

**Icelandic Insular Romance**  
**Replication, Reflection, and Networks of**  
**Narrative and Meaning**

**J. A. Strawbridge**

**James (Jamie) Alexander Strawbridge**

**Lady Margaret Hall**

**DPhil English**

# Table of Contents

iii	<b>Abstract</b>
1	<b>Introduction: Finding and Situating the Insular Romances</b>
2	Romance Problems: The Genre and its Critics
9	Making Sense of Things: Replication, Reflection, and their Application
14	Enter the Lists: A Corpus of Texts
27	<b>Chapter One: Modelling Exemplary Behaviour through Maiden-kings and Matchmaking</b>
32	Less Than Humble Beginnings: The Patterns of <i>Clari Saga</i>
42	Suitable Women: The Female Protagonist
53	Strong Foil: The Male Protagonist
61	Support Networks: The Secondary Characters
73	Event Management: The Structure
82	<b>Chapter Two: Reconstructing Romance and the Value(s) of Knighthood</b>
87	Objects of Interest: The Inheritance of Romance
99	Lionising Knights: The Lion of Romance
108	By the Numbers: <i>Ectors Saga</i> and the Shape of Chivalric Adventure
118	A Combative Approach: Characters in Conflict
129	Gaming the System: Courtly Activities in Action
143	<b>Chapter Three: Navigating the Romance World through the Scandinavian Past</b>
149	Local Hero: Alternative Protagonists
167	The Opposition: Villains and Monsters
182	Relative Importance: Family Structures
197	Changing Faces: <i>Mágus saga jarls</i> , Tradition, and Legend
210	<b>Chapter Four: Refiguring Romance for Religious Ends</b>
218	(En)Countering Paganism: Other Faiths and Conversion
233	Devil in the Details: Good versus Evil
250	Just Enough: Living and Ending Well
267	The Cheek, and Turning It: Farce and Forgiveness
278	<b>Conclusion: Moving Forward with the Insular Romances</b>
282	<b>Bibliography</b>

## **Abstract**

Critical study of Icelandic insular romances has been limited due to assumptions of poor literary quality and a lack of editions. This thesis constructs a corpus of Icelandic insular *riddarasögur* from thirty-four texts and explores the ways in which meaning is interwoven into their seemingly simple narratives through widespread repetitions and connections. The study introduces the concepts of “replication” (overt linking of two distinct elements) and “reflection” (the implications of such a comparison). Examples include lexical repetitions, recognisable narrative structures such as tripartite episodes, and broader semiotic features such as names and intertextual references. The aim of this thesis is threefold: to accumulate evidence in support of these conceptual networks; to explain and explore the effects these techniques have across the selected texts; and to interact with existing discussions about medieval Icelandic literature.

The first chapter focuses on a subgenre of romances, maiden-king narratives, to establish the basic principles of replication and reflection, while also considering the influence of exemplary literature. The second chapter uses the models of Continental romance to assess the presentation of knightly characters and demonstrates how replication and reflection can convey the value judgements of a particular composer or redactor. The third chapter contrasts this knightly world with a pool of broadly “Germanic” or “legendary” inherited material, showing how the composers engage in textual debates regarding the significance of Icelandic and Scandinavian heritage. The final chapter considers religious influences upon the romances, and how the narrative structures explored in the previous chapters can be augmented or subverted for spiritual purposes.

This thesis provides groundwork for further work on the genre. The study provides readings of specific texts, carefully situated within detailed analysis of their language and structures, and also introduces methodology and terminology for broader use.

## Introduction: Finding and Situating the Insular Romances

It is traditional to commence a study on the romances of the medieval Norse world with comments on the sorry history of scholarship in the area – its progress from complete disregard as essentially the “trash” of the Middle Ages to a topic that now has at best modest interest. However, the future of *riddarasaga* research is bright; over the past few decades, persistent work from dedicated scholars in the field has built solid foundations and some serious momentum. We can look forward to studies which will bring these overlooked texts to broader consideration, and perhaps even a wider contemporary reading public, with evident tastes in the marvellous and bizarre. Yet, to enter into a study of the romances conceived and produced in Iceland c.1300-1550 is to collide immediately with a host of problems relating to almost every aspect of the texts.

Most of the numerous manuscripts of these texts are post-medieval, many of the accessible editions are at least half a century old, and the critical editions closer to a century and a half. Simultaneously, much scholarship has circled around nebulous, and at points petty, issues of literary value and identity, or grappled with particular technical issues. Establishing provenance and chronology is a difficult and thankless task, while even the classification of these texts as medieval romances is problematic. It is dubious whether the romances can be considered uniquely “medieval” when texts of their nature continue to be produced en masse post-Reformation, and it is unclear how exactly these texts sit within the broader genre of “romance” and within the complex saga traditions of Iceland. Countless questions could be established to which we are still seeking the answers: Who composed these texts (and how), and who read these texts (and how)? Why did these texts become popular, if indeed they even were as popular as the uncertain manuscript record might suggest? How widely did they circulate, and what relationship do individual texts have to each other (if any)? How close are the versions and editions we have to the original texts (and how meaningful is the search for “originals”)? Were these texts intended as pure entertainment, or did they have more sophisticated aims?

The aim of this study is not to answer all of these questions, but to provide new tools and a new perspective on these texts. The fundamentals of my research have been based on a process of observation and exploration, taking stock of the texts as we currently have them, and the information that we have on the romances and their contexts, and building a framework and vocabulary to analyse and better understand these narratives. It is an almost purely literary approach, but its findings are significant. Many words have been dedicated to these texts as some indication of the movement of Icelandic literature in the age following the “classical” sagas, and in some cases the specific social implications and transmission history of these texts have been fruitfully explored, but so little space has been allowed for how the romances *work*. Much about the concerns and strategies of these texts has been left unspoken or even unobserved.

My main goal is to allow these texts to speak for themselves: on their own, to each other, and, more importantly, to the broader literary environment of medieval Iceland. In exploring thirty-four texts which I will label as medieval Icelandic insular *riddarasögur*, I hope to show that these romances are layered with significance, that they display a distinctive approach to the construction of narrative and the conveyance of meaning, and that, in these things, they are far from isolated from the rest of saga literature: they should be placed in dialogue with broader Norse texts and scholarship. It is through removing the romances from the periphery, and placing them in the midst of Icelandic literature, that we might be able to eventually find answers and solutions to those daunting questions and problems which plague the genre.

### **Romance Problems: The Genre and its Critics**

The problem of definition is recurrent throughout literature studies, particularly in genre work relating to the medieval period (itself an uncertain entity), and several issues collide when speaking of these texts that I label medieval Icelandic insular romances. The simplest aspect is the “Icelandic” nature of these texts: the entire production and dissemination of these texts relates to the language and literary context of Iceland; as Sheryl McDonald Werronen asserts, ‘They were written in Iceland, using Icelandic

(West Norse) language, for Icelanders'.<sup>1</sup> No text within the corpus I will be considering exists in a medieval version outside of Iceland, or in any other language (with one exception which I will broach in due course). By “medieval”, I am limiting the texts to those with substantial evidence for existing in something like their extant forms pre-1550, before the Reformation in Iceland, a decision that is in part pragmatic, as the story of Icelandic romance is much broader than can be covered here. Matthew Driscoll’s pivotal study of the post-medieval transmission and development of romance has opened the field to much-needed areas of study which still warrant further attention, but cannot be covered in this study.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, these romances are all prose narratives, and I will not examine the *rímur* which emerged in response to these romances and their material; as both Driscoll and Jürg Glauser explore, these *rímur* are fundamentally a part of the distribution of Icelandic romance, but critical understanding of this poetic tradition, and editing of the texts, is even more limited than that of the romances.<sup>3</sup> The selection of medieval prose material here is not intended as a firm demarcation, but as a practical focus, and this conversation can doubtless be developed in future by the inclusion of later material. The designation “insular” (which I shall return to later) follows a critical commonplace in acknowledging two broad phases to Norse romance: a phase of translation, typically associated with Norway and the court of King Hákon IV (although our understanding of this is increasingly nuanced), and a phase of Icelandic romances which eschewed inherited plots and characters in favour of new narratives composed from an assortment of motifs and tropes.<sup>4</sup> These latter texts are the *riddarasögur* of this study, although the translated material will remain relevant to the discussion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sheryl McDonald Werronen, *Popular Romance in Iceland: The Women, Worldviews, and Manuscript Witnesses of Nítidasaga* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), p.18.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew James Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Driscoll, *Unwashed Children of Eve*; Jürg Glauser, ‘Romances, *Rímur*, Chapbooks. Problems of Popular Literature in Late Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavia’, *Parergon* 8.2 (1990), pp.37-52.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance two introductions to the material: Marianne Kalinke, ‘Norse Romance (*Riddarasögur*)’, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, eds. Clover and Lindow (London: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp.316-363, and Geraldine Barnes ‘Romance in Iceland’, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.266-286.

Perhaps the most challenging element to define is that of “romance”: the term *riddarasaga* (literally, “story of knights”) is of medieval provenance, although only in a few limited places, where it refers to texts such as *biðreks saga* and *Flóvents saga*, neither of which are considered part of my corpus (although they will appear in the discussion). Nonetheless, the term *riddarasaga* has remained popular, and is variously applied solely to the translated material, or, more broadly, to any text of either phase (and I shall be following this latter convention).<sup>5</sup> Marianne Kalinke offers a measured endorsement of the generic use of the term:

The designation *riddarasögur* is an accurate descriptive term for the works being considered here, since they are peopled by knights and ladies, by kings and queens, by princes and princesses—the aggregate of feudal aristocracy in short. From a Continental literary perspective, however, the term *riddarasögur*, that is, chivalric sagas, is misleading, for it suggests translations and adaptations of the *romans courtois*, the courtly romance.<sup>6</sup>

It is certainly dangerous to make too many alignments between the concerns and practices of Icelandic romance and those of other traditions – one aim of this study is to show the distinctive qualities of these Icelandic texts – but they nonetheless participate in a broader cultural context we might conveniently label romance. A descriptive rather than prescriptive approach is most beneficial here: no single rule will encompass all of the texts, from the crusading narrative of *Rémundar saga* to the *fornaldarsaga*-influenced *Vilmundar saga viðutan* to the non-violent dream interpretation story of *Drauma-Jóns saga*. Rather, we may include as romances texts that contain some collocation of stereotypical romance features, such as knights, nobility, adventure, jousting, and love, to name just a few. This approach has an undeniable element of subjectivity, but I consider the blurry boundaries created by such a selection to be a help rather than hindrance; it is unhelpful to isolate the romances too much, and allowing these ideas to spread outward to adjacent or borderline texts will likely be productive. Modern work on the *riddarasögur* needs to carefully balance reactive and proactive

---

<sup>5</sup> For the former, see for instance Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921).

<sup>6</sup> Kalinke, ‘Norse Romance (*Riddarasögur*)’, p.321.

elements, to work with inherited assumptions and selections even if their basis is dubious, while simultaneously making new statements for the future of the research. The nature of my corpus is inseparably connected to its critical heritage: these are texts that have been considered to be romances, and it is necessary to analyse this selection for its features, and assess whether we wish to maintain its identity. This corpus of insular *riddarasögur* is one created by academics, but I intend to show that it might still be useful, even if only as a starting point in discussion.

