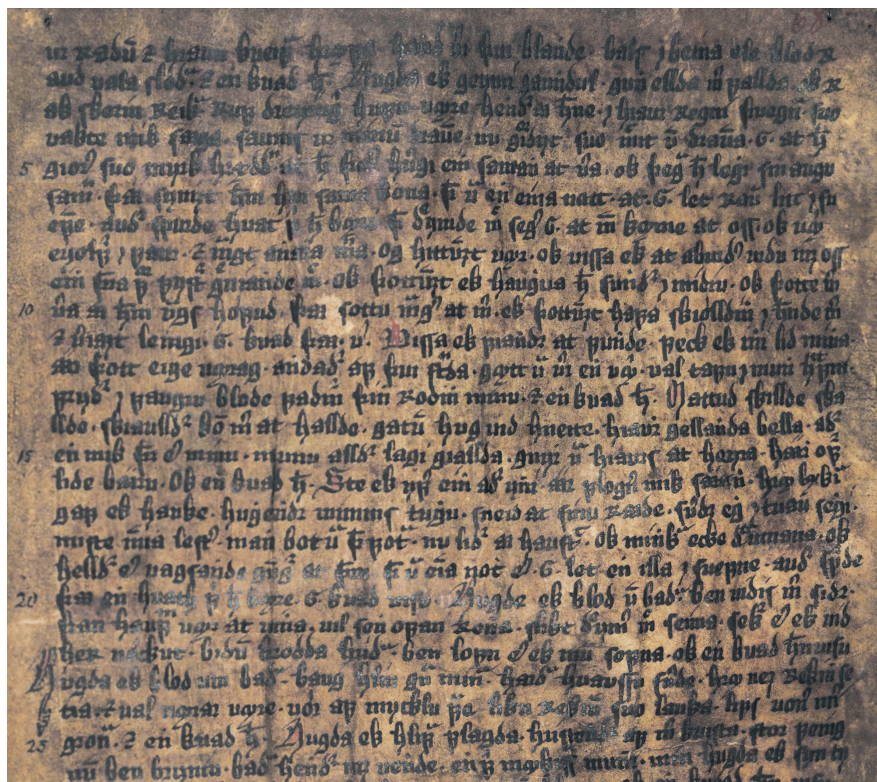


Figure 3: Eight stanzas from *Gísla saga* appear on this page, with the first letter of each verse having a stroke of red ink which is still faintly visible. Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 556 a 4to, f. 68r.

Once again, it can be seen how saga prosimetrum has the potential to construct two parallel discourses in these extensive runs of single-stanza quotation: the poet’s elaborate and wide-ranging reactions to events which engage with narrative development in a complicated and unbound way, and the saga narrator’s mainly linear story-telling, which often hardly engages with the words of stanzas at all, but nonetheless repeatedly directs our attention to them.

While the saga narrator of *Eyrbyggja saga* let Þórarinn’s stanzas accumulate and his engagement with his interlocutors develop, with only the very last stanzas terminating the scene, the narrator of *Gísla saga* stages a reiterative scene, initiated by Auðr’s question to her husband and terminated by his poetic response.

Arresting stanzas

A final aspect of prosimetric rhythm that I will examine in this chapter is the diverting effect on the reader of the content of some stanzas. Saga prosimetrum readily admits paradox and expects the audience of the saga to accommodate entanglement of various kinds generated by the juxtaposition of the complex discourse of skaldic utterance and the predominantly linear flow of prose, yet sometimes the consequent slowing down of the rhythm of reading that this necessitates risks pulling the reader up short for a longer pause.³² Indeed sometimes the interpretative reflections triggered by a particular stanza can have ramifications beyond the scene and episode in which they are recited and cast their shadow over an entire saga. Such is the case with a particular stanza in *Gísla saga* that I will now discuss.

Gísla saga is a work in which there is often tension between what the titular saga character says – especially in poetry – and what the narrator says about him. While there are some striking differences between the manuscript texts of the saga, with a longer, shorter and fragmentary version identified by editors, the poetry in both the full versions of the saga seems to have been fairly stable during manuscript transmission. There is just one stanza (*Gísl* 4) that appears only in the longer version (quoted towards the end of what is termed the Norwegian prelude) and it is judged on linguistic grounds to be from the fourteenth century.³³ Setting that stanza aside, *Gísli* begins his oeuvre with a 2-line *fornyrðislag* verse in his youth in Norway, spoken while in the middle of a fight with *Hólmgöngu-Skeggi*, uttering the lines after he cuts off his opponent's foot (see Table 1).³⁴ Interestingly, *Gísli* only begins to flourish as a *dróttkvætt* poet after he starts brooding over the murder of his brother-in-law, *Vésteinn Vésteinsson* (from *Gísl* 5 on). The tension between *Gísli*'s poetry and the narrator's presentation of him in prose is at its highest when *Gísli* divulges, in a stanza (*Gísl* 11), that he was the murderer of *Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson*, the husband of his sister, *Þórdís*. He recites the riddling stanza in his sister's hearing in front of her husband's grave-mound, with the narrator (of the longer version of the saga) introducing the stanza with the unusually charged inquit “*Gísli kvað þá vísu, er æva skyldi*” (*ÍF* VI, 58) [*Gísli* then recited a stanza that he never should have].

³² The implications of these observations on the rhythm of reading for speculation about the rhythm of a live performance of saga prosimetrum are fascinating, but beyond the scope of this analysis.

³³ Gade, introduction to *Gísl*, SkP V, 537–546.

³⁴ “*Gísli hjó í mót [. . .] ok af honum fótinn ok mælti*” (*ÍF* VI, 11) [*Gísli* cut his foot off and spoke].

The tension between the story of Gísli – no doubt known to some degree by the saga’s audience independently of the saga text – and the arc the narrator seeks to craft, is at its most taut here. Presumably this element of the plot could not be elided, since it propels Gísli’s sister to reveal the identity of her husband’s murderer and probably also because at least some of Gísli’s poetry might also have been independently well known enough by the audience of the prosimetric saga that the famous declamation could not be suppressed, however much the saga narrator regretted the behaviour of the saga figure. It is Gísli’s next stanza that I want to focus on here. It has recently been edited in the SkP volume on the poetry of the *Íslendingasögur*, edited by Kari Ellen Gade. I will turn to the prosimetric context in a moment, but first there are some aspects of the editing of the stanza that need to be addressed. Here is Gade’s edition, followed by the stanza in prose word order:

Gatat salfasta systir,
sveiga mín at eiga,
gætin Gjúkadóttur
Guðrúnar hugtúni,
þás log-Sága lægis
lét sinn af hug stinum
– svá rak snjallra bræðra
sør-Freyja – ver deyja.

Gætin systir mín gat at eiga salfasta sveiga Guðrúnar Gjúkadóttur hugtúni, þás lægis log-Sága lét ver sinn deyja af stinum hug; svá rak sør-Freyja snjallra bræðra. (*Gísl* 12, SkP V, 567–569)

[My careful sister did not have the earth-rooted branches of Guðrún Gjúkadóttir in her thought-field [MIND], when that goddess of the sea-flame [WOMAN = Guðrún], with determined courage, had her husband killed; in this way the goddess of the necklace [WOMAN = Guðrún] avenged her brave brothers.]³⁵

There is a significant difference in sense here from earlier editions of the saga, such as Finnur Jónsson’s edition in *Skjaldedigtning*, based on a nineteenth-century interpretation by Sveinbjörn Egilsson.³⁶ They associated the adjective *gætin* [cautious, careful] with *sveigr* which means branch and, in the sense of a curved object, the word is also attested denoting a headdress. Through the editorial process, Þórdís accordingly becomes fixated on her headdress – though for no obvious rea-

³⁵ The translation is my own, based on Gade’s edition.

³⁶ Finnur Jónsson, *Skjaldedigtning*, AI, 102–103, BI, 97–98; Sveinbjörn Egilsson, appendix to the edition of *Gísla saga*, ed. Konráð Gíslason, 170 and 183.

son. Finnur Jónsson's interpretation of the lines, that Þórdís is overly fond of her headdress, has been described by Kari Gade as "incongruous", "fanciful" and "not persuasive", and she follows instead Jón Helgason's suggested construal of the lines.³⁷ Editors and translators nonetheless previously lent into this casually misogynist interpretation of Gísli's stanza, describing Þórdís as vain and generally obsessed with finery.³⁸

If we accept the latest edition of the stanza by Gade, the characterisation of Þórdís is not that she is vain or inconstant, but that she is careful, mindful, wary; perhaps too thoughtful in the way that she had apparently unravelled Gísli's cryptic stanza in which he had earlier revealed his own culpability, but cautious too in the way in which she delayed transmitting the text of the stanza to the murdered man's brother, as the prose tells us, an act she understood would trigger vengeance and which she knowingly delayed. The prosimetric context of the stanza in which the stanza is quoted in the saga is as follows. After her husband Þorgrímur has been killed, Þórdís and her second husband Þorkr (Þorgrímur's brother) are accompanied by Þórdís's other brother Þorkell as they make a journey from Sæból to their new home in Þórsnes. When they come to the funeral mound of her slain husband, Þórdís is asked by Þorkr why she has been unhappy since the autumn games, and he reminds her that she had promised to tell him before they left the district. She repeats the stanza Gísli had recited when he looked at Þorgrímur's mound (*Gísl* 11) – the one the narrator thought he never should have uttered. She tells Þorkr that he need not look elsewhere concerning the killing of his brother Þorgrímur, and that justice will take its course. Þorkr becomes angry and wants to turn back and kill Gísli straightaway. Þorkell meanwhile leaves the party in order to warn his brother Gísli of the revelation. The text continues:

37 Gade, notes to *Gísl* 12, SkP V, 569.

38 "My sister loves to [at]tire her head / But little thinks of Gudrun dead", George W Dasent, "Gísli the Outlaw, 95; "meine eitle schwester" [my vain sister], Finnur Jónsson, notes to the Alt-nordische Saga-Bibliothek edition of the saga, 48; "min søster, òm for sin hovedpryd" [my sister, fond of her headdress], Finnur Jónsson, *Skjaldedigtning* BI, 97; "sú sem lætur sér annt um fald sinn"; "glysgjörn systir mín" [she who cares about her headdress; my sister eager for finery], Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, notes to the Íslenzk fornrit edition of the saga, 62; "Wife-veil-hearted wavering / Warped to miss, my sister", George Johnstone, *The Saga of Gísli*, 28; "My inconstant sister had not the firm heart of wise Guðrún", Gabriel Turville-Petre, "Gísli Súrsson and His Poetry", 379; "My sister, too taken / with her fine clothes", Martin Regal, *The Saga of Gísli*, 23; "My finery-obsessed sister did not manage to have the soul of Guðrún", David Clark, "Sexual Themes", 496.

Hann ríðr þegar svá hart, at brátt felr sýn. Hann snýr þá leiðsinni út á Hól ok segir nú Gísla, hvat títt er, at Þórdís hefir nú upp rofit málit ok rannsakat vísuna – “máttu nú ok svá við búask, at upp er komit málit.” Gísli þagnar ok kvað vísu: (ÍF VI, 61)

[Þorkell rides so fast that he is soon out of sight. He then changes course, to Hóll, and now tells Gísli what has happened, that Þórdís has cracked the case and worked out the stanza – “now you will have to get ready since the case has come out into the open” he says. Gísli was silent and spoke a verse.]

The narrator again hesitates in introducing Gísli’s poetry, depicting him as both dumbfounded and loquacious, as he draws a comparison between his sister – whose husband he has recently murdered – and the legendary figure of Guðrún Gjúkadóttir whose multiple tragic marriages are the subject of a number of eddic poems preserved in GkS 2365 4to (known as the Poetic Edda). Gísli continues, in prose:

“Ok þóttumk ek eigi þess verðr frá henni, því at ek þykkjumk þat lýst hafa nokkurum sinnum, at mér hefir eigi hennar óvirðing betri þótt en sjálfs mín; hefi ek stundum lagt líf mitt í háska fyrir hennar sakar, en hon hefir nú gefit mér dauðráð. En þat vil ek nú vita, bróðir, hvat ek skal þar eiga, sem þú ert, slíkt sem nú hefi ek at gørt.” “At gera þik varan við, ef menn vilja drepa þik, en bjargir veiti ek þér engar, þær er mér megi sakar á gefa. Þykki mér mikit af gørt við mik, at drepinn er Þorgrímur, mágr miinn ok félagi ok virkðavinur.” Gísli svarar: “Var eigi þess ván um slíkan mann sem Vésteinn var, at eigi myndi mannhefndalaust vera, ok mynda ek eigi þér svarar sem þú svarar mér nú ok eigi heldr gera.” (ÍF VI, 62–63)

[“I didn’t think I deserved this from her, since I think I made it clear on several occasions that, to me, her disgrace seemed no better than my own; I have sometimes put my own life in danger on account of her and she has now delivered my death sentence. But I would now like to know, brother, what I can expect from *you*, given what I have done.” “To give you warning if men want to kill you, but I can grant no assistance which would incriminate me. It has greatly affected me that Þorgrímur, my kinsman, colleague and close friend, has been murdered.” Gísli replies: “Was it not expected that a man such as Vésteinn would not be unavenged? – and I would not respond to you as you have responded to me; nor would I behave as you are behaving.”]

Just as the stanza is Gísli’s attempt to reframe his sister as weak and disloyal, so the prose dialogue shows him reframing – or manipulating perspectives – to cast Þorkell as disloyal as well. Þorkell explains that he will do what he can but he also tries to explain to Gísli that he himself has lost a close friend and a brother-in-law. Gísli discounts his perspective, evaluating his own loyalty to his own brother-in-law Vésteinn, as more significant. The perspectives of siblings count for little as far as Gísli is concerned, as he openly dismisses the expression of Þorkell’s point of view, having already erased Þórdís’s point of view, assuming his own perspective covers them both.

What gives pause in this prosimetric instance is not just the intensity of Gísli's self-righteousness but the implications of the parallel he draws. Guðrún's first husband, Sigurðr, is killed by her brothers, Gunnarr and Hogni while her second husband, Atli, kills those same brothers – a crime she spectacularly avenges. Crucially, after her brothers have killed her husband, Guðrún wants to have nothing to do with them; it is in fact she who is disappointed by their disloyalty to her.³⁹ In fact, when their respective first husbands are murdered by their brothers, both Guðrún and Þórdís mourn their loss and are repelled by the betrayal. Just as Guðrún turns against her second husband, Atli, when he murders her brothers, Gunnarr and Hogni, so too Þórdís turns against Þorkr. In due course, Þorkr and his ally Eyjólfur will hunt down the outlawed Gísli and kill him (chapter 35). In response, Þórdís stabs Eyjólfur in the thigh – she had intended worse – and divorces herself from Þorkr (chapter 37). This is the *saga* mode of female revenge, a toned down version of the *legendary* mode of feeding sons to their father and burning everyone within the hall. The behaviour of the two figures is in sync, in other words, albeit across the generically-challenging landscape of a *saga* analogue to the portrayal of a legendary heroine in a collection of eddic poems and a *fornaldarsaga*. It is in the context of their *second* marriages that the women's loyalty swings back to their brothers, in both cases because of what they regard as the despicable behaviour of their second husbands and their allies.

Therefore, at this point in their respective biographies, Þórdís does not fall short at all. In the fullness of time, her loyalty will gravitate towards her brother Gísli, after she witnesses the actions of her second husband Þorkr. Gísli never witnesses that act of loyalty by Þórdís because by then he is dead – or, as is the case for Guðrún, vengeance born of sibling loyalty only arises after the *death* of a brother, not when a sibling has just killed another sibling's spouse. Just like Guðrún, Þórdís felt honour-bound to pursue justice for her murdered husband, and faces a tragic dilemma when she finds out the murderer was her own brother. Conflicts of loyalty between a spouse and siblings are a touch-paper in the plots of many Old Norse literary texts with the prosimetric staging of this moment in the plot of *Gísla saga* rich in paradox. Prescient though he may be, Gísli does not foresee his sister's loyalty; nonetheless the parallel he draws in verse is memorable enough to resonate as the plot develops. Perhaps more importantly, Gísli implicitly aligns himself with Gunnarr Gjúkason in the stanza: by asserting legendary status for himself, he engages in an audacious act of self-heroising as a means of exonerating himself, while in prose he attempts to gaslight his siblings.

39 *Guðrúnarkviða II* in *Eddukvæði*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, vol. II, 357 (st. 20): “[. . .] né ek trúa gerðak” [I could not come to trust them].

Þorkell does not react to the verse, or that is how it is staged, with Gísli hardly drawing breath between his *dróttkvætt* defamation and his embittered prose vindication of himself. It is also noteworthy that although Þorkell appears to be the only audience for the stanza recitation, Gísli refers to their sister as “my sister” not “our sister”. As is his wont, Gísli orients members of his family entirely in relation to himself. If we follow through the logic of Gísli’s allusion to Guðrún, placing her as it does at the centre of the web of tangled loyalties, we become aware of the paradox. When Gísli invokes a legendary heroine who eventually turns against her brothers’ killer, even though the killer was her second husband, is he not also alerting the audience to the prequel to that legend, when those same brothers murdered her first husband? Given the number of eddic poems that depict Guðrún’s life, we can reasonably assume that Gísli the tenth-century saga character as well as the anonymous author of the prosimetric saga in the thirteenth century knew that Guðrún Gjúkadóttir was a woman of more than one marriage, with her first two marriages demonstrating in spectacular fashion the different ways in which loyalty to blood-kin and loyalty to kin-by-marriage could clash. As Gísli invokes Guðrún, the implications of the parallel come into play, the divergent energy of the poetry opening up narrative entanglement and interpretive possibilities.

Had Gísli’s stanza ended the scene, those implications might have had more time to develop, the rhythm slowing to enable listeners and readers to ponder the allusion – possibly leading the saga audience to wonder about Gísli’s blindness to the complexity of the lives of others and to his own culpability; and possibly inviting the audience to consider the allusion as a kind of foreshadowing of what Þórdís might do next. Instead the narrator has Gísli bluster on in prose, with the result that the paradox is not given much oxygen at this point in the prosimetrum. Nonetheless, a quoted stanza has the potential to float above the prose narrative, loosely tied to the moment in the storyline when it is voiced, but suspended over a broader expanse of the saga than a single scene and inviting audience reflection on its implications as the plot unfurls.

Prosimetric rhythm is accordingly of two tempos: the tempo of composition as the narrator crafts the intervals of prose between stanzas and the resonant space around their staging; and the tempo of the audience’s apprehension of prosimetric complexity as successive verse quotations complicate the storyline and the poetic turn of phrase of a saga figure lingers in the mind of the audience.

Kate Heslop

Unspeakable Stanzas: Voice, Narration and Interiority in *Eyrbyggja saga*

More than twenty years ago, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen described verse in the prosimetrum of the sagas of Icelanders as a “voice of the past”.¹ Quite a lot of attention has already been paid to “the past”, in investigations of the contribution of skaldic stanzas to the sagas’ evocation of the Settlement Period, of the role of memory in skaldic poetics, and of the question of whether the stanzas are as early as the sagas claim they are. The other part of Meulengracht Sørensen’s description, “voice”, is also fruitful. It reminds us that the stanzas are the quoted words of someone other than the saga’s author, and so introduces a narratological distinction that cuts across the formal one of metrical versus non-metrical text that is indexed by the term *prosimetrum*. Further, it suggests that stanzas are speech, expressive of individuality and inner life. Underlying the metaphor of voice in narrative, Mieke Bal argues, is a

craving for and self-evident alleging of origin [. . .] [that] insists too exclusively on illocution, that aspect of speech – and by extension, of all cultural utterances – that indicates the speaker’s intent. In the process it privileges the speaker, writer, or maker of images. Thus, the concept lends itself to subordinating and easily obscuring perlocution, the utterance’s effect, and thereby dis-empowers the listener, reader, or viewer.²

In a similar move to Bal’s, Vésteinn Ólason proposes that we read the sagas not monologically, but rather as *Dialogues with the Viking Age*. These provocations are all the more relevant for medieval texts, where manuscript transmission empowers scribes, readers who are also writers.

In saga genres which include poetry in eddic metres, where metrical lines can be difficult to distinguish from rhythmical prose (the eddic poem *Hárbarðsljóð* is an example), the transition between prose and verse can be a sliding one, in which a speaker gradually eases into, or is seized by, poetic utterance. This is not the case for the *Íslendingasögur* prosimetrum, which largely contains poetry in *dróttkvætt*. Here the boundary is strongly marked, in multiple ways. Sonically, as an audible disjunction

¹ Meulengracht Sørensen, “The Prosimetrum Form 1”, 172.

² Bal, “Phantom Sentences”, 19.

Note: This essay is dedicated to Eleanor, with thanks for our discussions of *Emma*.

Kate Heslop, UC Berkeley

between prose and the highly patterned *dróttkvætt* line. Discursively, by the use of a stereotyped *inquit*, usually either “þá kvað (N.N.) (vísu)” [then (N.N.) said (a verse)] or “svá segir (N.N.) í (poem name)” [so says (N.N.) in (poem name)]. Even graphically: although stanzas continue to be written out as part of the text block, rather than line by line, right through the Middle Ages, two graphic markers indicate the presence of a stanza. The usually-abbreviated sequence “þá kvað N. (vísu)”, gives a graphical tag with the text block; see for example “þa. q. k. v.” on a leaf from *Kormáks saga* in *Mǫðruvallahólk* (AM 132 fol, 126 v, containing *Korm Lv 34–41*; Fig. 4). And in many manuscripts, as here, a small marginal *v* marks the position of a verse in the prose.

This clear boundary blurs when instead of drawing a binary, purely formal distinction, of verse versus prose, we try to include the quoted stanzas in a grammar of narrative style. Part of what makes the *Íslendingasögur* so fascinating is their novelistic quality, to a large extent an effect of their style. Many proposals have been made for the historical determinants of saga style. No matter what we think the origins of the sagas might have been like, and what the formative influences on them were (both ongoing research programs in the field), they stand as a series of early experiments in written narrative, whose appeal was such that they continued to be copied and transmitted over many centuries. Saga manuscripts offer a window on to how early writers constructed their works and, traced through the *longue durée* of saga transmission, how durable those experiments were. Investigations of saga style are relatively thin on the ground in recent scholarship, but it is a topic where much remains to be discovered.³

In what follows, I will focus on *Eyrbyggja saga*, and try to build up a detailed picture of how a single medieval saga narrative represents voice, narration and interiority. While sticking to one saga limits generalizability, it is nonetheless worth doing, both to avoid flattening the variety of saga writers’ experiments with narrative strategies (*Fóstbræðra saga*’s medical digressions are perhaps the best-known example), and to make comparison of manuscript versions feasible. *Eyrbyggja saga* is extant in four medieval manuscripts, all of which are fragmentary: E (AM 162 E fol., Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, ca 1300), W (Wolf Aug 9 10 4to, Wolfenbüttel, Herzogliche Bibliothek, ca 1330–1370), M (AM 445b 4to, Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, ca 1400–1500), and G (AM 309 4to, Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, 1498). A further medieval witness, written in the closing years of the fourteenth century as part of a codex known as *Vatnshyrna*, burned in the Copenhagen fire of 1728. A copy of it made by Ásgeir Jónsson and Árni Magnússon survives (AM 448 4to, Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, ca 1700) and was used by Einar Ól. Sveinsson as the basis of his edition for the *Íslensk fornrit* series (ÍF IV); I will refer to it as 448 to avoid confu-

3 For a survey of work on saga style, see Sävborg, “Style”.

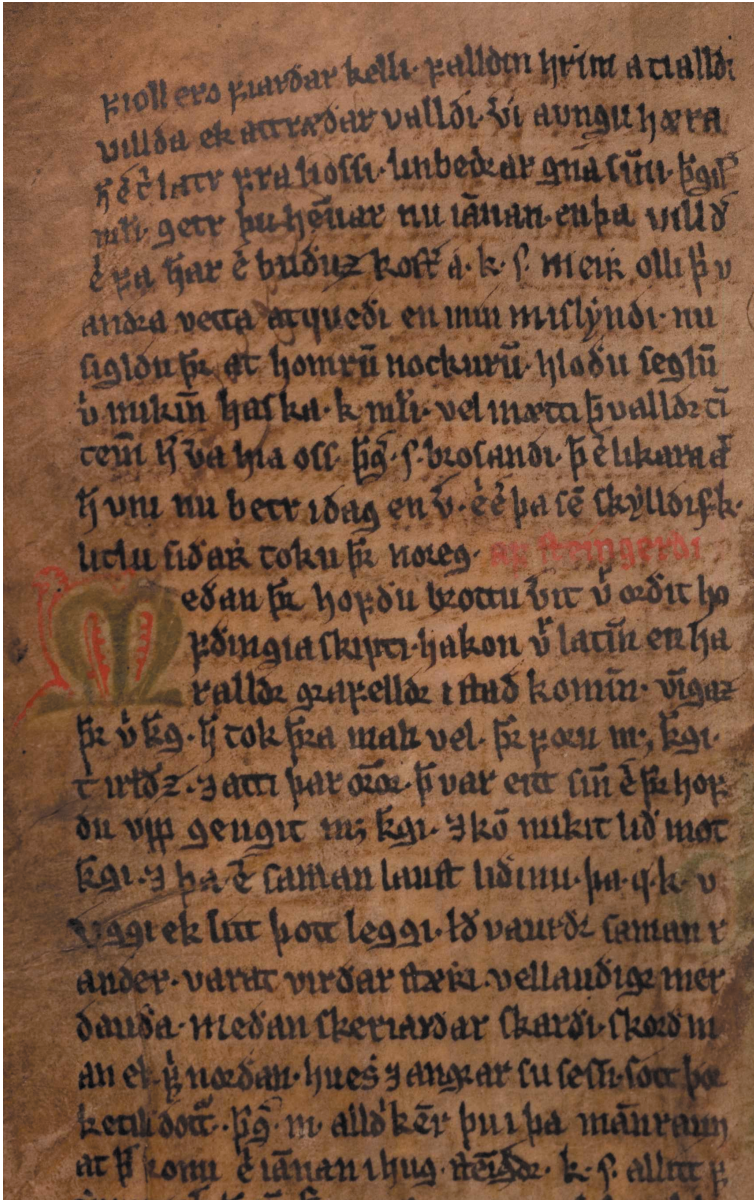


Figure 4: The usually-abbreviated sequence “þá kvað N. (vísu)” is a graphical tag within the text block; here, for example “þa. q. k. v.”, at line 18 on fol. 126v of *Kormáks saga* in *Möðruvallabók* (1330-70). A small ‘v’ is visible in the margin to the left of l. 19, where the stanza begins. Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 132 fol, f. 126va.

sion with the medieval vellums. In his semi-diplomatic edition of the vellum fragments of the saga, Forrest Scott argues that another early paper manuscript, AM 447 4to (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, ca 1650–1700) contains variants taken from M when it was in a more complete state.⁴ These variant readings were transcribed into 447 where its main text (which belongs to the Vatnshyrna class) differed from that of M. They will be referred to below as DJ after their scribe, Þórður Jónsson.

Manuscript variation is important because my study concentrates on two parts of the text where it is especially frequent: the stanzas, where the textual variation across manuscripts is high, as can be observed by opening any page of *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*; and relatively subtle linguistic features in the prose, such as tense variation, inquit and deixis.⁵ My analysis uses a model based on the framework of generative grammar and designed for the study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century novelistic fiction.⁶ Like virtually all narratological models, it was not conceived with medieval literature, still less sagas, in mind. I use it because it provides clear and rigorous linguistic criteria for distinguishing among different kinds of sentences in fictional narratives. Some aspects do not map perfectly on to the sagas, but these areas of mismatch are also revealing. Closely observing management of tense, deixis and voice across manuscript witnesses reveals how decisions made by multiple writers affect fundamental features of narrative representation, and suggests that *writtenness*, rather than authorship, makes the saga. Rather than “who speaks?”, my analysis asks “where do these sentences come from?”.

Sentences of discourse, sentences of narration

In her *Unspeakable sentences*, Ann Banfield constructs a typology of the different kinds of sentences used in modern literary fiction, with the aim of homing in on what is distinctive about written narrative. Easiest to identify is direct speech: representations of verbal communication between characters.⁷ What Banfield calls the “sentence

⁴ Scott, introduction to *Eyrbyggja saga*, pp. 123*–130*.

⁵ For a previous comparison of the style of the two versions, see Rode, “Eyrbyggja saga”. Her description is impressionistic (G is “chatty” and 448 “pedantic”, for example). She agrees with Einar Ól. Sveinsson that the Vatnshyrna / M version is a revision of the versions represented today by W, G and E, improved in “literary cohesiveness” and “sequence of events”, but lacking in “freshness”.

⁶ The model is outlined in Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences*. For subsequent applications to other kinds of narrative, see Kawashima, Phillippe, and Sowley (ed.), *Phantom Sentences*, and Patron (ed.), *Optional-Narrator Theory*.

⁷ As these sentences are mimesis of speech, not actual speech, Louviot advocates calling them “represented speech”; see Louviot, *Direct Speech in Beowulf and Other Old English Narrative*

of discourse” is introduced by verbs of speaking (in the sagas, *sagði/segir, svarar*, and so on), and mimics face-to-face communication: the sentence is said by a speaker, to an addressee, and takes place in a present that coincides with the moment of utterance. Thus, direct speech is linguistically marked in narratives by first and second person pronouns, referring to speaker and addressee/hearer respectively; present-tense references to events coterminous with the utterance; and deictic markers signifying *HERE* and *NOW*. Below are two examples from *Eyrbyggja saga* in which these features are marked. In these passages, Þórarinn svarti Þórólfsson’s wife, Auðr, and mother, Geirríðr, are addressing him after he has killed Þorbjörn Ormsson:

“vildu vér eigi úthýsa **þér**,” segir hon, “en hrædd **em ek**, at **hér** sé fleiri settir dúradómarnir í vetr, því at **ek veit**, at Snorri goði mun ætla at mæla eptir Þorbjörn, mág sinn.” (ÍF IV, 40)

[“we didn’t want to evict **you**,” she [Auðr] says, “but **I am** fearful that more door-courts be held **here** in winter, because **I know** that Snorri goði will intend to take up the case of Þorbjörn, his brother-in-law.”]⁸

Þá mælti Geirríðr: “Þat **er nú** ráðligast, at **leita** at slíkum tengðamönnum sem Vermundr **er** eða Arnkell, bróðir minn.” (ÍF IV, 41)

[Then spoke Geirríðr: “That **is now** most advisable, to **seek** out such relatives as Vermundr **is**, or Arnkell my brother.”]

Already in the simplest case, that of direct speech, one difference between saga style and the modern literary fiction Banfield focuses on is clear. The tense of inquit verbs in the sagas is not fixed and fluctuates apparently freely between present (the first example) and preterite (the second).⁹ Shifts into present tense in saga narration more generally have been quite well-studied, most recently by Ianeva-Lockney and Zeevaert.¹⁰ Factors such as the frequent abbreviation of verb forms in manuscripts make it difficult to come to any definite conclusion, but both studies suggest these shifts may be used as a stylistic resource, to frame scenes and emphasize important events, for instance. In other respects, saga direct speech conforms quite well to the model. The markers of speaker/addressee, present tense, and deictic reference to *HERE* and *NOW*, shown in bold type in the

Poems, 7–15. But I am sticking to Banfield’s terminology here because she uses the term “represented speech” for free indirect speech; see Banfield, *Unspeaking Sentences*, 68.

8 Translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Fidelity to the relevant details of the Old Norse texts has been prioritized over elegance.

9 The inquit verb *segja* is often abbreviated in manuscripts to *s.*, making it impossible to determine its tense, but tense variation can easily be observed in other inquit verbs such as *spyrja* and *taka til orða*.

10 Ianeva-Lockney, “Tense Switching as a Narrative Device”; Zeevaert, “The Historical Present Tense”.

examples above, are strong and consistent enough that they often stand alone, without an inquit, as an indicator of direct speech. Here Katla addresses her son Oddr as Arnkell's party arrives to search her house for him:

Hon bað Odd sitja hjá sér, – “ok **ver** hljóðr ok kyrr.” (ÍF IV, 51)

[She asked Oddr to sit by her, – “and **be** quiet.”]

Here the contrast between third person (*hon*, *Odd*, *sér*) and second (the imperative *ver* [be]), and between the past tense of *bað* [asked] and the present-tense imperative, indicates direct speech without an inquit (in the manuscripts, of course, without punctuation or quotation marks either). Another example in the same episode is less clear-cut:

“Þat skal sem **yðr** líkar,” segir Katla, ok bað matselju bera ljós fyrir þeim ok lúka upp búri; – “þat eitt **er** hús læst á bœnum.” (ÍF IV, 51)

[“It shall be as **you** please,” says Katla, and asked the cook to carry a light for them and unlock the storeroom; – “that **is** the only locked room on the farm.”]

In the final clause here, the only marker of direct speech is the present-tense verb *er* [is]. Preterite *var* would make the sentence a parenthetical observation, and unambiguously a sentence of narration (“*Þat eitt var hús læst á bœnum” [That was the only locked room on the farm]). In fact, given the tense-switching discussed above, it would seem to be possible to view the sentence with *er* as a sentence of narration too, rather than one of direct speech. The manuscript evidence suggests that scribes considered this possibility and opted against ambiguity. G, the only medieval manuscript extant for this part of the saga, has the inquit verb *kvað* [said] before *þat eitt* [. . .], while the paper manuscript 447 has the proximal deictic *hér* [here].¹¹

The other kind of reported speech is indirect speech. Formal criteria differentiate it from direct speech. A sentence of indirect speech is introduced by subordinating conjunctions such as “that” or “if” (Old Norse *at*, *ef*); its verbs obey sequence of tense rules (they are shifted into the past compared to a corresponding sentence of direct speech); words with a deictic function, indicating time and place of utterance, are also shifted, such that NOW becomes THEN and HERE, THERE; and the grammatical person of pronouns with the same referent match in the subordinate clause and the matrix (or main) clause. In short, while direct speech consists of two syntactically independent expressions (whose style, for example, can differ, and whose pronoun references are distinct), indirect speech consists of only one. Here

¹¹ Quotations from manuscripts are presented in normalized form for ease of reading.

Vermundr is assuring Þórarinn of his help after Snorri has won a judgment against him:

Vermundr₁ **kvazk** eigi **mundu** skilja við Þórarin₂, hvárt er hann₂ vildi, at hann₁ færi útan með honum₂, eða veita honum₂ vígsgengi **hér** á landi (ÍF IV, 55).¹²

[Vermundr **said himself** not **to have wanted** to part from Þórarinn, whether he wanted him to travel abroad with him or offer him support in fights **here** in the country.]

The equivalent sentence of direct speech would look something like:

*Vermundr₁ kvað, “Ek₁ **mun** eigi við þik₂ skilja, hvárt er þú₂ vilt [. . .]”

The matrix verb *kvazk*, the reflexive form of *kveða* [to say], regularly introduces a subordinate clause in Old Norse without use of the conjunction *at*. The preterite infinitive *mundu* matches preterite *kvazk*, where direct speech would use present-tense *mun*. In the embedded clause of indirect speech, *hann* and *honum* match the third-person reference to “Vermundr” in the matrix clause, while in direct speech “Vermundr” and *ek* do not match. So far the analysis holds. The most striking divergence is the appearance of *hér* [here] in the embedded clause of indirect speech, rather than *þar* [there] as shifted deixis would prescribe; the medieval manuscripts all agree on *hér* at this point. As already noted with regard to tense slippage, and as will be seen again below with now deixis, the rules governing these features appear to be somewhat less strict in saga narrative. The use of *hér* betrays an Iceland-centric perspective shared by all the medieval scribes.

The second of Banfield’s categories, after the sentence of discourse (itself divided into direct and indirect speech), is the sentence of narration. It occupies the opposite pole in her typology. The sentence of narration may contain a first-person speaker (singular, as in Dickens’ *David Copperfield* or plural, as in Ferris’ *Then We Came to the End*), or it may not, as is usually the case in saga narrative. However, in contrast to the sentence of discourse, it constitutively lacks an addressee or hearer.¹³ It therefore is not an act of communication between a speaker and listener, as discourse, with its *I-you* pair, is. This generalization holds true for *Íslendingasögur* narrative, where address to an audience using the second person does not seem to occur. The tense of narration is also marked. In French, a special past

¹² The subscript numerals refer to the two persons involved: 1 is Vermundr, 2 is Þórarinn.