The recurrent instability of the insular romance group is evident from the lack of critical treatment given to them as a collection. I will not include some of the now widely-quoted disparagements directed in critical writing of the past to the *riddarasögur*, as they add little to our discussion, but even some of the early advocates of the material remained hesitant in their treatment. Henry Goddard Leach, who included some of the earliest discussions of these texts in *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, only dealt briefly with the majority of these texts, and believed many to be translations. He showed a willingness to engage with the so-called *lygisögur* [lying-stories/fictional stories], but predominantly as a quaint novelty, calling them ‘the crazy quilts of medieval romance’.<sup>7</sup> Margaret Schlauch brought greater attention to the texts in *Romance in Iceland*, which still remains a central critical text close to a century later, despite its nature as an intentionally limited and at points cursory survey of romance material.<sup>8</sup> The study predominantly focused on motifs, included a large amount of source-tracing which we might now consider outdated, and the texts in discussion included a number of *fornaldarsögur* alongside both translated and original romances. The work is most useful as the starting-point for *riddarasaga* research it was planned as, and not as a definitive handbook, particularly given Schlauch’s tendency towards evaluative and negative comments on the material even as she studied it: ‘Their merit as narrative art is slight; when they are diverting, it is often for reasons not intended by the authors’.<sup>9</sup> This tendency to approach the *riddarasögur* with something of a double-edged sword has recurred across the development of scholarship. Paul Bibire, in a discussion that

---

<sup>7</sup> Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, p.164

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934).

<sup>9</sup> Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, p.169.

engages with the generic quandaries of Icelandic romance material, concludes that 'The Icelandic Secondary Romances are not great literature, though they are very frequently very entertaining literature. But they define the terms by which the Sagas of Icelanders are largely to be judged'; Gerd Wolfgang Weber made a case for the autochthonous nature of the romances (thereby challenging a critical accusation that foreign and fictitious material undermined the quality of native Icelandic literature), but based his interpretation on the assumption that the texts dropped the 'ideological cargo' of French romance.<sup>10</sup> Despite academic engagement with the romances, often mining them for cultural implications or analogues to more canonical texts, commentators repeatedly conclude that the romances are, in themselves, fundamentally superficial and poorly constructed. By placing the emphasis back on the workings of these texts, this study will show, regardless of literary quality, that subtext suffuses these romances, which have been carefully constructed to be anything but superficial or surface-level.

That is not to say that scholars have completely ignored the power of individual texts or groups, but these studies, by nature of their focus, have often remained partial, partly for pragmatic reasons and partly through personal choice. One of the most important pieces of scholarship in the area is Kalinke's *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, which examined a specific structural aspect (the narrative impetus for marriage) and unearthed a world of nuance and meaning throughout these texts.<sup>11</sup> Kalinke was in part responding to more overtly structuralist approaches, particularly that of Glauser, which, while applying rigorous analytical work to these understudied texts, reduced the romances to hollow vessels of motif.<sup>12</sup> She notes:

---

<sup>10</sup> Paul Bibire, 'From *Riddarasaga* to *Lygisaga*: The Norse Response to Romance', *Les Sagas de Chevaliers (Riddarasögur)*, ed. Boyer (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985), pp.55-74, here p.74; Gerd Wolfgang Weber, 'The Decadence of Feudal Myth: Towards a Theory of *riddarasaga* and Romance', *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, eds. Lindow, Lönnroth, and Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp.415-454, here p.426.

<sup>11</sup> Marianne Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> See in particular, Jürg Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas: Studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhalm, 1983), and Astrid van Nahl, *Originale Riddarasögur als Teils altnordischer Sagaliteratur* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981).

A study of motifs and narrative situations is useful for establishing the common—indigenous as well as foreign—literary lexicon that informs the *riddarasögur*. It accounts, however, neither for the interrelationships of persons and actions in an individual saga—or the relationship of persons and actions among several sagas—nor for the origin and resolution of conflict that is the basis of plot.<sup>13</sup>

Such an approach is rewarding, as Kalinke shows in her work, and this current study shares a core with hers that, if not necessarily post-structuralist, is certainly non-structuralist: examining the use of narrative structure and motif can be a means of highlighting the unique effects of individual texts, rather than building one overall picture of the genre. However, Kalinke's work chose the bridal-quest as its unifying principle, omitting several *riddarasögur* while including a range of so-called *fornaldarsögur*, showing how the term romance is more widely applicable than merely texts conventionally labelled as *riddarasögur*. While I do not wish to undermine the validity and usefulness of her approach, it is important to emphasise that it is only one way of grouping and discussing these texts, and does not preclude an examination of the *riddarasögur* as distinct from *fornaldarsögur* (although the border should remain open). Another selective approach is that of Geraldine Barnes, whose work *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, which is something of a spiritual successor to her own work on the didactic nature of translated romances, focuses on a range of insular romances with heavily “bookish” references and worlds. Although the learnedness of these texts is vital to comprehension, and many of her observations are incisive, we should be cautious about demarcating bookish romances too firmly, even if, as Barnes suggests:

The authorship of this group of *riddarasögur* is suggestive of a coterie of writers, familiar with each other's work and likely to be writing as much for their peers as for their anonymous patrons in a literary milieu in which mutual borrowing and reference were customary.<sup>14</sup>

Nebulous questions of authorship aside, the romances not considered among Barnes's “bookish” texts are worthy of attention, and deserve to be placed in dialogue with the more learned examples. While

---

<sup>13</sup> Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p.20.

<sup>14</sup> Geraldine Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur* (Odense: University of Southern Denmark Press, 2014), p.183.

the works of Kalinke and Barnes are invaluable resources, it is time for a study which examines all the texts of this supposed genre, to synthesise the work which has been done on assorted aspects and texts. Analyses such as Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's essay in Jónas Kristjánsson's edition of *Viktors saga ok Blávus* or Sheryl McDonald Werronen's more recent study of *Nítíða saga* are also important contributions to the *riddarasaga* field in general despite their necessary focus.<sup>15</sup> Many pieces of the puzzle of Icelandic romance have been produced but not assembled; before further work delves into the specifics of texts, their provenance, and the implications for medieval Icelandic culture, we need to construct an overall approach to these romances.

That is why my aim in this current study is to provide a means of reading these texts which is based on detailed work with the texts themselves, but supported by the assorted scholarship which has come before. Even if the genre of Icelandic insular romance is ultimately somewhat arbitrary and anachronistic, I want to demonstrate how useful these texts can be. They are helpful, both as individual works and in broader dialogue with each other and other texts, to understand the processes of composition and reading at the heart of the medieval Icelandic literature we have access to. This drive is encapsulated in my choice of the term "insular" as opposed to previous options such as "original", "native", "indigenous", or "Secondary": the aim is not to further clog the field with extraneous terminology, but to make an active statement about the nature of these texts. On the one hand, my choice is in response to the previous scholarship: while the lack of inherited narratives does make "original" a tempting choice, the undeniable reliance upon tropes, conventions, and even entire episodes from other texts makes overstating their originality unhelpful. Likewise, the terms "native" and "indigenous" imply these works spring from the local a little too much; in many ways, what makes these texts fascinating is the way they use the unoriginal and the foreign in distinctly Icelandic ways. Although Bibire's "Secondary Romance" merely makes a chronological observation, it still suggests a hierarchy of romance which scholarship has previously borne out – that the translated romances are

---

<sup>15</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Viktors Saga ok Blávus: Sources and Characteristics', *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Handritastofnum Íslands, 1964), pp.cix-ccix; Sheryl McDonald Werronen, *Popular Romance in Iceland*.

the more important of the two phases of Norse romance – and so is not helpful, like the term *lygisögur*, which, although not always used pejoratively, still retains a degree of dismissal of these texts. My choice of alternative also springs from the success of the term “insular romance” when applied to the British Isles, as scholars such as Susan Crane and Judith Weiss have used it to explore the distinct concerns and features of romance written in Britain in contrast to the Continent.<sup>16</sup> Although the nature of Anglo-Norman and Middle English insular romance is quite different to that of the Icelandic texts, I nonetheless want to capture some element of that force: the second phase of Norse romance is not necessarily native, but it does take on the character of Iceland and its literary culture in a major way. The qualities that make these texts so utterly Icelandic, without disregarding the foreign, will form a substantial part of this analysis going forward.

### **Making Sense of Things: Replication, Reflection, and their Application**

In labelling these texts, I have intentionally avoided the use of the term “popular”, despite its undeniable relevance to the insular romances. As Kalinke observes:

More than thirty romances, known with certainty to have been composed in Iceland in the Middle Ages, are preserved today. The burgeoning of the *riddarasögur* in Iceland, their preservation in an astoundingly large number of manuscripts, and their publication in popular editions in both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries bespeak the genre’s continuing appeal.<sup>17</sup>

There is strong evidence that the romances were widely read, certainly in the post-medieval period and probably at the time of composition; their presence in far more manuscripts than the *Íslendingasögur* is frequently and validly used to suggest their greater popularity. However, the term “popular” leads into historical associations of dismissal and disapproval, while simultaneously conveying assumptions about the audience; in the case of these texts, these are often best guesses. I want to frame these texts

---

<sup>16</sup> Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Judith Weiss, *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Kalinke, ‘Norse Romance (*Riddarasögur*)’, p.349.

in a different way relating to the same issue, and introduce a new term to guide the discussion: literature of proliferation. A literature of proliferation is one that unites several of the following features: a large quantity of texts of similar nature, transmitted to a great degree (features that we might suggest as evidence of popularity), but also, within the texts, showing a large quantity of characters or episodes, often of a conventional nature. The reason I want to unite the intratextual elements of proliferation with the contextual evidence is that it builds a comprehensive picture of the literary world that might have been presented to readers and listeners, without commenting directly on the nature of that audience. Romance is a genre that ultimately presents a hypothetical reader with a large quantity of knights, monsters, and adventures that consequently need to be sorted. We might think of a range of genres across time that are usefully thought of as proliferative: we might consider the crime novel, fantasy literature, or romance media (“genre fiction” being a common term for these) in our time; in studies of medieval literature, we can point to romance more broadly (for example the prose traditions of France which produced the Vulgate) as well as the large scale distribution and development of hagiography. The concept of literatures of proliferation allows us to talk about the challenges facing a composer of a text in a densely packed literary environment, without us having to identify the target audience precisely.

Icelandic *riddarasögur* are an important tool to use in considering literatures of proliferation, not only because they clearly embody the key features, but also because they emerge in a literary environment which is already remarkably proliferative. Icelandic prose literature is itself a capacious vessel for a range of different genres which both are reproduced en masse and feature vast quantities of characters and events. To peruse an Icelandic manuscript, with a selection of sagas of different supposed genres, is to be bombarded with names and nicknames, births and deaths, adventures and incursions. It is important to appreciate the sheer volume of information, fictional or not, which is conveyed in medieval Icelandic literature. This observation may seem unremarkable on its own, but there is evidence to suggest that Icelandic literature adapted to the pressures of this proliferation, and readers and composers developed frameworks for understanding and sorting this material through

associations and repetitions. The Icelandic insular *riddarasögur* display a series of patterns and structures, carefully arranged to present information in certain ways. For this study, I wish to develop a vocabulary and a reading approach to unlock some of this subtext. I hope that the framework may be useful for wider application in Icelandic literature, because this is not a phenomenon unique to romances, something I intend to indicate through placing the *riddarasögur* in dialogue with more critically-familiar genres and texts. A range of materials points towards these conceptual structures, but it is in the insular romances specifically that these patterns are most obvious and easy to trace, because of the freedom of fictionality: regardless of whether the audiences believed these texts to be true, their original creators cannot have. Characters and plots have not been inherited, and have therefore been invented at some point. Such creators possessed a significant degree of control over the shape of their narratives.

There are numerous ways to describe these processes, and some theoretical models (such as from semiotics and poststructuralism) could be fruitful, but I have opted for a new framework to convey the observations I have made through close work with all of these texts.<sup>18</sup> The core of this frame of understanding is what I will call “replication” and “reflection”. *Replication* refers to an overt linking of narrative units, such as characters or events or even qualities, as being in some way the same. As we shall see in the ensuing chapters, this replication can involve outright statements of similarity, direct lexical or syntactic repetitions, or more subtle methods such as the meaning and function of names or narrative structures themselves. The main feature of replicative moments is that an audience is confronted with a connection between otherwise distinct elements. *Reflection* is the subsequent meaning that can be inferred from these connections, particularly through the differences between similar entities. As we shall see, this can lead to characters whose counterparts offer an implicit evaluation of the initial figure’s behaviour, to repeated series in which the final success (or failure)

---

<sup>18</sup> Preliminary work on this thesis included consideration of theories of intertextuality, such as that of Julia Kristeva, for which see *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); a more general overview is Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000); these theories could be applied to the proliferative Icelandic romance genre in future studies.

indicates some significant change, or to newly introduced figures evoking the associations of previous characters without explanation needed. These connections can be simple and isolated or build into larger structures throughout a given text, which for the purposes of this study I will refer to as networks or patterns. These connections can even extend over texts, as elements of one text seem to draw upon and comment on the aspects of a predecessor. When Weber talks about the removal of romance elements from these *riddarasögur* – it is often suggested that Norse prose cut back on romance description, particularly that relating to emotion and ethics – it is only half of the story: these elements have been not simply been excised from the text, but moved into the subtext.<sup>19</sup> Naturally, the interpretation of these comparisons is subjective, and it is impossible for me to prove any individual reading; that is not the aim of this thesis. Rather, I would like first to draw attention to these replicative moments and convince readers that they can be found throughout the corpus (and beyond) to an extent that cannot be mere coincidence. Secondly, I will build my readings of these individual moments into a larger picture which points towards concerns and debates that appear to be recurrent in the medieval Icelandic literary environment. Alternative readings might be provided for any given connection, and future research may disprove outright particular assertions of mine, but I trust that the overall weight of evidence is strong enough and that the broad ideas that I construct will remain useful.

The main focus of my analysis throughout will be the thirty-four texts of my corpus, which themselves provide more evidence than can be conveyed within the scope of this thesis. Consequently, I have selected from each text the material which appears to me most fruitful for discussion, and placed it into dialogue with broader literary issues. The degree to which I talk about each text does not necessarily correspond to the length of texts or the quantity of evidence that can be obtained from them, but rather the relevance of the points to the topics I have chosen. I have arranged this material through the lens of other genres in medieval Iceland. In part, I wish to reinforce the connectivity

---

<sup>19</sup> Such an assumption of the move towards meaninglessness is offered by Weber: 'The entertaining quality of the story no longer stems from its 'spirituality', which was formerly superimposed on the factual, but it consists in the titillation of individual feats, adventures, dangers overcome, etc. or simply in the action of the story', in Weber, 'The Decadence of Feudal Myth: Towards a Theory of *Riddarasaga* and Romance', p.451.

between genres, and diminish the idea of these romances as isolated. Equally, pre-existing scholarship on more commonly studied texts can provide useful frameworks for discussing the insular romances, particularly given the lack of scholarship on the majority of these texts. By sorting the material into these categories, I do not want to overstate the connection between the texts of the other genres and the insular romances, nor are these distinctions suggesting a taxonomy of Icelandic romance (indeed, most of the texts will feature in multiple chapters). Instead, they draw together the concerns of independent texts into a larger dialogue around common issues. Ultimately, each text is unique, and part of the effect of replication and reflection is understanding the nuances between different texts that otherwise appear difficult to distinguish. However, the purpose of this study is to show how the romances have a dual identity, as unique entities that are nonetheless often dependent on their place within a large number of such texts.

While individual chapters stand to a degree on their own, they are arranged in such a way as to develop the points made in their predecessors, and to refer back and forward as necessary; ultimately, these issues defy neat compartmentalisation and are in dialogue with each other. First, to introduce the basic workings of replication and reflection, we shall explore in Chapter One a distinct subgenre that emerged within the romances, that of the suitor-spurning maiden-king, a figure with some roots in the tradition of *exempla*. In those texts, we shall examine the ways in which gender and social roles are negotiated through the positioning of characters and their actions; narratives use their structures in rhetorical fashion, to suggest certain viewpoints on appropriate conduct, and sometimes to challenge the assumptions of their forerunners. This judgemental undercurrent leads us, in Chapter Two, to the world of romance itself as inherited from the translated *riddarasögur*, in which conduct becomes utterly intertwined with contest. The texts work to construct competing images of knighthood and value, through episodes of direct contrast such as jousting and even chess, while asserting the insular romances' relationship to their translated ancestors. The evaluation of the chivalric world leads to a consideration of the so-called Germanic world, familiar from *fornaldarsögur*, with which the romance material is implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, compared; in Chapter Three, we shall examine

how vikings and trolls fit with a world of knights and courts, and also consider how that quintessentially Icelandic concern, family, slots into these narratives. Even the looming spectres of mythology and legendary heritage are incorporated into these frameworks. Finally, to see the reactions to the world of paganism and the past, we will examine in Chapter Four how Christianity, via the influence of religious literature such as hagiography, becomes invested in these romances: the same narrative structures which elsewhere elevate secular heroes can be used for a spiritual purpose. Among these ideological religious conflicts and assertions remains an element of fun and irreverence that does not always preclude an ultimate message of ethical guidance. These chapters are aimed to provide a solid platform for reading these *riddarasögur*, but they are also mere starting points for more detailed research into the relationship between these genres, so in my concluding remarks I will suggest some further directions for study, in which even the *Íslendingasögur* have a place. The romances are interesting enough by themselves, and that is ultimately the core of this work, but I hope that they also can be used as pathways to further discoveries and realisations in the field of Icelandic literature.

### **Enter the Lists: A Corpus of Texts**

In the absence of the time or means to peruse every potential romance in Icelandic manuscripts, the selection of my corpus is dependent on the work of previous scholars and the decisions of editors. In particular, the *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romance* by Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell, while now outdated as a bibliography, remains a vital guide to the texts currently regarded as romances.<sup>20</sup> Thirty-three texts of my corpus are found described in their work and the exception, *Nikulás saga leikara*, has more recently been associated with a medieval provenance by Kalinke and others.<sup>21</sup> The criteria for my selection are reasonably straightforward: these are Icelandic (rather than Norwegian) romances which scholars believe to be new creations rather than translations, and therefore appear not to use inherited

---

<sup>20</sup> Marianne E. Kalinke and P.M. Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> See Kalinke, *Bridal Quest Romance*, and McDonald Werronen, *Popular Romance in Iceland*.

narratives. That produces a comfortable list of around thirty texts, but a few outliers and borderline cases need to be addressed, both for inclusion and exclusion.

The inclusion of *Clari saga*, often (including by Kalinke) considered a translated romance, is due to two reasons. Firstly, there is no extant original, and there is sufficient doubt about whether the translation occurred or in what form. Secondly, it is a text fundamental to the maiden-king subgenre and is a useful tool for our discussion of replicative and reflective elements (we shall consider these issues further in Chapter One). If the status of *Clari saga* as translation is ever unequivocally proven, it merely changes the way in which we process the text, and suggests a possible origin for these stylistic elements, rather than refuting the observations themselves. *Mágus saga jarls* is broadly speaking an adaptation of the *Renaud de Montauban* material from French *chansons de geste*, but there is no intermediate Norse translation extant, and the narrative itself is so distorted from its original that it is functionally a new entity (see Chapters Two and Three). These two texts contribute enough to this discussion to warrant their inclusion.

Exclusion is perhaps a little more nebulous: *Tíodels saga* is an Icelandic adaptation of the Marie de France *Bisclavret* material, but follows the plot closely despite some notable changes; *Flóvents saga* has no known original to be translated from, but the style, complete with a narratorial figure called Simon, is distinctive enough to support its identity as a translation – unlike with *Clari saga*, I do not currently feel the need to give it the benefit of doubt.<sup>22</sup> The exclusion of the Icelandic Tristan tale, *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, is perhaps the most contentious, as it does represent a radical alteration to much of the traditional Tristan story. That being said, the fundamentals of the narrative of the love triangle remain in place, and many familiar episodes are preserved, if admittedly in strange forms.<sup>23</sup> In part, my exclusion of the Tristan tale is pragmatic; unlike the majority of our texts, it has received substantial

---

<sup>22</sup> See *Tíodels saga*, ed. Tove Hovn Ohlsson (Reykjavík: Stofnum Arna Magnússonar, 2009); ‘Flóvents saga’, *Fornsögur Suðrlanda*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld (Lund: F. Berlings boktryckeri, 1884), pp.124-208 (across two versions).

<sup>23</sup> ‘Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd’, ed. Peter Jorgensen and trans. Joyce Hill, *Norse Romance I: The Tristan Legend*, ed. Kalinke (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), pp.241-292.

critical attention, particularly recently.<sup>24</sup> Even though these ideas might be fruitfully applied to that text, I have chosen to allow the other romances more space. None of these exclusions are intended as absolute, as there is plenty of potential for texts from the neighbouring *fornaldarsaga* corpus, from post-medieval collections, and from any new discoveries; this corpus is the focus of this study because it roughly represents an impression of insular romance as currently understood.

Similarly, the lack of critical editions for the majority of these texts means that, from many scholarly perspectives, I am working with inadequate material. However, I do not wish the unfortunate state of *riddarasaga* text availability to continue to delay wider engagement with these texts. When I refer to any individual text, I am quoting a *version* of the text, behind which there are alternatives that cannot all be considered here. Each version has a validity of its own, even if subsequent editing prefers other readings; indeed, in this study, we will compare some texts in which multiple redactions have been preserved and edited to demonstrate how much nuance can be constructed even within essentially the same text. Such comparison of alternative readings is offered where practical and fruitful, but ultimately the aim of this study is to explore and explain the observable structures and meanings which exist in the texts as we currently have them, variably edited and by no means standardised.

A knock-on effect of this general uncertainty is that chronology will be approached with extreme care; while some texts have been positioned by scholars with enough confidence to allow direct intertextuality to be commented upon, in other cases the dating remains vague enough that positing too strongly a direct response to another text can be risky. More useful is the idea that these texts are in some way participating in a broader discussion of motifs and issues that may relate to specific texts of our corpus, to texts we do not possess, or to nothing in particular. The overall movement from early fourteenth century to late fifteenth century (and in the case of some redactions,

---

<sup>24</sup> See Marianne E. Kalinke, *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest: the Matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1981); Paul Schach, 'The *Saga of Tristram ok Ísodd*: Summary or Satire?', *Modern Language Quarterly* 21 (1960), pp.336-352 and 'Tristrams Saga ok Ýsoddar as Burlesque', *Scandinavian Studies* 59.1 (1987), pp.86-100.

even sixteenth century) can still be observed without a strict timeline of texts being necessary. In the summaries of my texts at the end of this Introduction, I have included the current consensus on approximate dating for each text: generally, this follows the assertions of Kalinke and Mitchell, and is equally represented in the compilation *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, both of which are more useful guidelines than the assertions of individual editors from a century ago. This authority is not absolute, as the most recent editors of *Sigrarǫðs saga frækna* have confidently pushed the text later than the *Bibliography* opted for, and so, in such cases, I have followed the dating of the edition I use.<sup>25</sup> Given the accumulation of these texts in post-medieval manuscripts, their initial date of composition is not always as relevant for comparison with other texts as their contemporary co-existence, but nonetheless a vague sense of diachronic development is useful.