¹³ Banfield observes that there are a small number of exceptions to this rule. First-person narratives structured as addresses to a second person, as in some stories by Mark Twain, are literary imitations of oral storytelling where the illusion of the speaking voice is maintained by means such as imitating pronunciation, addressing the hearer, and relating the events in the story to the time of the narration. See Banfield, *Unspeaking Sentences*, 171–178.

tense, the *passé simple* or aorist, is used for narration (and only narration), while in English and German the simple past / *Präteritum* is usual, although its restriction to written narrative is less absolute. Of the *passé simple*, Barthes observes that it “always signifies the presence of Art [. . .] Its function is no longer that of a tense [. . .] It is the unreal time of cosmogonies, myths, History and Novels”.¹⁴ There are signs that this is true of saga narrative as well. Sentences of saga narration, as already mentioned, mix present and preterite tense verb forms. The perfect tense (*hafa* + past participle), on the other hand, is used preferentially in sentences of direct or indirect discourse, and appears in sentences of narration only in very restricted circumstances. Heusler observes that the perfect “steht außerhalb der fortlaufenden Sagahandlung” [stands outside the progression of saga narrative].¹⁵ In *Eyrbyggja saga*, perfect tense is generally used in sentences of narration to make assertions about past states of affairs from the perspective of the time of writing, as for instance when the inadequate prosecution after Arnkell’s killing leads to changes in the law “ok **hefir** þat **haldizk** jafnan síðan” (ÍF IV, 104) [and that has been valid ever since], or in the recitation of descendants that ends the saga which says that Víðkunnr in Bjarkey “einn **hefir** gofgastr **verit** lendra manna í Nóregi” (ÍF IV, 181) [has been one of the most noble landed men in Norway].

In discourse, by contrast, the preterite is less frequent than the perfect or, in the case of reported speech as in the second example below, the past perfect that is mandated by sequence of tense:

Ok er þeir kómu skammt frá garðinum, nam Arnkell staðar ok mælti: “Hvært mun Katla eigi **hafa** heðni **veift** um höfuð oss? Ok **hefir** þar **verit** Oddr, sonr hennar, er oss sýndisk rokk-rinn.” (ÍF IV, 51–52)

[And when they came a little way from the farm, Arnkell stopped and said: “Is it possible Katla may **have pulled** the wool over our eyes, and Oddr, her son, **has been** there, where to us it seemed a distaff?”]

Geirriðr húsfreyja í Mávahlíð **sendi** þau orð inn á Bólstað, at hon **var** þess vís **orðin**, at Oddr Kotluson **hafi** **hoggvit** höndina af Auði. (ÍF IV, 50)

[Geirriðr, the woman of the house at Mávahlíð, **sent** these words in to Bólstaðr, that she **had become** aware that Oddr Kotluson **has chopped** the hand off Auðr.]

In the first example above, the contrast between preterite *kómu* (came) in the sentence of narration and the perfect tenses in the sentence of discourse is somewhat

¹⁴ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 36–37.

¹⁵ Heusler, *Altisländisches Elementarbuch*, 129.

jarring. Sequence of tense might lead us rather to expect “er þeir hófðu komit”, and Quinn’s translation of *Eyrbyggja saga* indeed has “When they had ridden [. . .]” (CSI *Eb*, 153). As noted above, saga narration’s shifts between present and preterite have a rhetorical function rather than referring to time relations. The same may be true of the shift in the quoted sentence between preterite and perfect: it signifies not a contrast between points in a chronological sequence, but rather between spoken discourse and narration.

The third distinguishing linguistic feature of the sentence of narration, according to Banfield, is the absence of that reference to a present moment (HERE and NOW) that is characteristic of the sentence of discourse. Drawing on Emil Benveniste’s study of narration in the French novel, where the *passé simple* that is characteristic of narrative is shown not to occur alongside deictic adverbs, she asserts that “deixis in general is entirely banished from the sentence of pure narration”.¹⁶ Here saga narrative is quite different from the modern fiction she discusses. The deictic adverb *nú* [now] is common in the sentence of narration in the sagas. Is this a sign that the sagas break with the “universal grammar of narrative tense”?¹⁷

How soon is now?

An exception to the rule that the sentence of narration generally lacks a NOW is the epic preterite, defined by Käte Hamburger in her *Logik der Dichtung* [Logic of Literature] as a sentence in which a preterite verb coexists with temporal adverbs which have present or future deixis (“Tomorrow was Christmas”, for example).¹⁸ In such sentences, Hamburger writes, “the preterite loses its grammatical function of designating what is past”.¹⁹ Rather, the preterite is among the signals of “a formally distinct category of linguistic performance which does not conform to

¹⁶ Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences*, 153. ‘Pure narration’ appears only to exist in French, due to the existence of a separate tense confined to the task of narration (the *passé simple*). For German, English — and perhaps Old Norse too — the situation is less clear-cut, as the preterite is not a purely narrative tense. I have suggested above that there appears to be a tendency in *Eyrbyggja saga* for the preterite to concentrate in narrative and the perfect in discourse. A much larger study would be needed to fully test this hypothesis.

¹⁷ Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences*, 154.

¹⁸ Quoted by Hamburger from Alice Berend’s wonderfully-named 1915 novel, *Die Bräutigame der Babette Bomberling*.

¹⁹ Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, 66.

the patterns and function of ordinary discourse”:²⁰ that is, fictional narrative. Banfield says of NOW deixis in sentences of fictional narration that

It is the conscious NOW which robs the past tense (*imparfait* or simple past tense or past progressive) of its sense of irrevocable pastness, for a past NOW has been revived; nevertheless, the conscious NOW is simultaneous with events which are still understood to be past . . . *The past events cannot be brought back to the present; they are forever past. But the consciousness of the one who experienced them can be brought back* [my emphasis].²¹

Admittedly, there is little sign of such a consciousness in sentences like “Björn var **nú** heima um vetrinn” (ÍF IV, 112) [Björn was **now** at home for the winter]. The great majority of NOW deixis in saga prose occurs in sentences of discourse (representations of direct and reported speech), and thus represents the NOW of the moment of communication. The word *nú* [now] occurs 128 times in the *Svart á hvítu* edition of *Eyrbyggja saga*.²² Half of these instances are in direct speech (including two in stanzas). The next largest share, about one-fifth of the total, is in sentences of narration that either refer to the act of narrating itself (“Nú skal segja frá [. . .]”) or to phenomena, often place-names, which still exist. Here *nú* marks a moment that is contemporaneous with the act of writing, for example “þar sem nú heitir Hauksá” (ÍF IV, 97) [there where it’s now called Hauk’s River], or “Þat er nú næst sagt [. . .]” (ÍF IV, 136) [That is now said next [. . .]].²³ Sentences of “epic preterite” narration harbor the next largest group of references to *nú*, a little under one fifth of the total. The remaining instances, around one eighth of the total, occur in either sentences of present historic narration or sentences of reported speech.

An important caveat is that this search was carried out on an edited text of the saga. Although large-scale phenomena – such as the concentration of NOW deixis in direct speech – seem likely to hold true across manuscripts, examination of individual instances reveals much variation in their use of *nú*.²⁴ Whether these differences are systematic awaits further investigation. What can be said at this point is that, although the combination of NOW deixis and present tense verbs

²⁰ Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences*, 142.

²¹ Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences*, 164.

²² Instances were identified using the Saga Corpus database (<https://malheildir.arnastofnun.is>) [last accessed 29 June 2024].

²³ W has *Hauks lækr* in place of *Hauksá*; see *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Scott, 171.

²⁴ For example, in the present-historic sentence “skilja þeir bræðr nú með kærleik” (ÍF IV, 64) [those brothers now part with affection], all the medieval vellums omit *nú* and have a preterite main verb: “skilðusk þeir bræðr með kærleikum”. The same is true of “en nú sésk hann hvergi” (ÍF IV, 78) [but now he is seen nowhere]. Here W and Þ have the past tense verb *sázk* [was seen], while M and G are defective. ÍF’s text in both cases is from 448.

would seem to offer potential for lively, vivid narration, this path has not generally been taken in *Eyrbyggja saga*. Instead, *now* deixis is used alongside avoidance of the preterite as a means of indicating speech and so of clarifying who is speaking in the text. The absence of punctuation marks to signal speaker shifts in medieval manuscripts (unless we consider the *p. k.* of poetic speech as such) was thus no barrier to the management of speaking voices in the text.²⁵

Consider, however, the following instance of preterite narration: “Eptir þat reið Þórólfr heim ok þóttisk **nú** hafa vel sýslat” (ÍF IV, 89) [After that Þórólfr rode home and thought himself **now** to have done well]. Þórólfr, *Eyrbyggja saga*’s nasty old man, has bribed his friend Spá-Gils to kill the freed slave Úlfar, hoping to cheat his own son Arnkell out of Úlfar’s land. The glee that is implied by the deictic *nú* is well captured in Quinn’s translation, which uses “rather” as an equivalent: “After that Thorolf rode home, considering himself to have done rather well” (CSI *Eb*, 171). The sole medieval manuscript witness, W, has “Eptir þat reið Þórólfr heim ok þótti **nú** allvel um slungit” [After that Þórólfr rode home and thought it **now** very well played].²⁶ Our initial impression that this sentence records “the consciousness of the one who experienced [the events]” is only intensified by the existence of this manuscript variant. It is notable that the variation affects not the plain narration of the first half of the sentence, but the expressive phrase after the verb *þykkja(st)* [think, seem]. *now* deixis in both these phrases indeed represents the past consciousness of Þórólfr, the subject of *þóttisk* [thought]. Such sentences approach Banfield’s third category.

Representing thought

Banfield’s main quarry in *Unspeaking sentences* is the third of her categories, usually known as free indirect style (a translation of the French *style indirect libre*). She calls it the sentence of represented speech and thought (RST). In it, the text ventriloquizes the thoughts and feelings of a character. The sentence of represented speech and thought partially overlaps with both the sentence of narration and the sentence of discourse. With the sentence of discourse, it shares a lack of grammatical subordination (RST is not introduced by “that”, as reported speech is) and the presence of expressive elements (RST can include, for example, evaluative adject-

²⁵ Moore notes how speaker shifts are indicated in Chaucer by the use of vocatives, inquirers, deictics and quotatives. See Moore, *Quoting Speech in Early English*, 45.

²⁶ *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Scott, 163.

tives, exclamations, repetitions, and incomplete sentences). Its grammatical form, however, is distinct from discourse: third person, rather than first person pronouns denote the thinking or speaking self, who is the subject of the verbs of thought and speech, and verb tenses match the surrounding sentences of narrative. In discourse, by contrast, the originating instance is a first-person speaker, and NOW is the moment of utterance. RST also shares some features with the sentence of narration. In both, NOW can be in the past (coterminous with the moment of experience, perception, etc. that it instantiates), and there is no second-person addressee. However, RST's expression of subjectivity – via evaluative adjectives, exclamations, repetitions, sentence fragments, and so on – differentiates it also from the sentence of narration.

Free indirect style is brought to a first peak of perfection in English by Jane Austen. *Emma*, first published in 1815, is full of examples. Here the heroine reflects on a friendly encounter with Mr Knightley:

They parted thorough friends, however; she could not be deceived as to the meaning of his countenance, and his unfinished gallantry; – it was all done to assure her that she had fully recovered his good opinion. – He had been sitting with them half an hour, she found. It was a pity that she had not come back earlier!²⁷

Although the final sentence, “It was a pity that she had not come back earlier!” represents Emma’s thoughts in the form of an exclamation, it has no first-person utterer, as the hypothetical equivalent sentence of discourse does (*“It’s a pity that I haven’t come back earlier!”). Consciousness is represented without the mediation of a narrator, and the answer to the question “who speaks?” is “nobody” (instead, the author writes). The constitutive lack of the first person places sentences of represented speech and thought outside of the realm of communication between speakers. They are literally “unspeakable”. Such sentences are the bedrock of Banfield’s claim that in written narrative, where language is liberated from the communicative function, new kinds of expressivity can be cultivated. In RST, “language makes it possible to differentiate expression and communication”.²⁸

Alongside the linguistic arguments for the idea that such sentences are unspeakable – that is, the impossibility of such a sentence in a communicative situation that involves a speaker and a hearer – there are also medial ones.

²⁷ Austen, *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. Chapman, 386.

²⁸ Patron, “Introduction”, 15.

Emma

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was more reserved on the subject of Weymouth and the Dixons than anything. She seemed bent on giving no real insight into Mr Dixon's character, or her own value for his company, or opinion of the suitability of the match. It was all general approbation and smoothness; nothing delineated or distinguished. It did her no service, however. Her caution was thrown away. Emma saw its artifice, and returned to her first surmises. There probably *was* something more to conceal than her own preference; Mr Dixon, perhaps, had been very near changing one friend for the other, or been fixed only to Miss Campbell, for the sake of the future twelve thousand pounds.

The like reserve prevailed on other topics. She and Mr Frank Churchill had been at Weymouth at the same time. It was known that they were a little acquainted, but not a syllable of real information could Emma procure as to what he truly was. "Was he handsome?"—"She believed he was reckoned a very fine young man."—"Was he agreeable?"—"He was generally thought so."—"Did he appear a sensible young man; a young man of information?"—"At a watering-place, or in a common London acquaintance, it was difficult to decide on such points. Manners were all that could be safely judged of, under a much longer knowledge than they had yet had of Mr Churchill. She believed everybody found his manners pleasing." Emma could not forgive her.

 Chapter 三三三.

EMMA could not forgive her; but as neither provocation nor resentment were discerned by Mr Knightley, who had been of the party, and had seen only proper attention and pleasing behaviour on

Figure 5: A page from *Emma* by Jane Austen (pub. J. M. Dent, London, 1906). A chapter break separates two instances of the identical sentence "Emma could not forgive her", an unspeakable element of the text's meaning.

D.A. Miller points out how the chapter break separating the two instances of the identical sentence “Emma could not forgive her” shown in Figure 5 (“her” being the highly irritating Jane Fairfax) marks a change from free indirect style in the first instance, where the text ventriloquizes Emma’s implacable annoyance, to a “fact of the fiction” in the second – a truth that has been established about Emma and can be narrated, just as Mr Knightley’s presence at Hartfield is.²⁹ The medially specific set of conventions that produce a chapter break in whichever edition the reader is using (spacing, numbering, perhaps a change in font or a new page) are also unspeakable elements of the text’s meaning. From a medial as well as from a linguistic perspective, then, the sentence of represented speech and thought is a characteristic of *written narrative*: that is, of language freed from the task of dialogic communication. How early it arose is debated. Free indirect style is usually linked to the rise of the novel in the seventeenth century, though earlier sightings have been made, for example in Biblical Hebrew,³⁰ and it seems likely that this and related narrative techniques for displaying the subjectivity of multiple characters have been repeatedly discovered, in slightly varying forms, at many times and places. Is there anything similar in the sagas of Icelanders?

Álfr þóttisk jafnan [. . .]

In the following example, Vermundr is considering what kind of present he would like from Hákon jarl:

En er Vermundr hugsaði eptir, hverra hluta hann skal af jarli beiðask, þá kom honum í hug, **at** honum myndi mikillar framkvæmdar afla á Íslandi, ef hann hefði slíka eptirgöngumenn sem berserkirnir váru, ok staðfestisk þar í skapi hans, **at** hann myndi leita eptir, ef jarlinn vildi fá honum berserkina til eptirgöngu; en þat bar til, er hann beiddisk þessa, at honum þótti Stýrr bróðir sinn mjök sitja yfir sínum hlut ok hafa ójafnað við sik, sem flesta aðra, þá er hann fekk því við komit; hugði hann, **at** Styr myndi þykkja ódælla við sik at eiga, ef hann hefði slíka fylgðarmenn sem þeir bræðr váru. (ÍF IV, 61–62)

[But when Vermundr considered which things he should ask for from the earl, then it came to his mind **that** he might achieve great success in Iceland, if he had such followers as the berserkers were, and it there became fixed in his thoughts, **that** he would find out whether the earl wanted to give him the berserkers as a following; and it led to his asking this that Stýrr, his brother, seemed to him [*honum þótti*] to keep much of his own share and behave

²⁹ Miller, *Jane Austen*, 63–65.

³⁰ Kawashima, “Biblical Narrative and the Death of the Narrator”.

unjustly towards him, as towards most others when he managed to do it; he considered **that** he would seem difficult to deal with to Styrr, if he had such attendants as those brothers were.]

The subordination by *at* [that] in the clauses after “þá kom honum í hug, “staðfestisk þar í skapi hans” and “hugði hann” mark these as sentences of narration, reports – albeit extended ones – on Vermundr’s thoughts, and not RST. The clause after “honum þótti” is not introduced by *at*, because a nominative + infinitive construction, rather than a subordinating conjunction, is usual after *þykkja* [to think, seem]. As in the example quoted above where Þórólfr’s thoughts are reported, the *þykkja* construction is used here in a manner that approaches represented speech and thought, even though the use of the infinitive means tense is difficult to determine.³¹ This example also lacks the temporal adverb *nú*, which supplied both a chronological reference point and an expressive element in the Þórólfr example. It is not clear whether the parenthetical “sem flesta aðra” [like many others] in this clause is part of Vermundr’s represented thought or not. Here too the scribes of W and G preferred to avoid ambiguity, writing “ok (við) flesta aðra” [and (towards) many others] and so by means of the coordinating conjunction *ok* assigning the thought to Vermundr. The medieval manuscripts W and G concur with 448 in signalling the presence of narration again after the *þótti*-clause, with the introductory phrase “ætla hann, at . . .” [he expects that . . .].³² It would only take the deletion of the matrix verb to convert this into a sentence of RST (*“. . . þá er hann fekk því við komit. Styr myndi þykkja ódælla við sik at eiga, ef hann hefði slíka fylgðarmenn . . .” [Styrr would find it difficult to deal with himself, if he had such attendants . . .]). But this step is not taken in any of the extant manuscripts.

Sentences that involve the verb *þykkja(sk)* are a good place to investigate how the saga represents thought. This verb occurs 118 times in the *Svart á hvítu* text of *Eyrbyggja saga*.³³ Once the forty instances in direct speech are excluded, the vast majority of the remaining sentences fulfil the first two criteria for RST. They are couched in the third person, lack subordination using *at* [that] for the grammatical-syntactical reasons noted above, and their tense matches surround-

³¹ Moore discusses a similar stylism, using *þenkkez* and an adjective, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: “The connotations [of the word *anious* [troublesome]] together with its use in a construction governed by the verb *þenkkez* suggests that the estimation of the voyage’s troublesomeness is Gawain’s”. See Moore, *Quoting Speech in Early English*, 141.

³² W and G have *myni* (present subjunctive) rather than *myndi* in the sentence of reported speech, due to the present-tense matrix verb.

³³ Search for baseform *þykkja* via the *Saga Corpus* database (<https://malheildir.arnastofnun.is>) [last accessed 29 June 2024].

ing sentences. They are thus clearly differentiated from discourse. In novels, expressive markers such as evaluative adjectives, exclamations, repetitions, and incomplete sentences serve to differentiate RST from sentences of narration. The last three features are too rare even in direct speech representation in the sagas to be relevant. Evaluative or intensifying adjectives and idiomatic expressions, however, do indeed frequently occur in sentences with *þykkja*, as in the following examples:

ok þótti honum þat **lítillmannligt** er þau höfðu hafnat fornum sið (ÍF IV, 10)
[and he thought it **low** that they had forsaken the old belief]

af slíku [sama] þótti hon **it mesta gøfugkvendi** [var. **gøfugmenni**] (ÍF IV, 13)
[from such (same) things she was thought **the most generous woman** (var. person)]

Snorri þóttisk **mjök** þurfa skóginn (ÍF IV, 85)
[Snorri thought himself **much** to need the forest]

þeim þótti **eigi í hendi liggja** at eiga við þá (ÍF IV, 163)
[they thought it **not to lie in the hand** to deal with them]

[Þórólfr] þykkisk nú **eigi sinni ár fyrir borð koma** (ÍF IV, 91)
[[Þórólfr] thinks himself now **not to be able to get his oars overboard**].³⁴

The evaluative adjectives (some in the superlative), intensifying adverbs, and idioms (“í hendi liggja”, “ár fyrir borð koma”) in these sentences suggest the expressive resources of speech. Compare a typical run of *Eyrbyggja*’s sentences of narration describing a startling, emotionally-charged event, the death of Þórólfr in a fit of pique:

Þórólfr bægifótr kom heim um kveldit ok mælti við engan mann; hann settisk niðr í öndvegi sitt ok mataðisk eigi um kveldit; sat hann þar eptir, er menn fóru at sofa. En um morguninn, er menn stóðu upp, sat Þórólfr þar enn ok var dauðr. Þá sendi húsfreyja mann til Arnkels ok bað segja honum andlát Þórólfs; reið þá Arnkell upp í Hvamm ok nokkurir heimamenn hans; ok er þeir kómu í Hvamm, varð Arnkell þess viss, at faðir hans var dauðr ok sat í háseti, en fólk allt var óttafullt, því at öllum þótti óþokki á andláti hans. (ÍF IV, 91–92)

[Þórólfr twist-foot came home in the evening and spoke to nobody; he sat himself down in his high seat and didn’t eat that evening; when people went to sleep, he sat there after. And in the morning, when people got up, Þórólfr still sat there and was dead. Then the house-

³⁴ This is the sole example of present-tense *þykkja* in the *Svart á hvítu* edition of the saga outside a sentence of discourse; however, it matches the tense of the immediately preceding verb, which is also in the present: “Ferr Þórólfr heim ok unir stórilla við sinn hlút ok þykkisk [. . .]” [Þórólfr goes home and likes his lot very little and thinks [. . .]] (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Scott, 167). *W* is the only medieval manuscript from this part of the saga; the post-medieval manuscripts have *þóttist*.

wife sent a man to Arnkell and instructed him to be told of Þórólfr's passing; Arnkell then rode up to Hvamm with some of his household; and when they came to Hvamm, Arnkell became aware that his father was dead and sat in the high seat, but all the people were full of fear, because there seemed to them displeasure in his face.]

Although an example like the one above of Snorri's needing the woods *mjök* [much] is only minimally expressive, it is nonetheless emphatic when compared to the blank externality of this reportage. Are the *þykkja*-sentences RST, then? Or are they rather the utterances of a narrator who has insight into the characters' internal worlds, even if he or she, for whatever reason, usually chooses not to pass it on?³⁵ One test for this occurred to me as I was reading the following sentence:

Álfr þóttisk ok kenna kulða af Óspaki ok hans félogum ok kærði þat jafnan fyrir Snorra goða, þá er þeir fundusk. (ÍF IV, 157)

[Álfr thought himself also to feel coldness from Óspakr and his companions and always mentioned it to Snorri goði when they met].

If the adverb *jafnan* [always] is moved forward in the sentence and placed after *þóttisk*, giving "Álfr always thought himself [. . .]", then the sentence reads not as Álfr's represented speech, but rather as that of another consciousness with insight of an absolute kind ("always" is not "often") into his nature – a narrator, perhaps? To my surprise, the medieval manuscripts (at this point, W and ÞJ) turned out to agree on the following wording:

Álfr þóttisk jafnan kenna ójafnaðar af Óspaki ok hans félogum ok kærði þat jafnan [v.l. ÞJ: opt] fyrir Snorri goði þá er þeir fundusk.³⁶

[Álfr always thought himself to feel injustice from Óspakr and his companions and always [ÞJ: 'often'] mentioned it to Snorri goði when they met.]

448 is stemmatically close to M, and their common text has often been suggested to be a revision of the version in W and G. Here, however, 448 diverges from M (if Þórður Jónsson's transcription of variants is to be trusted):

Álfr þóttisk ok kenna kulða af Óspakr ok hans félogum ok kærði þat opt jafnan fyrir Snorri goði þá er þeir fundusk. (448, 79r).

Presumably the alliteration of *kenna kulða* was more attractive to Einar Ól. Sveinsson than the awkward repetitions of the medieval manuscripts (whether

³⁵ There is no reason to restrict the gender of postulated narrators: step-mothers have a saga genre named after them.

³⁶ *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Scott, 267–269.

jafnan – *ójafnaðar* – *jafnan* or the tautologous *opt jafnan*). Perhaps the divergence in the medieval manuscripts is simply a matter of scribal error, with W’s scribe inserting an extra *jafnan* – but which one? Both the *jafnan* after *þóttisk* (in W and M) and the one after *þat* (in W and 448) have support in two of the three manuscript witnesses. Searching the *Íslendingasögur* corpus suggests that *þótti(sk) jafnan* is indeed an uncommon locution. In the online ‘Saga Corpus’ database, it occurs elsewhere only in chapter 11 of *Fóstbræðra saga* (“Þormóði þótti jafnan (var. lǫngum) daufligt er hann var heima með föður sínum” (ÍF VI, 169) [Þormóðr always (some mss. have ‘often’ instead) thought it boring when he was home with his father], and chapter 108 of *Njáls saga* (“Njáli þótti jafnan illt, er Mǫrðr kom þangat, ok fór svá jafnan, at hann amaðisk við” (ÍF XII, 276) [Njáll always thought it bad when Mǫrðr came there, and it always ended with him expressing his annoyance].³⁷ The example in *Fóstbræðra saga* is interesting, as it contains an evaluative adjective, *daufligr* [boring], and there is manuscript variation (*lǫngum* [often]), suggesting scribal unease with the absolute claim made by *jafnan*. A more thorough investigation would require data-mining of the saga editions and automated tools to enable investigation of manuscript variants – both of which may soon be possible. Already the data from *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Fóstbræðra saga*, with its suggestive manuscript variation, suggests that scribes noted the potential of *þykkja*-sentences to evoke a character’s viewpoint in a way not too distant from RST.

Narrating in verse, narrating in prose

A hostile reader may object that the sentences collected above are not markedly more expressive than the saga’s sentences of narration, and that despite all this the saga narrative remains pretty impersonal. Saga writers perhaps felt little need for the expressive resource of RST because they had another way to represent interiority, one unavailable to Austen (apart from Mr Elton’s ill-fated charade). The skaldic stanzas uttered by characters in *Íslendingasögur* prosimetrum also exhibit characteristics of both the sentence of discourse and the sentence of narration. The first

³⁷ Search on the *Saga Corpus* database (<https://malheildir.arnastofnun.is>) [last accessed 29 June 2024]. The *Svart á hvítu* edition used there has *ávallt* instead of *jafnan* in the *Njáls saga* example. Searching on “þótti ávallt” yields one further example, in *Laxdæla saga*: “Frá því er sagt eithvert sinn, at Bolli kom til Helgafells, því at Guðrúnu þótti ávallt gott er hann kom at finna hana” (ÍF V, 228) [Of that is said that one time Bolli came to Helgafell because Guðrún always thought it good that he came to meet her].

half of this claim should be uncontroversial. Such stanzas are introduced with an inquit, almost invariably “þá kvað (N. N.) (vísu þessa)” [then said (N. N.) (this verse)], though occasionally “N. N. orti (vísu þessa)” [N. N. composed (this verse)] appears.³⁸ They contain first-person speakers, vocatives and second-person addressees, and NOW deixis contemporaneous with the moment of utterance. The second claim may seem initially less plausible. Consider, however, the example of the *Máhlíðingavísur* [Stanzas about the People of Mávahlið] of Þórarinn svarti Þórólfsson. Seventeen stanzas from the sequence are quoted in chapters 18–22 of *Eyrbyggja saga*, and all but the first and last are triggered by a question or observation in direct speech from an interlocutor.³⁹ Around half of these questions pertain to the present moment of the conversation, or to upcoming events (for example, are you declaring Þorbjörn’s death? What news do you have? Will you ask Arnkell for help?). The rest pertain to past events: for example, before *Eb* 8, Guðný asks “Hefir þú nokkut varit þik nú frýjuorðinu þeira út þar?” (ÍF IV, 42) [Have you somewhat cleared yourself of their reproaches out there?]. Past reference in the perfect tense, as in this instance, is conventional in speech. Unusually, the series of questions that trigger *Eb* 10–14 are in the preterite:

Eb 10: “Hvart vissu þeir nú, hvart þú vart karlmaðr eða kona?” (ÍF IV, 43)
[“Whether they knew it now, if you were a man or a woman?”]

Eb 11: “Hví fórtu þá eptir þeim? Þótti þér eigi ærit at orðit it fyrra sinn?” (ÍF IV, 44)
[“Why went you then after them? Thought you not enough done already?”]

Eb 12: “Várkunn var þát [. . .] at þú stæðisk þat eigi [. . .] En hversu gáfusk þér þeir inir útlenzku menn?” (ÍF IV, 45)
[“That was excusable, that you tolerated that not [. . .] But how behaved those foreign men for you?”]

Eb 13: “Bar Nagli sik eigi allvel?” (ÍF IV, 46)
[“Bore Nagli himself not all that well?”]

Couched in the preterite, these questions invite Þórarinn to narrate. He recounts in the four stanzas in question how he cleared his name of shameful accusations by killing an unnamed warrior (*Eb* 10); then he returns to his enemies’ previous

³⁸ The examples can be inspected in the online ÍSP database (<https://gefín.ku.dk/q.php?p=isp>) [last accessed 29 June 2024]. A different formula, with present-tense inquit verbs and proximal deixis, *svá segir* (‘so says’), is used when introducing stanzas that do not appear in discursive situations. Just like Hauksá, stanzas introduced in this way are contemporary with the moment of writing. Occasionally, manuscripts vary between using *svá segir* and *orti þessa* in the case of certain stanzas; *þá kvað*, on the other hand, varies little.

³⁹ For a discussion of this mode of staging, see Judy Quinn’s essay in this volume.

accusation that he was the one to maim his own wife Auðr, and predicts further hostilities (*Eb* 11); he reports on the contrasting behavior of Nagli, who fled, and Álfgeirr, who fought (*Eb* 12); and finally, he describes Nagli's cowardly desire to jump into the sea rather than fight (*Eb* 13).

The stanzas on Nagli offer a good opportunity to compare the strategies used in verse and prose narration in detail. The two medieval manuscripts that contain this part of the narrative, M and G, show an unusual amount of divergence in their prose at this point, giving a view of three different strategies, two in prose, one in verse, for recounting the same events. The stanzas read as follows in the new skaldic corpus edition:

Nágöglum fekk Nagli
nest dáliga flestum;
kafsunnu réð kennir
klökkr á fjall at stökkva.
Heldr gekk hjalmi faldinn
(hjaldrs) at vápna galdri
(þurði eldr um aldir)
Álfgeirr af hvöt meiri.

Nagli fekk flestum nágöglum nest dáliga; klökkr kennir kafsunnu réð at stökkva á fjall. Álfgeirr, faldinn hjalmi, gekk heldr at galdri vápna af meiri hvöt; eldr hjaldrs þurði um aldir.

[Nagli gave most carrion-goslings [RAVENS/EAGLES] provisions wretchedly; the faint-hearted master of the ocean-sun [GOLD > MAN = Nagli] decided to flee to the mountain. Álfgeirr, however, hooded in a helmet, went to the incantation of weapons [BATTLE] with greater alacrity; the fire of battle [SWORD] swept amongst men.] (*Eb* 12, SkP V, 431)

Grátandi réð gætir
geira stígs frá vígi
(þar vasat) grímu geymi
(góð vön friðar hönnum),
svát merskyndir myndi
menskiljandi vilja
– hugði bjóðr á bleyði
bífstaups – á sæ hlaupa.

Gætir stígs geira réð grátandi geymi grímu frá vígi – þar vasat hönnum góð vön friðar –, svát merskyndir, menskiljandi, myndi vilja hlaupa á sæ; bjóðr bífstaups hugði á bleyði.

[The keeper of the path of spears [SHIELD > WARRIOR] dispatched the crying guardian of the helmet [WARRIOR = Nagli] from the fight – there was not much hope of peace there for him –, so that the mare-driver [SERVANT = Nagli], the necklace-sunderer [GENEROUS MAN = Nagli], might have wanted to leap into the sea; the bearer of the trembling cup [SERVANT = Nagli] thought of cowardice.] (*Eb* 13, SkP V, 433)

The narrative in these stanzas describes neither a sequence of events, nor their outcome (though earlier stanzas in the sequence report, for example, the death of Þorbjörn). The tenth stanza of the *Máhlíðingavísur* (*Eb* 12) is structured instead by a comparison. The eleventh stanza (*Eb* 13), while it is organized as cause and effect (note the prominence of *svát* ('so that') at the beginning of the second *helmingr*), tracks Nagli's changing emotional disposition, from tears and despair in the first *helmingr* to thoughts of flight and suicide in the second. Syntactic sequencing is broken by the interweaving of intercalaries, producing interrupted sentences which give the impression of a thought being arrested and later taken up again, for example in ll. 7–8 of *Eb* 13. The speaker, who elsewhere in the sequence describes the movement of his own thought, is here almost entirely concerned with passing judgment on his characters'; of the eight sentences of narrative here, only one ("eldr hjaldrs þurði um aldir") does not do this.

Although *Eb* 12 and 13 are almost entirely in the preterite, in the *Máhlíðingavísur* as a whole there are frequent shifts back and forth between the preterite tense of narration and present- and future-tense sentences that describe the speaker's reactions, hopes and fears.⁴⁰ The audience is addressed in the present tense, and modal auxiliaries and subjunctive forms are used to indicate dispositions and speculate on possible outcomes. The tense usage in the stanzas therefore falls between that of the sentences of discourse and those of narration in the saga prose. Its variousness brings it closer to the pole of discourse, but like narration, it has a distinct preference for the preterite. Needless to say, the use of kennings and other figurative language in the stanzas, as well as their sonic presence when read out loud, also sets them decisively apart from both discourse and narration in prose. This contributes to their distinctive expressive quality, which stands out from the prose narration much more clearly than the sentences with *þykkja* did.

The saga prose describes Nagli's behavior in some detail. In ch. 18, it recounts how he fled the fight and encountered some of Þórarinn's slaves who, when they saw Þórarinn and his companions chasing after Nagli, became terrorstricken and jumped off the headland Þrælaskriða to their death. The edition of the saga in Íslenzk fornrit, as is its usual practice, reproduces the highly circumstantial telling in the shared manuscript tradition of M and 448 without signalling that G is different. G's wording is more concise, as is often the case, and it does not include the following passage at all:

⁴⁰ Present historic narration, as described in Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace* 24–56, is absent from these verses.

[. . .] at hann [Nagli] hlýpi eigi á sjó eða fyrir björg; ok er þeir Nagli sjá, at mennirnir riðu æsiliga, hugðu þeir, at Þorbjörn myndi þar fara; tóku þeir nú rás af nýju allir inn til hofðans ok runnu þar til, er þeir koma þar, sem nú heitir Þrælaskriða; þar fengu þeir Þórarinn tekit Nagla, því at hann var nálíga sprunginn af mæði [. . .] (ÍF IV, 38)

[. . .] that he [Nagli] would not leap into the sea or over the cliffs; and when Nagli and the others see that the men rode furiously, they thought that Þorbjörn must be coming; they then all took off again towards the headland and ran until they came to that place which is now called Þrælaskriða; there Þórarinn and the others managed to catch Nagli, because he had nearly collapsed from exhaustion [. . .]

The episode ends in all versions with a description of the slaves' death as they jump off the headland, with only minor differences in wording. The differences between the two prose versions are striking. Most obviously, the highly coloured language used in the passage above, which is only in M/448, makes the account more emotive and dramatic – Nagli might “leap into the sea or over the cliffs”, the men ride “furiously”, Nagli has “nearly collapsed from exhaustion”. It also explains the characters' motivations, spelling out, in contrast to G, why the sight of Þórarinn's party riding towards them makes the slaves head for the hills. The longer version in M/448 includes Nagli in the collective panic, and has him only saved from death by the timely arrival of Þórarinn, while G does not specify that Nagli is caught (*tekit*), reporting only that the slaves jump over the cliff; nor does it transmit the placename Þrælaskriða.⁴¹ The sagas' usual resource of tense switching is not used to point the events here, which are all narrated in the past tense, with one instance of present deixis (*nú*) as the party makes for the headland. Instead, M/448 draw on the stanzas' vivid depiction of indecision, fear and flight – the echo of the stanzas' “á fjall” and “á sæ” is clear in their “á sjó eða fyrir björg”. The “represented thought” of the Nagli stanzas offered a resource for the writers of the prose in M/448 to make their narration more lively. Perhaps it also encouraged them to go beyond representing the words Nagli says to the slaves (“hann segir þeim fundinn ok liðsmun, hvern var; kallaðisk hann víst vita, at Þórarinn ok hans menn váru láttnir” (ÍF IV, 38) [he tells them about the encounter and the difference in forces that there was, said he knows for certain that Þórarinn and his men were dead]), as in G, and represent their perceptions and thoughts too (“hugðu þeir, at Þorbjörn myndi þar fara” (ÍF IV, 38) [they thought that Þorbjörn must ride there]).