Due to the range of editorial practices involved in the versions of the texts currently available, it is impossible to standardise usage to solely one form, such as critical editions. Instead, there are some best-text editions, some critical, some diplomatic, and some which are merely normalisations of previous editions. Two important examples are Agnete Loth's collection *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, which edits without normalisation a range of previously unavailable texts from vellum manuscripts, and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson's *Riddarasögur* collection, which is a popular printing of previously edited texts, adapted to modern Icelandic orthography. Despite the vast gulf in methodology between Loth and Bjarni, these are useful collections for presenting this material, and in the case of Bjarni's work, offer at least some more accessible spelling forms. In the below summaries, I indicate the texts from which I will be quoting my material, but also include other editions of note, including those from which Bjarni worked. I mostly reproduce the orthography of the editions I use, with some substitutions of unusual characters where necessary, but for ease of reading, I have removed editorial marks such as expansions and emendations, keeping only relevant diacritics and punctuation. All quotations from Icelandic will be followed immediately by translations, which are my own. The aim of these translations

---

<sup>25</sup> Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*; Phillip Pulsiano (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (London: Garland, 1993).

is to aid comprehension, so they will necessarily be readable rather than over-literal, but will maintain the specifics of vocabulary where parallels need to be drawn. Some words, such as *blámaðr*, I have opted not to translate, due to a lack of appropriate (and sensitive) translations, but the context of each of these isolated cases should be clear. I have generally opted to retain the names of locations from the text, with some minor normalisation, and instead place the name in italics; where the geography is of particular relevance, I will note its significance. As for character names outside of quotations, I have mostly followed the conventions of the relevant editors, and normalised recognisably Germanic names such as Vilhjálmr and Sigurðr but not made any effort to establish vowel lengths for the wealth of Latinate and pseudo-Latinate names, instead presenting the names generally as quoted, with some normalisation of consonants (such as “u” to “v”) and vowel clusters (such as “ij” to “i” or “y”) where appropriate. Titles of texts generally follow the edition from which I am quoting, with occasional shortening following convention, but alternative titles are indicated below. Working with the inconsistent and problematic textual record we have, these approaches are at some points compromises, but they are ultimately the best options to convey the information in an unobtrusive yet respectful fashion.

Understanding each text to its fullest is naturally dependent on more familiarity with the respective plots than the reader of this study is likely to possess. Lacking space for substantial summaries, let alone entire translations, I have summarised the essential elements of each text below as succinctly as possible. These summaries are subjective, and reflect only what I consider to be the major narrative movements of each text, but they hopefully offer a little guidance on the numerous romances which I shall be covering. Further plot summary will be incorporated into analysis on a chapter-by-chapter basis where appropriate.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> For alternative and fuller summaries, see Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*.

**Adonias saga**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Adonias saga', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances III*, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), pp.67-230.

*A prince, Adonias, born from a bedswap involving his father the king and the traitorous advisor Constantius, grows up in exile before returning to take on the traitor and his more noble son Constantinus, eventually reclaiming his realm.*

**Ála flekks saga**

Fourteenth/fifteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Ála flekks saga', *Riddarasögur V*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), pp.123-160.

See also: 'Ála flekks saga', *Drei Lygisögur*, ed. Ake Lagerholm (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1927), pp.84-120.

*Prince Áli is exposed by his father to avoid prophesied doom, but is raised by kind locals; as an adult, Áli repeatedly falls victim to the curses of a troll family, experiencing various adventures as a result before finally defeating the trolls.*

**Blómstrvalla saga**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: *Blómstrvallasaga*, ed. Theodor Möbius (Lipsiæ: sumptibus G. Engelmanni, 1855).

*Blómstrvellir is the site of assorted contests, in which heroes win gold and brides, and fight off heathen invaders. Two of these combatants are brothers separated tragically after a fight, and their reunion occurs after some misunderstanding and conflict.*

**Bærings saga**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Bærings saga', *Fornsögur suðurlanda*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld (Lund: F. Berlings boktryckeri, 1884), pp.85-123.

*An exiled prince, Bæringr, proves his knightly prowess by concealing his identity in a foreign land, simultaneously making progress in his quest for revenge and staving off the seduction of assorted women, finally reuniting with his realm and marrying a virtuous princess.*

**Clari saga**

(*Clárus saga*, *Klári saga*, etc.)

Early fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Clari saga', *Riddarasögur V*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), pp.1-61.

See also: *Clári saga*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld (Halle a. S.: M. Niemeyer, 1907).

*A prince, Clarus, seeks the haughty princess Serena only to be repeatedly humiliated; in response, he and his tutor Perus set an elaborate trap resulting in Serena spending a year in poverty and penance, before Clarus and Serena are united as her virtue is proven.*

### **Dámusta saga**

(*Dámusta saga ok Jóns*, etc.)

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Dámusta saga', *Þjalar Jóns saga: Dámusta saga*, ed. Louisa Fredrika Tan-Haverhost (Leiden: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1939), pp.49-108.

*A jealous knight, Dámusti, kills the fiancé of Gratiana, whom he loves; when she dies, Dámusti's piety to Mary saves him, and he is set to fight the monster who has faked Gratiana's death, leading to the union of the pair.*

### **Dínus saga drambláta**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: *Dínus saga drambláta*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Háskóli Íslands, 1960) – two redactions.

*A contest of wills occurs between the equally haughty Dínus and Philotemia, which ends up involving their entire realms and requiring assorted magical assistance. Eventually, Dínus beats Philotemia; they are married and the war is resolved through the help of a disguised prince.*

### **Drauma-Jóns saga**

Early fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Drauma-Jóns saga', *Riddarasögur VI*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), pp.147-170.

See also: 'Drauma-Jóns saga', ed. Hugo Gering, *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 26 (1984), pp.289-390.

*A young man gifted with powers of dream interpretation comes into conflict with a lord who claims the same ability. After Jón's death is faked, the lord's ruse is exposed, and Jón's ability to explain the emperor's dream sees him peacefully defeat his rival.*

### **Ectors saga**

(*Ektors saga, Hectors saga*, etc.)

Fourteenth/fifteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Ectors saga', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances I*, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962), pp.79-186.

*Prince Ector, named after the hero of Troy, gathers a coterie of knights who set off on independent adventures to prove their worth, before uniting against a foreign prince and his own band of knights. With the help of an exiled prince, Ector's side wins.*

**Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans**

Late fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Flóres saga konungs og sona hans', *Riddarasögur V* (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), pp.63-121.

See also: 'Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans', *Drei Lygisögur*, ed. Ake Lagerholm (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1927), pp.121-177.

*After King Flóres kidnaps and rapes a princess, the resultant triplets are separated in a shipwreck. They later unite in the army of a prince seeking Flóres's daughter after being refused the suit. Flóres is reunited with his sons, which leads to peaceful resolution.*

**Gibbons saga**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: *Gibbons saga*, ed. Raymond Page (Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1960) – includes alternative redactions of some sections.

*Prince Gibbon is captured by a magical lady, Greca, who becomes his lover, but they are forced to separate. Gibbon subsequently seeks to rape and defeat a maiden-king, before he is reunited with Greca. Gibbon's son with the maiden-king seeks revenge on his father, but they reconcile.*

**Grega saga**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Fragment af en ellers ukendt "Grega saga"', ed. Agnete Loth, *Opuscula 1* (1960), pp.201-206.

*A fragment of a romance; in this section, the knight Grega rescues a lion from a dragon, and the animal subsequently aids him in repeated encounters with giants.*

**Hrings saga ok Tryggva**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Hrings saga ok Tryggva', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances V*, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965), pp.233-238.

*A fragment of a romance; this section, the end of the saga, shows the happy reunion of lovers after previous marriages and conflicts.*

**Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns**

(*Hermanns saga ok Jarlmanns*, etc.)

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances III*, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), pp.1-66 – older redaction.

'Jarlmanns saga og Hermanns', *Riddarasögur III*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), pp.171-235 – younger redaction.

*Hermann sends his foster-brother Jarlmann to arrange a marriage, which is successful. Hermann's unnecessary jealousy and suspicion causes Jarlmann to leave, and Hermann's bride is kidnapped, requiring Jarlmann to venture into troll lands to retrieve her.*

### **Jóns saga leikara**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: *Jóns Saga Leikara*, ed. Martin Soderbach (University of Chicago, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, 1949).

*A knight sets out for adventure and soon defeats a serpent, ingratiating himself with the local king and sleeping with the princess. He discovers strange local customs, which are punishments for the king's adulterous wife, and Jón brings about settlement for himself and for all.*

### **Kirialax saga**

(*Kirjalax saga*, etc.)

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: *Kirialax saga*, ed. Kristian Kålund (Copenhagen: S. L. Møllers bogtrykkeri, 1917).

*A seemingly unfinished, intergenerational story of a royal family and their assorted bridal-quests and adventures; after his father Laicus's success, the central figure, Kirialax, fights in large battles and visits sites of renown, and his sons also attempt to prove their worth.*

### **Konráðs saga**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Konráðs saga', *Riddarasögur* III, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949), pp.269-344.

See also: 'Konráðs saga', *Fornsögur suðrlanda*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld (Lund: F. Berlings boktryckeri, 1884), pp.43-84.

*Prince Konráðr's love of his troublesome foster-brother leads to trouble when, in a foreign country, the latter impersonates Konráðr. Konráðr subsequently overcomes numerous trials, leading to an adventure into the kingdom of serpents, which conclusively proves his superiority.*

### **Mágus saga jarls**

(*Bragða-Mágus saga*, etc.)

Quotations from: 'Mágus saga jarls', *Fornsögur suðrlanda*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld (Lund: F. Berlings boktryckeri, 1884), pp.1-42 – older redaction.

'Mágus saga jarls (hin meiri)', *Riddarasögur* II, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949) – younger redaction.

See also: *Bragða-Mágus saga með tilheyrandi þáttum*, ed. Gunnlaugur Þórðarson (Kaupmannahöfn: Páll Sveinsson, 1858).

*Four brothers end up in a dispute with the emperor after one of them kills the previous ruler. Their plight is repeatedly aided by their magical kinsman Mágus, who rescues various figures and ultimately resolves the entire conflict through his trickery.*

**Mírmanns saga**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Mírmanns saga', *Riddarasögur* III, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949), pp.1-94.

See also: 'Mírmanns saga', *Riddarasögur. Parcevals saga. Valvers þátrr. Ívents saga. Mírmanns saga*, ed. Eugen Kölbing (Strassburg: K. J. Trübner, 1872), pp.137-213.

*Mírmann, son of a pagan lord, converts to Christianity and kills his father, but his mother poisons him. In disguise, Mírmann seeks the help of a foreign princess, whom he later marries, but he is tricked into a second marriage, and his first wife travels as a lord to defeat him.*

**Nikulás saga leikara**

Fifteenth-century

Quotations from: *An edition and study of "Nikulás saga leikara"*, ed. Keren H. Wick (University of Leeds, PhD thesis, 1996).

*King Nikulás, famed for his playfulness and magic, attempts to woo Dorma, the daughter of a reluctant king; he infiltrates the court and the princess joins and marries him. When Dorma's death is faked, Nikulás seeks to rescue her from a forced marriage, defeating her father.*

**Nítíða saga**

(*Nitida saga, Nitidu saga*, etc.)

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Nítíða saga: A Normalised Icelandic Text and Translation', ed. Sheryl McDonald, *Leeds Studies in English* 40 (2009), pp.119-45.

See also: Reprinted in Sheryl McDonald Werronen, *Popular Romance in Iceland: The Women, Worldviews, and Manuscript Witnesses of Nítíða saga* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

'Nitida saga', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances* V, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965), pp.1-37.

*The maiden-king Nítíða repeatedly outwits her forceful suitors using magic and trickery until one of them, Liforinus, chooses to help her against the other suitors; the pair are married, the evil suitors defeated, and one misguided suitor is found a different bride.*

**Rémundar saga**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Rémundar saga keisarasonar', *Riddarasögur* V, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1951), pp.161-339 (the edition Bjarni used as base text is unclear).

*A prince, Rémundr, dreams of a marriage to a foreign princess, but is injured by a pagan warrior; he sets out to find the figure of his dream. Although they unite, Rémundr subsequently returns home to rid his land of pagans, before the couple's marriage is fulfilled.*

**Samsons saga fagra**

(*Samsons saga fríða*, etc.)

Mid fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Samsons saga fagra', *Riddarasögur* III, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949), pp.345-401.

See also: 'Sagann af Samsoni Fagra', *Nordiska kämpa dater: i en sagoflock samlade om forna kongar och hjältar*, ed. Erik Julius Björner (Stockholm: J. L. Horn, 1737).

*Prince Samson seeks his beloved, who is saved from kidnapping by Samson's magical foster-mother. When the pair are reunited, the thief Kvintalín is sent to seek a magical mantle, in a world where an imposing abandoned royal called Sigurðr grows up and seizes power.*

**Saulus saga ok Nikanors**

(*Sáulus sags ok Nikanors*, etc.)