⁴¹ O'Donoghue suggests that the subjunctive mood of the statement in *Eb* 13, that Nagli “myndi vilja hlaupa á sæ” [might have wanted to leap into the sea], “is the root of what ends up as a weakness in the narrative” (O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 104). Nagli's rescue is indeed a blind motif, as he does not appear again in the saga.

Like Nagli, *Eyrbyggja saga*'s prose hesitates on the brink of free indirect style but never quite makes the leap. This may be because the stanzas offered saga writers a resource of a similar kind. They are representations of thoughts and feelings which share the expressivity of direct speech, but are formally distinct from it, not just in their failure to adhere to the Gricean cooperative principle (Sullivan 2008) or to tell their hearers things they don't already know, but also, as explored above, in their propensity to narrate.⁴² Like Austen's free indirect style, prosimetric style enables audiences to inhabit characters' viewpoints in a way that escapes the conventions that govern talk, but nonetheless grants them privileged access to characters' thoughts and feelings.

Abject voices

The longest series of stanzas on a single topic transmitted in the *Íslendingasögur*, the *Máhlíðingavísur* sequence is unusual in other ways too. One is its focus, announced by its title, on a group of ordinary people (not saints, champions or members of the retinue) – a circumstance which brings it closer to the conventions of the *Íslendingasögur* than those of skaldic poetry. Furthermore, it deals mainly with figures who stand outside the skaldic norm of male martial protagonism. Women whom the saga prose identified with Þórarinn's wife, mother and sister have speaking roles, and the wife and mother of his accuser appear off-stage. These women are not limited to the skaldic clichés of whetting and marveling at male violence, but also express independent jubilation at the destruction of their enemies. Those of the older generation, Þórarinn's mother Geirríðr and his assailant Oddr's mother Katla, are furthermore said to be skilled in magic. Þórarinn's party includes several people who the prose tells us are non-Icelanders, the Hebridean skipper Alfgeirr and the Scottish slave Nagli. All these figures are marginal in some way, and their unconventionality is reflected in – or represents an interpretation of – the *Máhlíðingavísur*'s inventive expressions for belligerent women, cowardly slaves, and Þórarinn's own persona as a man who resorts to violence only in extremis.

These characteristics are emphasized or given further twists in a number of variant readings in the manuscripts. *Eb* 3 is preserved in the largest number of manuscripts, as an "emblem" for the whole sequence. This means that it has the most variation – including plenty of minor lexical variation involving things like

⁴² See Fidjestøl, "The Kenning System", 41. On the Gricean cooperative principle, see Sullivan, "Genre-Dependent Metonymy in Norse Skaldic Poetry".

verb tenses and prepositional phrases. It also includes, more unusually, the replacement of entire or large parts of lines. This already happens in one of the medieval mss, G. But it appears to be commoner in later manuscripts: AM 129 fol (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, ca 1600–1700), has two examples in *Eb* 3. It is notable that all three whole-line replacements preserve “a”, if not “the” sense of the verse: that is, they work semantically.⁴³ AM 129’s “neitt segi ek húsfreyju” [I say nothing to the housewife] slots into the syntax of the first half-stanza. The idea seems to be that rather than defending himself against her slander with words, Þórarinn does so with warlike deeds. This manuscript’s second new line stresses a similar point, replacing the edited text’s claim to praise war only seldom (*sjaldan*) with a claim to do so “fyrir barð skjaldar” [by the edge of the shield].⁴⁴ G offers in place of l. 7 in the edited text “mælik ljóð fyr fljóði” [I speak a poem before the woman]. This woman (*fljóð*) must be construed with the two genitives that begin the next line, *hjaldrs goðs*, giving “woman of the god of battle”. What might that mean?

In *Eb* 11 the speaker describes his own forebodings of battle. This stanza includes an apostrophe to a person denoted by a warrior-kenning involving an Óðinn-name, “diminisher of Hroptir’s <Óðinn’s> fire” [SWORD > WARRIOR]. Another Odinic expression probably lurks in this half-stanza too. All previous editors emend *Yggs teiti*, the majority reading, to a form unattested in any manuscript, *ylgteiti*, where the first element is the feminine noun *ylgr* [she-wolf]. This gives a standard kenning for either battle or warrior based on the idea of the wolf’s joy in carrion. If we are instead willing to countenance the somewhat unconventional kenning *Yggs teiti* [gladness of Yggr <Óðinn> [BATTLE]], this half-stanza can be interpreted as expressing trepidation in the face of an upcoming battle which will gladden only Óðinn and his adherents. In this context, the “woman of the god of battle” in the G version of *Eb* 3 takes her place alongside the “true knowers of the sun of Gautr’s <Óðinn’s> thatch” [SHIELD > SWORD > WARRIORS] who, the final stanza predicts, will succeed in outlawing Þórarinn. These are the poet’s enemies, conceived of in Odinic terms.

43 The metrical issues raised by these substitutions will not be canvassed here. By the time AM 129 fol was written, the “skaldic tooth” of scribes and audiences may have been blunted.

44 The phrase *barð skjaldar* [edge of the shield] reads oddly in the skaldic context, where *barð* is always part of a ship, but the same phrase is found in one of the mid seventeenth-century continuations of *Pontus rímur* — *Pontus skýfði skjaldar barð / skjótt af ríkum herra* [Pontus shoved the edge of the shield / fast from the mighty lord] (14th *ríma*, st. 68); see *Pontus rímur*, ed. Grímur M. Helgason, 165 — suggesting a context for this scribal intervention in contemporary poetic practice.

Conclusion: voice, narrator, distributed author

The saga, as a literary form, establishes itself outside the parameters of Old Norse poetics, and that must have been [. . .] a most significant placement, one that almost certainly ensured that its reach was inclusive rather than exclusive in social terms.⁴⁵

Any passage of direct speech in a narrative makes strong mimetic claims, as an imitation *of* words *in* words. The sparse metatextual commentaries that have come down to us from medieval Iceland go one step further, claiming that skaldic stanzas as transmitted reproduce an exact sequence of syllables spoken aloud in a long-vanished moment of performance. The Prologue to *Heimskringla* says “kvæðin þykkja mér sízt ór stað færð, ef þau eru rétt kveðin ok skynsamliga upp tekin” (ÍF XXVI, 7) [the poems seem to me least moved out of place (i.e. corrupted?) if they are correctly composed and rationally interpreted]. The existence of large numbers of stanzas with archaic linguistic and metrical traits in the medieval manuscript record is strong evidence that some stanzas at least were transmitted faithfully by rhapsodic performers over long periods of time. The nature of the material nevertheless sets limits on its study, as Bjarne Fidjestøl observes in *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*:

the source material of this study is not court poetry in its most original form, for that is not accessible, but court poetry as it was available to the historians of the thirteenth century and can be reconstructed on the basis of their work. The point is likely self-evident, but it may still be reasonable to make clear what this study can pretend to.⁴⁶

The present chapter explores a different path from reconstruction, instead sifting the manuscript texts of the *Máhlíðingavísur* for evidence of creative work by readers of the thirteenth century and later – writers and audiences – with and on the poetic texts.

Recognition of the *Máhlíðingavísur*'s high degree of manuscript variation brings with it a shift of perspective, from “voice of the past” to “unspeakable stanza”. Just as Austen's play on the shift between a sentence of narration and one of represented thought is medium-specific, the passage between them marked by a chapter division, so is the variation I have explored a *writerly* play with the skaldic text, rooted in the discretion saga writers appear to have had to alter the wording

⁴⁵ Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga*, 16.

⁴⁶ See Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, 47: “[. . .] emnet for dette arbeidet ikkje er fyrstediktinga i si aller opphavlegaste form, for den er utilgjengeleg, men fyrstediktinga slik ho låg føre for historikarane på 1200-talet og kan rekonstruerast på grunnlag av deira verk. Dette seier seg vel kanskje sjølv, men likevel kan det vere grunn til å gjere klårt kva pretensjonar arbeidet har”.

of the stanzas. In another instance of a freedom licensed by the written medium, a subset of the medieval manuscripts of *Njáls saga* augment the first part of the saga with additional verses, often in place of corresponding prose passages in other versions of the saga.⁴⁷ The additional stanzas in *Njáls saga* make skalds out of characters such as Unnr, Gunnarr and Skarpheðinn; their most recent editor suggests they were composed only a few decades after the saga was first written down, possibly by a single poet.⁴⁸ In writing the link between utterance and utterer is broken, allowing for the rise of fictional stanzas, and the voice we hear is a ventriloquist's.⁴⁹

To return to the question with which I began: where do the sentences of saga narrative come from? Like Austen's narrator, whose godlike impersonality Miller attributes to Austen's reluctance to inhabit the abject position of an unmarried woman artist, saga narrators absent themselves, as far as possible, from the stories they tell.⁵⁰ Saga-writing is not depicted in the *Íslendingasögur*, nor in texts like *Sturlunga saga* that describe a literate society, and saga narration is not endowed with a speaking voice. Compared to medieval first person narrators, the narrating instances of the *Íslendingasögur* are elusive, never addressing the audience.⁵¹ Perhaps the social dynamics identified by Clunies Ross in the quotation above, and exemplified in *Eyrbyggja's* framing of the *Máhlíðingavísur*, have something to do with this reticence. Is it the author who speaks, then? Recent research on postwar Anglo-American "Big Fiction" points out that despite readers' love affair with the "creative, expressive" author, published fiction is the product of a "conglomerate superorganism" comprising, alongside the person we refer to as the author, "agents, scouts, editors, marketers, managers of subsidiary rights, wholesalers, distributors and retailers", across whom "authorship is distributed".⁵² In contemporary print culture, then, despite the existence of mass-produced, identical books, fixating on "the author" elides an irreducible plurality. The foregoing analysis has, I hope, shown that the idea of a singular identifiable author who takes responsibility for every word of the text is also far from the reality of the sagas, and that small-scale manuscript variation can be artistically

47 On these stanzas, see Guðrún Nordal, "Tilbrigði um Njálu".

48 In the other manuscripts of the saga, Gunnar and Skarpheðinn have one stanza each, and Unnr has none. For discussion of dating and manuscripts, see Fulk, introduction to *Nj*, 1206–1213.

49 On ventriloquism and voices from nowhere in the sagas of Icelanders, see Heslop, "Hearing Voices".

50 For a recent discussion of the anonymity of the *Íslendingasögur*, see Jørgensen, "Saga og forfatterskap".

51 For recent discussions of first person narration in medieval Scandinavian, German and English literature, see Glauser, ". . . Who Is the Author of This Book?"; Glauch, "Ich-Erzähler ohne Stimme"; Spearing, *Medieval Autographies*.

52 Quotations from Rosen, "Life inside the Fiction Factory"; cf. Sinykin, *Big Fiction*.

consequential. This will remain the case even if stylometry does succeed in satisfactorily identifying Sturla Þórðarson, the current front-runner, as “the author” of *Eyrbyggja saga*.⁵³

But replacing the traditional author-figure with a narrator-figure – attributing to the narrator, rather than to the author, decisions such as choosing whether to give the names of skalds, represent certain passages as direct or indirect speech, and so on – falls into a different trap. It transforms artistic choices into the decisions of an imagined narrator, about whom our speculations are unbounded, and therefore empty and uninteresting.⁵⁴ As Banfield demonstrates, a more satisfying theory takes its starting point from the mediality of *written* narrative. This *poetic*, rather than *communicative* model of narrative regards a narrative as a constructed world, not a story recounted to an audience as if in a performance of oral storytelling. The traditional author does not need to be reanimated in order to draw this distinction. Rather, ‘optional-narrator’ theories like Banfield’s represent a step forward precisely because they do not license the tacit replacement of the traditional author with a largely equivalent figure who is simply renamed ‘the narrator’. The manuscript variation charted above indicates the insufficiency of a traditional conception of authorship to the *Íslendingasögur*. Ideas of distributed authorship may turn out to be a better fit to what we find in the primary sources.⁵⁵ I hope to have shown at this point that detailed linguistic reckoning with the style of an *Íslendinga-saga* can throw light on its narrative experiments, and that such a reckoning is only possible on the basis of the manuscripts.

53 For recent stylometric work on *Eyrbyggja saga*, see Elín Bára Magnúsdóttir, *Eyrbyggja saga*; and Sigurður Ingibergur Björnsson, Steingrímur Páll Kárasón, and Jón Karl Helgason, “Stylometry and the Faded Fingerprints of Saga Authors”.

54 Culler, “Some Problems Concerning Narrators of Novels and Speakers of Poems”.

55 Ranković, “Who Is Speaking in Traditional Texts?”

Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir

Sensibilities in Saga Prosimetrum

In *Kormáks saga*, Kormákr expresses in verse his ardent desire for Steingerðr after having caught a glimpse of her eyes and ankles for the first time. The sensuous imagery in the stanza conveys the intense effect that the woman's appearance has on the poet, filling him simultaneously with timeless yearning and melancholy:

Brunnu beggja kinna
björt ljós á mik drósar
– oss hlægir þat eigi –
eldhúss of við felldan.
Enn til þokkla svanna
ítrvaxins gatk líta
– þrjú muna oss of ævi
eldask – hjá þreskeldi.

[The bright lights of both cheeks [EYES] of the woman burned on me above the joined wood of the living room; that does not make us [me] laugh. And I managed to catch a glimpse of the ankles of the beautifully shaped woman near the threshold; my longing will never grow old.] (*Korm* 2, SkP V, 1033)

The poet expresses deep, unfulfilled longing and admiration. Interestingly, the woman's eyes burn into him, as if permanently imprinting their gaze, further highlighting the enduring and perhaps painful nature of his yearning for her. As in many other scenes in the *Íslendingasögur*, we would know much less about Kormákr's feelings here if it were not for his stanzas. The surrounding prose is silent about Kormákr's emotions in this scene, while the poetry vividly expresses how he feels. As has often been observed, the narrative voice in the prose of the *Íslendingasögur* is generally externally focalised and emotional expression is mainly implicit. The observer's viewpoint in the prose, often akin to that of a film lens, means feelings most often need to be inferred from gestures, behaviour, metaphors, somatic markers (people swelling, bursting, or changing facial colour), formulaic locutions and various other allusions.¹

1 This is not to imply that the narrators of the *Íslendingasögur* are never all-knowing; however, on the few occasions when they do exhibit omniscience, their emotive depictions usually remain terse and devoid of further analysis or commentary. This is examined in more detail in Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, "The Language of Feeling in *Njáls saga* and *Egils saga*". On emotive formulas, see Sävborg, *Sagan om kärleken*, 45–67. On bodily markers of emotions, see e.g. Wolf, "Body Lan-

Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, University of Iceland

Out of the roughly forty *Íslendingasögur*, the majority, twenty-six sagas, contain poetry, totalling over seven hundred stanzas across the corpus. Prosimetrum, the alternation between prose and verse, can thus be regarded as an intrinsic feature of the genre. Several studies have concluded that the poetry in the sagas conveys feelings, such as love and grief, more openly and in a more detailed way, and its speakers analyse and describe their own emotions and interiority to a higher degree than in the prose.² However, the stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* are not evenly distributed among the sagas; some are rich in poetry, while others contain only a few verses.³ As a result, the prosimetric features of the sagas vary significantly, making each saga's style unique in this regard. Such diversity makes generalising about the genre challenging. Nevertheless, efforts have been made to describe the general function of verse in the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur*.⁴ Most recently, in her *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders* (2022), Margaret Clunies Ross explores the whole corpus of poetry in the sagas and draws attention to the fact that “compilers and redactors of sagas of Icelanders by and large avoided poetry of a formal or semi-official kind”, the reason probably being their preference for “poetry in a largely interior mode, one that revealed the inner lives of their characters, over formal poetry about battles and heroes following the models available from poetry of the Norwegian court”.⁵ Clunies Ross's observation echoes the conclusions of former studies that the sagas' poetry portrays emotions more explicitly and with greater detail compared to the prose. Although in many ways the sagas resist categorisations, the narrative voice in the prose generally represents an external third-person perspective. In contrast, the poetry shifts to the personal viewpoints and thoughts of individual characters. This is evident as the

guage in Medieval Iceland”, and Wolf, “Somatic Semiotics”. The most detailed studies on the emotional depiction in the prose of the *Íslendingasögur* are Sävborg, *Sagan om kärleken*; and Sif Ríkhardsdóttir, *Emotions in Old Norse Literature*, 57–144. A pioneer in this regard is Miller, “Emotions and the Sagas”. For a thorough discussion of saga style, see Sävborg, “Style”.

2 Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, 98, 151–156; Sävborg, *Sagan om kärleken*, 275–276; Sif Ríkhardsdóttir, *Emotions in Old Norse Literature*, 85–97; Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age*, 128–129; O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 6. On sagas in the subgenre of *skáldasögur* (sagas of poets), in particular, the essays in *Skaldsagas*, ed. Poole, serve as a prime example. See also O'Donoghue, *The Genesis of a Saga Narrative*; Finlay, “Love in the Eyes of Poets”.

3 See an overview in table form in Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, Gropper, Quinn, Wills, and Wilson, “Investigating the *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum”, 63.

4 Examples of such studies are Magerøy, “Skaldestrofer som retardasjonsmiddel i Íslendingesogene”; Guðrún Nordal, “The Art of Poetry and the Sagas of Icelanders”; Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir, “Um hlutverk vísna í Íslendingasögum”; Bjarni Einarsson, “On the Rôle of Verse in Saga-Literature”; Whaley, “Skalds and Situational Verses in *Heimskringla*”.

5 Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, 152.

speaker is grammatically explicit in 607 out of 722 stanzas of saga poetry, speaking in the first person in 97% of these stanzas, although this first-person perspective is usually mixed with third-person observations within the same stanza.⁶ When a verse is spoken, it thus marks more than just a shift from prose to a stylised poetic form. Heather O'Donoghue highlights the literary impact of this shift, remarking that it creates “a dramatic distinction between the poet’s inner world [. . .] and the world around him”.⁷

In this essay, I expand upon these studies, querying the observation that one of the functions of saga poetry is to reveal the interiority or inner thoughts and feelings of the poets. I first demonstrate that saga poets typically use emotion words to describe others rather than directly expressing their own personal feelings. This suggests that the poets’ interiority is often not explicitly revealed but is more commonly implied through their poetic observations about a third party. This creates a distance, offering a glimpse into the speakers’ sentiments instead of an unguarded revelation of their own interiority. I further examine how emotive expressions in saga poetry function not only as reflections of the poet’s interiority but more often as performative emotional displays. My analysis highlights that the common dichotomy between “inner” and “outer” expressions in saga prosimetrum is more complex than it appears. I demonstrate how verse-based emotional expression in the sagas is different in communal contexts compared to private settings. Certain types of emotions are more often openly performed in public and can be seen as strategic performances with specific social and political objectives, while other types of feelings are more typically expressed in private. Lastly, by applying the conceptual frameworks of emotional practice and performativity, my analysis delves into the social and performative aspects of emotions within saga prosimetrum, through the examination of representative case studies.

The database of the research project “The *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum” (ÍSP) serves as a tool for the analysis in this essay. The database contains a comprehensive collection of quantitative data on the features and prosimetric context of all 722 stanzas in the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur*.⁸

⁶ These results were generated through the ÍSP database at gefin.ku.dk in August 2023, through a crosstab search using the category SPEAKER GRAMMATICALLY EXPLICIT and its subcategories. In 591 out of 607 stanzas where the speaker is grammatically explicit, the speaker uses first-person language (singular or plural).

⁷ O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 140.

⁸ On the design of the database, see Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, Gropper, Quinn, Wills, and Wilson, “Investigating the *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum”. The ÍSP database is accessible online (<https://gefin.ku.dk/q.php?p=isp>) [last accessed 30 August 2023].

Use of emotion words

In the *Íslendingasögur*, over three hundred stanzas feature one or more emotion words, as registered in the ÍSP database.⁹ Among these are the most renowned emotive expressions in the corpus, with which many readers are familiar, such as the end of Egill’s poem *Sonatorrek* in *Egils saga*: “Skalk þó glaðr | með góðan vilja | ok óhryggr | heljar bíða” [Yet I shall gladly, with good will and without sadness, wait for death] (*Eg* 96, SkP V, 326).¹⁰ The poet expresses a sense of acceptance and even eagerness towards the prospect of death, without any sorrow or reluctance, despite the loss of his sons. The self-expression here is unequivocal, with the poet explicitly using first-person emotion words to convey his feelings. In a similarly direct self-expression in *Kormáks saga*, Kormákr expresses his deep love for Steingerðr: “betr annk sigli-Sógu | an sjölfum mér hǫlfu” [I love the necklace-Sága <goddess> [WOMAN] twice as much as myself] (*Korm* 77, SkP V, 1166). However, this kind of internalised self-expression – where an emotive word in the first person directly conveys the poet’s feelings – is the least frequent form of expression through emotive words in saga poetry as charted in the ÍSP database, occurring in less than one-fifth of all instances where an emotion word is present (Table 1).

Table 1: Categorisation of expressions through emotion words in *Íslendingasögur* poetry.

EMOTION WORDS	
Self-expression (internalised)	71
Self-expression (externally observed)	93
Observation of others’ emotions	241
Total:	405

It is slightly more common for self-expressions to be framed as externally observed, with the speaker observing their own emotions as an impetus towards acting upon them. For example, in stanza 5 of *Víga-Glúms saga*, Víga-Glúmr depicts his anger as a force that propels him: “þóttumk | þjósti keyrðr” [it seemed to me that I was driven by anger] (*Glúm* 5, SkP V, 1380).¹¹ In the second stanza of *Sonatorrek*, Egill depicts grief as a barrier that prevents his poem from gushing

⁹ On the definition used of what qualifies as an emotion word, see Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, “The Language of Feeling in *Njáls saga* and *Egils saga*”, 12–16.

¹⁰ Translation of *óhryggr* adjusted by the author.

¹¹ Translation adjusted by the author.

out of him: “Esa auðþeystr, | þvít ekki veldr | hǫfugligr, | ór hyggju stað” [[the poetry] is not easily made to gush from the place of thought [MIND], because heavy sorrow causes that] (*Eg* 73, SkP V, 299). In *Kormáks saga*, Kormákr describes his sudden and intense love for Steingerðr as an emerging force within his mind, akin to a tangible, growing entity: “Nú varð mér í mínu | [. . .] jǫtuns leiði | [. . .] snótar | rammaǫst” [Now a powerful love has arisen in me in my mind of the woman of the giant [GIANTESS > MIND]] (*Korm* 1, SkP V, 1031). These kinds of externally observed self-expressions occur in a little less than a quarter of the instances when an emotion word is used in quoted stanzas.

In the corpus as a whole, it is most common that emotion words appear not as self-expressions of the poet’s internal state, but as observations about another person’s feelings. In these instances, speakers might for example emphasise their own achievements and courage by boasting about them in one half of a stanza – but in the other half, they contrast their actions with the perceived disreputable conduct of their opponent, thereby implying their own emotions of pride and contempt. An example of this approach is a stanza from *Grettis saga*. Grettir boasts of his killing of a bear in the second *helmingr*, while mocking his kinsman’s failure to do the same in the first, explicitly highlighting his kinsman’s fear through the emotion word *hræddr* [afraid]:

Opt kom heim í húmi
hræddr, þá er öngum blæddi,
sá er vetrliða vitja,
víg-Njörðr, í haust gjörði.
Sá engi mik sitja
síð fyrir bjarnarhíði;
þó kom ek ullar otra
út ór hellisskúta.

[The slaughter-Njörðr <god> [WARRIOR = Björn] who went to visit the bear in the autumn often came home frightened in the twilight, when nobody had bled. Nobody saw me sitting late in front of the bear’s den; yet I got the otter of wool [BEAR] out of [his] cave.] (*Gr* 20, SkP V, 681)

Grettir applies the word *hræddr* to Björn to ridicule him for his cowardice and simultaneously elevate himself. In this stanza, the emotion word functions to imply the speaker’s boastful pride in himself and his contempt for his opponent. Grettir employs *hræddr* not to disclose his own internal feeling of fear but to convey his disdain for Björn.

In another example, from *Gísla saga*, Gísli Súrsson’s animosity, resentment, and disappointment are clearly implied in a stanza where he disparages his wife’s kinsmen for failing him in a legal case that led to his outlawry. He notes

that they “glúpnuðu es glaðir skyldu” [looked downcast when they should have been cheerful], as if pelted with a rotten egg (*Gísl* 14, SkP V, 571). The verb *glúpna* suggests the men broke down, lost courage, or were moved to tears.¹² This degrading depiction of the kinsmen through emotion words, with its subjunctive mood, reflects Gísli’s regret and sense of injustice at the outcome of his case.

At times, it is not humans but inanimate objects such as weapons that have emotions attributed to them, although the weapons – particularly those that have a name – can be seen as extensions of their owner’s psyche. For instance in *Njáls saga*, Skarpheðinn Njálsson vividly portrays his axe, called *Rimmugýgr* [troll woman of battle], as if it were angry, while boastfully announcing that he had used it to kill Þráinn Sigfússon: “reið söng rósthljóðum | Rimmugýgr til dimmum” [the angry Rimmugýgr sang too-gloomy brawl-sounds]. (*Nj* 33, SkP V, 1262). This depiction personifies the axe’s rage and its ominous battle song, symbolically reflecting Skarpheðinn’s own fury and sense of prowess in battle.

The data presented in Table 1 indicates that approximately sixty percent of instances involving emotion words are not self-expression of the poets’ internal states but rather observations of other people’s (or other entities’) emotions, indirectly conveying the poets’ thoughts and feelings.¹³ This use of emotion words creates a narrative distance in the emotive expression, implying the speaker’s feelings rather than stating them outright. This ties into Clunies Ross’ observation that the poetry in the *Íslendingasögur* is largely in an “interior mode” and reveals the inner lives of its characters.¹⁴ The findings indicate that when it comes to emotion words, this interiority is often conveyed implicitly and in a more complex way than the dichotomy of “inner” and “outer” suggests, intertwining internal and external perspectives and resisting straightforward categorisation. This further underscores an evident point: that emotion words in themselves do not provide a full picture of the poets’ inner world, which must be extrapolated from other signals in the stanza. The emotive force of the poetry and prose of the *Íslendingasögur* is conveyed through various interlacing signifiers: these signifiers manifest through metaphors, physical gestures, actions, and performance, as well as emotive language. Features including kennings and other forms of circumlocutions in the poems, rhythm, poetic diction, and recurring emotive themes (that sometimes span entire poems, such as in *Sonatorrek*) as

¹² See *glúpna* in *ONP* and Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*.

¹³ This ratio remains remarkably consistent across the prosimetric sagas within the corpus, although it is slightly lower, or roughly fifty-five percent, in the group of skaldsagas, famous for their themes of love and rivalry, along with extensive poetry (*Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa*, *Kormáks saga* and *Hallfreðar saga*). The same applies to *Egils saga* and *Víglundar saga*.

¹⁴ Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, 152.

well as the interplay between the poetry and prose, all contribute to the amplification and contextualisation of the emotional impact of what is being conveyed. To represent this complexity, the implied emotions within each stanza of the corpus were analysed and recorded in the ÍSP database, which will be the focus of the next section.

Implied emotions

Not only are emotions in saga poetry conveyed simultaneously through various signifiers, but skaldic poets also typically blend sentiments such as anger and contempt or sadness and love within the same stanza. The intricate nature of the poetic language results in a fusion of expressions within each stanza, implying a diverse spectrum of feelings. Emotions expressed in the stanzas are more likely to be complex and multiple rather than straightforward. As Barbara H. Rosenwein notes, emotions come not as “singletons” but rather form a part of a chain of emotional events, sometimes involving multiple feelings.¹⁵ Consequently, each stanza is often associated with multiple categories of implied emotions in the ÍSP database, which prioritises comprehensive markup over restricting each stanza to a single defining emotive expression. The eleven categories of implied emotions in the database are *sadness*, *joy*, *fear*, *anger*, *contempt*, *love*, *envy*, *surprise*, *shame*, *pride*, and *regret*. In addition, the category *ambiguous* was created for obscure or uncertain cases. When building the database, predefined categories of implied emotions were not used; rather, the categories gradually formed from the themes that emerged during the analysis.¹⁶ Commentary and clarifications are provided for each case. The categories are broad; for instance, the category of implied anger includes expressions of irritation as well as fury, and the category of love encompasses romantic, familial, and friendly love and affection, as well as sexual desire. Analysing the emotion categories in relation to audience sizes reveals a distinct pattern. As has long been observed, saga poetry is typically tightly woven into the prose narrative and the overwhelming majority of the stanzas are staged as spoken before an audience, many embedded within conversations.¹⁷ Table 2 shows the breakdown of stanzas categorised by audience size.

¹⁵ Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, 8.

¹⁶ On this gradual approach to forming emotion categories, based on the *prototype approach* within the field of psychology, see Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, “The Language of Feeling in *Njáls saga* and *Egils saga*”, 12–19.

¹⁷ On this point, see Judy Quinn’s chapter in this volume. Situational stanzas, which are interwoven into the narrative and frequently recited in response to saga events, are typical of the *Íslend-*

Table 2: Proportional distribution of stanzas in *Íslendingasögur* according to audience size.

AUDIENCE SIZE	PROPORTION OF STANZAS
Group	42%
Two people	13%
Individual	29%
No audience	2%
Ambiguous	14%

As Table 2 demonstrates, a significant proportion of stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* are recited in a group setting. Setting the ambiguous category aside, this amounts to half of the stanzas. A closer look at the types of emotions conveyed before audiences of varying sizes reveals a discernible trend: certain emotions are predominantly expressed in collective settings, while others are more frequently articulated in the presence of a single other individual or in solitude.

Table 3: Instances of implied emotions categorised proportionally by audience size.¹⁸

IMPLIED EMOTIONS	AUDIENCE SIZE				Total
	Group	Individual / no audience	Two people	Ambiguous	
Anger	45%	27%	22%	6%	100%
Contempt	50%	23%	15%	12%	100%
Pride	56%	27%	12%	5%	100%
Joy	60%	13%	7%	20%	100%
Fear	25%	48%	11%	16%	100%
Regret	26%	45%	13%	16%	100%
Love	25%	45%	12%	18%	100%
Sadness	30%	42%	7%	21%	100%
Envy	20%	46%	7%	27%	100%

ingasögur. See Whaley, “Skalds and Situational Verses in *Heimskringla*”, 251–252; Bjarni Einarsson, “On the Rôle of Verse in Saga-Literature”.

¹⁸ The results were generated through the ÍSP database (<https://gefín.ku.dk/q.php?p=isp>) [last accessed 30 August 2023], through a crosstab search using the categories EMOTIONS IMPLIED and SIZE OF AUDIENCE. The numbers were subsequently imported into MS Excel to calculate proportions in percentages for comparison. The categories SURPRISE, SHAME and AMBIGUOUS were excluded due to their small size, which rendered them statistically insignificant.

The data presented in Table 3 reveals that emotions such as anger, contempt, pride, and joy are predominantly conveyed in verse in front of a group (45–60% of cases), whereas emotions like fear, regret, love, sadness, and envy are more likely to be implied more privately, either before one individual or in the absence of an audience.

The behavioural codes governing saga characters' emotive conduct are heavily influenced by the concept of honour. The key personal traits that contribute to increased honour among male saga chieftains, as Preben Meulengracht Sørensen notes, include readiness to stand firm and defend oneself and one's family, through acts of violence if necessary.¹⁹ Honour in the saga world needs to be continuously defended and maintained. Within this system, showing emotions like fear, regret, sadness, or envy would be counterproductive, as doing so would indicate weakness and despair, leading to the loss of honour. In this sphere, to be passive or behave gently would undermine one's masculinity, while action and agency would reinforce it. Thus, we find the grand men of *Egils saga* reprimanded when they stray from this ideal: Egill's grandfather, Kveld-Úlfr, is scolded for not taking revenge but instead lying in bed, overcome with sorrow for the loss of his son, and Egill himself receives friendly advice that it is not manly to sit passively in grief (ÍF II, 60, 148, 294–296). In this way, masculine ideals are emphasised in many *Íslendingasögur*, as seen in the efforts made to avoid an open display of feelings, particularly those deemed signs of weakness.²⁰ Sif Rikhardsdóttir notes that this “calls attention to a presumed cultural preference for emotional suppression or concealment (as opposed to demonstration)”.²¹ Although this could account for a preference for expressing emotions like fear, regret, love, sadness, and envy in solitude or to an audience of one, expressions of anger, contempt, pride, and joy seem less subject to these rules of concealment and are more commonly expressed in collective settings as overt performances of masculinity. The open display of these emotions is apparently deemed more socially acceptable, and often, such expressions form part of a calculated performative display that transcends expressions of interiority to engage with wider social and political dynamics. Such displays can be seen as strategic performances with specific objectives. In what follows, I will look more closely at a

19 Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling og ære*, 203–206. See also essays in Helgi Þorláksson (ed.), *Sæmdarmenn*.

20 On masculinity and crying in *Njáls saga*, see Ármann Jakobsson, “Masculinity and Politics in *Njáls saga*”. On masculinity in the *Íslendingasögur*, see Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders*.

21 Sif Rikhardsdóttir, *Emotions in Old Norse Literature*, 38; see also 91–92.

few case studies to explore the differences, analysing representative examples spoken in solitude or in front of one audience member, in contrast with those spoken in a group setting.

In solitude

Soliloquy is a form of a dramatic monologue which the speaker delivers in solitude, or while “under the impression of being alone”.²² The soliloquist thus shares their inner thoughts with the audience or the reader in apparent self-reflection. The corpus of poetry in the *Íslendingasögur* contains only rare instances of characters vocalising their emotions in solitude.²³ Of these very few instances, Helga Bárðardóttir in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* speaks two such emotive soliloquies, where the prose does not indicate any audience present. On the occasion of the second one, her father, Bárðr Snæfellsáss, has picked her up from her lover’s abode and brought her home to his cave in the glacier Snæfellsjökull. She becomes very unhappy at the separation from her lover, as described in the prose: “Engu undi hon sér, síðan er hon skildi við Skeggja; mornaði hún ok þornaði æ síðan” (ÍF XIII, 122) [She was not content with anything since she separated from Skeggi, she withered and dried up ever since].²⁴ Helga is then described as reciting a stanza “einn dag” [one day], where she directly expresses her thoughts. She laments her separation from her lover, conveying her grief and a sense of impending devastation resulting from her love. Helga expresses her heartache over her lost love, depicting the contrast between the joyful warmth of her love for the man and the pain she currently endures:

Braut vilk bráðla leita;
brestr ei stríð í flestu
mér fyr menja rýri;
munk dáliga kálaz,
þvíit auðspenni unnak
alteitum sefa heitum;
sorg mák sízt því byrgja;
sitk ein trega greinum.

²² See “soliloquy” in Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. On absent audiences, see Heather O’Donoghue’s chapter in this volume.

²³ As Table 2 shows, only 2% of the stanzas are spoken in solitude. However, 14% of stanzas are spoken in an ambiguous setting where the prose does not provide clear information about the audience.

²⁴ All translations of saga prose are my own.

[I want to leave quickly; my grief for the diminisher of necklaces [GENEROUS MAN] does not abate at all; I will be wretchedly destroyed because I have loved the wealth-clasper [RICH MAN] with most joyful warm emotion; for that reason I can in no way conceal my sorrow; I sit alone in [my] grief.] (*Bárð* 2, SkP V, 22)

The stanza is atypical in many respects. It stands out for its unusually rich and direct self-expression of intense feelings. It features one of the most extended sequences of emotive language in the *Íslendingasögur*: “unnak alteitum heitum sefa” [I have loved [the man] with most joyful warm emotion], highlighting her fervent passion for Skeggi. Although the preceding prose indicates Helga’s deep unhappiness, the verse further articulates the intensity of her feelings and state of mind. The poet layers multiple emotions, including loneliness and a sense of utter helplessness, as Helga depicts herself sitting alone in grief, without a confidante. Her turmoil and agitation are implied through descriptions of her inability to hide her sorrow, a feeling of coming undone, and her fears for her life: “mun ek dáliga kálast” [I will be wretchedly destroyed]. The stanza also conveys a profound despair, as the speaker expresses a desire to leave swiftly and communicates that grief is a constant presence in her life. The prose that follows tells of Helga leaving her father’s house and becoming a mysterious wanderer, unable ever since to find happiness.

Also set in the wilderness, two stanzas in *Eyrbyggja saga* are spoken in a cave, in solitude and yearning.²⁵ Björn Breiðvíkingakappi frequently visits his beloved Þuríðr, who is married to another man. The visits prompt her husband to enlist the help of a sorcerer to get rid of his rival. Björn finds himself caught in a dark blizzard on Fróðárheiði in Snæfellsnes, forcing him to seek shelter in a cave, where he is left soaking wet and freezing cold, the prose relates. His second stanza expresses his bitterness as well as his feelings of separation and love:

Sýlda skark svana fold
 súðum, þvít gæibrúðr
 óstum leiddi oss fast,
 austan með hlaðit flaut.
 Víða gatk vásbúð
 – víglundr nú of stund
 helli byggir hugfullr –
 hingat fyr konu þing.

²⁵ Björn subsequently speaks a third stanza about his experiences in the cave (*Eb* 31). This stanza is spoken in the presence of household members upon his return home, in response to their inquiries about where he has been during the storm.

[I cut the ice-stiff land of swans [SEA] with hull-planks from the east, with a laden vessel, because the attentive woman had led us [me] straight to love. I got an ample lodging of hardship here instead of a woman's bed; the *hugr*-filled battle-tree [WARRIOR = Björn] now spends a while in a cave.] (*Eb* 30, *SKP* V, 463)²⁶

As in Helga's stanza, the primary focus here is the sense of separation. The verse delves into the speaker's connection with the woman he loves and his personal struggle with feelings of loneliness and a sense of loss. The speaker expresses his love for the woman, but with a bittersweet tone that conveys his frustration at the distance that separates them. He laments this separation, yearning to share a bed with his beloved and unfavourably comparing his current cave shelter to her comfortable bed. The speaker uses the term "hugfullr" to describe himself, suggesting that he is brimming with *hugr*. While *hugr* can encompass various meanings, like mind, thought, temper, emotion, disposition, courage, and ardour, here it forms a part of a kenning for a warrior in a compound ("hugfullr"), implying the meaning of being courageous. However, given the emotional intensity of the verse, *hugr* could also signify the emotional turmoil and distress filling the speaker up to the brim due to the challenges of love, loneliness, and desperation.

In *Grettis saga*, Grettir Ásmundarson similarly utters an emotive stanza in the wilderness that is framed by the prose as a monologue spoken in solitude. He has just had an intimidating encounter in the Icelandic highlands (Kjölur) with the mysterious Hallmundr, who turned out to be stronger than Grettir. Grettir implies his loneliness, fear, and lack of support under these circumstances, lamenting that his brothers, Atli and Illugi, are not with him:

Mér stóð málma skúrar
mundangs hvatr ok Atli
– staddr vilda ek svá sjaldan –
snarr Illugi fjarri,
þá er ófælinn álar
endr dró mér ór hendi
– brúðr strýkr horsk, ef hræðumz,
hvarma – Loptr inn armi.

Snarr Illugi ok Atli, mundangs hvatr skúrar málma, stóð mér fjarri – sjaldan vilda ek svá staddr –, þá er inn armi Loptr dró endr ófælinn álar ór hendi mér; horsk brúðr strýkr hvarma, ef hræðumz.

[Brave Illugi, and Atli, moderately bold in the shower of weapons [BATTLE], were far away from me – seldom would I wish to be so placed – when that wretched Loptr [= Hallmundr]

²⁶ The translation of *hugfullr* has been adjusted by the author.

previously dragged, undaunted, the straps from my hand; the wise woman will wipe [her] eyelids if I am afraid.] (*Gr* 45, *SkP* V, 742)

Grettir's emotions in this stanza revolve around fear and desolation. The poet applies the word *hræðask* [to be afraid], indicating that he is already experiencing fear or at least anticipates it. The nuances of the depiction are further conveyed through the syntax, using a modal auxiliary of speculation ("sjaldan vilda") and a conditional clause ("ef hræðumz"), which express the emotions in an exploratory manner. Grettir further hints at his apprehension of Loptr (Hallmundr) by conveying his aversion to going through the ordeal of having him snatch the reins from his hands. The stanza also emphasises his isolation and lack of immediate support, as his brothers, Atli and Illugi, are far away. The stanza suggests a concern for the reaction of a "horsk brúðr" (likely his mother, Ásdís, with whom he shares a loving relationship), who might shed tears if he were to display fear, further implying his closeness with this woman.

In these poignant verses from three sagas, we encounter a trio of speakers, each navigating their feelings in solitude. They are all spoken in marginal spaces: in a glacial wilderness, in a cave, and in the highlands, highlighting the speakers' seclusion. A common thread of loneliness and lament runs through these verses as the speakers grapple with the harsh realities of their current circumstances. The utterances are entwined with the speakers' sense of profound longing, whether for a beloved or a family member, creating a sense of yearning that resonates throughout the stanzas. The stanzas, unfolding within desolate spaces, provide a secluded stage for the poets to voice their innermost feelings, granting them the privacy to express their feelings of vulnerability, mournful love, fear, and sadness, which are seldom shared in public in the sagas.

Confidential settings

Similarly to stanzas spoken in solitude, those in confidential settings tend to express certain emotions reserved for intimate contexts. The following examples demonstrate how feelings such as fear, shame, sadness, and love are managed in verse within the nuanced societal norms of the sagas.

While accusing someone of fear or cowardice is depicted as highly insulting in the sagas, it is equally a source of embarrassment to experience fear, let alone to make it known among the public that one is afraid. Helgi Ásbjarnarson in *Droplaugarsona saga* confides in his wife through a stanza how anxious he feels. His enemy, whom he had thought was dead, is rumoured to still be alive. Helgi decides to move his household to another area where there are more of his supporters

nearby. There, he builds a new closed-off bed (*lokhvíla*) to sleep in. His wife, Þórdís Brodd-Helgadóttir, asks him why he chose as their new home a place so overgrown with trees that one cannot see when someone approaches (ÍF XI, 166–167).²⁷ Helgi replies in verse, recounting his recent anxieties and premonitions about potential threats from enemies who might seek him out and attack him:

Ák í mörk, es myrkvir
miðleggs daga tveggja
– framm berk heið í hljóði –
hraun, argspæing margan,
at mótstafir Meita
myni menn, þeirs styr vinna,
hildarbörum hjarra
hrælækjar mik sökja.

[I have many an ominous foreboding in the forest when it grows dark over the wilderness during the join of two days [NIGHT] – I bring forth poetry in the silence –, that staves of the encounter of Meiti <sea-king> [BATTLE > WARRIORS], men who engage in fighting, will attack me with the battle-ready hinge of the corpse-brook [BLOOD > SPEAR.] (Dpl 1, Skp V, 136

The subject of the first *helmingr* is the forebodings that the poet feels about the danger he faces. These forebodings occur at night, when visibility is limited, contributing to a heightened sense of anxiety, especially when one cannot foresee potential threats or defend oneself against them. The poet's declaration that he brings forth his poetry in silence ("framm berk heið í hljóði") may be read as meaning that the speaker brings the poetry forth while others are silent, or that he speaks quietly himself, perhaps due to the sensitive subject. The phrase is an implicit reaction to the silence itself, in turn amplifying the speaker's anxieties: he expects impending violence in the future, though his fears are not yet confirmed and continue to worry him. Helgi's quiet revelation of his apprehension and anxiety starkly contrasts with the public bravado often depicted in the sagas, underscoring the conflict between personal vulnerability and the outward display of courage expected of saga heroes. In the prose that follows, Helgi's fears are confirmed, as his enemies stealthily approach his farm and kill him in his bed (ÍF XI, 168–172).

Silence is also at the centre of Unnr Marðardóttir's confidential poetic expressions to her father in *Njáls saga*, which demonstrate that while the feeling of shame is not openly discussed in the prose of the *Íslendingasögur*, poetic voices sometimes allow its expression. In three stanzas spoken in private to her father,

27 On stanzas recited as a response to a question, see Judy Quinn's essay in this volume.

Unnr communicates how deeply concerned she is with being mocked because of her husband Hrótr's sexual dysfunction. She delicately conveys her embarrassment as she asks her father for advice about divorce: “Verðk [. . .] | – satt er, at sék við spotti – | segja mart eða þegja” [I must – it is true that I am on my guard against ridicule – say much or be silent] (*Nj* 1, SkP V, 1220). In this stanza, Unnr reveals her concern about potential ridicule (*spott*) if her situation becomes known. She grapples with whether to confide in her father or stay silent. She only hints at the events that have transpired, evoking a sense of shame, embarrassment, and intimacy. The subsequent prose relates that her father falls silent after hearing her first stanza, underscoring the social sensitivity surrounding the matter and the risk of losing honour through public ridicule. The two move to another location, securely away from the hearing of others (KG, 29). Yet another delicate matter is raised in private in *Egils saga*. As Egill Skalla-Grímsson sits unhappily, his trusted friend Arinbjörn approaches, assuming his sadness is due to his brother's death and remarking that it is manly to bear it well (ÍF II, 148). Thus, Arinbjörn invokes the norm to conceal grief. But grief is not what troubles Egill, who expresses himself in a famous stanza (*Eg* 23, SkP V, 210), implying his love for Ásgerðr and his fear of revealing his feelings to her.

As a final example, a renowned warrior in another saga implies his shame and worry through poetry in a confidential setting. The beginning of *Grettis saga* introduces Qnundr Ófeigsson, who lost his leg in battle, earning him the nickname *tréfótr* [wooden leg]. At one point, Qnundr falls into a deep silence, prompting a good friend to ask about his well-being (ÍF VII, 9). In response, Qnundr conveys his emotions in a poignant stanza, staged by the prose as spoken in a private dialogue between the two:

Glatt erat mér, síz mættum
 – mart hremmir til snemma;
 oss stóð geigr af gýgi
 galdrs – él-Þrimu skjaldar.
 Hykk, at þegnum þykki
 (þat er mest) koma flestum
 (oss til yndismissu
 einhlítt) til mín lítit.

[I have not been cheerful since we encountered the Þrima <valkyrie> of the storm of the shield [BATTLE > AXE]; many an affliction seizes hold too soon; harm was caused to us by the troll-woman of incantation [AXE]. I think that most men will consider me of little worth; that's greatly sufficient for our loss of joy.] (*Gr* 1, SkP V, 640)

In the stanza, Qnundr conveys his sense of desolation and implies his shame due to his physical condition, stemming from his feeling of diminished worth in the eyes

of others – emotions that are not openly conveyed in the prose of the saga. The maiming would have a detrimental impact on a skilled warrior’s combat abilities, inviting the risk of ridicule and a decline in his honour. It has caused him to view himself in a lesser light, and he is sure that others now hold him in low regard.

The stanzas spoken in solitude or to a single individual highlight a tendency to confine the expression of certain emotions, especially those conveying weakness, to more intimate settings. The stanzas explored here reveal how emotions such as shame, fear, sadness, and love are navigated within the societal norms of the sagas. Sagas depict characters like Unnr addressing her husband’s impotence, Qnundr coping with his diminished status, or Helgi wrestling with his anxiety and fear, with each finding a confidential space to express emotions that in public would remain hidden.

Yet, as Barbara Rosenwein points out, emotions serve multiple purposes and often have “over-determined functions and meanings”.²⁸ Beyond merely reflecting the inner states of poets, stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* can also be seen as “instruments of sociability” and read as “social interactions”.²⁹ In the following discussion, the focus shifts to prosimetric sensibilities in group settings, where particular types of emotions are overtly displayed and used as social instruments. By applying the conceptual frameworks of emotional practice and performativity, this analysis will delve into the social and performative aspects of emotions within the saga prosimetrum.

Performative emotional display

Monique Scheer’s concept of emotional practice provides a useful lens for the analysis of emotive poetry recited in group settings.³⁰ Scheer’s model focuses on emotional display as a social practice, emphasising the corporeal and communicative aspects of the expression of feelings and how interlaced such expression is with other cultural practices, such as behaviour, rituals, language, display rules, and discourses.³¹ Scheer stresses the role of the body as the primary “actor and

28 Rosenwein, “Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions”, 21.

29 Rosenwein, “Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions”, 19–20.

30 Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?”. Scheer’s approach has influenced a range of studies on emotions of the past; see e.g. Davison et al., “Emotions as a Kind of Practice”; Maddern, McEwan, and Scott (ed.), *Performing Emotions in Early Europe*; Flannery, “Personification and Embodied Emotional Practice”.

31 Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?”, 209–215. On practice theory, see e.g. Schatzki, Cetina, and Savigny (ed.), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*.

instrument” in emotional practice: not only does it provide “the locus of the competence, dispositions, and behavioural routines of practice, it is also the ‘stuff with and on which practices work’.”³² As Jutta Eming points out, this is particularly pertinent to medieval texts that accentuate symbolic display,³³ as is the case in the *Íslendingasögur*.

Scheer’s model is essentially a social constructionist model, originating within the field of sociology, and rests on the conceptualisation of emotional display as communicative.³⁴ Thus, emotional practices, in Scheer’s terms, follow the display rules of the community in which they are expressed, and they are also frequently studied as culturally contingent scripts of actions, utterances, and body language.³⁵ Though originating as a concept applied within social sciences and history to describe real social dynamics, all of these features can be identified in fictional texts and examined in relation to the literary expression of emotion and the social dynamics within an imagined narrated world.³⁶

To illustrate the application of Scheer’s model, consider a scene in *Egils saga* where Egill demands compensation from King Aðalsteinn for the death of his brother. The stage for Egill’s performance of his emotions is set when he finds his brother dead, slain in a battle waged on behalf of the king. Upon Egill finding the body in the battlefield, the narrative slows down from the fast-paced, action-packed descriptions of the progress of the battle and closes in on Egill’s reaction:

Egill [. . .] hitti þar Þórólf bróður sinn látinn; hann tók upp lík hans ok þó, bjó um síðan, sem siðvenja var til. Grófu þeir þar gróf ok settu Þórólf þar í með vápnum sínum öllum ok klæðum; síðan spennti Egill gullhring á hvára hönd honum, áðr hann skildisk við; hlóðu síðan at grjóti ok jósu at moldu. Þá kvað Egill vísu. (ÍF II, 141–142)

[Egill [. . .] found there his brother Þórólfr dead; he picked up his body and washed it, then he prepared it according to the customs. They dug a grave there and put Þórólfr in it with all his weapons and clothes; then Egill clasped a gold arm ring on each of his arms, before he left him; then they stacked rocks at the grave and poured earth over it. Then Egill recited a poem.]

32 Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?”, 200–201.

33 Eming, “Emotionen als Gegenstand mediävistischer Literaturwissenschaft”, 259.

34 On this approach, see Rosenwein and Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?*, 19–25, and Turner and Stets, *The Sociology of Emotions*.

35 On such scripts, see e.g. Wierzbicka, *Emotions Across Languages and Cultures*.

36 Representative examples of such studies are Starkey, “Brunhild’s Smile”; Tennant, “Prescriptions and Performatives in Imagined Cultures”; and Eming, “On Stage”. Starkey and Tennant focus on the *Nibelungenlied*, while Eming analyses Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan*.

The detailed text keeps Þórólfr's dead body as the focal point and, through this attention to the body, conveys Egill's loss. The physicality of the events is at the forefront. Egill finds the body, picks up the corpse in his arms, and washes and prepares it himself for burial. He digs a grave and puts jewellery on Þórólfr's arms before he parts with him. The honourable burial ritual demonstrates Egill's loyalty and compliance with the ethical codes of the honour-based society of the saga world, as well as emphasising the dead Þórólfr's heroic status through the grandeur of the burial. While the prose is loaded with corporeal imagery denoting loss, respect, and grief, the poetic voice later in the scene directly addresses the feelings involved. The burial ritual allows for a public expression of Egill's grief through the poem, recited over the gravemound in the company of his followers in a group setting, as a part of the burial rites:

Gekk, sás óðisk ekki,
jarlmanns bani snarla
(þreklundaðr fell) Þundar
(Þórólfr) í gny stórum.
Jörð grœr, en vér verðum,
Vínu nær of mínum,
– helnauð es þat – hylja
harm, ágætum barma.

Bani jarlmanns, sás óðisk ekki, gekk snarla í stórum gny Þundar; þreklundaðr Þórólfr fell. Jörð grœr of ágætum barma mínum nær Vínu – þat es helnauð – en vér verðum hylja harm.

[The killer of an earl [= Þórólfr], he who feared nothing, advanced keenly in the great clash of Þundr ≤ Óðinn> [BATTLE]; strong-minded Þórólfr fell. The earth grows over my noble brother near Vína – that is deadly sorrow – but we [I] must conceal grief.] (*Eg* 17, SkP V, 197).

In the poem, Egill refers to his brother as *barmi minn*, which is particularly intimate because it refers to the one who grows up by the same bosom (*barmr*) and further includes a possessive pronoun (*minn*), emphasising Egill's closeness with his brother, and through that, his loss. He frames his agony as deadly grief, one that he must conceal. Simultaneously, the scene is filled with ambivalence: Egill may bear some indirect responsibility for his brother's death, and he also desires his wife, to whom he quickly proposes.³⁷

The second part of Egill's emotional performance takes place at King Aðalsteinn's court where Egill performs his demands for compensation for the loss of

37 As discussed by Torfi H. Tulinius, *Skáldið í skriftinni*, 51, 97.

his brother. In full war gear, with his shield, sword, and helmet, he is offered a seat of honour directly across from the king.

Egill settisk þar niðr ok skaut skildinum fyrir fœtr sér; hann hafði hjálm á höfði ok lagði sverðit um kné sér ok dró annat skeið til hálfis, en þá skelldi hann aprtr í slíðrin; hann sat upprétr ok var gneyprtr mjök. [. .] Ekki vildi hann drekka, þó at honum væri borit, en ýmsum hleypði annarri brúninni ofan á kinnina, en annarri upp í hárrœtr. (ÍF II, 143–144).

[Egill sat down and put his shield before his feet; he had a helmet on his head and lay his sword over his knees and pulled it occasionally half out, and slammed it back into its sheaths; he sat straight up with a very stooping head. [. .] He refused all drink, though it was carried to him, but alternately moved one eyebrow down to his cheek and the other up to the roots of his hair.]

The bowed head communicates grief, while the slamming of the sword is decidedly provocative. The peculiar motion of the eyebrows is ambiguous but implies deep discontent as well as an expression of sadness. A little later in the scene, when he has received his compensation, Egill himself explains the wrinkles on his forehead and the drooping of his eyebrows as an expression of his grief:

Knóttu hvarms af harmi
hnúpgnípur mér drúpa;
nú fann ek, þanns ennis
ósléttur þær rétti. [. .]

[My jutting peaks of the eyelid [EYEBROWS] drooped from grief; now I have found the one who straightened those unevennesses of the forehead [EYEBROWS].] (Eg 20, SkP V, 203)

The detailed focus on Egill's facial movements invites the reader to observe his face closely, even as he later describes their meaning in poetry, reinforcing the performance as both a visual and aural experience. The poetic voice expresses grief, while through his body, Egill simultaneously publicly expresses hostility and provocation towards King Aðalsteinn, which is only soothed when Aðalsteinn has presented him with a gold ring and two chests full of silver in compensation. Egill's eyebrows become normal again, and the prose notes that from then on Egill started to regain his joy (ÍF II, 143).

Intertwined, we have here at least three threads in Egill's emotional expression: the poetic voice expressing grief with emotion words, the corporeal expression of emotions through the movement of the eyebrows and slamming of the sword, and the goal-oriented performance in front of an audience. This demonstrates the connection between the staging of Egill's grief and the political aim he has with his performance: to acquire honourable compensation for the death of his brother.

John L. Austin's influential concept of performative utterances, which simultaneously express and execute an action, performing a speech-act,³⁸ has been extended to gestures and non-verbal acts.³⁹ Non-verbal behaviour and gestures are viewed as possible speech acts in the sense that they communicate meaning and evoke a procedure. Within the broader academic field of cultural studies, the general term "performative" is also used in a non-Austinian sense, signifying the theatrical aspects of what is being studied.⁴⁰ In this matter, I follow Kathryn Starkey's definitions, who notes that the "distinguishing feature of performatives is that they function to affect socially recognised states of affairs, changing the status of someone or something".⁴¹ In other words, when speaking of *performative emotional display* in this essay, I take it as entailing a goal orientation or a political aim.

In the case of Egill and the death of his brother, Egill's body language at the court is a performative emotional display, aimed at securing honourable and generous compensation for the death of his brother. Successfully achieving this, Egill publicly demonstrates his satisfaction and joy by taking a drink, relaxing his eyebrows, and visibly regaining his joy.⁴²

A theatrical scene in *Bandamanna saga* further exemplifies Scheer's model of emotions-as-practice, which includes the performance of emotions through staging, gestures, ritualisation, and the theatricalisation of social practices. In this saga, Ófeigr Skíðason confronts eight powerful confederates at the Alþingi. These are unscrupulous chieftains aiming to outlaw his son and seize his wealth. Ófeigr defends his son cunningly and skilfully, eventually rebuking the confederates for their moral deficiency. Ófeigr's shrewd public performance of regret and lamentation serves his aims, illustrating the strategic use of emotional expression. As

38 Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. An example would be a bet or a promise: "To say something is to do something" (12). This also implies, such as in the case of "I do" in weddings, that the performative utterance requires a behavioural context to be a successful speech act because the sole syntactic aspect does not hold the complete meaning on its own. For an elaboration and development of Austin's theory, see Searle, *Expression and Meaning*.

39 Most prominently used by Judith Butler in her writings on gender. See e.g. Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution".

40 For the diverse uses of the term, see essays in Parker and Kosofsky Sedgwick (ed.), *Performativity and Performance*; Burke, "The Performative Turn in Recent Cultural History".

41 Starkey, "Brunhild's Smile", 163.

42 Egill's hostile expression is reminiscent of *ira regis*, a specific performative display of anger tied to royals in the literature and the learned writings of the medieval West. In these writings, the king's expressions are portrayed as primarily demonstrative, the king publicly displaying joy and anger alternately, controlling his subjects by giving illustrative signals of his moods. See Althoff, "*Ira Regis*", 59–60, 74; and other essays on the social function of anger in the Middle Ages in Rosenwein (ed.), *Anger's Past*.

the eight chieftains and their men gather in a large circle at the Alþingi, Ófeigr steps into the centre, tasked with choosing arbitrators for his son's case (ÍF VII, 347). His movements are carefully portrayed in the prose: he flutters his eyelids, looks around, lifts his hood and strokes his arms, subtly presenting himself as frail and senile. Through this calculated demeanour, he recites a stanza that laments his mental decline, which he claims led him to inadvertently select the two most hostile men to decide his son's case:

Illt er ýtum
 elli at bíða;
 tekr hon seggjum frá
 sýn ok vizku.
 Áttak næsta völ
 nýtra drengja;
 nú er úlfs hali
 einn á króki.

[It is bad for men to live to old age; it deprives men of sight and understanding. Just now I had the choice of able men; now a wolf's tail is the one [thing] on the hook.] (*Band* 4, SkP V, 11)

On the surface, Ófeigr's stanza appears to be a typical lament about the woes of aging, expressing regret and sadness over his diminished faculties.⁴³ However, the saga's readers are privy to information unknown to the characters within the story: Ófeigr's lament is a ruse, a performative emotional display, crafted to project innocence and harmlessness. The prose reveals that Ófeigr has already covertly secured the complicity of the very arbitrators he feigns to have chosen poorly. The stanza adds a layer of irony to the episode, as Ófeigr feigns senility and poor judgment in his selection of arbitrators for his son's case. The poet further reflects on this act by portraying his choices as the worst possible – the “wolf's tail”, a metaphor for something utterly useless or undesirable – while in reality, it is a calculated move to influence the case's outcome.

As the legal dispute reaches its conclusion, Ófeigr recites a triumphant stanza, performing his joy at the successful outcome of his carefully orchestrated plan to prevent his son's outlawry and asset seizure. He purposefully frames the stanza as a documentary device, seemingly intent on embedding the details of the events and their resolution in the memories of the audience. Introducing the stanza with direct speech, Ófeigr underscores the lasting impact of poetic testimony, further highlighting the strategic use of verse in the sagas to shape narratives and influ-

43 Other such stanzas are *Laxd* 1 (see also *Korm* 48), *Korm* 50, *Eg* 1, *Eg* 130–132, and *Háv* 3.

ence perception: “Nú vil ek kveða yðr vísu eina, ok hafa þá fleiri at minnum þing þetta ok málalok þessi, er hér eru orðin” (ÍF VII, 356) [Now I want to recite a stanza to you, and then more people will remember this assembly and the conclusion of this lawsuit, which has taken place here]:

Flestr mun – Áms ok Austra
 ek vátta þat sáttum –
 málma runnr um minna
 – mik gælir þat – hælask.
 GatK höfðingjum hringa
 hattar land, en sandi
 æst í augun kastat,
 óríkr vafit flíkum.

Flestr runnr málma mun hælask um minna; ek vátta þat sáttum Áms ok Austra; þat gælir mik. GatK, óríkr hringa, vafit land hattar höfðingjum flíkum, en kastat sandi æst í augun.

[Many a bush of weapons [WARRIOR] will praise themselves for less; I bear witness to that in the reconciliation of Ámr <giant> and Austri <dwarf> [POETRY]; that comforts me. I, not rich in rings, managed to wrap cloths around the chieftains' land of the hat [HEAD], and throw sand energetically in their eyes.] (*Band 5, SkP V, 12*)

Ófeigr delivers the stanza while surrounded by all eight confederates and their respective supporters, at a public place at the Alþingi. The verse radiates joy and triumph, mixed with contempt for the confederates and pride in his successful defence of his son. Ófeigr's clever manipulation is underscored by his reference to himself as “not rich in rings”, highlighting his strategic prowess despite a lack of wealth. The stanza not only glorifies his triumph but also mocks the chieftains, depicting them as having their heads wrapped in cloth while he throws sand in their eyes. Judy Quinn's observation that the poetic voice of the skalds in the sagas is “graced with significance and authority”, in comparison to the voice of the narrator, further highlights the power of Ófeigr's verse.⁴⁴ Skaldic poetry holds the power to elevate or damage reputations, and Ófeigr leverages this in his verse, emphasising the need to immortalise his achievements and the confederates' humiliation: “ek vátta þat sáttum Áms ok Austra” [I bear witness to that in the [POETRY]]. Thus, his stanza serves as a performative display of joy, pride and contempt, a calculated tool to enhance his status at the expense of his opponents, utilising its poetic form as a potent social and reputational weapon. Margaret Clunies Ross's assertion that “poetry was never value-neutral and so was never free from an illocutionary or perlocutionary effect” is particularly relevant in this con-

⁴⁴ Quinn, “Ok er þetta upphaf”, 61.

text.⁴⁵ She notes that the poetry “projected a particular social image of the poem’s subject into society at large”.⁴⁶ The impact, of course, is amplified as more people learn the stanza, and there are a few instances in the corpus where a verse to contains an injunction for people to learn it.⁴⁷

Another person who stages his emotions, albeit in a more subtle way, is Þórarinn svarti [the Black] Þórólfsson in *Eyrbyggja saga*. He speaks a series of stanzas at the residence of his brother-in-law, Vermundr inn mjóvi [the Slender], as a part of his *Máhlíðingavísur*. The verse is spoken in a hall where many people are gathered (ÍF IV, 41, 44). Þórarinn is seeking the support of Vermundr in an upcoming lawsuit and makes his case partly through his series of verses, with brief interspersed comments by the members of the audience. In the following stanza, Þórarinn is attempting to stage himself as both moderate and courageous, emphasizing that his actions so far have been justifiable.

Kveðit mun, Hropts (at heiptum)
 hyrskerðir, mér verða
 (kunnak áðr) fyr Enni
 Yggs teiti (svá leita),
 es lútviðir létu
 lækendr, þeirs skil flækja,
 – eggjumk hófs – at hjøggak
 Hlín goðvefjar mína.

Teiti Yggs mun verða kveðit mér fyr Enni, Hropts hyrskerðir; áðr kunnak svá leita at heiptum, es lækendr lútviðir, þeirs flækja skil, létu, at hjøggak mína Hlín goðvefjar; eggjumk hófs.

[Gladness of Yggr ≤ Óðinn> [BATTLE] will be pronounced for me before Enni, diminisher of Hropt’s ≤ Óðinn’s> fire [SWORD > WARRIOR]; earlier I was able so to seek after hostility, when dangling stooping-trees [MEN], those who twist distinctions, said that I maimed my Hlín <goddess> of fine cloth [WOMAN = Auðr]; I egg myself on to moderation.] (*Eb* 11, *SkP* V, 428).

The poet implies his anger over false accusations that he had harmed his wife. His words suggest an inner fury, which he paradoxically frames as self-restraint (“eggjumk hófs”), hinting at restrained rage. This portrayal seems to aim to showcase his

45 Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics*, 232.

46 Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics*, 232. On the poet’s profession, see Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 117–195.

47 Another good example of this is a stanza by Þuríðr Ólafsdóttir *pá* in *Heiðarvíga saga* (*Heið* 3, *SkP* V, 986). See also *Nj* 16, *Nj* 62, *Vígl* 6, *Eg* 53. These are among the 87 stanzas that are registered in the ÍSP database as containing REFERENCE TO POETIC TRANSMISSION, where the transmission of the poem or its content is referred to or implied.

moderation despite the brewing anger, justifying his subsequent violent retaliation against his adversaries, whom he portrays as the wrongdoers (“þeirs flækja skil”). Moreover, the line “áðr kunnak svá leita at heiptum” [earlier I was able so to seek after hostility] carries an implicit sense of boastfulness, depicting the poet as poised for combat. Ultimately, the expression reveals a complex interplay between simmering anger, restrained fury, and a calculated display of readiness for retaliation. The poet delivers this stanza not only to express his emotional state but also to advance a political end. Seeking (and eventually gaining) support from Vermundr, he strategically combines a display of contained anger and moderated retaliation, aiming to gain empathy and validation for his past actions.

A final example discussed in this essay on the performative aspects of emotions within saga prosimetrum concerns a female poet in *Njáls saga*. In the *Íslendingasögur*, particular words are repeatedly tied to the same actions, such as where it is noted with a formulaic wording that a male gets angry and subsequently insults someone, or more commonly, strikes a blow: “Þá reiddisk Hǫskuldr ok laust sveininn með sprota” (ÍF XII, 29) [Then Hǫskuldr became angry and struck the boy with a stick]; “Þá reiddisk Þorvaldr ok laust hana í andlitit, svá at blœddi” (ÍF XII, 33) [Then Þorvaldr became angry and hit her in the face so it bled]; “Þá reiddisk Glúmr ok hjó til hans með handsaxi” (ÍF XII, 29) [Then Glúmr became angry and struck at him with a short sword]; “Gunnarr reiddisk ok . . . lýstr hana kinnhest” (ÍF XII, 124) [Gunnarr became angry and slapped her on the cheek]. This formula is only applied to one woman, Þórhildr skáldkona [the woman-poet] in *Njáls saga*. She catches her husband gazing at a young woman at a wedding feast. Her subsequent actions are not a physical slap or a blow, but a verbal one in the form of a couplet, spoken in the presence of a large group of wedding guests:

[. . .] hon reiðisk ok kveðr til hans kviðling:
 “Era gapriplar góðir,
 gægr er þér í augum,
 þráinn”, segir hon. (ÍF XII, 89; *Nj* 12, SkP V, 1235)

[She becomes angry and recites a couplet: “The [or: Your] gaping rods are no good; lechery is in your eyes, Þráinn,” she says.]

Þórhildr’s rage is decidedly driven home through the *kviðlingr*, which functions as a verbal attack that severely and publicly insults her husband, Þráinn Sigfússon. It humiliates him by subtly stating that he is a lecher, that he is fawningly ogling (“gægr”) a young woman. The word “gapriplar” could translate as “gaping rods”, which might refer to a “staring man”, a “skirt-chaser” or “nymphomaniac” (ÍF XII, 89f.). Possibly the word refers to Þráinn’s genitals, declaring that they are

“no good”, and the ambiguous wordplay of this short verse might increase the force of the insult. By reciting the couplet, Þórhildr retaliates for the disgrace her husband caused her, using the power that is available to her – the equivalent of a slap. Her husband’s reactions underline the gravity of the act. Þráinn immediately throws Þórhildr out of the house, announces their divorce, and replaces her with the young woman he was gazing at. The scene not only marks her exit from the house and her marriage but also from the saga. However, while the account of Þórhildr’s fate unfolds in the above manner in the saga text, the outcome of the plot on another narrative level is considerably more in Þórhildr’s favour. With the insult being in verse, it adheres to the tale of events, to Þráinn’s shame, and the saga’s subsequent portrayal of him is less than favourable.⁴⁸

The case studies of poetry delivered in group settings, examined here, exemplify the open display of anger, contempt, pride, and joy. Unlike emotions typically concealed due to the perceived weakness they indicate, the expressions of these feelings are part of deliberate and strategic performances in public. They extend beyond the mere expression of an interiority, engaging with broader social and political dynamics. Analysed through the lenses of emotions-as-practice and performativity, the case studies reveal the strategic nature of these group recitations. For instance, Egill alternately displays aggression and joy to secure compensation from King Aðalsteinn for his brother’s loss. Þórhildr skáldkona transforms a potential physical confrontation into a verbal onslaught, using poetry to publicly shame her husband, simultaneously conveying her own humiliation and anger. Þórarinn svartí carefully balances his portrayal of moderation and courage, subtly expressing controlled anger to garner support in a legal dispute. Ófeigr in *Bandamanna saga* artfully adopts the guise of senility, lamenting his infirmities, before later proudly and triumphantly displaying joy and contempt in victory. These instances highlight the use of emotive poetry as a tool for social influence and reputation management.

Gísli’s final stand

The case studies further illustrate the interweaving of literary devices that creates the emotive force of each stanza. The metaphors, circumlocutions, physical gestures, actions, performances, emotive language, and prose context along with the

⁴⁸ Þráinn is repeatedly portrayed as a flawed and impetuous character in *Njáls saga*, as is analysed by Ármann Jakobsson, “The Impetuousness of Þráinn Sigfússon”.

interplay between poetry and prose, all serve to amplify what is being conveyed. Gísli Súrsson's final stanza in *Gísli saga* is a prime example of the interlacing of signifiers of emotions, embodying in a preeminent way the concepts explored in this essay.

After eluding capture for thirteen years, the outlaw Gísli finds himself cornered when Eyjólfur inn grái [the Grey] and his men finally uncover his hiding place. A battle ensues, and in a bid for strategic advantage, Gísli climbs onto a crag with his wife Auðr. Despite being surrounded, Gísli manages to kill or wound many of his attackers. Mortally wounded, with his intestines exposed and held in place by his shirt, moments before his eventual leap off a cliff, his last utterance resembles a farewell message, serving as a last declaration to be remembered by.

Nú sækja þeir Eyjólfur at fast ok frændr hans; þeir sá, at þar lá við sömð þeira ok virðing. Leggja þeir þá til hans með spjótum, svá at út falla iðrin, en hann sveipar at sér iðrunum ok skyrtunni ok bindr at fyrir neðan með reipinu. Þá mælti Gísli, at þeir skyldi bíða lítt þat, – “munu þér nú hafa þau málalok, sem þér vilduð.” Hann kvað þá vísu. (ÍF VI, 114)

[Now, Eyjólfur and his kinsmen attack fiercely, realising that their honour and respect were at stake. They thrust their spears at him, causing his intestines to fall out, but he gathers up his guts into his shirt and binds them underneath with the rope. Then Gísli said that they should hold off for a while, – “you will now get the end that you wanted.” He then recited a stanza.]

The theatrical setting provided by the prose presents the verse as a highly declarative performance, bearing qualities of a stage drama. Gísli pauses the combat, creating a space in which to deliver the stanza, and by this he signals the importance of his message while ensuring that his enemies hear it:

Fals hallar skal Fulla
fagrleit, sú s mik teitir,
rekkilót at røkkum
regns sínum vin fregna.
Vel hygg ek, þótt eggjar
ítrslegnar mik bíti
(þá gaf sínum sveini)
sverðs (minn faðir herðu).