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Saulus saga ok Nikanors', *Late Medieval Romances* II, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), pp.1-91.

*After an initial conflict, two nobles, Saulus and Nikanor, become foster-brothers, and must work together to retrieve the kidnapped sister of Nikanor. A combination of battles and infiltration leads to the retrieval of Saulus's bride, and a match is found for Nikanor.*

**Sigrarðs saga frækna**

(*Sigrarðs saga frækna*, etc.)

Fifteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Sigrarðs saga frækna: A normalised text, translation, and introduction', eds. Alaric Hall, Steven D. P. Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies* 21 (2012-2013), pp.80-155.

See also: 'Sigrarðs saga frækna', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances* V, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965), pp.39-107.

*Prince Sigrarðr falls foul of a maiden-king cursed by her stepmother. After repeated humiliations, Sigrarðr impersonates an imposing viking, and, with the aid of his disguised foster-brother exiles, he breaks the assorted curses and is reconciled with the maiden-king.*

**Sigrarðs saga ok Valbrands**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Sigrarðs saga ok Valbrands', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances* V, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965), pp.109-194.

*An impressive hero marries a princess after proving his worth, but is treacherously killed by her vindictive champion Valbrandr. The couple's son, named Sigrarðr after his murdered father, is raised in secrecy, before returning to seek revenge on Valbrandr.*

**Sigurðar saga fóts**

(*Sigurðar saga fóts ok Ásmundar Húnakongs*, etc.)

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Sigurðar saga fóts', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances III*, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), pp.231-250.

*A princess is fought over by two warriors, with the original suitor Ásmundr eventually yielding her to Sigurðr, before the two become foster-brothers. When Ásmundr, in a new bridal-quest, is captured, Sigurðr subsequently saves him.*

**Sigurðar saga turnara**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Sigurðar saga turnara', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances V*, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965), pp.195-232.

*Prince Sigurðr travels under an alias to foreign land and sleeps with the local king's daughter, requiring some trickery to maintain the affair in the face of her angry father. Despite the attempts of a cunning chamberlain, Sigurðr wins the hand of the princess.*

**Sigurðar saga þögla**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Sigurðar saga þögla', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances II*, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), pp.95-259 – longer redaction.

*Sigurðar saga þögla: The Shorter Redaction*, ed. Matthew Driscoll (Reykjavík: Stofnum Árna Magnússonar, 1992) – shorter redaction.

*The taciturn Sigurðr, overshadowed by his older brothers, proves his worth in a series of adventures, accruing foster-brothers and defeating monsters; he rapes and humiliates the maiden-king who previously defeated his brothers. The son of the union brings about peace.*

**Valdimars saga**

Late fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Valdimars saga', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances I*, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962), pp.51-78.

*When a princess is kidnapped, her brother Valdimar sets out to rescue her, encountering a family of trolls who aid him against the machinations of the monstrous queen of the land. Valdimar is aided by the step-children of the queen, and the queen is killed, restoring peace.*

**Viktors saga ok Blávus**

(*Viktors saga ok Blávus*, etc.)

Late fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Viktors saga ok Blávus', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances I*, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962), pp.1-50.

See also: *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Handritastofnum Íslands, 1964).

*The profligate prince Victor seeks fortune and becomes foster-brothers with the elusive Blávus. The pair defeat assorted enemies, before Victor repeatedly attempts to woo a maiden-king (in reality Blávus's sister); the match is arranged, and a foreign bride kidnapped for Blávus.*

### **Vilhálms saga sjóðs**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from 'Vilhálms saga Sjóðs', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances IV*, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1964), pp.1-136.

*A king wins a magic ring from trolls but is kidnapped; his son Vilhjálmr, in the same conflict, has to set out and name all the trolls, rescuing kings in the process. A series of kidnappings of noble women leads Vilhjálmr and his allies across lands, defeating assorted opponents.*

### **Vilmundar saga viðutan**

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Vilmundar saga viðutan', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances IV* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1964), pp.137-201.

*Twin princesses are born and destined for notable husbands; suitors appear, but it is finally a rural recluse, Vilmundr, looking for his lost goat, who proves himself and wins the hand of one (with some misunderstandings); a foreign prince similarly proves himself to marry the other.*

### **Þjalar-Jóns saga**

(*Saga Jóns Svipdagssonar ok Eireks forvitna*, etc.)

Fourteenth-century

Quotations from: 'Þjalar-Jóns saga', *Þjalar Jóns saga: Dámusta saga*, ed. Louisa Fredrika Tan-Haverhost (Leiden: H.D. Tjeenk Willink, 1939), pp.1-47.

*A court is visited by a strange guest, who tempts a prince, Eiríkr, into an adventure to seek a maiden. The mysterious Gestr is in fact an exiled prince called Jón; Eiríkr helps him and his family to defeat the cruel Lord Roðbert, and rightful marriage and rule is established.*

# Chapter One: Modelling Exemplary Behaviour through Maiden-kings and Matchmaking

Although deriving much of their material from clear sources and influences, the insular romances have some distinctive elements, evident particularly in a subgenre we can loosely call “maiden-king narratives”. This selection of stories about an imperious female ruler who spurns suitors provides a perfect example of the workings of replication and reflection, as the texts are seemingly in dialogue with each other and broader social concerns. In this chapter, we shall see how the ideology of individual composers can be written into the fabric of seemingly derivative narratives in remarkably different ways, navigating issues such as gender and conduct. As we explore the components of this relatively discrete subgenre – the female and male protagonists, secondary characters, and episodes – we can explore these narrative structures as vehicles for certain viewpoints, intentional or otherwise, through simple but effective strategies of repetition and patterning.

The origin of the *meykongr*, who is often the defining feature of a text in which she appears, is somewhat enigmatic. Although the spurning woman is a motif recognised elsewhere, commonly labelled “King Thrushbeard” from the Grimms’ tale, the maiden-king specifically is a uniquely Icelandic element.<sup>1</sup> As with many seemingly fantastical *riddarasaga* elements, it was previously commonplace to locate the maiden-king’s origin somewhere in “the East”, specifically in relation to the Persian *Rose and Cypress* or the Arabian tale of ed-Datma and Prince Bahram.<sup>2</sup> Although a connection with eastern traditions remains possible, Frederic Amory’s work querying the Byzantine (and more broadly “Eastern”) aspect of the *riddarasögur* is a reminder that such source links risk simplifying and idealising a complicated network of textual movement for which we possess limited evidence.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, assorted Germanic origins have been proposed, with varying degrees of plausibility. The

---

<sup>1</sup> See for instance Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934), p.92, and Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p.104.

<sup>2</sup> Likewise see Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, pp.92-94, and Kalinke, *Bridal Quest Romance*, pp.105-107.

<sup>3</sup> Frederic Amory, ‘Things Greek and the *Riddarasögur*’, *Speculum* 59.3 (1984), pp.509-523.

Modþryð/þryð/Fremu “diversion” in *Beowulf* is narratively and thematically similar, but is itself a problematic passage with much scholarly attention and no strong connection to maiden-kings across geography and hundreds of years.<sup>4</sup> Similar can be said of Brynhildr, who at least has a firm Icelandic presence, and shares maiden-king features both in her refusal to wed without trials and in her position as maiden-warrior *valkyrie*, but the latter tradition is nebulous, and mostly irrelevant to our maiden-kings.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps more compellingly, Saxo Grammaticus’s *Gesta Danorum* contains a variety of female characters whose features may have offered inspiration for maiden-kings, including Amleth’s second wife Herminthrud and the chaste Gyrith, as well as a generally misogynistic attitude relevant to our discussion.<sup>6</sup> The subgenre’s origin remains uncertain, and mostly unrelated to our study, as ultimately the maiden-king possesses a thoroughly Icelandic identity and context as the texts appeared and the tradition developed.

In terms of the Icelandic corpus, maiden-king narratives are not firm characterisations of texts, because not all maiden-king narratives use the word *meykongr*; conversely, not all texts that use the term employ the narrative structure associated with it. Furthermore, texts often feature maiden-king narratives as only part of their overall structure. However, maiden-kings feature as a subsection of “bridal-quest” plots, centred around a male protagonist identifying and wooing or winning a noble

---

<sup>4</sup> Commentators unpacking the complexities of the passage in *Beowulf* include Bruce Moore, ‘The Thryth-Offa Digression in *Beowulf*’, *Neophilologus* 64.1 (1980), pp.127-133 and Francis Leneghan, ‘The Poetic Purpose of the Offa-Digression in *Beowulf*’, *Review of English Studies* 60 (2009), pp.538-560; Kalinke mentions the similarity in *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p.36, but Shaun F. D. Hughes favours the connection somewhat more, in relation to *Clari saga* in ‘*Klári saga* as an Indigenous Romance’, *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, ed. Wolf (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp.135-164: ‘The author has adapted *exempla* to a bridal quest narrative very similar to the one sketched out in the þryð episode in *Beowulf*’ (p.158).

<sup>5</sup> Thorough discussion of Brynhildr can be found in Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) particularly in her chapters on ‘The Maiden Warrior’, and ‘The Whetter: Brynhildr’; on Brynhildr’s complex relationship to oaths, suitors, and trials, see Fredrik J. Heinemann, ‘Retrospectivity in *Völsunga saga*: the Brynhildr-story’, *Leeds Studies in English* 35 (2004), pp.23-42; Kalinke briefly covers the Brynhildr link across its different guises, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp.36-37, p.133, following Amory, ‘Things Greek and the *Riddarasögur*’.

<sup>6</sup> Kalinke discusses Herminthrud, Gyrith, and various other female figures from *Gesta Danorum* throughout *Bridal-Quest Romance*, see particularly p.37, pp.86-87; for Saxo’s presentation of women, see Birgit Strand, ‘Women in *Gesta Danorum*. I. Saxo’s Description of Women Compared with Snorre’s. II. Thyre Danebod in *Gesta Danorum*’, *Saxo Grammaticus: A Medieval Author between Norse and Latin Culture* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1981), pp.135-167.

woman for his wife. The structural study of maiden-king narrative arcs is indebted to Kalinke's work on bridal-quests. She outlines what she sees as the 'distinguishing characteristics of the [maiden-king] tale':

(1) the desired bride is sole ruler, *meykongr* (=maiden king, that is, an unmarried female sovereign) of a country or a part of a country; (2) she disdains and mistreats all suitors; (3) like other suitors, the hero is humiliated and rejected by the arrogant woman; (4) the hero returns to engage in a battle of wits and wiles with the misogamous ruler; (5) only after the hero has discerned the woman's major flaw is he able to outwit and then marry her.<sup>7</sup>

These features are not constant, and the adaptation of them is part of the corpus's engagement with the concept, but Kalinke's outline is a solid foundation for analysing the texts' movement towards or away from the central structure. From these features, and with some flexibility, a current corpus emerges of thirteen medieval Icelandic texts. Two maiden-kings appear in texts traditionally labelled *fornaldarsögur*: Ingibjörg in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, a maiden warrior who identifies as male until defeated in the fourth bridal quest of the text; and the cruel queen Ólöf in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, who tortures suitors and is eventually kidnapped and impregnated by Helgi.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, one translated romance, *Partalopa saga*, uses the term maiden-king in presenting the independent queen who is later married; the narrative as a whole is not similar to maiden-king narratives, but does suggest a cultural familiarity with the term.<sup>9</sup> These three texts have been thoroughly studied by Kalinke, and do not form part of our study of the insular *riddarasögur*, in which the maiden-king concept proliferates further and is engaged with more intently.<sup>10</sup> However, the existence of these texts is a reminder of the *riddarasögur*'s broader context, particularly given the blurry boundaries between translated and insular *riddarasögur*, as well as romances and *fornaldarsögur* (see Chapters Two and Three). Instead, this

<sup>7</sup> Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p.36.

<sup>8</sup> Both texts can be found in *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954-1959): 'Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar', vol. 4, pp.51-176; 'Hrólfs saga Kraka', vol. 1, 1-105.