[The fair-featured Fulla <goddess> of the rain of the hall of the spear-socket [HAND > SILVER > WOMAN = Auðr], who brings me joy, shall ask, brave, about her brave husband. I feel good, although fair-welded edges of the sword bite me; my father gave his son that toughness.] (*Gísl* 40, SkP V, 616)

In his verse, Gísli conveys a strong sense of pride, asserting that he feels good despite his injuries, affirming his courage (“røkkum”).⁴⁹ At the same time, he expresses his love and admiration for his wife Auðr by noting that she brings him joy (“sús mig teitir”), praising her beauty (“fagrleit”) and her courage (“rekkilót”), as well as emphasising their close bond (“vin sínum”). In fact, he refers to his family members three times using possessive pronouns (“sínnum”, “minn”), highlighting the significance of these relationships. Gísli also touches on his enduring legacy by emphasising that Auðr shall enjoy his reputation for bravery (“skal freгна, rekkilót, at røkkum vin sínum”). His reference to the toughness inherited from his father further speaks to the saga’s themes of honour, lineage, and legacy. The stanza is an act of defiance, as Gísli denies his enemies the satisfaction of seeing him die by a sword. Instead, he leaps from the cliff after uttering the verse. In his descent, he deals a lethal blow to one of his enemies, splitting his head and torso, a bold final act that underlines his defiance and skills as a warrior.

Gísli’s final stanza incorporates performative elements as well as a poignant expression of the poet’s affection and pride. This stanza exemplifies the various factors discussed in this essay: direct emotional expressions through emotive language, metaphors that strongly imply emotions, circumlocutions and observations of other’s emotions, and the art of performative emotive staging. It stands as a comprehensive representation of the complexity of emotive expressions within prosimetric contexts, revealing their multifaceted nature.

Conclusion

The stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* provide a layered perspective on emotions, demonstrating the diverse roles played by emotive poetry in saga prosimetrum. Integrated into their prose contexts, the emotive force of the verse extends beyond its content to encompass the context within the prose, emphasising the significance of staging and delivery. The analysis in this essay indicates that emotive expressions in saga poetry and prosimetrum act not only as reflections of the poet’s inner world, but also as performative emotional displays, complicating the dichotomy between “inner” and “outer” expressions. Saga poets typically use emotion words to describe others rather than directly expressing their personal feelings, which suggests that the poets’ interiority is more often implied rather

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the prosimetric setting and effect of this stanza, see Quinn, *The Creativity Paradox*, 52–54.

than explicitly revealed. This creates a critical distance, offering glimpses into the speakers' sentiments through their observations of others.

The analysis furthermore reveals a difference in verse-based emotional expression in communal contexts compared to solitary settings. Emotions like anger, contempt, pride, and joy are predominantly expressed in group settings, while fear, regret, love, sadness, and envy are more often articulated in private. This aligns with the masculine and heroic ideals in many *Íslendingasögur*, which discourage the open display of emotions seen as weak. Case studies of stanzas spoken in solitude or to a single individual contrasted with those spoken in group settings further illustrate these findings. In collective contexts, poets openly display anger, contempt, pride, and joy as part of strategic performances with social and political objectives. These examples highlight how emotive poetry serves as a tool for social influence and reputation management, engaging with broader social and political dynamics. Through the lenses of emotions-as-practice and performativity, the strategic nature of these performances becomes evident, showing that the poets' emotional expressions extend beyond personal reflection to impact their social world.

This illustrates the nuanced complexity of emotional expression within the prosimetric structure of the sagas. The multifaceted functions of verse, conveyed through various modalities within a unified literary framework, elevate the stanzas' emotive significance beyond mere expressions of interiority.

Alexander Wilson

Competing Geographies in the Poetry and Prose of *Víga-Glúms saga*

In this essay, I analyse how the distinct formal and literary qualities of saga prose and skaldic verse could be artfully juxtaposed to create complex, multifaceted depictions of life in medieval Iceland. Specifically, my focus is on how saga prose and skaldic poetry differ in the portrayal of space and spatiality – differences that, I suggest, result in competing geographies being encoded when these literary forms are combined, in ways that enrich the text.

I first consider some pertinent theoretical aspects of space that are useful for analysing conceptualisations of space in society and in literature. I then outline how skaldic poetry and saga prose generally depict space differently, with reference to the distinctive formal qualities of each medium. The main focus of the essay is a case study of *Víga-Glúms saga*, a narrative in which the contested demarcation of space is central to the plot, in which I show how the intertwining of poetic and prose geographies complicates and enriches the saga. While space in *Víga-Glúms saga* is consistently connected to notions of property, identity, and ownership, the ways in which those concerns are expressed vary considerably across the prose account and Glúmr's verse. I suggest that the differences in how these media construct space, when juxtaposed in saga narrative, encourage deeper interpretative engagement to make sense of the competing geographies that emerge from the mixture of distinct literary forms.

The spatial and the social

Space is a fundamentally social concept. While we may conceptualise the physical space in which we exist as a “primordial given”, Edward Soja points out that “the organization and meaning of space is a product of social translations, transformations, and experience”.¹ In Michel de Certeau's distinction between place and space, space is understood as the active, communal experience of a particular place. While place is “an instantaneous configuration of positions [which] implies an indication of stability”, space is “composed of intersections of mobile ele-

¹ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 80.

Alexander Wilson, University of Leicester

ments”, which essentially makes space “a practiced place”.² In other words, both place and space are socially constructed, but where place refers to a nominally stable location – for instance, a residential street organised around the distribution of certain durable objects, such as buildings and infrastructure – space is dynamic, in that it encompasses how a place is actually used by individuals and communities. A place is thus transformed into a space by the practice of different activities, which may include activities for which it was not intended; the organisation of a place affects, but does not determine, what practices can occur on or within it.³ A farmstead is constructed as a place intended primarily for agriculture or husbandry, but its configuration of buildings and land, its centre and its boundaries, can also become a space for ceremonies, festivals, and even legal disputes, as is often the case in the sagas. It is worth noting that in this conception of space, bodies (human and non-human) are not incidental, but constitutive as the agents through which space is organised and maintained, meaning that space cannot be directly equated with topographic or architectural features.

In this respect, the organisation of space also makes visible the power relations in society. The mapping out of the landscape into discrete places, and how those places are distributed within society, is inherently bound up with social hierarchies and dependencies. For instance, which members of society have access to a particular place? And what activities are they permitted to carry out there that can contribute to its transformation into a space?⁴ As Sverrir Jakobsson notes:

The organization of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience. Space, along with time, is a cultural subtext, i.e. a fundamental cultural framework. Subtexts are cultural presuppositions that are generally unexamined because they are assumed to be “the way things are”. Socially produced space is a created structure comparable to other social constructions, in the same manner as history is a social construction of time.⁵

The creation and maintenance of particular spaces, and by extension of a particular understanding of space, is thus a defining cultural activity. In the case of me-

² De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.

³ Though he does not make the same distinction, the importance of subjective activity, rather than the ordering of objects, in determining the parameters of a space is also stressed by Michel Foucault; see Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, and Power”, esp. 245–247. Foucault suggests that even in spaces designed to maintain oppression, “there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings” (245).

⁴ The connection between space and power in medieval Iceland can be seen in the ways that chieftains leveraged their status to gain wider access to land in their region; see Sverrir Jakobsson, “The Process of State-Formation in Medieval Iceland”, 155–159.

⁵ Sverrir Jakobsson, “Heaven is a Place on Earth”, 4; see also Sverrir Jakobsson, “Space”, 175.

dieval Iceland, the prominence of emigration and settlement as a cultural script that fundamentally shaped Icelandic identity is evident in the *Íslendingasögur*, which often begin with accounts of how the ancestors of the protagonists charted and laid claim to the land. Margaret Clunies Ross argues that “the immigrant society was obliged to ‘produce’ its own social space in an entirely new environment and to justify that production, at least initially, in terms of the cultural paradigms that dominated the thinking of the groups from which they had come”.⁶ This representational process also indicates the extent to which space is relational – not only within the society that creates and maintains it, but also in relation to the other societies that influence and shape such activities.

In considering the treatment of space in literary texts, we are dealing with the valences of this social construct at a further remove, in which socially produced space is filtered through the lens of a given literary form. The configuration of space and time in literature has often been analysed in relation to the concept of the chronotope, literally ‘time-space’, theorised by Mikhail Bakhtin. For Bakhtin, the chronotope is “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature”, which he sees as a “formally constitutive category of literature”, and he suggests that different arrangements of space and time are what create generic distinctions.⁷ Bakhtin views time as the dominant principle in narrative chronotopes, given its primacy in narrative progression, but the concept has been applied to analyse both space and time in literary works, including the sagas.⁸ Along with time, space is an important factor in determining saga genre, as Massimiliano Bampi notes: “The temporal and geographical setting of the action play the foremost role in distinguishing one saga genre from another”.⁹ In the *Íslendingasögur*, for instance, Torfi Tulinius suggests that the genre’s chronotope is defined by an “inherent ambiguity attached to the characters and events of the sagas”, which results from two factors: the setting during the transition from paganism to Christianity, and their function as narratives of settlement.¹⁰

6 Clunies Ross, “Land-Taking and Text-Making in Medieval Iceland”, 159–160. Clunies Ross discusses the gendered spatial practices that the Icelanders brought with them from Scandinavia, as well as the conceptual situating of paranormal entities outside the bounds of normative society, as particularly important paradigms in this respect.

7 Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel”, 84–85.

8 See especially Phelpstead, “Adventure Time in *Yngvars saga víðförla*” and *Holy Vikings*; Rohrbach, “The Chronotopes of *Íslendinga saga*”; and Tulinius, “Returning Fathers” and “Time and Space”.

9 Bampi, “Genre”, 8; see also Tulinius, “Time and Space”, 150–152.

10 Tulinius, “Returning Fathers”, 21–22. While the former concern may seem more temporal and the latter more spatial, each consists in a fused spatiotemporal development. The conversion is defined by a temporal shift and takes place over time, but involves the abandonment or repur-

The genre's transitional setting means the "moral ambiguity [of the characters] can be explored more openly than if they were contemporary Christians", as it affords justification for characters not to reject traditions derived from pagan belief outright. Likewise, the process of Iceland's settlement entailed a high degree of social uncertainty for the migrants, especially the descendants of Norwegian chieftains who did not become part of the Icelandic ruling class.¹¹

Because space, in relation with time, is a fundamentally constitutive category of literature, the inclusion of different literary forms within a text may entail the juxtaposition of distinct geographies, which diverge in how they construct physical place and social space. For the study of prosimetrum, then, it can be illuminating to investigate how space is configured differently across the contrasting media of skaldic poetry and saga prose. In particular, we may consider how the geographies that these forms produce not only complement one another in depicting the intersections between space and sociopolitical concerns, but also how they compete with each other by introducing divergent interpretative possibilities into the text.

Space in skaldic verse and saga prose

Though skaldic poetry and saga prose often treat similar subject matter and feature common points of reference, the complex form of the poetry can render its content strikingly different from the typically laconic prose in which it is embedded. Skaldic verse is highly expressive; it makes substantial use of circumlocutory diction and metaphor through kennings and *heiti* [poetic epithets].¹² The poetic voice often moves between different perspectives, sometimes in a rather jarring manner.¹³ The demanding metrical form of *dróttkvætt* [courtly metre] also results

posing of former religious spaces in favour of the new. Settlement primarily concerns opportunities for land-ownership, but in the context of Iceland — which had no indigenous peoples at the time of Scandinavian settlement — benefited early settlers more than later migrants, who arrived in a burgeoning nexus of spatial practice and political claims to the land.

¹¹ Tulinus, "Returning Fathers", 22. Torfi elsewhere terms these characteristics of the *Íslendingasögur* a form of "ontological uncertainty"; see Tulinus, "The Matter of the North", 253.

¹² For an overview of skaldic diction, see Marold, "The Diction of Skaldic Poetry".

¹³ A striking example of this is found in *Svarfdæla saga*, where Klaufi Snækollsson refers to himself in the first, third, and even second person in a single stanza: "Hygg ek, at héti | Hrólfr Nefglíta; | sá býðr Klaufa | kván at verja. | Muntattu, Þoggvir, | brúðar njóta, | nema Nefglitu | næmir lífi" [I believe that Hrólfr was called Nefglíta; that one intends to withhold the woman from Klaufi. You will not enjoy the lady, Þoggvir, unless you deprive Nefglíta of his life] (*Svarfd* 1, SkP V, 1342). *Þoggvir* [evil-doer] is an epithet given to Klaufi earlier in the saga after he maims

in unusual syntactic structures, with sentences interwoven in ways that are difficult to parse.¹⁴ Even when skalds express private opinions, there is still “a dissociating element [. . .] implied by the strictly controlled and complicated form of the language”, as Stefanie Gropper suggests.¹⁵ This contrasts with saga prose, which reproduces more naturalistic speech patterns in narration and character speech. While skaldic poetry foregrounds heightened language and imagery, saga prose tends to restrict metaphor to idiomatic proverbs and direct speech.

The stylisation of skaldic verse thus requires different hermeneutic strategies to unpack its meaning. It is likely that interpretation relied on the listener having considerable experience of the form. Roberta Frank suggests that the peculiar syntax and diction of the poetry “usually depended for its decoding as much on previous knowledge and training as on a feeling for, or observation of, nature”.¹⁶ Hannah Burrows reasons that the cognitive processing of kennings in real time would thus have been facilitated by increased familiarity with this metaphorical system, with “the mental effort [being] reduced for the experienced listener who simply needs to recognise common semantic-field combinations”.¹⁷ Alois Wolf also observes that skaldic poetry typically “arbeitet mit Vorstellungstypen und erzeugt Assoziationsmöglichkeiten, die das Geschehen und die Menschen in Bereiche hineinheben, die ins Heroische, ja ins Mythische weisen” [works with conceptual models and generates associative possibilities that lift events and people into realms that point to the heroic, indeed, to the mythical].¹⁸ Many kennings involve mythical and legendary allusions that are more easily unpacked if one has knowledge of the stories, and the compilation of these narratives in the poetic treatise *Snorra Edda* attests to the importance of this knowledge in the composition of skaldic poetry.

It is no surprise, then, that skaldic verse and saga prose differ somewhat in their use of space and setting. Saga prose is organised strongly by its narrative qualities. Its structure is determined largely by developments in its plot, meaning it is typically formed around chains of cause and effect. Within this environment, characters are depicted as stable presences; they move through the storyworld in naturalistic, embodied ways, and there is a strong degree of continuity in their presentation. The focus on sociopolitical conflict – the resolution of legal disputes

another man during a wrestling contest (ÍF IX, 157), so it seems, at least in the saga context, that Klaufi is addressing himself in the stanza as part of an incitement to attack Hrólfr.

14 For a detailed example of disruptive skaldic syntax, see Frank, “Dróttkvætt”, 394–395.

15 Gropper [Würth], “Skaldic Poetry and Performance”, 265.

16 Frank, “Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences Have a Skaldic Tooth?”, 339.

17 Burrows, “The Mead of Poetry”, 103.

18 Wolf, “Zur Rolle der *vísur* in der altnordischen Prosa”, 459.

or generational feuds – means that specific places or settings draw narrative focus in the prose primarily when relevant to plot developments, but are more likely to be mentioned in passing if they are tangential to events. Lena Rohrbach notes that historiographical sagas in Iceland centre on spaces like the house, the route, and the threshold, settings with established social functions that act as loci for activity, movement, and change.¹⁹ The *Íslendingasögur* vary in their depiction of the natural topography of Iceland, with narratives of marginal figures, like outlaws and paranormal beings, more likely to feature such settings when their protagonists leave or lose access to more central societal spaces.²⁰

By contrast, skaldic poetry does not lean heavily on narrative as an organising principle, with most *lausavísur* being weakly narrativised at best. Skaldic verse is organised principally through its stylistic elements: rhythm, metre, alliteration, assonance, metaphor, and so on. Unlike the prose, the poetry in the *Íslendingasögur* does not always reference particular places, with poetic depictions of topographical features just as likely to be allusive. In the context of the *Íslendingasögur*, this can be seen from the contrast between the very frequent use of topographical elements in kennings, either as referents or determinants, and the low number of specific place names in the extant poetry associated with the genre.²¹ As Edith Marold notes, even where “details of landscapes like trees, the sea, mountains, caves or heaven etc., are present in the system of kennings”, they appear “only as more or less abstract terms”, with skaldic verse more likely to focus on persons and actions rather than setting.²² This can be illustrated with an example from *Kormáks saga*:

Brim gnýr brattir hamrar
blálands Haka strandar;
allt gjalfr eyja þjalfa
út líðr í stað víðis.
Mér kveðk heldr of Hildi

19 Rohrbach, “The Chronotopes of *Íslendinga saga*”, esp. 356–366.

20 By ‘landscape’, I mean the physical topography of the world, which is produced socially as particular places and spaces.

21 While around 13% of stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* refer to named locations, over 62% reference landscape features at least once, either directly or, more commonly, as constituent parts of metaphorical structures. For more details, see the categories CONTENT > NAMED LOCATION and CONTENT > LANDSCAPE/NATURE in the ÍSP database (<https://gefin.ku.dk/q.php?p=isp>) [last accessed 20 February 2024].

22 Marold, “Mythical and Metaphorical Landscapes”, 218–219. Hannah Burrows, however, suggests that the generality of nature imagery in skaldic verse does not mean that the poetry “has nothing to tell us about genuine observations of or engagements with natural environments, or that it could not evoke memories of specific places and environments”; see Burrows, “Aesthetic Expressions of Nature in Skaldic Verse”, 39–40.

hrannbliks an þér miklu
 svefnfátt; sörva Gefnar
 sakna mank, es vaknak.

[The surf is roaring, the steep cliffs of Haki's <sea-king's> dark land [SEA > WAVES] of the shore; all the surge of the enclosure of islands [SEA] is flowing out into the abode of the ocean. I say that I am rather more sleepless because of the Hildir <valkyrie> of wave-gleam [GOLD > WOMAN] than you [are]; I will miss the Gefn <goddess> of the stone necklace [WOMAN] when I wake up.] (*Korm* 56, SkP V, 1123)²³

The stanza clearly associates the imagery of the loud, hostile sea with the internal turmoil that the poet feels at his distance from the woman he desires. There is a sustained idea of typically stable topographical features becoming fluid or being made malleable, such as the cliffs of the dark land standing in for waves (*brattir hamrar Haka blálands*), and the sea, referred to as being enclosed by islands (*þjalfi eyja*), being transformed into a contained place breached by the surge of the poet's feeling, its contents flowing out into the larger expanse of the ocean. This depiction of the shifting landscape is juxtaposed with the emotional and somatic experience of the poet's sleeplessness, the implication being that he suffers from the kind of turmoil felt on rough seas. The verse does not refer to a specific place, but uses familiar topographical features to produce a broader sensory experience, one that encourages interpretation on an emotive, abstract level.

Where saga prose favours the specific and the narratively significant, skaldic verse more often treats in the abstract, the allusive. Unsurprisingly, this affects the kinds of chronotopes created, and which characterise, each medium. While the spaces that emerge consistently across the saga corpus – houses, farmsteads, assemblies, royal courts, pathways and seaways – acquire a tangible presence through sustained narrative attention on the activities that define them, the chronotopes that arise in skaldic verse are more fragmentary. This results from both the poetry's concise stanzaic form and its comparatively low level of narrativity, which, when combined, make it difficult for characters or spaces to develop the sustained textual presences required for enduring chronotopes to emerge. Joy Ladin argues, however, that the chronotopes of non-narrative poetry, which “flicker and flow in a series of hints, glimpses, dissolves, defining consciousness, world and values via evanescence rather than stability”, can still be “as central to the vitality and meaning of those texts as the stability of chronotopes is to the

²³ All translations of Old Norse prose are my own, but translations of skaldic verse are taken from the recent volume *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*, ed. Clunies Ross, Gade, and Wills (SkP V).

vitality and meaning of prose narratives”.²⁴ In narrative, “the primary category is time”, because of the centrality of developments in plot to narrative structure, but the chronotopes of skaldic poetry are not as strongly defined by temporal progression. Rather, references to time and space are often shaped by analogy or similarity rather than contiguity, with poets more likely than prose narrators to align their experience directly with the heroic, legendary past.

Case study: *Víga-Glúms saga*

To clarify the usefulness of these ideas in reference to saga literature, I will now focus on an analysis of how *Víga-Glúms saga* incorporates the distinct ways in which skaldic poetry and saga prose configure and present space. I have chosen *Víga-Glúms saga* as my focus for two reasons. First, Glúmr’s poetry makes frequent reference to important spaces in Glúmr’s life, most notably his property at Þverá, which enables interesting comparisons with the depiction of these spaces in the prose. John McKinnell notes a high frequency in the verse of “elements connected with or employing wordplay on terms for land or landscape”, suggesting that while “none of these would seem notable by themselves, [. . .] the concentration of them may reflect the concerns of the individual poet”.²⁵ Second, it is notable that the saga’s plot focuses on the disputed geography of the farmstead Þverá, as Glúmr vies with his peers over their claims to his land as part of his rise (and fall) in the region.

The contestation of space is thus a central theme in its poetry and prose, which means the saga lends itself well to an analysis of space across the different forms. Katherine Rich, for instance, provides an excellent close-reading of how land and landscape are portrayed throughout the saga, with a particular focus on the consonances between the landscape imagery in Glúmr’s poetry and the political conflicts in the prose that see him eventually forced out of his ancestral home.²⁶ My purpose in this essay, however, is to give attention to the moments of tension that emerge within the text as a result of combining the distinct literary forms of saga prose and skaldic verse, in order to investigate the interpretative possibilities engendered by their disruptive juxtaposition.²⁷

²⁴ Ladin, “It was not Death”, 133.

²⁵ McKinnell, introduction to *Glúm*, SkP V, 1372.

²⁶ Rich, “Poetry and Landscape in the *Íslendingasögur*”, 139–170.

²⁷ For an example of the artful potential of dissonance in saga prosimetrum, see Wilson, “Dissonant Voices in the Prosimetrum of *Heiðarvíga saga*”.

I focus on three areas of the text where the configuration of space is prominent across poetry and prose. These are the moving boundary of *Glúm* 1, connected to Glúmr's dispute with his neighbours over his farmland; the poetic reshaping of the landscape in *Glúm* 3; and the association between land and legacy in *Glúm* 8–9, where Glúmr's poetic centering of his agency and the apparent continuity of his household are undermined by the prose's account of his loss of Þverá and his itinerant old age.

The intrusive border (*Glúm* 1)

The first stanza in the text is spoken when Glúmr discovers that his overbearing neighbours, Þorkell hávi and his son Sigmundur, have moved the boundary that separates their farms onto his portion of the land, thus diminishing his property. Laura Taylor calls it “the most famous example in family saga narrative of a problematic, physical boundary”,²⁸ with its movement the catalyst for Glúmr's violent retribution against his neighbours, and his subsequent rise to power in the district through the legal disputes that follow.

As a fifteen-year-old, Glúmr sails abroad to visit his kinsmen in Norway. On returning to Iceland, he meets his mother Ástríðr, who informs Glúmr (and indeed the audience) about the overbearing behaviour of their neighbours, Þorkell hávi and his son Sigmundur, in his absence: “Nú ferr Glúmr út til Íslands ok heim til Þverár. Ok móður sína hitti hann brátt, ok fagnaði hon honum vel ok sagði ójafnað þeira feðga ok það hann þó hafa við þólinmœði, en kvazk til lítils um fær at ganga þeim í móti” (ÍF IX, 20) [Now Glúmr travels out to Iceland and home to Þverá. And he soon met his mother, and she greeted him warmly and told him about the overbearing behaviour of that father and son, and yet asked him to bear it with patience, but said that she was hardly capable of going against them]. The inchoate quarrels over the land between the families' farms are mentioned earlier in the saga, but no details have been given about the specific events that Ástríðr mentions. After speaking with his mother, Glúmr rides to the boundary of the farm and sees that it has been moved further onto their property, thus diminishing it, at which point (and location) he speaks a verse:

28 Taylor, “The Representation of Land and Landownership in Medieval Icelandic Texts”, 139.

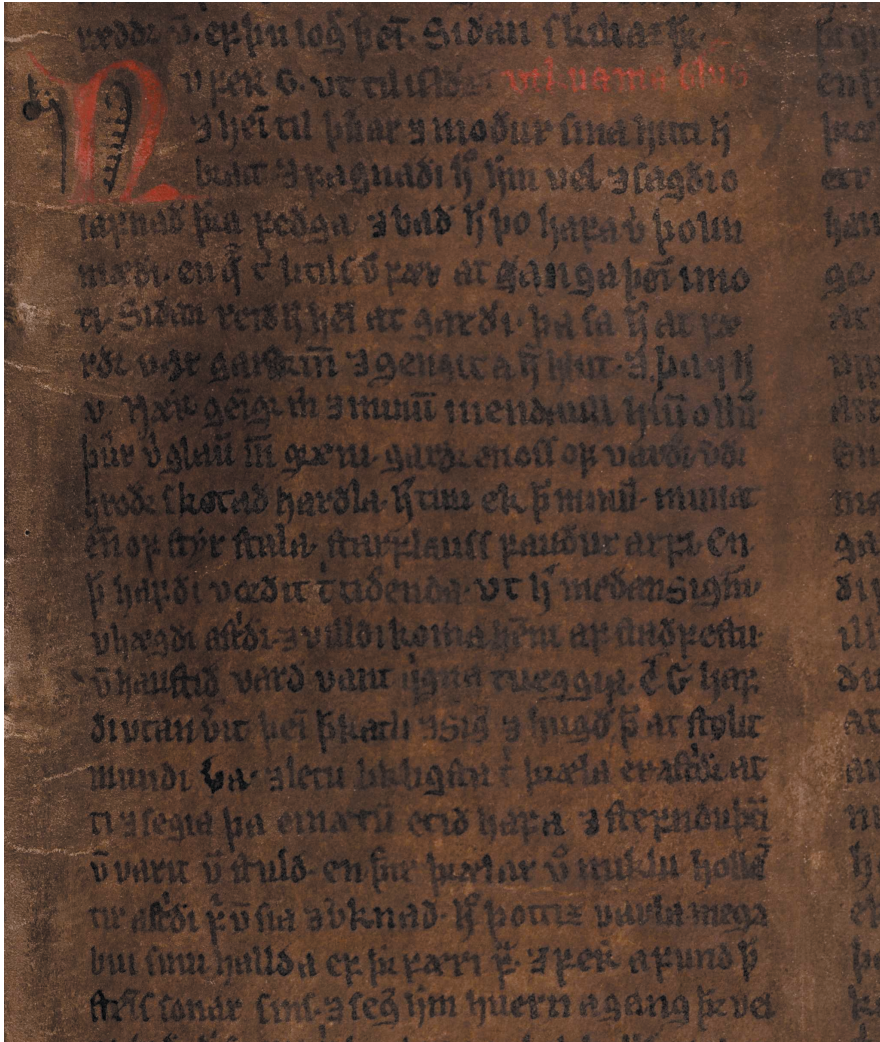


Figure 6: The first stanza of *Víga-Glúms saga* is written shortly after the beginning of chapter 7. Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 132 fol. (Möðruvallabók), f. 132ra.

Síðan reið hann heim at garði. Þá sá hann, at færðr var garðrinn ok gengit á hans hlut, ok þá kvað hann vísu: (ÍF IX, 20)

Nærr gengr mér ok mínum,
menþøll, hjúum øllum
– þverr við glaum – inn gröeni
garðr, an oss of varði.

Verðr hróðrskotat harðla
 – hér tínik þat – mínum
 munat enn of styr stála
 starflauss – fõðurarfí. (*Glúm* 1, SkP V, 1374)

[Later, he rode home to the boundary [of the farm]. Then he saw that the boundary had been moved and encroached onto his property, and then he spoke a verse:

Necklace-fir [WOMAN], the green boundary passes nearer to me and all my household than we expected; cheerfulness dries up at that. The reputation of my inheritance has been severely beaten aside; I am giving an account of it here; yet I will not be without work in the *tumult of steel weapons* [BATTLE].] (*Glúm* 1, SkP V, 1374)

The prose clearly implicates Þorkell and Sigurðr as the wrongdoers through Ástríðr's speech to her son, as well as the framing of the boundary as having been moved by someone (*færðr var garðrinn*). Yet Glúmr's stanza does not refer directly to the men, instead portraying the boundary itself (*inn græni garðr*) as an active entity encroaching upon his property. The boundary is described as moving ominously towards him and his household (*nærr mér ok öllum hjúum mínum*), an implication, along with the prediction of violent conflict, that the threat to his land entails danger not only to the integrity of his community, but also that of his body.²⁹ Also of note here is Glúmr's address to a woman – perhaps his mother, though she is not said to be present – through a kenning with a baseword referring to a fir-tree (*-þoll*), an image of static presence in contrast to the moving boundary.³⁰ If the address is indeed to Glúmr's mother, the poetry can be read as contrasting the symbolic rootedness of his family in that place with the invasive border moving against them, the land reimagined as a shifting aggressor.

In her analysis of this episode, Judy Quinn includes an observation by Stefanie Gropper that “to some extent, [Glúmr's] first poetic utterances marks his rite of passage into assertive heroic status in the saga action”,³¹ and it is true that Glúmr frames himself in the verse both as an active participant in the impending conflict and, in a spatial sense, as an active presence in witnessing these events (*hér tínik þat*). In a sense, in riding up to the boundary and reciting the verse there, the prose stages Glúmr as confronting the intrusive presence envisaged in his poetry head-on, with the skald placing himself at the site of the conflict in

²⁹ I am grateful to Stefanie Gropper for suggesting the latter interpretation.

³⁰ See also the analysis of this episode in Quinn, *The Creativity Paradox*, 19–26.

³¹ Quinn, *The Creativity Paradox*, 27.

order to challenge the encroaching border. Yet it is also notable that the proximity of the conflict staged through this poetic recital is not mirrored in the subsequent prose, which dives back into a detailed account of past events, for which Glúmr is absent, before returning to the present – at which point Glúmr’s arrival in Iceland is narrated again, but this time with less impetus on him securing the property for his family. The saga says that Glúmr spent some time at the ship before heading home with his wealth, but his recital of the verse is not mentioned, and he takes no further action: “En it sama skaplyndi hafði hann sem fyrr, var fálátr ok lét sem hann heyrði eigi þat, er gǫrzk hafði út hér meðan” (ÍF IX, 24) [But he had the same disposition as before; he was rather quiet, and behaved as if he had not heard what had happened out here in the meantime]. If the verse stages Glúmr’s self-initiated movement into a more heroic role, the following prose works against the immediacy of this dramatic imagery, delaying the progression of the plot by staging Glúmr’s previous absence in more detail, then emphasising his apparent reluctance to involve himself in the conflict.

The effect of this narrative retardation is to draw out the difficulty of Glúmr’s situation by contrasting the ideal and the actual. In his poetry, Glúmr presents himself as the authoritative combatant he expects (and is expected) to become; in the prose, he remains the *kolbíttr*-like youth that he was when he left Iceland a year before, a status he is yet to transcend fully. The situation is complicated by the power wielded by Þorkell and Sigmundur, who force Ástríðr to forfeit her claim to the prosperous field shared by the farms by falsely accusing her slaves of theft, then refuse to return it (though offer to pay for it) when the accusation is revealed to be untrue. Despite being in the wrong, the neighbours reason that Glúmr is unlikely to confront them, since his older brother Þorsteinn has failed to oppose them. Faced with the obligation to confront men of higher status and wealth, it is perhaps unsurprising that Glúmr attributes the injustice done to his family and their property to the land itself, representing its agentive movement as the threat he must face, and thus displacing the legal and political complexities bound up with its possession into a single entity to be confronted. It is only at the end of the summer that Glúmr, egged on by Ástríðr, commits to taking revenge; he kills Sigmundur in the field at the heart of the dispute, an act that marks his transition within the saga to becoming a truly active participant in the politics of the region.

Reshaping the landscape (*Glúm 3*)

Glúmr speaks the saga's third stanza while being pursued by Víga-Skúta, his former son-in-law through his marriage to Glúmr's daughter, but who angered Glúmr by abandoning his wife and returning her to Þverá.³² Skúta later ambushes Glúmr at his shieling; without weapons, Glúmr attempts to flee. The prose shows how Glúmr escapes Skúta because of his knowledge of the landscape where the chase occurs. When Skúta confronts Glúmr at his shieling and prevents him from re-entering the building, Glúmr runs to a gorge over a nearby river:

Glúmr hopar at gljúfrunum, en Skúta sækir eptir. Glúmr steypisk ofan fyrir gljúfrin, en Skúta leitar þar ofan, er ganga mátti, ok sér í gljúfrunum, hvar kápuna rak, ok hleypr til ok leggþ þegar til. Þá heyrir hann mál yfir sik: "Lítill fremð at spilla klæðum manna." Skúta sér upp ok kennir þar Glúm. Hann hafði raunar vitat, at þar var undir tó ein, er hann fór ofan. [. . .] Þá kvað Glúmr þetta: (ÍF IX, 53)

Halfs eyris metk hverjan
hrísrunn fyr ó sunnan;
vel hafa víðir skógar
vargi opt of borgit. (*Glúm 3*, SkP V, 1378)

[Glúmr retreats to the gorge, but Skúta pursues him. Glúmr plunges down into the gorge, but Skúta looks down from above at where he could have gone, and sees where his [Glúmr's] cloak was drifting in the gorge, and leaps at it and immediately stabs it. Then he hears speech above him: "There is little honour in spoiling people's clothes." Skúta looks up and recognises Glúmr there. He had indeed known, when he leapt from above, that there was a certain grassy verge there. [. . .] Then Glúmr spoke this:

I value each bush south of the river at half an ounce [of silver]; extensive woods have often protected a wolf well.] (*Glúm 3*, SkP V, 1378)

Both prose and verse concern Glúmr's protection by the landscape, but the imagery used in each form varies. The prose contrasts Glúmr's sudden leap into the gorge with Skúta's more considered descent, the implication being that Skúta is more unfamiliar with the area. Glúmr uses his knowledge of the particular landscape to trick his pursuer, as the saga makes clear in retrospect. The poetry, however, refers instead to features not mentioned in the prose account, such as forests and scrubland, rather than the river gorge ("gljúfr") and the grass verge ("tó"). John McKinnell also notes that Glúmr's reference to the landscape south of

³² This stanza is also quoted in the version of this episode preserved in *Reykðæla saga*, where it is the only verse quoted in the saga (ÍF X, 234). The *Reykðæla saga* version is not edited by Skaldic Project as a separate stanza (*Reykð = Glúm 3*, SkP V, 1378).

the river, if we take it to be a reference to the prose, does not map onto the local geography. The pursuit must have taken place east of the river if Glúmr were to have travelled north to Þverá on the same side, which McKinnell suggests may indicate, along with the references to distinct landscape features, that the stanza is “not now in its original context”.³³ Katherine Rich suggests that Glúmr’s choice to situate himself in the south should be read as part of a tendency in the saga “to set Espihóll and Þverá against one another as *norðr* and *suðr* respectively”,³⁴ even though this conflict does not concern Skúta at all. The apparent contradictions seem not to have been important to whoever wrote the saga, however, and it is worth considering whether they can be interpreted productively.

In the prose, spatial elements emerge only when they become relevant for progression of the plot. The gorge near the shieling is mentioned first when Glúmr realises he needs to flee his pursuer; similarly, the grassy verge he uses to fool Skúta is revealed only after he makes himself known to his beleaguered pursuer. The distinctive, particular shape of the landscape is thus important principally as it shapes and influences the characters’ actions. By contrast, the verse favours allusive comparison over specificity in its communication of how the space is experienced. Where the prose emphasises that Glúmr’s survival relies on his knowledge of the local landscape, reiterating for the benefit of the audience that he had in fact known of the ledge – and implicitly that Skúta had not – the poetry is more expansive in its depiction of space, implicitly aligning the events with the image of a wolf (or perhaps outlaw, given the valences of the term *vargr*) hidden by a vast forest.³⁵ Its focus is thus not on the individual’s interaction with a particular landscape, but on the imaginative comparisons that can be drawn between the events and the stock of conventional poetic spatialisations. For the grassy ledge used by Glúmr to save himself, its juxtaposition with this poetic reimagining of the landscape both expands it, reframing it as comparable to the protection afforded by extensive woodland, and emphasises its smallness: the wolf may need to rely on the wide woods, but Glúmr needs only an easily-missed ledge to outsmart his opponents.

The wider significance of the stanza hinges on the identification of the wolfish figure. It is tempting to read it as Glúmr implicitly presenting himself as a wolfish figure to reinforce the threat he makes in the prose, where he taunts Skúta that he will pursue him in turn: “Þá mælti Skúta: ‘Á þat áttu at minnask, Glúmr, at nú hefir þú runnit ok beitt eigi Skútu.’ Glúmr segir: ‘Satt er þat, en vilja

33 McKinnell, notes to *Glúm* 3, SkP V, 1378.

34 Rich, “Poetry and Landscape in the *Íslendingasögur*”, 152.

35 On the terminology used to describe outlaws, including the term *vargr*, see Riisøy, “Outlawry”.

mynda ek þat, at þú rynnir eigi skemmra, áðr sól settisk í kveld” (ÍF IX, 53) [Then Skúta said, “Now you ought to remember this, Glúmr, that you’ve now run away and not waited for Skúta.” Glúmr said, “That’s true, but I’d intend it so that you run no less farther before the sun sets this evening”]. While the prose understandably presents Glúmr as a hunted figure, given he is unarmed and at risk of violence from his pursuer, the verse may be contesting that notion in aligning Glúmr with the danger posed by the wild wolf – and thus warning Skúta to take Glúmr’s threat seriously. I think it is more likely, however, that the wolfish figure is meant as a reference to Skúta. McKinnell compares the phrasing with other proverbs in the sagas that connect wolves to ideas of betrayal, and suggests that “Glúmr is probably implying that Skúta’s attack on him was *ylfskr* [wolfish, treacherous], [and] that Skúta will now have to flee from him like an outlaw, having forfeited his legal immunity by virtue of his treacherous attack”.³⁶ While he finds it “rather odd for the first couplet to refer to Glúmr and the second to Skúta”,³⁷ it may be that the stanza as a whole is thus constructing not a version of the *actual* space in which the pursuit took place, but a *possible* space – the imagined site of Glúmr’s intended pursuit of Skúta. In this interpretation, the first couplet can be understood as Glúmr taunting Skúta that he will be grateful for any protection he can get; in the absence of extensive woods, each bush he finds will be worth its weight in silver. In this context, we may also speculate whether the auditory consonance between Skúta’s insulting retort about Glúmr having run from him (“hefir runnit”), and Glúmr’s poetic claim to value each bush (“hrís-runn”) highly, could be read as an intentional refashioning of Skúta’s words, through which Glúmr transforms a potential source of dishonour to him into a humiliating reminder of Skúta’s failure to finish the job – and a rejoinder that he, in turn, should value any cover that the sparse Icelandic landscape affords him.

Even if we assume that the stanza originally had a different context, then, it is notable that its present context in the saga still offers interpretative resonances that go beyond the particular topography articulated in the prose. While the prose focuses on the specifics of Glúmr’s escape – how the distinct form of the gorge shapes Skúta’s pursuit, and how Glúmr’s knowledge of its shape saves him – the verse, spoken after the practical need for escape has passed, allows Glúmr to recast the interaction in his favour through more abstract and allusive imagery. In a sense, the distinct expectations, and thus affordances, of poetry give Glúmr the opportunity to artfully reimagine the landscape, both as a diegetic re-

³⁶ McKinnell, notes to *Glúm* 3, SkP V, 1378–1379.

³⁷ McKinnell, notes to *Glúm* 3, SkP V, 1379.

sponse to his would-be humiliator and, with a knowing wink, for the benefit of the audience.

Land and legacy (*Glúm 8–9*)

After Glúm secures the borders of his property, he establishes himself as a leading figure in the district. Unsurprisingly, given his epithet (which translates to ‘killer’), he makes many enemies along the way, eventually culminating in a lengthy lawsuit that results in him being made to give up ownership of Þverá to his opponent Einarr Þveræingr Eyjólfsson. When the day comes for him to hand over the property, however, Glúm places himself in the high-seat of the farmhouse and refuses to leave. His defiance is associated explicitly with social status: “Hann lætr tjalda skálann ok vill eigi svá skiljask við landit sem kotkarlar” (ÍF IX, 89) [He has the hall hung with tapestries, and so does not want to part with the land like a peasant]. It is only when Einarr’s mother Hallbera arrives to confront Glúm, declaring that she has consecrated the land to her son with fire, that he departs.³⁸ Looking back at the property over his shoulder, Glúm speaks a stanza as he rides away:

Rudda ek sem jarlar
 – orð lék á því – forðum
 með veðrstöfum Viðris
 vandils mér til landa.
 Nú hefki, Valþøgnis, vegna,
 Várar skíðs, of síðir
 breiða jörð með þorðum,
 bendir, mér ór hendi.

[I cleared my way to lands with *staves of the storm of Viðrir’s* <Óðinn’s> *rod* [SPEAR > BATTLE > WARRIORS] like jarls long ago; word spread about that. Now I have finally struck the broad earth with its [high] borders out of my hand, *bender of the stave of the Vár* <goddess> of *Valþøgnir* <Óðinn> [VALKYRIE > SWORD > WARRIOR].] (*Glúm 8*, SkP V, 1387)

The prose depicts Þverá as a setting in which Glúm acts, its symbolic power as his property matched by its practical use as a space in which Glúm has physical

³⁸ The act of carrying fires around the boundary of a land claim is made elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur*, such as in *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 4) and *Vatnsdæla saga* (ch. 10), though it is associated there with land claims made as part of Iceland’s settlement, rather than as the result of a legal dispute. For analysis of this and other rituals in the construction of conceptual boundaries in Iceland, see Phelpstead, “Ecocriticism and *Eyrbyggja saga*”.

presence. In the stanza, however, Glúmr treats the property more abstractly as a fragile item that can be struck from his hand, a framing that diminishes the space from an environment to a graspable, contestable object.³⁹ The contestation of space is also prominent in the prose, but the conflict involving Þverá unfolds more gradually there; the details of the legal case take up several chapters, and Glúmr stays on the land for another year even after he forfeits the property.⁴⁰ By contrast, the verse presents the farmstead as something lost in an instant, held onto by the poet until the fateful moment when it leaves his hand.

The centering of Glúmr in the stanza as agent is also noteworthy, in that the poet attributes the loss of property squarely to his own actions. The description of clearing his way to lands (“ek rudda mér til landa”) with warriors, an act directly linked to ancient claims of rulership in the verse, along with the claim to have struck Þverá and its borders out of his own hands (“hefk vegna breiða jörð með borðum ór hendi mér”), frames him as the active figure in these events, who gains, then loses, his territorial claim through his use of violence. It is true that Glúmr’s killings contribute to him forfeiting the property, but the poetic imagery elides the role played by others in determining the parameters of the space: the protracted contestation of the farm between Glúmr, Þorkell, and Sigmundur, and later the men of Espihóll; the pitched battle that takes place (ch. 22–23); the lawsuit pursued successfully by Einarr to claim Þverá; and, in the preceding prose, the actions of Hallbera to force Glúmr out of the land. While Glúmr’s verse re-frames the space as something over which he has (had) control, the prose depicts him as being symbolically excised through a land-cleansing ritual, forced from the householder’s high-seat into an itinerant existence.

These dynamics are explored further in the following summary, which deals briefly with Glúmr’s stays at various farmsteads in the region, and in which another stanza is quoted:

39 Similar imagery is used earlier in the saga by Glúmr’s son Már, who, in direct speech, predicts to Glúmr that the battle with Þórarinn, which leads to the suit with Einarr, will cost him the property: “Nú muntu Þverárland hafa slegit ór hendi þér” (ÍF IX, 79) [Now you’ll have mowed the land at Þverá out of your hands]. This puns on the meanings of the verb *slá* [to mow/to strike], a reference to Glúmr’s preceding remark that “harðsløegr var Hrísa-teigr nú í dag” (ÍF IX, 79) [Hrísa-teigr [the field on which the battle took place] was hard to mow today]. Glúmr rejects Már’s earlier prediction, but the later stanza picks up on this imagery.

40 This arrangement parallels Þorkell hávi’s forced withdrawal from the property earlier in the saga, where he is forced to sell Þverá to Glúmr for no more than half its value as part of the lawsuit concerning Sigmundur’s death, but is permitted to dwell on the farm for one final year (ch. 9).

Glúmr bjó á Møðruvöllum í Hørgárdal við Þorgrím fjúk ok unði því eigi lengr en einn vetr. Þá bjó hann tvá vetr í Myrkárdal. Þá hljóp þar skriða nær bænum, svá at tók sum húsin. Þá kvað Glúmr vísu: (ÍF IX, 90)

Munat . . . enn sælu
menbrjótandi hljóta;
oss kom breiðr í búðir
þoggr af einu hoggvi,
þás, fleinmarar fjóra,
fullkátir vér sötum
– nús (mógrennir) minna
mitt setr – tigu vetra. (*Glúm* 9, SkP V, 1390)

Þá keypti Glúmr land at Þverbrekku í Øxnadal ok bjó þar, meðan hann lifði, ok varð gamall ok sjónlauss. (ÍF IX, 91)

[Glúmr lived at Møðruvellir in Hørgárdalr with Þorgrím fjúk, and dwelled there no longer than one year. Then he lived for two years in Myrkárdalr. Then a landslide crashed down there near the farmhouse, so that it swept away some of the buildings. Then Glúmr spoke a verse:

The *necklace-scatterer* [GENEROUS MAN] will not enjoy . . . good fortune; far-reaching damage has come upon us in our quarters as a result of a single blow, when we had remained cheerful for forty years, *feeder of the seagull of the arrow-sea* [BLOOD > RAVEN/EAGLE > WARRIOR]; now my estate is smaller. (*Glúm* 9, SkP V, 1390)

Then Glúmr bought land at Þverbrekka in Øxnadalr and stayed there as long as he lived, and he became old and blind.]

Glúmr’s claim to have sat cheerfully for forty years is undermined by the prose, which details his forced itinerancy in his old age, as is the claim that his good fortune had ended because of a single blow, in light of the saga’s depiction of the sustained feuds that eventually force him to leave his ancestral home. The poetic description of the “breiðr þoggr” [far-reaching damage] done to the property is also more hyperbolic than the prose, which refers to “sum húsin” [part of the buildings] as having been destroyed – undoubtedly a serious event, but one that is more localised than its poetic framing implies. The differences between these media appear to stem from their distinct treatments of space, with the emphatic account in the poetry connected to the form’s tendency towards grandiose comparisons over granular details. The damage to the house is presented in the verse as deeply significant for the emotional state and misfortune of the poet, but is less important in the prose, where the incident is framed almost as a footnote in Glúmr’s biography, and thus not afforded the level of attention given to his earlier, more narratively impactful actions.

It is tempting to read the different representations of space in prose and verse as an ironic juxtaposition at Glúmr's expense, which undercuts the claims made in his poetry to highlight his actual lack of influence after being forced to leave Þverá. More likely, however, is that the bathetic element of the prose, in which Glúmr is compelled into quasi-vagrancy, is meant to heighten the emotional despair in his poetic attempts to retain more agency and continuity in his relationship with the space he shaped for such a long time. The second stanza associates the space less with a specific place, whether the farmhouse, the enclosure, or the surrounding lands, than with the emotions and implicit activity of those who occupied it. When contrasted with the prose account, it is clear how much Glúmr has lost: not only the grandiose buildings of Þverá, nor the influence and power that comes with occupying such a valued seat, but also the communal-ity and ancestral identity bound up with the property.⁴¹

Conclusion

The treatment of space across poetry and prose in *Víga-Glúms saga* suggests that while both forms present common concerns throughout the text, namely, the importance of holding onto one's property, and the connections that such spaces have to the formation and sustenance of one's identity, they express spatial matters in distinct, and often contrary, ways. Rather than undermining the quality of the text, however, their differing perspectives can be understood productively as introducing significant, but not irresolvable, tensions into the narrative, which motivate interpretative engagement to make sense of these ruptures in the text. The competing geographies presented in the saga contribute to the characterisation of Glúmr, whose attempts to heroicise his experience through poetry clash with his portrayal in the prose, which paints him as a tricky, disreputable figure – perhaps indicating the gap between the public perception of Glúmr and his poetic view of himself. In the prose, the spaces of the farmhouse and the wider farmstead become sites of conflict, environments in which social and legal disputes arise and are played out. In Glúmr's poetry, the same spaces are refigured both as smaller – as objects to be struck at by foes, or even by oneself – and as larger, as

⁴¹ The impressive nature of the buildings at Þverá is made clear in the first chapter of the saga, where Hreiðarr, a Norwegian merchant staying the winter with Glúmr's grandfather Ingjaldr, declares to him that “ek hefí komit á nökkura bæi hér í Eyjafirði, þá er bestir eru, ok sé ek engi herbergi slík sem hér” (ÍF IX, 5) [I've visited certain farms here in Eyjafjörður, those that are finest, and I haven't seen a household such as this one].

sites that facilitate comparisons to the legendary past and through which immediate emotional experience can be mediated.

The combination of literary forms thus enables the saga to incorporate distinct modes of conceptualising spatial experience into the narrative, in ways that enrich and expand on the central themes of the text. Focusing on the inherent differences between poetry and prose, rather than the ways in which they complement one another, may feel like reading the saga against the grain, but the case of *Víga-Glúms saga* suggests that such formal dissonance was, in fact, productive for the artistic intentions of those who composed it. The juxtaposition of media enables productive friction between their distinct communicative modes to emerge in the saga, which is used to create conflict and complexity within specific scenes and on the broader thematic level. By picking up on and heightening these opposing elements, *Víga-Glúms saga* is able to depict the political contestation of land and space, and thus of identity, in a more artful, multifaceted way than would otherwise be possible.

Heather O'Donoghue

Absent Audiences in Family Saga Prosimetrum

Introduction

Old Icelandic family sagas (*Íslendingasögur*) are a plausible representation of a possible historical reality – even if this is in fact an imagined reality. The narrative is almost always a representation of events that *might* have taken place, and how characters *might* have behaved, whether they did or they did not.¹ *Íslendingasaga* narratives are characterised by naturalistic plausibility, grafted on to, or elaborated from, a bed rock of historical actuality.

There might seem to be no way of distinguishing what did actually happen from an account of what might have, that is, is the saga author's own intuitive and naturalistic invention. But there are some kinds of account that cannot be based on actuality, because the implausibility lies not in the content of what is recounted as having been said or done, but in how the saga narrator – or any intermediary – could possibly have known such things. An obvious example is for a saga author to relate what a character was thinking, or what was said or done in the absence of any witness. These thoughts, speeches or actions might have actually happened, but no one could have known them, and so the author – or previous storyteller – must have invented them.²

This essay will be concerned with the representation of dialogue, of what is said to have been said. By dialogue, I simply mean the representation of speech in narrative, not necessarily an exchange between two or more characters. Dialogue in *Íslendingasögur* is – mostly – naturalistic and plausible, although com-

1 An exception to this is the inclusion of supernatural figures or events in *Íslendingasaga* narratives — most commonly, witches and revenants. Explaining this inclusion demands some speculation about what a putative medieval audience might have believed to be part of the 'real' world, which is beyond the scope of this piece. See, for instance, Ármann Jakobsson and Mayburd (ed.), *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150–1400*.

2 I shall use the terms 'saga author' and 'saga narrator' almost interchangeably, but although there is no clear dividing line between the two, I will tend to use saga author when large-scale issues of structure and scene construction are involved, and saga narrator when it is a matter of how the story is told. I use the broader term 'storyworld' rather than 'diegesis', which refers to the storyworld only as depicted in the narrative.

Heather O'Donoghue, University of Oxford

mon sense suggests that it is unlikely to represent verbatim what was actually uttered. But there are some possible departures from this rule. For example, it is conceivable that the historical Njáll on whom the protagonist of *Njáls saga* is based did actually say “með lögum skal land vart byggja, en með ólögum eyða” [with laws shall our land be settled, but by lawlessness laid waste] (ÍF XII, 172). Perhaps it was a public declaration – as it is presented in the saga – and represents an actual event that was remembered and passed on, thus becoming part of cultural memory, although the precise wording might have been elaborated or tidied up. By contrast, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir probably did *not* say “misjöfn verða morginverkin; ek hefi spunnit tólf álna garn, en þú hefir vegit Kjartan” [ill-assorted [or ‘very different’] are morning-tasks; I’ve spun twelve ells of yarn, and you have killed Kjartan] when she was told of the death of the love of her life at the hands of her husband Bolli (ÍF V, 154).³ The more memorable the speech, the more likely it is possibly to be actual, but paradoxically, the opposite is also true: it is just as likely to have been fictional and honed. So memorability – perhaps reinforced by alliteration, or a striking syntactic inversion, as is the case with what is ostensibly Guðrún’s remark – is no guide to authenticity. The context of the speech – at least, as represented in the saga – may be a more useful guide: Njáll’s declaration about the fundamental necessity of law is reported as a public utterance, and one can easily imagine it as part of a persuasive speech at the *alþingi*, whereas Guðrún’s tense remark about the contrast between her and her husband’s ‘work’ that morning is set in the context of a hostile exchange between man and wife.⁴ No onlookers or eavesdroppers are mentioned (although we should perhaps assume that others were present whether they are mentioned or not). But it is hard to imagine a public context in which this remark might have been proclaimed.

As I have suggested elsewhere, Guðrún’s remark recalls the association between valkyries, who determine men’s lives or deaths on the battlefield, and weav-

3 See Louis-Jensen, “A Good Day’s Work”, for a discussion of the manuscript history of this remark, and an exploration of how much yarn might have been spun and when. Louis-Jensen concludes that “the basis of the reading [. . .] in the manuscript tradition of *Laxdæla saga* is so slender that there is in fact no chance of its being original” (190) — let alone historically authentic.

4 Louis-Jensen imagines Guðrún “pretending that the couple are merely exchanging domestic commonplaces suitable for the end of a working day or shift”; see Louis-Jensen, “A Good Day’s Work”, 192. I share Helga Kress’s view (as paraphrased by Louis-Jensen) that there is “bitterness and sarcasm” in Guðrún’s words, and that she “stresses the contrast rather than the complementarity between male and female fields of activity thus expressing her frustration at being kept away from the centre of events (i.e. the battlefield)”; see Louis-Jensen, “A Good Day’s Work”, 197–198, n. 8. For the original essay, see Kress, “Mjök mun þér samstaft þykkja”, 104–105.

ing or spinning.⁵ It seems to me more likely that associating Guðrún with valkyries would have been part of the saga author's literary strategy, part of what Louis-Jensen calls the "compositional level of the saga", and not something Guðrún as a character would have been aware of.⁶ We see the same strategy in *Njáls saga*, in the way Hildigunnr is implicitly but insistently associated with the valkyries of the poem *Darraðarljóð*.⁷

We may remember that Guðrún wanted to go abroad with Kjartan, and was not allowed to; perhaps her remark is an element in the saga author's insightful depiction of a woman already frustrated by traditional gender roles in saga society. We may recall that as a teenager she confidently chats with an important and learned chieftain, pressing him to stay at her family's farm. And yet, what could be more natural(istic) than a housewife spinning yarn? It is entirely characteristic of *Íslendingasaga* narrative not only to blend fictionality and historicity, but also to disguise sophisticated literary artistry in an apparently naturalistic mode.

It is well nigh impossible, then, to determine whether or not what is represented as dialogue in *Íslendingasaga* narrative records verbatim what was actually said at the time. Perhaps it is wholly invented. Sagas are full of direct speech, especially in particularly dramatic stretches of narrative – the scene between Guðrún and her husband Bolli after the killing of Kjartan, for instance, is structured as a series of direct speeches. The saga author has prioritised immediacy and drama over the appearance of historicity, or authenticity – although we should remember that a medieval audience might not in any case have been concerned about historicity in the same way as modern scholars may be.

Skaldic verse as direct speech

I now turn to the primary subject of this essay, which is the incorporation of skaldic verse as the direct speech of characters in saga narrative. Representing characters uttering verses as direct speech is the single biggest departure from naturalism in *Íslendingasaga* narrative. And unlikely as people speaking *dróttkvætt* as dialogue may seem, I want to examine an even further degree of implausibility,

5 O'Donoghue, "Figura in *Njáls saga*", 156–158. But see Bek-Pedersen, "Fate and Weaving", for an analysis of the persistent double confusion between weaving and spinning, and valkyries and Norns. I have further suggested that Guðrún's conclusion at the end of the saga, that she was worst to the one she loved best (ÍF V, 228), may also evoke the valkyries' possible roles as sexual partners of the warriors they have themselves fated to die.

6 Louis-Jensen, "A Good Day's Work", 194.

7 See O'Donoghue, "Figura in *Njáls saga*".

that is, verses spoken when the narrative context does not provide anyone in the storyworld to hear them – what I have called absent audiences.

Reciting a verse is not in all circumstances an implausible or unrealistic act. Saga characters are sometimes shown reciting pre-prepared verse – such as when Egill Skalla-Grímsson declaims his oddly ambivalent praise poem *Höfuðlausn* at the court of King Eiríkr blóðox in England (ÍF II, ch. 61). But such recitations are usually well-signalled in the narrative. There is to my mind a significant degree of implausibility around the impromptu composition of skaldic verse, as when characters are shown responding at once in verse to a situation such as a challenge, a revelation or an unexpected event.⁸ So we can mostly view the technique of giving characters direct speech in the form of skaldic stanzas as a literary illusion, a narrative mode, rather than an attempt to recount what might have happened.

The effects of saga prosimetrum in which the verses are presented as the dialogue of saga characters are well known, and have often been discussed. They include immediacy, access to the emotions of characters, “pointing” dramatic moments in the story, and pacing the narrative, amongst many others.⁹ Their quasi-extradiegetic status – that is, the sense that they belong to the way the story is told, rather than representing events in the storyworld – is suggested by the fact that other characters within the storyworld are not shown to make any reference to this shift to verse. That the utterance has been in verse rather than in prose remains completely unremarked.

This brings me (at last) to the question of audience. If speaking in verse is not an event in the storyworld, then we as readers or listeners do not need to imagine it taking place – indeed, we cannot imagine it taking place. The only way of situating such verses within the storyworld is to envisage saga characters speaking to themselves, solitary figures voicing thoughts aloud, rather like a sort of soliloquy. But characters speaking aloud to themselves is hardly appropriate as part of a naturalistic narrative, and speaking aloud in *dróttkvætt* even less so. And to have characters speaking something like soliloquies in saga narratives brings us up against the issue of how the saga author could have known what was said.

And yet, in their creation of prosimetrum, saga authors *do* represent characters speaking, apparently aloud, in situations in which it is problematic for us as readers or listeners to envisage an audience to receive them. One particular issue is an apostrophe in the verse that does not match the context of the narrative. Possible examples of such mismatches might be that the verse is addressed to a

⁸ But for a defence of impromptu composition, see Frog, “Speech-Acts in Skaldic Verse”.

⁹ See O'Donoghue, “Prosimetrum in the *Íslendingasögur*”.

woman, while the storyworld audience is male; or there is an apostrophe to a plural subject, while the saga author provides only one addressee.¹⁰ Such discrepancies very probably reveal that the stanza has been recycled from its original context and is freshly incorporated into a new narrative it does not quite fit. It seems that in such cases the creator of the prosimetrum has prioritised the effect of including the verse over the inconsistency, and it is tempting to try to guess what the original context of the verse might have been. This is an interesting but ultimately very speculative line of enquiry. In what follows, I will nevertheless consider such possibilities, as well as drawing attention to verses that, while presented as the direct speech of saga characters, raise significant issues about the existence of an audience. I will take two examples from *Grettis saga* and examine Gíslí's dream verses in *Gísla saga*.¹¹

***Grettis saga* (i): Grettir responds to news of his outlawry**

In chapter 47 of *Grettis saga*, Grettir returns to Iceland from his travels in Norway and is hit on arrival with three pieces of bad news: his father has died, one of his brothers has been murdered, and he has been outlawed during his absence from Iceland (an act of dubious legality). Although, characteristically, the saga narrator does not elaborate on the significance (beyond the obvious) of these tidings, the story so far, and as it later unfolds, prepares us for the news to have an especially distressing effect on Grettir. Although relations with his father were once extremely hostile, in chapter 37, Grettir overhears one of his enemies speaking disrespectfully about Grettir's father's imminent death; Grettir kills him. Familial loyalty clearly overrides the quality of their relationship. Fraternal relations are more positive. Grettir's murdered brother Atli is evidently a great loss to the whole family: he is described a little earlier in the same chapter as being "gæfr ok

¹⁰ For a list of addresses to absent addressees in the *Íslendingasögur*, including ambiguous cases, see the category ADDRESSEE NOT PRESENT in the ÍSP database (<https://gefin.ku.dk/q.php?p=is/ categories/category/421>) [last accessed 26 February 2024].

¹¹ All references to the saga prose are to the ÍF editions, and prose translations are my own unless otherwise specified. Quoted stanzas and their translations are derived from SkP V. References to the verses in my text use the numbering of the stanzas in ÍF, so that it is possible to see the disposition of the verses in the saga text. I considered the stanzas examined here in my discussion of saga prosimetrum in *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, but not with a specific focus on the issue of audience.

forsjáll” [steady and prudent] (ÍF VII, 125) – a safe pair of hands minding the family farm for his elderly parents while Grettir is away causing mayhem. Towards the end of the saga, Grettir’s younger brother Illugi shares his exile on Drangey, and his support in fighting off Grettir’s enemies is the occasion of Grettir’s famous celebration of the bond brothers have: “Berr er hverr á bakinu, nema sér bróður eigi” [your back is bare if you have no brother [to mind it]] (ÍF VII, 260). And Grettir has a powerful connection with his half-brother Þorsteinn, a physically unprepossessing figure who becomes the unlikely avenger of Grettir’s death. The saga author makes it plain in that the deaths of a father and a brother will be felt to be a great loss by Grettir.

We can infer from the saga as a whole that the news of his outlawry will also be a major blow to him. Grettir’s relations with society at large are always problematic, and this sentence of outlawry marks the beginning of his remarkable twenty-year existence outside the protections of Icelandic society, a half-life of exile that results in his death. From our point of view as readers or listeners, Grettir’s outlawry is a major turning point in the saga, a defining moment in his life. But for Grettir, it means rejection, the culmination of his inability to fit in with societal norms. Moreover, it is arguably an unfair sentence, passed in his absence, which the respected lawspeaker has serious reservations about. Grettir is a difficult character, impetuous, violent and vengeful, but he respects fair play and knows how to do the right thing – as, for instance, in the episode in which he chivalrously and ingeniously defends the women at Þorfinnr Kársson’s farm from berserks (ch. 19). The saga author makes it clear that he is not someone to disregard a legal verdict. And as we see from his subsequent relationship with the farmer Sveinn, which I discuss shortly, he evidently relishes human company. Outlawry, like bereavement, will cause him grief.

But we are not told this by the saga narrator – nor, most significantly, can the characters in the storyworld deduce it from his response to the news. The narrator is quite clear about this: “Svá segja men, at Grettir brygði engan veg skapi við þessar fréttir ok var jafnglaðr sem áðr” [People say that Grettir made no change in his demeanour in response to what he had heard, but was as cheerful as ever] (ÍF VII, 148). We do not know who these people are; the narrator is simply using public opinion to comment on events, rather than intervening in the narrative.¹² Of course, one might be tempted to argue that they are people who are watching when the news is delivered. But it is striking that the narrator has cleared the scene of an audience by grammatical means “Þessi tíðendi kómu ǫll senn til Gret-

¹² See the section on displacement in ch. 4 of O'Donoghue, *Narrative in the Icelandic Family Saga*, 121 ff.

tis” [These pieces of news came all at once to Grettir] (ÍF VII, 147). No one brings the news; it simply comes by itself, as it were.

But if the audience in the storyworld – undefined as it is – perceives no response from Grettir, we as readers or listeners are given insight directly into Grettir’s inner feelings through the verse that is attributed to him. The extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator – who by definition plays no part in the story – passes on a message that none of the saga characters seem to apprehend in the form of a skaldic stanza with no particular audience or reaction in the storyworld. Indeed, the stanza even alludes, paradoxically, to Grettir’s silence at the bad news:

Alt kom senn at svinnum
sekt mín, bragar tíni;
föður skal drengur af dauða
drjúghljóðr ok svá bróður.
Þó skal margr í morgin
mótrunnr Heðins snótar,
brjótr, um slíkar sútir,
sverðs, daprari verða. (*Gr* 30, *SkP* V, 705)

[Everything has come at once – my outlawry – upon the wise proclaimer of poetry [POET]; a stalwart man must be long silent concerning the death of [his] father, and of a brother likewise. Yet many a bush of the meeting of the woman of Heðinn <legendary hero> [= Hildir > BATTLE > WARRIOR] shall grow more downcast concerning such griefs in the morning, breaker of the sword [WARRIOR].]

That verses in sagas function as the main vehicle for the expression of their speaker’s inner emotions is widely recognized, as I noted above. In *Grettis saga*, it is a familiar technique not only with regard to Grettir himself, but also from the saga’s earlier account of his great-grandfather, Önuendr, who only speaks of his feelings in verse – in fact, his direct speech in the saga narrative is virtually all in the form of skaldic stanzas. I have elsewhere called this “Grettir’s poetic inheritance”, although it is the creation of the saga author, and thus a literary heritage rather than an actual one.¹³ The most striking aspect of the verse as articulation of Grettir’s inner feelings is the paradox that grief causes its speaker to be *drjúghljóðr* [lit. ‘long silent’]. Variations on this paradox occur elsewhere in the *Íslendingasaga* corpus. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, for example, Þórarinn svartí of Mávahlíð recounts the events of a battle in skaldic stanzas, yet the saga then says “eptir þat segir Þórarinn tíðendin” [after that Þórarinn tells the news] (ÍF IV, 44), as if his poetic recital did not in itself convey any information about the battle, so that the speaking of the verse was the paradoxical equivalent of silence. There is an even

13 O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 184–187.

more striking example in *Gísla saga*, which is also, perhaps significantly, in the context of receiving unwelcome news. Gísli is told that his sister has broadcast his admission of killing his brother-in-law Þorgrímr. Gísli, the saga narrator tells us, “þagnar ok kvað vísu” [falls silent and spoke a verse] (ÍF VI, 62). Ursula Dronke once memorably described verses in saga prosimetrum as “set aside from the currents of ordinary speech”.¹⁴ One could go further, and describe verses such as the above examples as being set outside the storyworld in some way, in the sense of seeming like quasi-extradiegetic addresses to the audience of the saga, rather than the characters within it.

But Grettir's stanza likely did not originate as a specially commissioned extradiegetic element in a fictional narrative, part of a sophisticated author's project to tell a story by combining contrasting literary modes – rather than, as is often said of saga narrators, simply recounting what (might have) happened – because the final issue raised by the strophe is the integral apostrophe to a male warrior, “brjótr sverðs” [breaker of the sword]. The apostrophe is buried in Grettir's veiled threat that he will exact lethal vengeance for his wrongs – essentially, make them as sorry as he now is. The syntax of *dróttkvætt* and the lack of a vocative case in Old Norse can occasionally make it difficult to distinguish what may be an apostrophe from a simple repetition of the subject. But there is no ambiguity here. So to whom is the stanza addressed? The saga narrator has taken some pains to efface any audience, even a putative one. The obvious conclusion is that the stanza must at one time either have had, or been provided with, another context, that is, one in which it was addressed to someone, even if only the conventionally purported audience implied by the ‘Dear reader’ trope.¹⁵ I want to be clear that pointing out this discrepancy is not to pick a hole in the saga author's narrative, but on the contrary, to show how remarkable a saga author's literary skills can be, in combining materials from disparate sources, creating a psychologically compelling narrative, and preserving the saga convention that, as Dronke long ago put it, “emotion, inmost thoughts and visions, are to be expressed by any man (if expressed at all) in verse”.¹⁶ In cases where storyworld audiences are absent, however, the verses are accessible only to us, as a saga audience. Grettir's emotional privacy is thus ensured in the saga, even if that was not an aspect of the original context of the verse.

14 Dronke, “The Poet's Persona in the Skalds' Sagas”, 9.

15 Of course, an address to a purported singular audience is much more likely in an age of private reading than it is in saga society.

16 Dronke, “The Poet's Persona in the Skalds' Sagas”, 26.

Grettis saga* (ii): The *Sṟḑulkolluvisur

When Grettir arrives in Iceland, planning the revenge he has vowed in the verse, he cannot find a horse to meet his needs, so he sets out one night in secret, alone and disguised, and at dawn steals a horse from a farmer called Sveinn, who has a generic sounding first name (*sveinn* [lad]) and is not given a patronymic, suggesting a fictional character. When told of the theft, Sveinn speaks a verse, and sets off in pursuit of Grettir and his horse. Grettir leaves stanzas for people he meets along the way to memorize, and Sveinn himself responds to these poetic messages in verse. This sequence of verses is given the title *Sṟḑulkolluvisur* [Saddle-Cow verses] after the name of the stolen horse, *Sṟḑulkolla*.¹⁷ Grettir seems to have had no intention of keeping the horse, and sets it loose for its owner to find once he has reached his destination. He and the farmer are happily reconciled when Sveinn is reunited with *Sṟḑulkolla*, and just for fun rehearse the verse sequence together. The episode has the appearance of a light-hearted romp, although a careful reading of the verses taken out of their prose context gives no indication that Sveinn has taken the episode as lightly as the prose presents it; the tone of his verses is actually quite hostile and aggressive towards Grettir.¹⁸

The insults and threats contained in the verses (especially Sveinn's) make the sequence reminiscent of an episode of flyting, a ritual antagonistic poetic exchange such as we find in *Lokasenna* or *Hárbarðsljóḑ* in Old Norse, and more widely throughout early Germanic literature. But in this case, the verses cannot stand alone, but only make sense in the narrative context of a pursuit, because they include imperatives to a third person – in the first instance, a named interlocutor Halli, who is told to tell Sveinn about the horse's whereabouts, and to be quick about it, and in the second, to an unnamed woman Grettir meets along the way, who is also instructed to pass on the verse. Here, then, the stanzas demand a storyworld audience, and the saga author provides two characters to hear the verses (and construe them, and pass them on). These are not verses that Grettir could speak to thin air; it would make a nonsense of the narrative.

Halli (like Sveinn) has no patronymic, and this is his only appearance in the saga; his sole function is to be audience to Grettir's mocking verse, and to transmit to Sveinn the information it contains. Grettir speaks the verse to Halli, instructing him to pass on the news about the horse-theft, and describe the perpetrator. In re-

17 The usual translation of the horse's name is 'Saddle-Head', the verses then being known as 'Saddle-Head verses'. But the word *kolla* means female animal or cow, and the nickname 'Saddle-Cow' is an aptly kenning-like creation to designate a horse.

18 See O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 197–201.

sponse to Sveinn's questioning, Halli paraphrases its content. His *précis* echoes word for word the key phrases in Grettir's verse; the transmission of the message is neatly if perfunctorily achieved. But the strategy is not so straightforward next time. Grettir's next interlocutor is a woman: she is not named in either prose or verse, and the narrator very laconically introduces her with the bare phrase "var þar úti kona" [there was a woman there outside] (ÍF VII, 150). Sveinn, following close behind, opens the exchange by addressing a verse to her, asking if she knows where the horse-thief is headed. She too has the sole function of providing an audience and a means of transmission for the verses. This time, however, the verse is not described as having been paraphrased. When Sveinn questions the woman, "hon sagði þá slíkt, sem henni var kennt" [she recited just as she had been instructed]. That we are to understand that she actually spoke the verse itself is clear from Sveinn's response: "Hann hugsaði vísuna ok mælti [. . .]" [He thought about the verse, and said [. . .]] (ÍF VII, 151).

Halli's paraphrase offers a smoother narrative, because he does not repeat Grettir's instruction, contained in the stanza, to spread the news, and nor is he imagined as doing so. But the woman, in repeating the verse, must be understood as repeating not only the information, but also Grettir's instructions as contained in the stanza:

Færðu hafloga hirði,
 (hefir braut gripit lautar
 áll) velborin vella
 (vigg) dís, gamanvísu.
 Ek vildi svá jöldu
 Yggs líðgjafi riða
 æst, at ek mun gista
 orðrakkr at Gilsbakka.