<sup>9</sup> *Partalopa saga*, ed. Lise Præstgaard Andersen (Copenhagen: C. A. Reistlz Forlag, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> See Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*; in particular *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is the sole focus of Kalinke's chapter, 'A Paradigm for Bridal-Quest', pp.25-65, which she uses as the groundwork for her study.

chapter focuses on ten insular *riddarasögur*, texts which sometimes connect with each other directly, but consistently interact with the shared concept of the maiden-king.

The use of a maiden-king narrative brings more than mere novelty to a text, although each certainly employs replicative techniques in part to create a distinct character in the genre. The subgenre's overarching structures and expectations provide a platform for individual texts to guide their readers towards ideological standpoints, in unique and potentially controversial ways. At the centre of this is the issue of gender, with the presentation of women fundamental to all the maiden-king texts and their various analogues. The studies by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir and Jenny Jochens, both on maiden-kings and other women in Icelandic literature and society, have highlighted the overt misogynistic basis for the maiden-king tradition and the surprising flexibility in how this can be adapted, reconsidered, or even occasionally challenged.<sup>11</sup> How each text handles the maiden-king herself reveals the contestation of female roles in Icelandic literature, and beyond that, a wide range of implications for women and men, marriage and wooing, and even politics. As part of the Icelandic insular romance tradition, these texts employ replication and reflection through the sorting and patterning of the bridal-quest pieces to model exemplary behaviour, through positive and negative portrayals, and the tension between them, within and across texts.

The narrative drive of the maiden-king narratives towards examples of good and bad actions likely has some origin in the body of exemplary literature in medieval Iceland. Alongside international traditions of Latin *exempla*, Iceland produced a range of vernacular works, some seemingly original, some translated from Latin or even Middle English, many edited in Hugo Gering's *Íslendzk Æventyri*.<sup>12</sup> The *exempla* are wide-ranging and varied, and the boundaries and shared features of the genre are

---

<sup>11</sup> Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); see Jenny M. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995) and *Old Norse Images of Women*.

<sup>12</sup> For general background on the *exempla*, see Peter A. Jorgensen, 'Exempla', *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Pulsiano (London: Garland, 1993), pp.173-174, and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'Prose of Christian Instruction, A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. McTurk (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008); Gering lists 101 exempla in his edition *Íslendzk Æventyri*, ed. Hugo Gering (Halle a. S: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1882), although several have multiple parts or versions.

nebulous; the Icelandic term *æfyntyr* to describe such a text only complicates matters, as the word has a less precise meaning in medieval Icelandic.<sup>13</sup> Generally, they are short narrative texts which highlight moral or immoral behaviour, sometimes concluded or framed by direct moralisation, but often merely implied or possibly supplied by a preacher in a sermon using an *exemplum*. Their topics are greatly varied, and many links can be drawn to the *riddarasögur*, including in religious matters (see Chapter Four, ‘Devil in the Details’), and in little episodes in these texts which could be considered embedded *exempla*. However, as Shaun F. D. Hughes has noted, gender is a repeated concern of the Icelandic *exempla*; the maiden-king texts can be viewed as participating in a literary culture of modelling correct behaviour for women and men, and all their interactions.<sup>14</sup> There are direct links between the *exempla* and these texts: *Clari saga* purports to be a story found by Jón Halldórsson, whose love of *exempla* is attested in his own *þáttr*, itself included in Gering’s collection; later, the story of Jónatas, which existed in multiple forms in Iceland, influenced *Viktors saga ok Blávus* and *Sigrarðs saga frækna*.<sup>15</sup> More broadly, several of the replicative and reflective methods which shape the readings of these texts can be seen in a variety of Icelandic *exempla* most likely unconnected to our texts, and I will gesture towards those parallels without necessarily suggesting any direct connections. Instead, the engagement of the maiden-king texts with the morality of behaviour is at once a demonstration of the distinct tools of the *riddarasögur*, and indicative of a wider cultural dialogue which the *exempla* share in. As the maiden-king tradition develops across the medieval period, it is marked by interaction with previous texts and with this wider context in order for each text to present and nuance its worldviews and ethics.

---

<sup>13</sup> A thorough discussion of these problems, and particularly the etymology and development of *æfyntyr*, is included in Shaun F. D. Hughes, ‘The Old Norse *Exempla* as Arbiters of Gender Roles in Medieval Iceland’, *New Norse Studies*, ed. Turco (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), pp.255-300, particularly pp.264-271.

<sup>14</sup> Hughes, ‘The Old Norse *Exempla* as Arbiters of Gender Roles’, pp.255-300.

<sup>15</sup> For the Jónatas texts and commentary, see Peter A. Jorgensen, *The Story of Jonatas in Iceland* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1997); for its connections to the *riddarasögur*, see Peter A. Jorgensen, ‘The Icelandic Translations from Middle English’, *Studies for Einar Haugen* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), pp.305-320, and Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ‘*Viktors Saga ok Blávus*: Sources and Characteristics’, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Handritastofnum Íslands, 1964), pp.cix-ccix.

## Less Than Humble Beginnings: The Patterns of *Clari Saga*

*Clari saga* is the archetypal maiden-king text and seemingly the earliest form of the narrative within the insular romance corpus; its echoes can be felt throughout later texts.<sup>16</sup> Most scholars date it to the beginning of the fourteenth century, partly on manuscript evidence and more problematically on some of its own claims. The text labels itself as a *frásögn* [narrative] from a Latin metre called *rithmos* found by Brother Jón Halldórsson in Paris, and somehow translated. However, these statements have been interpreted in numerous ways: Einar Ólafur Sveinsson noted that ‘the style of the saga supports the view that it was translated from a Latin work’ and Kalinke also accepts the translation on stylistic grounds and supports the implied attribution to Jón.<sup>17</sup> Hughes writes compellingly to challenge its nature as a translation, while maintaining Bishop Jón’s involvement, and Peter Hallberg suggests a more radical and less convincing alignment with the writing of Bergr Sökkason.<sup>18</sup> There are authorship claims in other insular romances, but they are more obviously outlandish, such as the attribution to Humerus (Homer) in *Vilhjálm’s saga sjóðs*; the greater plausibility of the link to Jón Halldórsson does not guarantee it is not equally fictitious. Certainly, the prose of the text is Latin-influenced and Bishop Jón’s aforementioned *þáttur* attests that he transmitted *exempla*. The chronology could easily align, but little else is clear. Whether a translation or not, *Clari saga* is the undeniable start of the maiden-king tradition in Iceland, and its continuing presence alongside other maiden-king texts has a greater relevance than any lost or fictitious Latin source. Whether the style is Latin or Icelandic, this text shows the attention to repetition, patterns, and distortion which marks the insular *riddarasögur*, and it can also be viewed

---

<sup>16</sup> For an example of a particularly extreme view of the text’s early importance: ‘Icelanders also adopted foreign structures, forms, and themes. They resisted using the Arthurian paradigm as a model for their romances, and instead imitated the structure of *Klári saga*, a narrative attributed to Jón Halldórsson’, in ‘Old Norse-Icelandic Literature, Foreign Influence’, *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Pulsiano (London: Garland, 1993), p.453; the acceptance of Jón Halldórsson’s involvement is a significant part of this particular dating.

<sup>17</sup> Einar Ól., ‘*Viktors Saga ok Blávus*: Sources and Characteristics’, p.cxii; Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p.67 (‘The style of the saga suggests, however, that the work we know is a translation—rather than a re-telling—from a Latin text, presumably undertaken during Jón Halldórsson’s studies in Paris around the year 1300.’).

<sup>18</sup> Hughes, ‘*Klári saga* as an Indigenous Romance’, p.147 (‘There seems no particular reason to doubt the claim that Jón Halldórsson is the author of *Klári saga*. But on the other hand there is no reason to believe that he based the story on a Latin poem found in France.’); Peter Hallberg, ‘A Group of Icelandic “*Riddarasögur*” from the Middle of the Fourteenth Century’, *Les Sagas de Chevaliers: Riddarasögur* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985), pp.7-53.

in relation to *exempla* whether it literally was one or whether it merely imitates them. For these reasons, *Clari saga* is included among the insular romances, and the maiden-king subgenre in particular.

I will explore the methods of replication and reflection employed in *Clari saga* through several broad narrative areas, which I will later use to examine the remaining texts in dialogue with each other: the maiden-king and her suitor (whom we will call the protagonists for convenience, despite their actual antagonism); the secondary characters who affect and comment on the protagonists' interactions; and the structure which shapes and informs the bridal-quest. To that end, a more detailed outline of the plot than offered in the Introduction is necessary. Clarus, the son of the emperor of *Saxland*, is told by his teacher Perus of Serena of *Frakkland*, and Clarus immediately decides to visit her, but is humiliated there. Enlisting the help of Perus, who spends three years making three machines of increasing splendour to bribe the princess, Clarus returns to Serena as "Eskelvarð". For two nights, Clarus exchanges one of his treasures for a night with Serena, only to be put to sleep, beaten, and expelled. Serena's handmaid Tecla is magically forced to betray her mistress and the third night results in Serena's rape. She awakens to find herself in the wilderness with a demonic husband and, for a year, she follows the creature in poverty. She eventually encounters Clarus and is beaten by him three times; reconciliation and marriage follow. The text provides the pattern for the maiden-king narratives, but its specific framing gives it a unique identity and an important legacy in the message it leaves.

Serena, our first maiden-king, fulfils few of the features of a fully-fledged maiden-king narrative, probably indicating the saga's position as the starting point of the tradition. The word *meykongr* appears nowhere in the text, nor does Serena possess sole rule; she is a princess, *konungsdóttir*, who lives an isolated existence in a tower under her dominion. However, Kalinke has noted in the text the 'three motifs that are common to all the maiden-king romances':

- (1) the misogamy of the desired woman;
- (2) the rejection and humiliation of the wooer by the maiden;
- (3) the humiliation and outwitting of the maiden-king by the rejected suitor, so that she consents to marriage.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p.68.

To this can be added her significant, if not unilateral, power, as the text emphasises her authority by use of a repeated description. First, when Perus describes her exceptional nature, he qualifies, ‘því að sakir hennar vizku lýtur nálega að henni öll stjórn ríkisins jafnfram sjálfum konungi’ (p.6) [because, on account of her wisdom, nearly all the government of the realm obeys her as much as the king himself]. Clarus, when raising his suit to Serena, appears to parrot the phrase: ‘hann hafði það sannspurt, að sakir hennar vizku laut til hennar öll stjórn og ráð ríkisins með konunginum’ (p.17) [he had heard it attested that, on account of her wisdom, all the government and counsel of the realm with the king obeyed her]. This moment of repetition outlines Serena as at least a proto-maiden-king figure, possessing all the authority and equated indirectly with a king. She provides the model for maiden-kings and shares their generic identity.

Evidence that this world is patterned for effect emerges in consideration of the two protagonists. The text carefully replicates words and phrases to align these two as a fitting match. Perus’s description of Serena contains the judgement ‘þótt leiti um alla veröld, finnst eigi henni vitrari né kurteisari’ (p.6) [Even if the whole world were searched, no-one wiser or more courteous than her would be found]. In parallel, the chatter surrounding Clarus’s arrival frames him as a similar paradigm: ‘eigi muni finnast þvílíkur maður, þótt leiti um alla veröld, sem er Clarus keisarason’ (p.10) [no such man as is Clarus, emperor’s son, will be found even if the whole world were searched]. Subtle alignment of their initial positions, fulfilling stereotypical romance ideals of the perfect man and woman, is then supported by a continued association between their paths, and particularly their suffering. The text balances the suffering dealt out by Serena with what she later receives, and uses parallel phrases to reflect this. While Clarus, increasingly humiliated, is forced to the position where ‘þykir einskis verð vera hin fyrri sín skömm hjá þeirri, sem nú hefir hann fengið’ (p.33) [his former shame seems of no note compared to that which he now has received], Serena is later made to feel the same: ‘allt þykir henni einskis vert, það sem hér til hefir um gengið’ (p.51) [all that which has happened up to now seems to her of no note]. And when Clarus considers Perus’s work futile, his anger at his teacher is expressed

with a particular metaphor: ‘Og aldri steigst þú enn lengra fram með þitt vit en einn nautreki eða rotið laukshöfuð’ (p.21) [and you never progressed any further with your intelligence than a herder or a rotten head of leek]. This metaphor is appropriately reworked via Perus, because his production of stunning tents with mechanical elements affects Serena to the point that ‘svo mikla fýsi fær hún til þessa tjalds, að bæði þau, sem hún hefir áður fengið, virðir hún hér hjá eigi meira en eitt rotið laukshöfuð’ (p.37) [she gets so much desire for this tent that she values both of the ones which she received before as no more than a rotten head of leek in comparison]. This metaphor is a clear replication, aligning the experiences of Clarus and Serena, with a particular emphasis toward Serena receiving a comeuppance. This model of requital is fundamental to *Clari saga* and can be seen in several *exempla*, such as in the story of Jónatas, in which a woman who tricked Jónatas out of his treasures is killed by the same type of poisonous apple which Jónatas had to eat while poor and lost; in ‘Frá þeim manni er drap prestana II. í kirkjunni’, the repenting killer Vilchin is killed under the assumption he is ‘þvílíkan sem hann var fyrr’ [just like he was before] and thereby fulfils his penance.<sup>20</sup> The religious implications of a requital structure, in relation to confession and penance, are clear, but the techniques in *Clari saga* can also be seen from a romance viewpoint, shaped with the teleology of the eventual marriage in mind, and a sense that the protagonists should match each other. Serena must balance out the wrongs she committed. From the inception of the maiden-king subgenre, and from the beginning of the narrative, these texts are concerned with fitting the two protagonists together.

As the leek’s head metaphor shows, the protagonists are intricately tied to their supporting players. Unusually for the *riddarasögur*, *Clari saga* has a relatively tight cast of characters, comprising the protagonists, their fathers, and their main assistants. The secondary figures, Perus on Clarus’s side and Tecla on Serena’s, help to shape the plot and comment on it. These two assistants have parallel narrative functions, as the figures who act on behalf of their respective leader. The text engages with their parallel natures, as Perus and Tecla receive identical accusations from Clarus and Serena: Clarus

---

<sup>20</sup> ‘Jonatas ævintýri’, *The Story of Jonatas*, pp.1-46; ‘Frá þeim manni er drap prestana II. í kirkjunni’, *Íslendzk Æventýri*, pp.30-34.

wonders at Perus's purpose 'ef þú komst hér til einskis nema spá mér illspár?' (p.21) [if you came here for nothing except to make bad prophecies for me], while Serena orders Tecla 'spá oss engar illspár!' (p.38) [don't make bad prophecies for us]. Indeed, the supporters are united by the implication that they can see the course of the narrative better than their superiors. Perus prophetically says 'að óvíska sé í að eiga við slíkan ófagnað lengur, sem er Serena konungsdóttir, segir hann því verra munu af fá, sem þau eigast lengur við' (p.21) [that there is folly in engaging longer with such misery as is Serena, king's daughter; he says it will get worse the longer they are interacting], and Tecla comments on Serena's unsustainable repeated strategies: 'Er eg ugganda, að einhver komi yður mikil hefnd í síðustu fyrir skipan' (p.38) [I am afraid that some great vengeance will come upon you in the end for this plan].

The importance of the supporting figures has textual precedent: Tecla may be indebted to Bringvain of the Tristan tradition who is in most texts a source of solutions and sense. Although there is no direct evidence for Tecla's connection, Perus is a definite intertextual personality. He is found in three *exempla*, all focused on the triumph of intellect and trickery over arrogance and greed. In the first, after being denied marriage to the sister of two lords, he uses illusion to engage in an affair and trick the lords, mocking them for missing out on being connected to him. In the second, Perus uses illusions to trick a greedy lord into robbing him of a noble steed and gear which are revealed to be an ass and junk. In the third, Perus creates an illusion in which a humble nobleman is given power, to prove how arrogant he will quickly become.<sup>21</sup> The use of Perus in *Clari saga* seemingly aligns with these texts: Perus opposes Serena's arrogance towards Clarus and highlights her greed, and he uses illusion to craft her penance. To any audience familiar with the Perus tradition, his inclusion brings these associations to the text and strengthens the moral, highlighting the role of supporting characters. However, some adaptation has occurred: although the *exempla* support a Perus who would be anti-Serena, there is nothing in that material that suggests he would support Clarus, an arrogant and powerful youth just like those featuring

---

<sup>21</sup> 'Af meistara Pero ok hans leikum', *Íslendzk Æventyri*, pp.217-231; additionally, an unnamed 'meistari' in another exemplum, 'Af einum meistara' (pp.256-266), uses a similar illusion to show the haughtiness of his student, who is given a vision of being the sole survivor of a viking attack on the monastery and later becoming abbot, where he shows his true nature and the master drops the illusion.

as the antagonists of his exempla. *Clari saga* takes Perus, a protagonist in *exempla* who highlights the faults of men, and, by shifting him into a subordinate role, co-opts his message for the romance protagonist, subordinating the female figure and her underling, who parallels Perus on the wrong side.

With this balance of man and man on the right side, and woman and woman on the wrong side, it is narratively fitting that the equilibrium is shifted by moving Tecla onto Clarus's side by means of an enchantment. The narration overtly acknowledges the moment of change in Tecla: 'Og jafnfram sem hún kemur inn um þresköldinn, bregður hún lit, sem eitthvert kastist í hug henni, það sem eigi hafði fyrr' (p.39) [and just as soon as she comes in through the threshold, she changes colour, as if something that had not been there before was thrown into her mind]. Tecla likewise acknowledges the transition: 'Eg fyrirstend eigi, hvað umskipti orðið er með mér, því að eg vilda eigi rjúfra trúnað minnar frú, en í annan stað fyrirstend eg, að eg vilda nú ekki vita yðvart mein heldur en sjáfrar minnar' (p.40) [I do not understand what change has happened in me, because I would not like to break faith with my lady, but in another respect I sense that I would not now like to experience your pain any more than my own]. The language of development, and particularly the paralleling of before and after, one inclination and another, acknowledges the pivot in this character, who, as part of this previous balance, therefore marks a change in the narrative. The shift in allegiance now leads to Clarus's victory over Serena, a moment which is itself marked as change:

Nú vaknar frú Serena snimma og bregður augum og sést um, og hennir þykir nokkuð undarlega við bregða: Horfið sér hún landtjaldið og alla sína þjónustumenn; brottu eru skipin öll; horfin er nú gullstöfuð sæng og purpuri með gullsamuðum línlökum, en í staðinn kominn skarpur skinnstakkur. (p.43)

[Now Lady Serena awakens early and opens her eyes and looks around, and something seems to her to have changed remarkably: she sees that the tents and all her servants are gone; all the ships have disappeared; now the gold-adorned bed is gone, and the purpura with the gold-embroidered linen, and in its place a rugged mound of skin has come.]

These moments are similar to the third Perus *exemplum*, where the nobleman's world suddenly disappears as the illusion breaks, and he is returned to the past:

Bregður nú því við, at hertoginn er við skip sín, ok eigi hafði lengri stund verit en haninn var soðinn, þar sem hann þóttiz kóngur vera svá at árum skipti, ok eiga drottningu ok hafa landstjórn, ok allt þetta var ekki utan sjónhverfing ok í móti því sem satt var<sup>22</sup>

[Now it changes, so that the warlord is on his ships, and it has not been a long time since the chicken was cooked, while he thought himself to be a king so that years passed, and to be married to a queen and have the rule of the land; and all this was nothing except illusion and contrary to what was true.]

Moments of change are marked for attention in *Clari saga*, and pieces are carefully linked with either language or function to construct a balanced world which anticipates and emphasises a change in the situation.

*Clari saga* is a text which relies upon narrative rhythm, through insistent replicative elements. The text's broad two halves, pivoting around the defeat of Serena, are both markedly repetitive, although in different ways. After the initial wooing and humiliation, the first phase is constructed around the three-part structure of Clarus's time as Eskelvarð. The narrative is insistent upon events being 'sem fyrr' (p.30, p.35, p.37, and elsewhere) [as before], or variations upon 'mjög líkt og fyrri' (such as those on p.23 and p.30) [very like as before]. The highlighting of this replicative structure anticipates the coming change. Three-part structures are unique to neither *riddarasögur* nor *exempla*, but some *exempla* similarly rely on the rhythm of three-parts, anticipating a change in the third. In 'Af hinum helga Dunstano', a devil twice tricks a smith until Dunstanus changes places with him; as in *Clari saga*, the repetition is emphasised with phrases like 'þá er enn sem fyrr' [then it is again as before] and 'var enn sem fyrr' [again it was as before].<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in 'Frá prestakonu er tekin varð af djöflunum', the corpse of an unrepentant priest's lover is visited three nights by devils until stolen away completely, with similar phrases 'enn sem fyrr' [again as before] and 'ferr allt á sömu leið' [it all goes the same way].<sup>24</sup> If we posit any similarity of audience between *exempla* and *Clari saga*, as the text itself implies,

<sup>22</sup> 'Af meistara Pero ok hans leikum', p.231.

<sup>23</sup> 'Af hinum helga Dunstano', *Íslendzk Æventyri*, pp.46-47.

<sup>24</sup> 'Frá prestakonu er tekin varð af djöflunum', *Íslendzk Æventyri*, pp.124-126.

it suggests readers or listeners attuned to the moral reading of three-part structures. Furthermore, *Clari saga's* three-part structure is necessarily prefigured by Perus's three years producing the necessary objects, which is a period of repetition with minimal plot development. Each passage of time in the text commences with the appropriate variation of 'Á hinu fyrsta ári ríkis meistara Peri kallar hann saman þá steypara, sem hagasta beið í öllu Saxlandi, og lætur efna til mikillar smíðar.' (p.22) [In the first year of Master Perus's reign, he calls together those craftsmen, the most capable available in all *Saxland*, and has a great construction started] and concludes with a variation on 'Varð þessi smíð alger á hinu fyrsta ári ríkis meistara Peri.' (p.23) [this construction was completed in the first year of Master Perus's reign]. In between, there is no narrative content outside the detailed construction of each treasure. The incremental increase in quality reduces the significance of the previous creation: the effect of the final treasure is 'undrast hver, er sér, svo að nú þótti lítils um vert þau, er fyrr höfðu ger verið' (p.25) [everyone who sees it marvels, so that the ones which had been made before now seemed of little note]. The previous passages are given a certain redundancy. Following this rhythm, readers anticipate an ensuing tripartite structure so that each treasure has some relevance. The incessant stasis and repetitiveness of the narrative prepares for a change, highlighting Serena's arrogant ignorance of her invulnerability while the audience are guided to expect her punishment.

The second phase of the narrative therefore produces a balancing effect as Serena is placed into a repetitive structure herself. She is forced to live in poverty and turmoil, and the pattern of this penance is established: she pursues her "husband" along the route of waggoneers, and is denied food and comfort in the evening. Subsequently, the narrator states 'Ekki er hér meira af að segja en svo fara þau dag fyrir dag æ þar eftir, sem þessir vagnmenn fara undan. [. . .] Svo gekk fram hennar ævi um alla tólf mánaði' (p.49) [There is no more to say here than that they travel so day after day, always, following where these waggoneers move . . . So it proceeded in her life for all of twelve months]. This year is narratively elided, so that it is only the character of Serena who experiences the weariness of its repetition. To further parallel and outbalance Clarus, Serena is the victim of a three-part structure, seeking alms for her injured "husband", only to be beaten by Clarus outside a church and aided by a

kindly gentleman. Again, the narrative emphasises its repetitiveness in a condensed form that restricts the full experience of Serena's torment to her and not the audience:

Það er hér skjótast af að segja, að hann skipar henni aðra nátt hina sömu útvist og fyrr. En hversu það gengur út, má í fáum orðum greina: Hún situr með samri pínu og fyrr, fær pústur annan, finnur mann hinn sama og þiggur ölmusu með samri grein og hinn fyrra dag, kemur svo heim, að hún fær söm erfiðislaun sem fyrr, en það er heitan og illyrði. (p.56)

[It is most quick to say that he arranges the same lodgings outside for her the second night as the previous one. And how that proceeds can be explained in few words: she sits in the same torment as before, receives another blow, finds the same man and receives alms in the same fashion as the previous day, comes back so that she receives the same payment for her labour as before, and that is hatred and scorn.]