[Deliver the jesting stanza to the keeper of the sea-flame [GOLD > MAN = Sveinn], well-born *dís* <minor female deity> of gold [WOMAN]; the eel of the dell [SERPENT = Grettir (*grettir* 'serpent')] has snatched away the horse. I, the giver of the drink of Yggr <Óðinn> [POETRY > POET], wanted to ride the mare so frantically, in order that I can spend the night, true to [my] word, at Gilsbakki.] (*Gr* 34, *SkP* V, 717)

I do not know why the saga author treats these two parallel exchanges differently, one paraphrased, the other reported to have been recited, together with its otiose instructions. But there is another element in the verse that is ill-fitting in the narrative context: the elaborate address to a woman contained in it, the reason why the saga author had to bring a woman into the narrative to receive it, however perfunctorily. But those instructions – together with the immediately topical mention of Gilsbakki, Grettir's intended destination – make it clear that

this verse must at one time have belonged in a narrative – and therefore prosimetrical – context.¹⁹

Roberta Frank considers the question of why skalds address women in their stanzas, and produces some very thought-provoking statistics that are directly relevant to the verse in question here. She notes that many celebrated skalds – Bragi, for example, or Egill – never address women, and “even of those who do, a majority only do it once”.²⁰ However, as she observes, “About two-thirds of the skaldic stanzas addressed to women are preserved in family sagas” and moreover, saga authors “usually make the skald’s apostrophized woman a full participant in the narrative”.²¹

Frank also claims that skalds address women as “the other” in terms of gender in order to bolster their own masculinity, and that “It is when the family-saga skald is most absorbed in himself – his dreams, his interiority, his extinction – that he is most likely to address the ‘other’”.²² One might, of course, argue that these circumstances are precisely those in which *Íslendingasaga* poets would speak a verse anyway, simply to reveal their interiority. But in fact, of the six verse apostrophes cited by Frank in *Grettis saga*, four occur in episodes in which women are necessary to the narrative. Grettir speaks verse 9 to his mother, when he deliberately scores his father’s back instead of rubbing it in front of the fire; he speaks verse 19 to the woman of the house, whom he has defended from berserks who attacked specifically because the men of the house were away; and he speaks verse 65 as a crude boast before a sexual assault on a female servant. One verse cited by Frank – stanza 73 – is spoken not by Grettir, but by his half-brother Þorsteinn, as part of the saga’s adaptation of the courtly romance that has been called *Spesar þáttur*, in which the woman, Spes, hears him singing from inside his prison cell. So there are only two verses of Frank’s six in which the narrative context demands an otherwise unprovided female audience.

Of these two, verse 34 from the *Sqðulkolluvisur* is, as we have seen, ostensibly addressed to an unnamed woman who happens to be outside as Grettir passes by on the stolen horse. Verse 49, spoken later on in the saga, is contextualized in a

19 The only other possibility is that the stanza once belonged in a narrative poem consisting of dialogue, like some eddic poetry. The prose inserts in the eddic poems in the *Codex Regius* demonstrate that some degree of prosimetricality was still felt to be needed, and it is hard to imagine a narrative poem, with dialogue, in skaldic stanzas. For the topicality of Gilsbakki, see O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 198. Grettir is headed there because it is the home of Grímr, an ally and likely supporter in the quest for vengeance for Atli’s death.

20 Frank, “Why Skalds Address Women”, 68.

21 Frank, “Why Skalds Address Women”, 75.

22 Frank, “Why Skalds Address Women”, 76.

similarly perfunctory way: this time, a farmer's daughter happens to be outside, and asks Grettir for news as he rides back to his hideout. In this latter verse, Grettir is indeed bolstering his masculinity: he jeeringly boasts about the men he has killed, and with grim understatement predicts that two of them – whom the saga narrator tells us Grettir split in half, one horizontally and the other vertically – will take quite a while to recover from their injuries. This verse is arguably the only one with a female apostrophe that is consonant with Frank's contention that addressing a verse to a woman is a gendered act inherent in the form and performance of skaldic verse. But the verses in *Grettis saga* are classed by Frank (following Finnur Jónsson) as "spurious" – that is, identified as the direct speech of saga characters but likely to be later compositions. So perhaps these unknown later poets were imitating the practice of earlier skalds and included apostrophes to women as part of the gendered aesthetic, á la Frank, but needed an invented woman to provide a naturalistic audience. Verse 49, spoken to the farmer's daughter, may have belonged in this category. But with verse 34, transmitted to the unnamed woman in connexion with the horse theft, the narrative cannot work unless the verse has an audience, somebody in the storyworld not just to hear it, but to pass it on, and thus participate in the narrative situation it presupposes. It must originally have had some narrative context. However, only the verse, with its female apostrophe, and not the narrative situation, demands a specifically female audience.²³

The form of the apostrophe itself – rather grandiose woman kennings with no obvious relevance to the actual addressee, "velborin vella dís" [well-born *dís* <female deity> of gold] in verse 34, or "hirði-Sága hornflæðar" [tending-Sága <goddess> of the horn-flood] in verse 49, may be a curious legacy of a *dróttkvætt* form that was performed (or imagined to be performed) in an aristocratic setting. We might perhaps also recall love verses in the poets' sagas, in which imposing or elaborate kennings might be accounted flattery. It is worth noting that Frank's data on apostrophes shows that the woman kennings in Grettir's verses echo some apostrophe kennings characteristic of those in Kormákr's love verses, but which are not found elsewhere addressing women, such as kennings based on the names of Freyja or Sága.²⁴

Once again, I would stress that these intriguing wrinkles in the created prosimetrum are not significant as indications of sloppy composition, but rather reveal

23 It may be going too far to see the juxtaposition of the word for horse (*vigg*) and part of the apostrophe (*dís*) as suggestive of the female name Vigdís, as if the original prosimetrum involved not an unnamed woman, but a full-blown female character.

24 See Frank, "Why Skalds Address Women", 80–83. Frank also remarks on the positioning within the stanza of female apostrophes; I think this is a very valuable line of enquiry.

the saga author not only combining disparate materials, but also creating a compelling fictionalized – that is, themed – biography of Grettir, the central character, the outlaw who needs people, but cannot live in society, and who interacts with other poets – such as the farmer Sveinn – and with women, but otherwise uses verses paradoxically to hold communication at bay and keep his distance from others. One can just about discern the layers of earlier forms of the material, and see that a transformation has taken place. However, we can admire the saga as it has come down to us, with Grettir’s proud stoicism in the face of tragedy leading the saga author to confront the narrative paradox of a saga soliloquy, and the breaking of what has been called “the fourth wall”; and a light-hearted and clever chase narrative in which Grettir makes one of his few male friends, a fellow poet who is, counter-intuitively, the victim of Grettir’s lawlessness.

***Gísla saga* (i): Gísli admits to a killing**

I want to extend the idea that the prosimetrum in *Grettis saga* has been created in consonance with the literary themes of the whole saga – in spite of the difficulties with audience that this seems to have occasioned – to the prosimetrum in *Gísla saga*. The narrative of *Gísla saga* is marked by things unsaid.²⁵ Most notably, Gísli claims to know who killed Vésteinn, but will not name the perpetrator. But there are other silences too: the woman Ingibjörg in the prefigurative first chapter of the saga, who only reveals after her husband’s death – and then only obliquely – that she might rather have married his brother; or the extraordinary unspoken pact between Þorgrímr and Gísli not to disclose the identity of Vésteinn’s killer (ch. 14). It is ironic, then, that the verse that to my mind raises the most pressing issues of audience – of who might have heard it in the storyworld – is an utterance that the saga author, or a scribe, felt so strongly should have remained unsaid that one manuscript, following the standard introduction to a verse used as Gísli’s direct speech – “Gísli kvað þá vísu” [Gísli then spoke a verse] – adds the comment “er æva skyldi” [which [he] never should have] (ÍF VI, 58; see n. 1). The verse in question is one in which Gísli openly (at least by the cryptic standards of skaldic verse) admits to the killing of Þorgrímr.

Gísli has killed his brother-in-law Þorgrímr in one of the most talked-about scenes in saga literature: Gísli sneaks into the bedroom of Þorgrímr and his wife, Gísli’s sister Þórdís, under cover of darkness, when the household is asleep, and, in

²⁵ See O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, ch. 3.

a distinctly sexualized act, stabs Þorgrímr as he sleeps.²⁶ This tense and compelling scene is described in detail, which raises the familiar audience question: who was there to see it happen? In fact, no one except Þórdís could have witnessed the killing, which may remind us of the killing of Vésteinn, since only he and his sister, Gísli's wife Auðr, were present when the fatal blow was struck, so that she was the only witness.²⁷ Like Þórdís, Auðr gives no indication that she saw who did it, although the anxious and intrusive questioning of Þorkell, Gísli's brother, about how she is taking her brother's death might tempt us to infer that he is really asking how much she knows. Gísli himself does not at first admit the killing, which defines its legal status as murder rather than manslaughter.²⁸ But nobody says anything, until Gísli recites the self-incriminating verse at a ball game.

When Þorgrímr's body is discovered, Gísli seems to be the prime suspect, and a large body of Þorgrímr's supporters make their way to Gísli's farm, their hostile intent implicit in the panic of the thrall who sees them coming. Gísli speaks a verse at this point in the narrative, presumably to the cowardly thrall, but containing a somewhat inappropriate (or perhaps mocking) warrior kenning in its apostrophe, "folkrunnr" [war-bush (or 'tree of battle')] (*Gísl* 10, SkP V, 561). This verse enjoins tactical silence: "Látum vér of oss sem hljóðast" [Let us be as quiet as possible] (*Gísl* 10, SkP V, 561). Memorably, Gísli's brother Þorkell spots a pair of snow-encrusted and thus incriminating shoes in Gísli's bed closet, and, in a gestural version of all the silences that characterise the saga, nudges them out of sight with his foot. Gísli himself not only hides his guilt, but deflects suspicion (but only within the storyworld – after all, we saw him kill Þorgrímr) by offering to help with the funeral rituals. However, we as audience immediately recognize that this offer precisely mirrors Þorgrímr's earlier readiness to help Gísli with Vésteinn's funeral, thus confirming for us the status of what is clearly a tit-for-tat killing.²⁹ This complex interaction of speech and silence establishes the immediate context of the verse that should not have been spoken:

26 See especially Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past in Edda and Saga*, ch. 4.

27 A servant is called to the scene almost immediately, but there is no sense that he was present all along.

28 According to Icelandic law, a killing which is kept secret was held to be murder, while a killing which is openly proclaimed attracted a lesser charge, the equivalent of the modern 'manslaughter'. For a masterly overview and analysis of Old Icelandic legal provisions, see Miller, "Grágás and the Legal Culture of Commonwealth Iceland".

29 It is also worth noting that after Vésteinn's death, Gísli and Þorgrímr exchange words after a ball game that seems to re-enact their murderous hostility (ch. 15).

Teina sák í túni
 tál-Gríms vinar fálu
 Gauts þess's geig of veittak
 gunnbliks þáamiklu.
 Nú hefr gnýstærir geira
 grímu Þrótt of sóttan;
 þann lét lundr of lendan
 landkostoð ábranda.

[I saw new growth in the greatly thawed yard of the destroyer of the troll-woman's companion [GIANT > Þórr]-Grímr [Þorgrímr], of that Gautr ≤ Óðinn> of the battle-flash [SWORD > WARRIOR] whom I caused harm. Now the increaser of the din of spears [BATTLE > WARRIOR = Gísli] has overcome the Þrótt <god> [= Þórr] of the mask [*grímr* ('masked one') = Þorgrímr]; the tree of river-fires [GOLD > MAN = Gísli] has granted land to that land-user.] (*Gísl* 11, SkP V, 564)

Gísli sits down to mend a bat for Þorsteinn, a member of his team, glances towards Þorgrímr's burial mound, and speaks the verse. The whole episode takes place in snowy weather, and this is repeatedly alluded to in the narrative (as with Gísli's snowy shoes, for instance). We have been told that snow does not lie on south side of Þorgrímr's burial mound. The narrator tells us that people in the locality interpret this as a sign of favour to Þorgrímr from the god Freyr; we may interpret it as preparation for the verse in which Gísli says that he can see shoots sprouting up through thawing snow. Setting the scene, the narrator says that women, including Þórdís, were sitting on the slope – the bank of the grave-mound, perhaps – but it seems awkward that they are sitting in melted snow. What are they doing there – apart from forming a substantive audience for the verse that Gísli must be imagined as reciting aloud? Why then does Gísli incriminate himself like this?

Perhaps Gísli did not think he'd be overheard. But we have had an episode of unsuspected overhearing earlier in the saga, when Gísli's brother Þorkell eavesdrops on women exchanging dangerous confidences about their pre-marital love affairs (ch. 9). The narrator can evidently handle scenes of overhearing where necessary, but has not presented this scene in that way. Perhaps Gísli did not expect a woman to be able to understand the unusually cryptic *dróttkvætt*. But the saga author does not expect an audience to suppose that Þórdís can at once grasp the meaning of this difficult stanza with its onomastic riddles, giving her narrative time to construe it. I myself have suggested that Gísli may be presented as being in the grip of an inescapable fate, like Vésteinn who is fated not to be able to prevent himself from visiting Gísli even though he has been warned off; the narrative of the ball game is filled with supernatural incident, which might seem to confirm a sense that everyday rules of conduct have been briefly suspended,

and no one has the freedom to exercise free will any more.³⁰ But I now think that the answer may lie in the similarity between this skaldic stanza and a verse from the eddic poem *Guðrúnarkviða II*:

Hugða ek hér í túni
teina fallna,
þá er ek vildak
vaxna láta.³¹

[I imagined here in the homefield
fallen shoots,
ones that I wanted
to be left to grow.]³²

The situation of the two verses is entirely different: Guðrún Gjúkadóttir is remembering her husband Atli's account of his terrible vision of the murder (by her hand) of their two young sons. But the allusion to Guðrún is the key thing here, for she too was caught in a conflict of loyalties between husband and brothers. Her loyalties changed dramatically (at least if we assume, probably mistakenly, continuity of subject in the several eddic poems about her); her brothers were responsible for the death of her beloved first husband Sigurðr, but when, later in the legendary cycle, she is married to Atli, who kills her brothers, she exacts her terrible revenge for them on him, murdering their sons and burning him alive in his hall. At the ball game in the saga, we are reminded of the Guðrún whose husband was her brothers' victim, since Gísli has killed Þorgrímr, but later in the saga, Þórdís swaps sides, taking vengeance on her brother Gísli's killer, and divorcing herself from her second husband Þorkr. At this point in the saga, therefore, we see the counterpart of the first eddic Guðrún when Þórdís betrays Gísli to her husband by making known to him the meaning of the incriminating verse. But the implicit allusion to the Guðrún story also functions proleptically, in that in spite of this betrayal, Þórdís will try to avenge her brother Gísli's death.

The similarity between the Guðrún story and the story of Þórdís cannot be coincidence: the verse can only be a deliberate evocation of the Guðrún lay. But it is extremely difficult to work out whether the content of the stanza inspired the saga narrative, or whether the broad outlines of the saga story inspired some skald (not necessarily Gísli, of course) to allude to Guðrún in a stanza attributed to him. A third possibility is perhaps the most interesting (although all three are

³⁰ See O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 153, and Harris, "Obscure Styles (Old English and Old Norse)".

³¹ *Guðrúnarkviða II* in *Eddukvæði*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, vol. II, 360 (st. 40).

³² This translation is my own.

unverifiably speculative): that prose and verse were composed as a whole, not brought together or manipulated by the saga author to create prosimetrum out of originally separate materials. But an indication that this is very unlikely to have been the case brings us back to the question of audience, and the difficulties raised by this issue: why Gísli spoke the incriminating verse aloud; why the women were sitting in wet snow; why none of the men at the ball game heard it; whether Gísli is to be imagined as extemporizing or reciting. These are all questions we might reasonably ask of a realistic narrative, but, as I have argued, the speaking of verse is a major departure from the narrative plausibility characteristic of *Íslendingasögur*, and trying to imagine the storyworld circumstances of recitation – and especially the existence or otherwise of an audience – focuses our minds on that departure, and on the likelihood that the difficulty we may have encountered is a result of a verse having been recycled, that is, reused in a new narrative context.

One response to the question of why Gísli incriminated himself by uttering the stanza is that the saga author was taking care to alert us – extradiegetically – to the parallel between Þórdís and Guðrún, which was perhaps already a feature of the materials being combined to create the prosimetrum. The verse taken out of its prose context would in fact fit the familiar skaldic role of a boast – and not a confession – by the perpetrator following a killing. It is easy enough to imagine Gísli (as a literary figure) recounting his career in retrospective verses. Speculation about any prior form of the elements of the prosimetrum, for instance the priority of prose or verse, or whether the verses have been excerpted from a longer sequence, or composed individually to fit a narrative context, is, as I have said, irresistible, if unverifiable. If we imagine that the stanza that is presented here as puzzling (but intriguing) self-incrimination was instead one of sequence in which Gísli, like a number of other male saga characters, enumerates hostile encounters, the hero would be a very different Gísli from the character the saga author has created for us. Our Gísli is a tormented victim of circumstances, trying to do the right thing and agonizing about his actions in verse, in marked contrast to the facts of the hero's life as a ruthless outlaw. To quote Ursula Dronke again, "Gísli becomes a skald [that is, speaks in verse, H.D.] so that the dimension of thought shall not be cut away from his actions [. . .] [The verses] intensify the prose narrative precisely because the author of them has conceived so deeply what the conscience of a man must be like who must do such deeds."³³

In sum, the saga author has created a linear narrative out of possibly separate and probably temporally distanced literary components, placing the stanza

33 Dronke, "The Poet's Persona in the Skalds' Sagas", 26.

not as part of what might have been a free-standing retrospective sequence, but almost immediately after the killing it both celebrates and admits to. This has created audience issues – but produces the added drama of casting Þórdís as a treacherous woman with divided loyalties. We may note that Þórdís does not inadvertently betray Gísli to her husband Þorkr; she actually adds that “munu rétt búaín málin honum á hendr” [it would be only right to prosecute him for his crime] (ÍF VI, 61).³⁴ To accomplish this family drama, and to cement the parallels between Þórdís and her eddic counterpart Guðrún, Gísli has to speak the stanza, and Þórdís has to hear it and pass it on, even though this occasions such difficulties with the realism of the scene. Finally, to return to the eddic verse in which Guðrún quotes her husband Atli's vision of the death of their sons, the young shoots in that stanza are no longer growing tall: the verse begins with a formula characteristic of the recitation of visions or dreams, “hugða ek” [I thought [I saw]]. Perhaps the author of some of the verses in *Gísli saga* actually recalled the eddic stanza; of the so-called dream verses, which I now turn to, six begin with this formula (*Gísl* 30–31 and 35–38).

***Gísli saga* (ii): Gísli's dream verses**

Like Grettir, Gísli is a celebrated outlaw, and the isolation of his outlawry raises the familiar and very obvious issues of audience: who was with him to hear the verses spoken? But unlike Grettir, Gísli shares much of his outlawry with a woman, his wife Auðr. These circumstances resolve two familiar and pressing audience issues: apostrophes to women in skaldic verses, and the question of who might hear an outlaw's verses. However, there is an extra narrative challenge: dreams are elements in the inner lives of their dreamers, such that no one can know what someone was dreaming unless they recount their dreams to a third party.

Gísli has troubled dreams on six occasions, and on each separate occasion, he speaks verses. I have elsewhere traced the way in which the saga narrator begins by avoiding privileged epistemic access to Gísli's inner life – in this case, his

³⁴ In the longer version of the saga, Þórdís's calculated intent in having her brother face the law is strongly emphasised in her expanded dialogue, where she urges Þorkr “at fara landzlogum fram um þetta mal, oc gera mann sekann, þviat þu hefir mala efni sva bryn at bita mun G(ísla) saukinn” [to act according to the laws of the land in this matter, and to have the man outlawed, because you have such a clear case that Gísli will be found guilty]; see *Gísli saga Súrssonar*, ed. Loth, 41. I am grateful to Alexander Wilson for this suggestion.

dreams – by having him tell Auðr about them, thus preserving the external focalisation characteristic of *Íslendingasaga* narratives, but then gradually slides into reporting the coming of the dream woman as if it were a narrative event, rather than a dream, a feature of Gísli's inner life that would require articulation.³⁵ Having already explored how the narrator uses Auðr to maintain external focalisation, I want here to focus more closely on Auðr's role as Gísli's interlocutor. Significantly, the so-called dream verses are arranged in the narrative in a remarkably systematic, symmetrical and not at all naturalistic way: the first and last groups of the six are each of four stanzas, and the intervening and remaining four are each of three stanzas. Such precise organisation betrays the ordering hand of a saga author, and naturally prompts us to speculate about their original status.

Gabriel Turville-Petre, for instance, felt that the first group of four verses must at some time have been in the form of a *flokkr*, an informal sequence of skaldic stanzas.³⁶ The verses are presented as if recited by Gísli in unbroken succession, one of only two such unbroken sequences in the saga.³⁷ They are spoken in response to Auðr's anxious query about his dreams after a troubled night – that dreams had disturbed him seems to be presumed.³⁸ Gísli's prose response to Auðr both reflects and to some degree interprets the content of the verses that follow.³⁹ His claim that the dream woman warned him against charms and witchcraft, for example, is an elaboration on the verses, although the encouragement of charity in verse 19 does have a distinctly Christian flavour. But apart from prompting the verse sequence with her question, Auðr remains a passive and shadowy audience; she makes no comment on his prose summary of the content of the verses, nor on the verses themselves.

Auðr's presence is, however, emphatically implied by the two female apostrophes in the first verse: “fold eldar unnfúrs” [land of wave-fire [i.e. gold]] and “Eir aura” [Eir <goddess> of wealth] (*Gísl* 16, SkP V, 573). This is a particularly appropriate kenning to address Auðr with, for her name means “riches”. Although it is generally believed that kennings do not have a very precise relevance to their

35 O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 159–167.

36 Turville-Petre, “Gísli Súrsson and his Poetry”, 139.

37 The other unbroken sequence (*Gísl* 13–15) expresses Gísli's reaction to his sentence of outlawry. It resembles part of a retrospective autobiographical poem.

38 A question to consider: does *lét illa* mean “slept badly”, as published translations have it, or does it mean that Gísli actually cried out in his sleep?

39 I have argued that the existence of two dream women, one good and one bad, is a construct of the saga narrator, and not borne out in the poetry; see *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 163.

referents, it is notable that throughout these dream verses, the apostrophes to Auðr are kennings involving gold or riches. Perhaps even more intriguingly, when in a stanza Gísli refers to a dream woman – not in an apostrophe, but in reference to her – the kennings involve elements related to cloth or drink. In verse 17, Gísli reports what was said to him by the “Vör banda” [Vör <goddess> of ribbons] and “Bil blæju” [Bil <goddess> of the bed-sheet] (*Gísl* 17, SkP V, 575). This pattern is consistent throughout the whole collection of dream verses – for instance, there are four kennings (in verses 20, 25, 26, and 31) including some version of the word *saumr* [sewing], and three relating to ale. The first, “öl-Nanna” [ale-Nanna <goddess>] (*Gísl* 20, SkP V, 581), is a fairly straightforward circumlocution, but the other two are more complex. In verse 25, the woman is referred to as “hneiði-Sól hornflæðar” [inclining Sól <goddess> of the horn-flood] (*Gísl* 25, SkP V, 588),⁴⁰ and in verse 29 as “skorða skapkers” [prop of the ale-vat] (*Gísl* 29, SkP V, 597). These two kenning types seem to reference the attributes of valkyries: their functions as creators of the cloth of men’s fates, and providers of drink in Valhöll. The dream woman is also referred to by two valkyrie names: Hildir (*Gísl* 24) and Gøndul (*Gísl* 31). It is hard not to conclude that Gísli’s dream woman is imagined as a valkyrie, and that the verses that report her words and actions allude to her as such, while elsewhere in the verses, apostrophes are addressed to Auðr, using different kennings that play on the meaning of her name.

Throughout Gísli’s dreams, Auðr remains the passive audience I described in connection with the very first sequence. Having once prompted Gísli, she never comments on his responses, either verse or prose, and never enquires further. But her presence, if perfunctory in the prose narrative, is clearly presupposed in the verses themselves, because three of the six groups of verses contain at least one verse with a female apostrophe in the form of a kenning on the “goddess of riches” pattern, and once, in the fifth group, there is a direct second person address to a woman being stained with the speaker’s own blood. In this verse, the speaker’s claim that he saw “fríðr faðmr þinn [. . .] roðinn í fögru blóði” [your beautiful bosom [. . .] reddened in my fair blood] (*Gísl* 32, SkP V, 603) implies an intimacy that strongly identifies its addressee as Auðr. This leaves two exceptional groups, the third and the fourth, in which there are no apostrophes and no second person addresses. And the prose introduction to the third group of three verses – unlike all of the other stanza sequences – does not mention Auðr asking Gísli about his dreams. The audience is absent in both verse and prose, and Gísli can only be imagined speaking to thin air.

⁴⁰ Note the similarity of this kenning to the female apostrophe in the aforementioned verse by Grettir: “híðí-Sága hornflæðar” [tending-Sága <goddess> of the horn-flood] (*Gr* 49, SkP V, 751).

It is important to be clear that the saga narrator has not simply given up on the concept of the verses being recited to an intradiegetic audience: all the sequences of verses following this anomalous third group see Auðr back on sleep-watch duty, asking what Gísli has dreamed in the same terms as the other prompts. But there are no apostrophes in groups three or four, and confusingly, in verse 30, Gísli refers to the actions of the dream woman and designates her with kennings that I have argued are appropriate to Auðr: “Þrúðr auðs” [goddess of riches], with its open play on Auðr’s name, and “bandi báls vala slóðar” [band of the bonfire of the falcon’s track [ARM > GOLD > WOMAN]] (*Gísl* 30, SkP V, 599).⁴¹

As I have said, one can only speculate about the forms that verse sequences may have taken before being used to create saga prosimetrum – if indeed they did pre-exist the saga as we have it. But it does seem that the groups of verses attached to Gísli’s nightmares have a coherence that matches the precision of their division into three groups of three book-ended by two groups of four. We have already noted Turville-Petre’s suggestion that the first group of four stanzas originally formed a free-standing sequence. The second group contains a statement by Gísli – that he told his dreams to other men – that is completely at odds with the prose, suggesting that the two media are not contemporaneous. The stanzas of the fourth group are all exceptionally gory. In the penultimate fifth group, the verses are distinctly reminiscent of retrospective battle verses in which a successful fighter boasts of his achievements, and throughout the final sixth group, Gísli foresees his own grim death. These groups are carefully themed in this way, and this is also true of the anomalous third group of verses, with its absent audience. In these three verses, Gísli’s dream woman is not only referred to in terms suggestive of valkyries, but also behaves just like a valkyrie, promising she will heal his wounds, inviting him to sleep alongside her in a luxurious bed, and offering both herself and untold riches for him in the afterlife. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the saga author could not imagine Gísli reporting all this to Auðr, and preferred to absent her as his audience.

Gísli’s relationship with Auðr – and indeed the varying quality of marital and sibling relationships – is an insistent theme in *Gísla saga*, and collides most memorably with other themes of loyalty in Gísli’s confident reassurance to the girl who fears that Auðr may be about betray him to his enemies: “Ger þú þér gott í hug, því at eigi mun mér þat at fjórlesti verða, at Auðr blekki mik” [Set your mind at rest, because my death will not come about as result of Auðr’s treachery] (ÍF VI, 99). And in what are almost his last words, Gísli rejoices in his marriage to Auðr: “Þat vissa ek fyrir löngu, at ek var vel kvæntr, en þo vissa ek eigi, at ek

41 This second kenning is unique, and very uncertain in its interpretation.

væra svá vel kvæntur sem ek em [I've known for a long time that I married well, but I did not know just how well married I've been] (ÍF VI, 112). To be shown relating to her the lascivious promises of his dream woman about a luxurious afterlife would surely have disturbed and even undermined this unusual picture of a secure and happy marriage – unusual, at least, in the husband's open rejoicing in it.

Conclusion

It is evident from all these examples – and from countless others throughout the whole corpus of the *Íslendingasögur* – that difficulties with the absence, or apparently forced creation, of an appropriate audience to hear a verse spoken in the storyworld is diagnostic of the verse having been repurposed in some way in order for it to be incorporated into the existing saga as part of the narrative prosimetrum. Sometimes, as with Grettir's verse on hearing the news of his bereavements and outlawry, the speaking of the verse seems almost extradiegetic, an aspect of how the saga author tells the story rather than a description of an event in the storyworld. This verse functions as a message to us as saga audience, emphasizing Grettir's isolation and at the same time revealing his otherwise private interiority, but which remains unheard and unremarked in the storyworld. Gísli's ostensibly incomprehensible decision to speak aloud a verse announcing his culpability for the murder of Þorgrímr, by contrast, is the saga author's way of articulating the verse in order for it to be heard and passed on, thus cementing the saga author's carefully created and reverberating parallels between Þórdís and Guðrún, and the divided loyalties of sisters and wives, no matter how improbable the motivation behind the recitation, or the circumstances of the overhearing. Verses that contain apostrophes to women, such as Grettir's verse 34 to the unnamed woman outside a farmhouse, instructing her to pass on to the farmer Sveinn what has happened to his horse, seem likely to have always required a narrative context, but not, perhaps, the existing one, a witty and tense narrative that has, however, demanded the perfunctory creation of a female audience in the storyworld. And finally, it seems to me that the saga author could not brook the undermining of a powerful depiction of a strong and stable marriage by allowing Gísli to tell Auðr about the tempting assurances of the valkyrie-like woman in his dreams.

Importantly, as I have insisted throughout, the difficulties in storyworld plausibility outlined here, although functioning as a red flag for the possibility that the verse has been repurposed for its present context, are not symptomatic of mere carelessness in composition. Rather, the new prosimetrum can be shown to

be a vehicle for delicate and yet powerful thematic effects. Just as the representation of saga characters speaking skaldic stanzas aloud is, in my view, the most major departure from narrative plausibility in *Íslendingasögur*, the creation of a prosimetrum that requires this is similarly evidence of the most remarkable literary skill and sensibility in authors who have for far too long been praised for simply recording 'what happened'.

Alison Finlay

What's in a Name? The Phantom Poems of the Poets' Sagas

The dilemma of the poets' sagas (*skáldasögur*) is that, while their focus is on the lives and personalities of poets, a generic convention prevents, or severely limits, the actual citing of the poetry that made them famous and, presumably, created the appetite for stories, true or apocryphal, about their lives and works. Even the longer works of the most famous skald, Egill Skalla-Grímsson, are included in his saga largely through the efforts of modern editors: in surviving manuscripts they are either totally omitted, added as postscripts by later copyists, or feature only in extracts.¹ This conforms to the convention generally followed in the poets' sagas, where the account of a poem's genesis is followed by a single stanza introduced by “ok er þetta upphaf kvæðis” [and this is the beginning of the poem] – as with the *Möðruvallabók* introduction to *Sonatorrek* in *Egils saga* (ÍF II, 245–246).² The saga, unusually, also reports the poet giving this work a title: “kvæði þetta kallaði hann *Sonatorrek*” (ÍF II, 257) [this poem he called *Sonatorrek*].³ In this essay, I suggest that this limitation on the citing of the skalds' works offered an opportunity to fictionalising saga authors, who were able to create narrative detail from the titles of longer poems that are not cited, and spin references to longer poems from single *lausavísur* cited in their sagas.

It is the stories of the genesis of the poems, and what these tell us about the sensibilities and creative energies of poets, that are central to the poets' sagas. The cited tags from the poems work rather as stanzas from court eulogies are said to work in the *konunga sögur*: as apparent authentication of the probably fictionalized accounts of the genesis of the poems, and of the interaction with their patrons, audiences, and often with other poets, that are the stuff of saga narratives about poets. In the case of well-known poets such as Egill or Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, we

1 See the essay in this volume by Annette Lassen for an account of the preservation of Egill's poetry across the manuscripts of the saga.

2 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

3 Although the whole of *Sonatorrek* is conventionally inserted at this point in editions (and translations) of *Egils saga*, only the initial stanza is cited at this point in *Möðruvallabók*, the remainder surviving only in post-medieval witnesses of the saga. See Clunies Ross, introduction to *Eg St*, SkP V, 294–295, for further details, as well the introductions to *Eg Hfl*, SkP V, 236–240, and *Eg Akv*, SkP V, 327–331, for the comparable situation with the transmission of Egill's other long poems, *Höfuðlausn* and *Arinbjarnarkviða*.

Alison Finlay, Birkbeck, University of London

can interpret this as a kind of intertextuality: the audience may be assumed to know the poem referred to, and therefore be interested in the story of its origin and the personality of its creator. I will be exploring here ways in which the authors of the poets' sagas elaborate this relationship with references to poems that are less well known, perhaps in many cases invented by the authors themselves to serve their own developing narratives. In some cases this could be described as anti-prosimetrum, as it is characterized by references to poems that are not cited and may never have existed; in other cases, a fragment of verse apparently belonging to one poem may generate the fiction of an answering one; the poems are characterized, not by illustrative quotations, but by the response of an audience.

An example of the elaborating of narrative material from the name of a poem that has not survived appears in the episode in *Morkinskinna* (GKS 1009 fol.) recounting the arrival of Arnórr jarlaskáld at the court of the joint kings of Norway, Magnús inn góði Óláfsson and his uncle Haraldr harðráði. A comparison made between two poems performed at a king's court by rival poets, assessed and judged by the king himself and sometimes other members of the audience, is something of a trope in the sagas and *þættir* about poets; this story turns the convention on its head, in the novel situation of joint rule, by presenting two poems by the same poet, where the juxtaposition implies a comparison of the two kings to whom they are addressed. Haraldr harðráði, who regularly features in tales of poetic performance as a connoisseur and patron of poets as well as a poet himself, compares the poem now known as *Hrynhenda* (but unnamed in the narrative) that Arnórr addresses to Magnús with the tribute he himself receives, named as *Blágagladrápa* [Black Geese *drápa*]: “Mitt kvæði mun brátt niðr falla ok engi kunna, en drápa þessi er ort er um Magnús konung mun kveðin meðan Norðrlönd eru byggð” (ÍF XXIII, 146) [My poem will quickly disappear and no one will know it, but this *drápa* composed about King Magnús will be recited for as long as the North is inhabited]. Haraldr's reputation as a critic has been vindicated, since some twenty stanzas of *Hrynhenda* survive, while nothing is known of *Blágagladrápa* other than the name. The story makes use of the oblivion into which the *drápa* for Haraldr must already have fallen when *Morkinskinna* was written, characterising it only with a bland “gott kvæði” [a good poem], while four stanzas are cited of *Hrynhenda*; Haraldr's commentary on it is foregrounded by his willingness to interrupt the recital, objecting first to the poem's beginning with an apparently irrelevant account of the poet's own doings.⁴ Then, more sig-

⁴ His objection that the poet begins with an account of his own previous doings, rather than the king's attainments, is echoed by Óláfr hvítaskáld in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, who comments of a fragment about the poet as seafarer, now taken to be part of the poem's exordium, “en þat heyrir ekki konungs lofi” [and that does not belong to praise of a king]; see *Málhljóða-*

nificantly, he objects to Arnórr's "exceptional zeal" in elevating Magnús above other rulers.⁵ In the first cited stanza, Arnórr not only affirms that "manni veit ek fremra annan" [I know no other man more outstanding], but also spells out the corollary, "hverr gramr es þér stóru verri" [every king is worse than you by far].

Haraldr's surly reaction highlights the awkwardness of the specific situation in which the performance takes place: "'Lofa konung þenna sem þú vill,' segir hann, 'en lasta eigi aðra konunga'" (ÍF XXIII, 144) ['Praise this king as much as you like,' says he, 'but do not disparage other kings']. The logical consequence of praising one king to the skies is that rival kings are implied (or, here, stated) to be inferior, an embarrassment to a poet called upon to praise two kings simultaneously. In the context of *Morkinskinna*, which uses anecdotes about poets to reveal facets of the qualities of the kings they serve, the potential difficulty of the relationship between two kings ruling simultaneously emerges as the main focus of this episode. Andersson comments that "there is an implication in this passage that an important factor in the retention of skaldic verse was aesthetic: verse judged to be good had a better chance of survival, though perhaps in this case it was the metrical novelty of *hrynhent* that ensured the memory of Arnórr's praise of Magnús".⁶ In fact, though, Haraldr's judgement is not based on overtly aesthetic grounds and he makes no mention of the distinctive octosyllabic metre (*hrynhent*) which Arnórr may have been the first to use in an encomium.⁷ The absence of any explanation underlying Haraldr's prediction suggests, rather, a sense of the arbitrariness of the survival of one poem, while the other survives only in name.

In a more conventional use of the trope in *Gunnlaugs saga*, the focus shifts to comparison of the temperaments of the two poets themselves, expressed both in the etiquette of the situation of performance and deduced from the qualities of their poems. In this episode the saga's hero, Gunnlaugr ormstunga Illugason, and his rival in poetry and love, Hrafn Qnundarson, present poems to King Óláfr sǣnski, and each is asked to comment on the other's poem:

Konungr mælti: "Gunnlaugr skal fyrri flytja, því at honum eirir illa, ef hann hefir eigi sitt mál." Þá kvað Gunnlaugr drápuna, er hann hafði orta um Ólaf konung: ok er lokit var

og málskrúðsrit, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 57. This, and perhaps a tendency to extravagant praise, seem likely to be widely known characteristics of *Hrynhenda*, reinforcing by contrast the obscurity of the poem in praise of Haraldr.

5 See Whaley's introduction to Arn *Hryn*, SkP II, 181.

6 *Morkinskinna*, trans. Andersson and Gade, 431.

7 See Whaley's introduction to Arn *Hryn*, SkP II, 182. Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, 113, speculates that Haraldr's comment, "allákaflika yrkir sjá maðr" [this man composes very energetically] refers to the tempo of the verse encouraged by this metre, but this is not obvious.

drápunni, þá mælti konungr: “Hrafn,” sagði hann, “hversu er kvæðit ort?” “Vel, herra,” sagði hann, “þat er stórt kvæði ok ófagrt ok nokkut stírkveðit, sem Gunnlaugr er sjálf í skaplyndi.” “Nú skaltu flytja þitt kvæði, Hrafn,” segir konungr. Hann gerir svá. Ok er lokit var, þá mælti konungr: “Gunnlaugr,” segir hann, “hversu er kvæði þetta ort?” Gunnlaugr svarar: “Vel, herra,” segir hann, “þetta er fagrt kvæði, sem Hrafn er sjálf at sjá, ok yfir-bragðslítit; eða hví ortir þú flokk um konunginn,” segir hann, “eða þótti þér hann eigi drápunnar verðr?” Hrafn svarar: “Töllum þetta eigi lengr, til mun verða tekit, þótt síðar sé,” segir hann, ok skilðu nú við svá búit [. . .] Ok er Hrafn var til brottferðar búinn, þá mælti hann til Gunnlaugs: “Lokit skal nú okkarri vináttu, fyrir því at þú vildir hrœpa mik hér fyrir höfðingjum. Nú skal ek einhverju sinni eigi þik minnr vanvirða en þú vildir mik hér.” (ÍF III, 80–81)

[The king said: “Gunnlaugr is to perform his poem first, because he reacts badly if he doesn’t get his own way.” Then Gunnlaugr recited the *drápa* he had composed about King Óláfr, and when the *drápa* was finished, the king spoke. “Hrafn,” he said, “how well is the poem composed?” “Well, my lord,” he said; “it is a grandiose poem, and ugly and rather stiff, just as Gunnlaugr is himself in temperament.” “Now you are to perform your poem, Hrafn,” says the king. He does so. And when it was finished, the king spoke. “Gunnlaugr,” he says, “how well is this poem composed?” Gunnlaugr replies: “Well, my lord,” says he, “it is a fair poem, as Hrafn is himself to look at, and without substance; and why did you compose a *flokkr* about the king?” he says; “didn’t you think he was worthy of a *drápa*?” Hrafn answers: “Let’s not discuss this any longer; it will be taken up, though that may happen later,” and now they parted without more ado [. . .] And when Hrafn was ready to leave, he spoke to Gunnlaugr: “Now our friendship must be at an end, because you tried to disgrace me here in the presence of chieftains. I shall now, at some time, disgrace you no less than you tried to disgrace me here.”]

Thus is born the quarrel to the death between the poets, through the medium of their rivalry for Helga in fagra [the fair]. The apparent incursion of literary criticism into saga prose in this scene is paradoxical considering that neither poem exists or, it can safely be assumed, ever did exist. But the invited commentary on the two poems is almost ostentatiously deflected into the poets’ personal attacks on each other. Less obvious, perhaps, is the question, what Gunnlaugr has done to incur Hrafn’s wrath, to the extent that he becomes Gunnlaugr’s lifelong enemy, and hurries back to Iceland to forestall his marriage to Helga?

Gunnlaugr’s criticism makes it clear that Hrafn has committed a schoolboy error in composing only a *flokkr*, rather than a *drápa*, for the king. This *faux-pas* is familiar from the anecdote told in *Heimskringla* (and Snorri’s *Separate Saga of St Óláfr*) about the encounter of Þórarinn loftunga with King Knútr inn ríki, for whom he has composed a *flokkr*. This instigates a story about the origin of Þórarinn’s *Höfuðlausn*; Knútr rejects the *flokkr* as a *dræplíngr* (pleasingly translated by Anthony Faulkes as ‘a runt of a *drápa*’),⁸ and orders him to produce a *drápa* by

8 Snorri Sturluson: *Heimskringla. II*, trans. Finlay and Faulkes, 207.

the following day, or be hanged. Þórarinn sets to work and, according to the account of *Heimskringla*, repurposes his *flokkr* with the addition of a *stef* and a few extra stanzas. Of this poem only the *stef* survives (ÍF XXVII, 307).⁹

Whether or not the distinction between *drápa* and *flokkr* was so clear-cut in reality, it is rigidly observed by Gunnlaugr in his saga. Of the three kings and two jarls that he makes poetry for, only the kings – the others being Aðalráðr of England and Sigtryggr silkiskegg in Dublin – are accorded *drápur*, and in the latter two cases, the *stef* of the poem (which distinguishes a *drápa* from a *flokkr*) is cited as a sample.¹⁰ If it were really such a slight to offer a mere *flokkr* to a king, we would expect the king himself to take offence. Instead, Gunnlaugr is presented as the stickler, the expert on propriety in poetic matters – though his behaviour in other respects leaves much to be desired, lacking the *kurteisi* with which Hrafn is credited. His insistence on propriety – perhaps representing the stiffness that Hrafn criticises in the poem – sits oddly alongside the aggression in his challenge to Hrafn; as Sigurður Nordal notes in his edition of the saga, “[p]egar þessa er gætt, verður ljóst, hversu mikil móðgun felst í orðum Gunnlaugs við Hrafn frammi fyrir konungi sjálfum, eða hvílik ormsunga Gunnlaugur var” (ÍF III, 80, n. 1) [when this is considered it becomes clear how much offence is concealed in Gunnlaugr’s words to Hrafn in the presence of the king himself, and how much of a “serpent-tongue” Gunnlaugr was]. It is his eagerness to point out Hrafn’s potentially lethal error that leads Hrafn to accuse him of shaming him before the court, and begins their lifelong enmity. The story only makes sense as the catalyst for the poets’ enmity to an audience familiar with the story of Þórarinn, or others like it.

A number of examples of poetic competition are found in *Bjarnar saga Hít-dælakappa*. One interesting feature of this saga is the lengths it goes to to create a poetic identity for a protagonist, Björn Hít-dælakappi, who even in the terms of the saga itself has no pretensions to being a court poet. Nevertheless, his feud with the poet Þórðr Kolbeinsson is carried out by means of a rich variety of poetic confrontations, in the exchange both of abusive occasional verses and, according

9 The story is retold in *Knyttlinga saga*, with some additional detail: the poem is named there as *Höfuðlausn* [Head-Ransom], which identifies the story as belonging to what Matthew Townend calls “a widespread narrative pattern” in which poets — the others being Egill Skalla-Grimsson and Óttarr svarti — deflect a king’s initial hostility through the composition of a life-saving poem; see Townend, introduction to Ótt *Hfl*, SkP I, 740. *Knyttlinga saga* also adds a touch of humour in the confounding of Þórarinn’s expectation that the brevity of the poem as first presented will be an advantage, since it will not detain the king long. But it is only in *Heimskringla* (and the *Separate Saga*) that the *stef* is cited.

10 “En þetta er stefit í” [and this is the *stef* in it] (ÍF III, 71); “ok er þetta stefit í” [and this is the *stef* in it] (ÍF III, 75). In the latter case, one further stanza and one *helmingr* are also cited. Neither poem survives elsewhere.

to the saga, by the opposition of longer poems that each is said to compose for the humiliation of the other. In most cases these poems are referred to, but not cited.

While Björn is not identified as a court poet, his antagonist, Þórðr Kolbeinson, is widely acknowledged as such both in the saga and elsewhere, and the first poem referred to in the saga is *Belgskakadrápa*, said to be composed by Þórðr for Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson of Norway. Þórðr arrives at the court of Jarl Eiríkr, where Björn is already established – as a member of the *hirð*, but not a poet. Þórðr recites a poem in honour of the jarl: “Þórðr flutti kvæðit, ok var þat drápa ok gott kvæði” (ÍF III, 116) [Þórðr presented the poem, and it was a *drápa* and a good poem]. At the end of the episode set in the jarl’s court, the saga records, “Drápa sú, er hann orti um Eirík jarl, heitir *Belgskakadrápa*” (ÍF III, 119) [The *drápa* that he composed about Jarl Eiríkr is called *Belgskakadrápa*]. There is no further information about the nature or content of this poem, nor is it named elsewhere, and there is no clue as to the meaning of its name. In her edition of Þórðr’s poetry Jayne Carroll translates it as “Bag-shaking *drápa*” and suggests it was “possibly a reference to the skald’s desire for recompense”, but the kind of bag that *belgr* usually refers to makes that rather unlikely, since a poet shaking a sack in the hope of having it filled would look rather too optimistic.¹¹ The context of the saga might suggest that this is the name of the poem referred to in the episode related a little earlier. But there is some ambiguity about this. The wording also suggests that Þórðr only composed one *drápa* for Jarl Eiríkr, but in fact we have preserved numerous verses assigned to his *Eiríksdrápa*, and referring to events much later than 1007, when the scene at Eiríkr’s court would seem to be dated. The episode of the sojourn of Björn and Þórðr with Jarl Eiríkr is preserved not in the saga proper, which survives only in a defective seventeenth-century manuscript and later copies, but in the expanded version of *Óláfs saga helga* which preserves a summary version of the lost beginning of the saga; while this appears to be a close paraphrase of the missing section of *Bjarnar saga*, there is no guarantee that the name of Þórðr’s poem actually appeared in the saga itself, or that the account of Þórðr presenting his *drápa* was not even further separated from the naming of the *drápa* than it is in the surviving summary. Did Þórðr compose two *drápur* for Jarl Eiríkr? Finnur Jónsson thought so, and assigned three of the surviving stanzas to *Belgskakadrápa*.¹² Bjarne Fidjestøl thought there was probably a single poem known by two names.¹³ Jayne Carroll, in her edition, includes all of

11 Carroll, introductions to ÞKolb, SkP I, 486, and ÞKolb *Eirðr*, SkP I, 487. See also Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, s.v.: “the skin, taken off whole (of a quadruped) [. . .] they were used as bags, in which to carry flour [. . .] or the like.”

12 *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, A1: 212; B1: 202–203.

13 Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, 116.

Þórðr's seventeen surviving stanzas ("with varying degrees of confidence") in a single poem called *Eiríksdrápa*.¹⁴ A comparable problem is found with Hallfreðr's poem or poems for Óláfr Tryggvason. These are conventionally divided into an early *Óláfsdrápa* and a later *erfidrápa* commemorating the king's death, but not so much on firm evidence as, in the words of Diana Whaley, "because it is natural to assume that Hallfreðr did not wait for his lord to die before eulogizing him".¹⁵ *Hallfreðar saga* of course dramatises his first encounter with the king, the king's reluctance to hear his poem (no doubt because of the non-Christian associations of skaldic poetry, rather than because it is a *flokkr*, as it is said to be when it is first mentioned; when the poem is delivered it is referred to as a *drápa*). The delivery, or not, of the poem becomes part of the battle of wills over conversion between the king and the poet that, in this version anyway, earns the poet his nickname *vandræðaskáld*.

Assuming that *Bjarnar saga* did refer to the *Belgskakadrápa* in the same way as it appears in the reconstructed version of the saga, the name of the poem appears to be a vestige of a tradition concerning Þórðr as a court poet, like the reference to Arnórr's otherwise lost *Blágagladrápa*. The very obscurity of the poem's name seems to guarantee that the poem did exist, since it serves no narrative purpose in *Bjarnar saga* – other than to reinforce the contrast between Þórðr as a genuine court poet, and Björn as an admiring servant of kings, but one whose poetic skills were directed only to witty disparagement of his rival on the domestic front.

Back in Iceland, the developing feud between Björn and Þórðr, who has married Björn's betrothed Oddný by tricking her into believing Björn has died, includes an exchange of insulting verse, Björn's *Grámagaflím* [Grey-belly Calumny] being compared to the *Kolluvisur* [Cow-verses] supposedly composed by Þórðr (ÍF III, 168–170). Neither poem is said to be spoken outright by its poet, but two minor characters discuss whether Björn's poem is "háðugligri" [more offensive] than the *Kolluvisur* said to be composed by Þórðr about Björn (of which nothing survives). Neither poem is recorded in direct speech, although three stanzas of Björn's *flím* are cited as an aside by the saga author, and the character who is lured into reciting Þórðr's is killed for his pains. Roberta Frank comments, "Literary criticism rarely raises its head in saga prose, unless one counts *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa*, in which two minor characters carry on a dispute as to whether Björn or his competitor Þórðr has composed the more malicious lampoons about the other".¹⁶ This

¹⁴ Carroll, introduction to ÞKolb, SkP I, 486.

¹⁵ Whaley, introduction to Hfr *Óldr*, SkP I, 387.

¹⁶ Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, 91.

scene is indeed a parody of the literary criticism implied in scenes of poetic performance, where the audience, as well as the addressee, is called on to judge a poem that has been presented. The three stanzas of Björn's satire that are cited are introduced with "En þetta er í flíminu" (ÍF III, 168) [But this is in the satire], a phrase reminiscent of, and perhaps parodying, the introductory formula already mentioned for a stanza or *stef* cited as the sample of a *drápa* or other formal poem, although it is quite likely that the *flím* was never any longer than the three stanzas cited, since the material in the saga's useful summary of the poem's contents is all covered in what is preserved:

[. . .] en þau váru þar efni í, at Arnóra, móðir Þórðar, hefði etit þann fisk, er hann kallaði grámaga, ok lét, sem hann hefði fundizk í fjöru, ok hefði hon af því áti hafandi orðit at Þórði, ok væri hann ekki dála frá mǫnnum kominn í báðar ættir [. . .]

[[. . .] the contents of it were that Arnóra, Þórð's mother, had eaten the fish that he called grey-belly, and alleged that it had been found on the beach, and that she had become pregnant with Þórð from eating it, and that he was not completely descended from humans on both sides [. . .]].

This makes it clear that the insult is contained mainly in the suggestion of miscegenation, of being only partly human, while Þórð's mother (not otherwise mentioned or even named in the currently truncated state of the saga, though his parentage was probably originally detailed in its now lost opening chapters) is mocked for eating rotten fish found on the shore, and for the unusually detailed depiction of the indignities of pregnancy.

No such helpful summary is given of Þórð's corresponding poem, the *Kollu-vísur* [Cow-verses], "er Þórðr hefir ort um Björn" [which Þórðr composed about Björn]. Did this poem ever exist? Overhearing the recitation of Þórð's poem, Björn kills the speaker, escaping prosecution because of a provision made earlier in the saga that anyone reciting stanzas composed by either of the poets could be killed with impunity (*falla óheilagr*). This provision was put in place after an earlier incident, in which Björn had prosecuted Þórðr for his contribution to an exchange of single *lausavísur*. In stanza 19 of the saga, Þórðr mocks Björn for picking up a newborn calf, lying under its mother's tail in the byre (SkP V, 84):

Hvat skyldir þú h*alda
heimaríkr í slíki*
– enn hǫfumk orkn of skeindan –
ár á mínu sári?
Þat mun sorg, und saurgan,
seimþollr, hala kollu,
remmitungls, at rǫngum,
randskjalfr, greipt þú kalfi.

[Why should you, mighty at home in the slime, keep on talking about my wound, whether a seal has scratched me? That will be a grief, fir-tree of riches [MAN = Björn]: that you, trembler of the strong moon of the shield [(lit. "strong-moon's shield-trembler")] SWORD > COWARDLY WARRIOR = Björn] grabbed at a crooked calf by the wrong end under the dirty tail of a cow.]

The use of the word *kolla* for “cow” in this stanza reinforces the supposition that it must be related in some way to the otherwise non-existent *Kolluvisur*, in which Þórðr may have been thought to have elaborated the theme of the earlier stanza. Some have thought the title *Kolluvisur* actually refers to Þórðr's earlier stanza; the saga author may have deliberately implied this, or it could have been the interpretation of a confused later scribe, since, as the poetical critics within the saga discuss the scurrilous works, the poem is referred to more than once in the singular (*vísa*, *vísuna*) despite the plural of the title. But those well versed in skaldic poetry may find the title *Kolluvisur* strangely familiar. Another poem of this name, again not cited, is referred to in *Sneglu-Halla þáttur*, as part of the battle of slurs engaged in by the disruptor Halli and the dignified Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, King Haraldr harðráði's *hofuðskáld* [chief poet] (ÍF XXIII, 271–277). This episode in which non-cited poems are compared bears some similarity with the scene in *Bjarnar saga*. Halli claims to have composed a poem in honour of the king and asks permission to recite it; he is forestalled by the jealous Þjóðólfr, who is said to be “noðkvat ofundsjúkr við þá menn er kvámu til hirðarinnar” [rather envious of the men who came to the court] (ÍF XXIII, 271), and who challenges Halli's claims not to have composed poetry before. Þjóðólfr says he has composed a *kvæði*: “Þat heita Kolluvisur er hann orti of kým út á Íslandi er hann gætti” [It is called *Kolluvisur*, which he composed about cows he was tending out in Iceland] (ÍF XXIII, 277). Halli admits to this, and claims he had not expected people to find it a model of poetry (*kvæðismynd*) if it became known; when ordered to recite it, however, he ripostes with a demand that Þjóðólfr must also in turn recite the *Sóptrogsvísur* [Dustbin verses] which he had composed while doing menial work with other children in his large, poor family back in Iceland. Both poets are obliged to recite these poems, which the king predictably dismisses as trivial: “Hværtveggja er kvæðit ofengiligt, ok munu ok lítil verit hafa yrkisefnin, ok þat er þó enn fengminna, Þjóðólfr, er þú ortir” [Each of the poems is worthless, and has little content, and yet the one you composed, Þjóðólfr, is the lesser in worth] (ÍF XXIII, 277). After a further exchange of (non-poetical) slurs, Halli is allowed to recite his poem for the king – also unknown elsewhere – which is said to be “gott ok vel ort” [good and well composed] (ÍF XXIII, 278). The story is told in a context where the king figures as a connoisseur of poetry, setting challenges for his poets and judging their performances; it presents a carnivalesque assault on the dignity of the serious poet Þjóðólfr, and a parody of the formulaic prelude to the presenta-

tion of a flattering poem by a new arrival at court, found for instance in the scene in *Gunnlaugs saga* discussed earlier and in that of Þórðr's appearance at Jarl Eiríkr's court in *Bjarnar saga*, where a fellow Icelander is asked about the credentials of the new arrival and attests to his worthiness to perform. In the larger context of Morkinskinna, *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* contributes to the contrast between the experiences of aspirant Icelanders, often poets, at court and the rusticity they represent (and in this case, have tried to conceal) as Icelanders of sometimes humble origin. As far as the poems themselves are concerned, Þjóðólfr's seems to be envisaged as a sort of work song, intended to encourage the children at their sooty task of ash-carrying, whereas there is no clue as to what poetry Halli could have woven about the cows he was tending; in this respect Þórðr's satirical poem, repeating or enlarging on the themes of his stanza about Bjørn's relations with a cow, is better grounded in the logic of the narrative. As Ursula Dronke puts it, "it is not difficult to see what coarse comedy Þórðr could have made out of the incident [of Bjørn picking up the newborn calf] in his *Kolluvísur*, or to imagine the incident being invented, and given circumstantial detail, to provide a convincing occasion for such verses, by a teller of the saga (whether the verses were authentic or not)".¹⁷

At this point we need to ponder the element *-vísur* in the titles of these poems. I have already mentioned the confusion in *Bjarnar saga* as to whether the *Kolluvísur* consist(s) of one stanza or a sequence. It is not obvious that such titles always refer to what we would understand to be a single poem, to be performed together as part of a single unit, rather than a collection, all on a related topic, gathered together over a period of time. The General Introduction to *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* attempts to define *-vísur* as a category of poem and to make the distinction between *-vísur* and *flokkr*. As the editors observe, this distinction is "somewhat blurred": Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Bersögglisvísur* [plain-speaking verses], for instance, is referred to in Flateyjarbók as *Bersögglisflokkr* (SkP I, lxvii):

The term *vísur* 'stanzas' is used in Old Norse literature to refer to an extended poetic composition without a refrain that commemorates a specific event (e.g. a battle or a journey), and in most cases the poet reports on this event as a participant or an eyewitness [. . .] It would appear, however, that a *flokkr* was more indebted to the genre of panegyric than the *vísur* in that it eulogised a person through his actions, and that *vísur* expressed a more general concept denoting "narrative poem" which encompassed *flokkr* as well as expressed poems of a more trivial nature.

17 Dronke, "Sem jarlar forðum", 71.

The emphasis here on narrative as characteristic of poems referred to as *vísur* is significant. Of the instances given, a journey may present more as a sequence of events, where a battle is more clearly a single event; the way that saga authors present poems in dissected form as a framework for narrative emphasises this tendency. The example of the *Kolluvísur*, in which the distinction between a full-blown poem (in which stanzas are presented in a sequence at a single hearing) and a one-off stanza (*lausavísa*) is blurred, gives rise to the possibility that *-vísur* may actually also refer to an open-ended collection of stanzas, added-to at will over a period of time by the poet, or as a collective effort as narratives about competing poets were developed in oral tradition, and less loosely connected thematically and stylistically than would normally be expected in a “narrative poem”.

There is a comparable example in *Hallfreðar saga*, which refers to slanderous *vísur* composed by Hallfreðr about Kolfinna's husband Gríss; according to the version of the saga found in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, “þat er hálfníð” (ÍF VIII, 188) [that is half-*níð*]. These stanzas are said to be composed in the course of the winter after Hallfreðr's adulterous stay with Kolfinna in a shieling, on his return to Iceland from abroad. During the interlude in the shieling he had recited a sequence of four stanzas, rich in insult of Gríss. In a later settlement of the rivals' quarrel, Hallfreðr is ordered to pay compensation to Gríss: “fyrir Gríssvísur skal Hallfreðr gefa Grísi grip einn góðan” (ÍF VIII, 193) [for the *Gríssvísur*, Hallfreðr is to give Gríss some valuable object]. If “Gríssvísur” is interpreted as the title of a poem, it refers presumably to the stanzas composed over the winter, after the fact; the relationship of these to the stanzas spoken supposedly spontaneously in the shieling interlude is unclear.¹⁸ If it is accepted that a title ending in *-vísur* could refer to an open-ended assemblage of stanzas, accumulated over a considerable interval, rather than to a purposefully constructed poem, it could apply – within the logic of the narrative – both to the stanzas spoken in the shieling and to further elaborations added by the same poet over time; in this case, over the course of the winter. It can also be envisaged that such a cache of stanzas might attract additions from other verse-makers in the course of transmission of an oral narrative; and that a saga writer might take advantage of the fuzziness of the distinction between a loose assemblage of stanzas and a loosely constructed poem to

¹⁸ Diana Whaley gives cautious credence to the hypothesis that “some of the scurrilous stanzas aimed at Gríss may have come from the *Gríssvísur*”, and cites Kari Ellen Gade's argument, in an unpublished paper, that the thematic continuities and echoes within these stanzas support this supposition; see Whaley, introduction to *Hallfr*, SkP V, 869–870. My argument is that even if the stanzas were not “too beautifully crafted and too well integrated as a sequence to be credible improvisations”, as Whaley puts it — see Whaley, introduction to *Hallfr*, SkP V, 869 — this is no reason why they could not be referred to as the *Gríssvísur*.

enhance the gravity of the offence, so that Þórðr's single stanza becomes the poem *Kolluvisur*.¹⁹

Bjarnar saga yields a further example. There is another episode where two poems are presented in paired performances, and measured and evaluated by their audiences (ÍF III, 174–175). These poems – both named but not cited – are spoken by the rival poets themselves, perhaps appropriately as the prelude to a horse fight, in the name of entertainment. The contest is initiated by Þórðr, who, when asked to entertain the assembled audience, recites stanzas called *Daggeisli*, composed about Bjørn's wife Þórdís, whom he calls “Landaljóma” [light of lands]. Bjørn hears him out and then, without being asked, retorts with stanzas called *Eykyndilsvísur*, *Eykyndill* [island torch] being his nickname for Þórðr's wife Oddný. Both poems are referred to as “vísur” [stanzas], rather than “kvæði” [poem]. We are doubly in the dark about Þórðr's poem, since we know next to nothing about Bjørn's wife Þórdís, his marriage to her having been related in what is now a lacuna in the saga; nor does the saga give any hint of any relationship between her and Þórðr. It seems clear that the poem's title is an extrapolation of Bjørn's epithet for Oddný. As Edith Marold points out:

The poetic names for the two wives are [. . .] equivalent: *Eykyndill* “island candle” is a skaldic variation of *Landaljómi* “land radiance”, where *ey* “island” corresponds to *land* “land” and *kyndill* “candle” corresponds to *ljómi* “radiance”. Both names can be described as periphrases for “sun” [. . .] While Þórðr's poem [. . .] is beyond reconstruction, the case is different with Bjørn's. It happens that *Bjarnar saga* features a series of *lausavísur* in which Oddný, Þórðr's wife, is called *Eykyndill*. These stanzas are quite widely dispersed in the narrative but we should contemplate the possibility that once re-assembled they might prove to represent the constituent parts of a single poem, perhaps the very *Eykyndilsvísur* named in the saga.²⁰

Marold points out that four of Bjørn's stanzas refer to Oddný (as she is called in the saga prose) as *Eykyndill*, and attempts to argue that these stanzas, which are all somewhat awkwardly positioned in the contexts assigned to them in the saga, represent an originally coherent poem that has been dismembered and dispersed throughout the narrative, either by the saga author or in the course of transmis-

¹⁹ The apparent confusion, or vague association, between Þórðr's single stanza and the (longer) poem *Kolluvisur* may account for an oddity in *Bjarnar saga*: the enormously large fine of “hundrað silfrs” [a hundred of silver] imposed on Þórðr when he is prosecuted for composing the stanza (ÍF III, 154), considerably more than the “þrjár merkr silfrs” [three marks of silver] imposed on Bjørn shortly afterwards for a far more damaging stanza accompanied by the raising of *níð* (ÍF III, 156). This discrepancy could be explained if the single stanza were in some way being confused with the longer poem.

²⁰ Marold, “The Relation between Verses and Prose in *Bjarnar saga Hítödelakappa*”, 83–84.

sion of the material preceding the writing of the saga. This is part of Marold's larger project to group together other *lausavísur* in the saga and assign them to other postulated longer poems. Cutting these stanzas loose from the saga context, she takes them to delineate the course of the adulterous relationship between Björn and Oddný, which the saga does indeed relate circuitously. In particular, on the basis of the two of these stanzas located within the part of the saga where Björn spends a claustrophobic winter with his rival and his wife, in the course of which, it emerges, their adulterous relationship takes place and Oddný bears a son, Kolli, Marold considers that “[t]he subject matter of *Eykyndilsvísur* [. . .] points to western European inspiration. The cuckolding of the husband is a standard motif in fabliaux, which were widely disseminated in oral tradition”.²¹

While the argument for *Eykyndilsvísur* being made up of the stanzas scattered through the saga in which the name *Eykyndill* occurs is not entirely convincing, the name does encourage us to deduce that the poem referred to in the episode at least referred to Björn's beloved and perhaps made play of the light imagery that the nickname conjures. Marold goes further, though, to speculate on the content of Þórðr's poem, which there is nothing else in the saga to support. She places great weight on Þórðr's son Kolli's comment on the equivalence of the two poems – *mér þykkir jafnskapnaðr, at verki komi verka á mót* (ÍF III, 174–175) [it seems to me evenly balanced that one poem counters the other] – drawing the conclusion that the content of the two must be identical:

What might the content of Þórðr's poem have been? The implication of Kolli's comment [. . .], and the correspondence between the two female names, *Landaljómi* and *Eykyndill*, is that the poems were related in substance. The title of Þórðr's poem, *Daggeisli* 'Day's Ray', provokes speculation. Could this ray be those of the rising sun, forcing Þórðr out of the bed he has shared with Björn's spouse? Could the poem represent an adaptation of the troubadour *alba*, or dawn song, to serve a new function? The classic central motif in this genre – the man being woken up by a mistress who is another man's wife – is carried over intact, but instead of representing the lovers' emotions on the occasion the poem becomes a vehicle for satire and slander against the rival, augmenting the dispute.²²

It is clear that speculation goes much too far here, postulating a relationship for Þórðr with a woman that the saga makes no suggestion he has even met, and going against Marold's own account of Björn's scornful depiction of Þórðr as a cuckold. The comment that the poems are “jafnskapnaðr” [evenly balanced] implies only that they involve the same degree of offence to the husbands of the women addressed or referred to, not that the offence is of exactly the same kind

21 Marold, “The Relation between Verses and Prose in *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa*”, 90.

22 Marold, “The Relation between Verses and Prose in *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa*”, 90.

in both cases. Nevertheless it is interesting that Marold's analysis of the scene demonstrates a response that follows exactly the guidelines laid down by the saga author. The equivalence of the poems is vouchsafed by the essentially identical nicknames given to the two women, and confirmed by the exchange between Þórðr's two sons: that is, it is the audience of the twin poems, weighing them up from their differing points of view, who pronounce that they have cancelled each other out – hence, the rather anticlimactic end of the episode, which results in no further action – except, of course, for the conclusion, a frequent refrain in the saga, that “[e]r nú sem fyrr, at Þórðr unði hvergi betr við en áðr” (ÍF III, 175) [it was the case now, as before, that Þórðr was no better pleased with it than before].

I have suggested elsewhere that the poem *Daggeisli*, or rather its title, is an invention, the claimed relationship between Þórðr and Björn's wife coming out of nowhere to imitate the long-established one between Björn and Oddný.²³ Marold has responded to my doubt with “one might comment that it existed about as much or as little as the *Kolluvisur*”²⁴ – a cogent remark, since my doubts do also extend to the *Kolluvisur*. I would surmise that both *Daggeisli* and *Eykyndilsvísur* are invented names of poems that did not exist in reality, created to continue the saga's theme of poetic rivalry, and link it more intimately with the element of sexual competition than do those stanzas that did have a basis in tradition. The stanzas already incorporated in the saga in which Björn uses the name “Eykyndill” for Oddný formed the inspiration for the title of the poem referred to in the episode, and by extension, for the matching title of Þórðr's poem. Alternatively, if my hypothesis that “-vísur” could be used of a loose assemblage of stanzas rather than an actual poem is justified, the Eykyndill stanzas now embedded in the saga could have been among those recited. Whether there was any further basis for the name *Daggeisli*, or for Þórðr's relations with Björn's wife, is impossible to know given the saga's now fragmentary state, but it could well be invented on the analogy of Björn's poem.

We are on firmer ground with the *Kolluvisur*, given the existence of the perhaps fragmentary *Grámagaflim* that Þórðr's poem was supposed to match, of the single stanza in which Þórðr mocks Björn's handling of a cow, and of the identically named poem, whose actual existence may be equally in doubt, attributed to Sneglu-Halli. And yet the process of expansion that yields the neat pairing of equally abusive poems looks remarkably similar to what I have posited for the invention of the *Daggeisli*–*Eykyndilsvísur* comparison. Again an existing, cited

23 Finlay, “*Níð*, Adultery and Feud in *Bjarnar saga Hítöelakappa*”, 174.

24 Marold, “The Relation between Verses and Prose in *Bjarnar saga Hítöelakappa*”, 90.

stanza provides the basis for the title and theme of the poem, which itself is an invention designed to maintain the equivalence of performance between the poets.

Bjarnar saga is uniquely concerned with the weighing of poetic insults between the two rivals. As their antagonism grows more acute, the offending verse swells from the exchange of single *lausavísur* to the recital of full-blown poems. This not only increases the extent of the offence, but allows for the construction of episodes of confrontation, along the lines of those in which poets present their competing poems in the presence of royalty. The episode in *Gunnlaugs saga* uses the theme in a different way, the quarrel over the two unnamed poems heralding the transition back to Iceland and the development of the rivalry into the competition for the love of Helga. It is possible even to speculate that the trope of the competition over poetic performance before a king formed the kernel for the story, common to the four poets' sagas, of the lifelong quarrel between poets for the love of a woman.

Bibliography and List of Abbreviations (SkP, ÍF)

SkP (Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages)

- SkP V *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*. Ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Kari Ellen Gade and Tarrin Wills. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages V. Turnhout: Brepols, 2023.
- Band* *Bandamanna saga*. Ed. and trans. Margaret Clunies Ross. SkP V. 3–15.
- Bárð* *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*. Ed. and trans. Margaret Clunies Ross. SkP V. 16–30.
- BjH* *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa*. Ed. and trans. Alison Finlay. SkP V. 56–123.
- Dpl* *Droplaugarsona saga*. Ed. and trans. Richard Perkins. SkP V. 133–151.
- Eb* *Eyrbyggja saga*. Ed. and trans. Judy Quinn [*Eb* 1–2 and 20–27] and Kate Heslop [*Eb* 3–19]. SkP V. 405–474.
- Eg* *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. Ed. and trans. Margaret Clunies Ross. SkP V. 152–391.
- Flóam* *Flóamanna saga*. Ed. and trans. Richard Perkins. SkP V. 475–478.
- Fbr* *Fóstbræðra saga*. Ed. and trans. R. D. Fulk. SkP V. 479–532.
- Gísl* *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. Ed. and trans. Kari Ellen Gade. SkP V. 533–618.
- Glúm* *Víga-Glúms saga*. Ed. and trans. John McKinnell. SkP V. 1371–1399.
- Gr* *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. Ed. and trans. Jonathan Grove. SkP V. 619–808.
- Gunnl* *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*. Ed. and trans. Diana Whaley. SkP V. 819–867.
- Hallfr* *Hallfreðar saga*. Ed. and trans. Diana Whaley. SkP V. 868–914.
- Harð* *Harðar saga*. Ed. and trans. Margaret Clunies Ross. SkP V. 915–945.
- Háv* *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*. Ed. and trans. Rolf Stavnem and Margaret Clunies Ross. SkP V. 946–976.
- Heið* *Heiðarvíga saga*. Ed. and trans. Colin Grant. SkP V. 977–1011.
- Korm* *Kormáks saga*. Ed. and trans. Edith Marold. SkP V. 1012–1183.
- Krók* *Króka-Refs saga*. Ed. and trans. Kari Ellen Gade. SkP V. 1184–1191.
- Laxd* *Laxdæla saga*. Ed. and trans. Margaret Clunies Ross. SkP V. 1197–1204.
- Nj* *Njáls saga*. Ed. and trans. R. D. Fulk. SkP V. 1205–1314.
- Reykð* → *Glúm* 3
- Svarfd* *Svarfdæla saga*. Ed. and trans. Kari Ellen Gade. SkP V. 1337–1370.
- Vatn* → *Hallfr* 1
- Vígl* *Víglundar saga*. Ed. and trans. Klaus Johan Myrvoll. SkP V. 1400–1449.

ÍF (Íslenzk fornrit)

- ÍF II *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. Ed. Sigurður Nordal. Íslenzk fornrit II. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1933.
- ÍF III *Borgfirðinga sögur*. Ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit III. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1938.
- ÍF IV *Eyrbyggja saga*. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson. Íslenzk fornrit IV. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935.
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