The almost perfunctory repetition makes a strong contrast to the elaboration of Perus's repeated tasks.

There is a deep awareness of the narrative power of replicative structures, invested with a distinctly reflective quality: Serena is paying for precisely the frustrations she offered Clarus and the reader.

The structure is centred around conveying the text's ideology: *Clari saga* is concerned with the subjugation of the unruly female into marriage.<sup>25</sup> The replicated structure makes Serena pay, and the expository and didactic close to the narrative emphasises the contrast of before and after: 'Mun og hvorttveggja í minnum haft vera langan tíma, hver grimmdamaður þér voruð fyrr meir eða hver dyggðarmaður þér voruð síðar meir í jafnmikilli raun' (pp.58-59) [And one of these two things will be held in memory for a long time: either what a villain you were before, or more of what a virtuous person you were afterwards in as great a trial]. The text's ideological message is intricately tied to its narrative structure, presenting the reader with an aberrant figure turned into a conforming one.<sup>26</sup> It clearly echoes an *exemplum's* structure; for example, 'Trönubátttr' sees a man turned into a crane by his wife, only for him to return and use the same magic on her (with the added punishment of a maiming), before

---

<sup>25</sup> Jóhanna Katrín notes 'The maiden-kings are by modern standards empowered, but their rule, often legitimate within the saga world, is nevertheless depicted as deviant, and they always marry in the end, losing the autonomy and legitimate power they have before.', in *Women in Old Norse Literature*, p.116.

<sup>26</sup> Kalinke comments that 'there is no mistaking the clerical bent of its author and the narrative's exemplary function' in 'Table Decorum and the Quest for a Bride in *Clari saga*', *At the Table: Metaphorical and Material Cultures of Food in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Tomasik and Vitullo (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp.51-72, here p.68.

an outright moral concludes the text: ‘fylliz þat hér, at hverr tekr þat at sér sem hann veitir öðrum’ [here it is fulfilled that each person receives for themselves what he gives to others].<sup>27</sup> Although moralisation concludes both, those parts could be removed and the structures themselves would still point towards the message.<sup>28</sup> Serena’s greed is not directly commented on at the end, but is a clear theme throughout, at her expense.<sup>29</sup> The text instead achieves this through the aforementioned use of Perus, opponent of greed, and direct replication which refigures Serena’s gaze. When seeing one of Perus’s creations, Serena ‘getur nú líta þá sýn, sem eigi beit lítt hennar hjarta’ (p.33) [now gets a look at that sight which bit her heart in no small way]. After a year of torment, the sight of Clarus produces the same response in her: ‘Og nú getur hún líta þá sýn, sem eigi beit lítt hennar hjarta’ (p.53) [And now she gets a look at that sight which bit her heart in no small way]. Rather than commenting on her greed, the text instead merely displaces it into dutiful love for a husband and regret for misdeeds. Through maintaining the language, the narrative has transported Serena from one perspective into another in aid of her movement from “incorrect” to “correct” behaviour.

The legacy *Clari saga* leaves is vital to the corpus, but its precise style and ideological standpoint is never replicated precisely. No other text in this corpus contains an overtly didactic epilogue, and the Griselda-like penance of Serena is likewise unique. These features probably indicate a much closer connection to *exempla* than the subsequent texts possess. However, the concerns and methods evident in *Clari saga*, and the more generally “exemplary” purpose, provide continuity through the remainder of the subgenre. The burden of the tradition is to interact with the role of the maiden-king figure, and to adjust or reaffirm the opinions of *Clari saga*, whether directly speaking to this text or not. As we shall see, the texts which follow make radical changes to this standpoint, or use more radical methods to

---

<sup>27</sup> ‘Trönuþáttir’, *Íslendzk Æventyri*, pp.272-275.

<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Saxo relies upon the insertion of moralising passages to convey his misogynistic ideology, such as on the fickleness of women following his Herminthrud story, or the inappropriateness of warrior women following his Alvild narrative; see Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, Volume I, ed. and trans. Karsten Friis-Jensen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015), p.220, p.476.

<sup>29</sup> The greedy woman is a trope commented on by Jóhanna Katrín: ‘Women’s desire for treasure and riches is depicted negatively, encouraging the audience to regard them as evil and sinful in a Christian sense (since greed is one of the seven deadly sins), and to rejoice when it leads to their oppression’ in *Women in Old Norse Literature*, p.112; the theme is likewise central to ‘Jónatas æventyr’.

reinforce it, but in all cases there is an awareness of the movement and networking of pieces – protagonists, secondary characters, structure – in aid of a reading experience which implicitly promotes an ideology, without need of recourse to direct commentary. The maiden-king corpus can be viewed as a series of replications and reworkings of this central ideological struggle between female ruler and suitor, although the relative importance of the plot to each saga is flexible. Texts to varying degrees conform or subvert the model proposed by *Clari saga*, both in its misogynistic ideology and its structural features.

### **Suitable Women: The Female Protagonist**

If *Clari saga* provides the foundation for the misogynistic maiden-king narrative, we can use that framework to consider the ensuing texts, from the later parts of the fourteenth century and the early fifteenth century, as broadly moving in two directions, which could be loosely termed progressive and reactionary. Some narratives reposition the maiden-king as a less malignant, and less maligned, force than their predecessors, sometimes by placing more moral judgement on the male protagonist: the strongest example of this is *Nítíða saga*, which Jóhanna Katrín considers to possess ‘an overt proto-feminist message’.<sup>30</sup> Although other texts are not so progressive, they nonetheless offer a contrast to *Clari saga*. In *Victors saga ok Blávus*, the wooing is only part of the narrative, with more interest in the reformation of the profligate Victor, and two texts, *Nikulás saga leikara* and *Ála flekks saga*, present *meykongar* and yet none of the features of conflict. However, the legacy of *Clari saga*’s ideology of violent female submission can be found in several texts, including *Dínus saga drambláta*, *Gibbons saga*, and *Sigurðar saga þöglá*. All embody the *Clari saga* structure of requital, in which the misdemeanours of the maiden-king are revisited upon her, and she is raped as part of the suitor’s revenge. To these three texts can be added the longer redaction of *Mágus saga jarls*, which includes a female ruler who rejects her suitor and is faced with the prospect of kidnap, rape, and further humiliation, although it is unfulfilled. These two ideological directions are not strict groupings, and it is unclear whether each text

---

<sup>30</sup> Jóhanna Katrín, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, p.127.

responds to a particular predecessor or the maiden-king idea more generally, but these texts navigate this central crux of how to position the audience in relation to the maiden-king.

In order for this adjustment of the maiden-king to occur, there needs to be some shared ground; to some extent, the term *meykongr/meykonungr* develops a neutral identity, particularly by the fifteenth century. *Sigrarðs saga frækna* can talk, potentially somewhat wryly, about the role as historically commonplace: ‘Hon lét taka sik til konungs um allt landit, ok var þat kallaðir meykonungar i þann tíma, er svá breyttu’ (p.108) [she had herself taken as king through all the land, and those who so acted were called maiden-kings in that time]. Similarly, *Ála flekks saga* can offhandedly introduce Þornbjörg with ‘fyrir henni [the city] réði einn meykonungur – og ætti hún þar forræði, – er Þornbjörg hét’ (p.134) [a maiden-king who was called Þornbjörg ruled over the city – and she had the authority there]. The maiden-king has a pseudo-historical identity, and is assumed as a familiar literary type. Any individual maiden-king participates in a larger collection of those figures through recognisable markers of the maiden-kings such as the characters’ names. A pattern of name usage has been observed by commentators such as Barnes: ‘An educated medieval audience may have read symbolic significance into the pseudo-allegorical personifications of the princesses Serena (*Clári saga*), Fulgida (*Victors saga ok Blávus*) and Nitida (*Nitida saga*), all of them shining according to their Latin etymologies’.<sup>31</sup> *Clari saga* attests to an expectation for names to be interpreted: when Serena mocks Clarus, the text asserts ‘og betur má hún nú kallast Severa en Serena, því að skírleikinn kastaði hún’ (p.18) [and now she can better be called Severa than Serena, because she casts goodwill away]. This semiotic use of names continues throughout the subgenre. To Barnes’s concrete examples can be added ‘Florentia’ from *Gibbons saga* [flowering], and looser Latin names Sedentiana [presumably from “seated”, perhaps in the sense of ruling], and Philotemia [pseudo-Latinate-Greek, presumably from *philos*, “[learned] love”]. These maiden-kings are connected by Latinate names indicating sophistication, high status, and desirability. Notably, the two so-called borderline *fornaldarsögur* feature Germanic names, “Þornbjörg” in *Ála flekks saga*, and “Ingigerðr” in *Sigrarðs saga frækna* (both possibly inspired by Ingibjörg from *Hrólfs saga*

---

<sup>31</sup> Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, p.185.

*Gautrekssonar*), which suggests an even greater awareness of names in relation to literary environment. Certain general expectations accompany maiden-king figures, and can even be exploited: commentators have used the links between ‘Nítíða’ (Latin *Nitida* [shining]), and ‘Clarus’ [bright] to suggest *Nítíða saga* is responding to *Clari saga*, showing that the perspective has switched from the male figure to the female in accordance with the ideology of *Nítíða saga*.<sup>32</sup> These naming conventions establish a link between the texts, and allow maiden-kings to be compared and contrasted with each other.

Likewise, physical description frames the maiden-kings in relation to each other. Old Icelandic literature prose traditionally eschews extended description, and the insular *riddarasögur* follow a general stripping-back of lavish detail which occurred in the translated romances.<sup>33</sup> Yet maiden-kings are frequently accompanied by extended passages, to such extremes as Sedentiana in *Sigurðar saga þögla*:

enn eptir þui war hennar yfirlit sem hennar fyrirfaranda kynn birti þui ath sæt eple falla af sætu tre. suo kom og hier til. ath huergi j nordraalfu heimsins fannzt hennar jafninge ath aasionu og veralldligum listum. suo war hun hæuersklig j lijkams uexti at hun war sem vaxinn reyr matuliga mior. Hennar augu woru skjinnandi sem stiqrnur j heidbiortu uedre af þeim synnduzt geislar skjina. Hofudit uar bollott sem eyiar þær er gullz lit hafa med skinande birte sem logannde elldr edur solar geislar. Ok medur sinu fagra haare matti hun hylia sinn lijkama allann. suo woru hennar kinnur og hinn væne munnur. þetta allt var suo fagurliga skapat ath avllum war þat audsynt ath natturann hafdi þar alla virct aa lagit medur sialfre hamingiunne ath skapa hana langt wm fram adrar meyar er þaa woru j ollum heiminum. (p.100)

[And her appearance was in accordance with what her preceding family displayed, because sweet apples fall from sweet trees. So it also happened here that her equal in countenance and worldly skills could be found nowhere in the northern region of the world. She was also courteous in the formation of her body, so that she was like a tree grown fittingly slim. Her eyes were shining like stars in the clear sky; rays seemed to shine from them. Her head was round like those islands which have a golden colour, with shining brightness like blazing fire or

---

<sup>32</sup> See for instance Paul Bibire, ‘From *Riddarasaga* to *Lygisaga*: The Norse Response to Romance’, *Les Sagas de Chevaliers: Riddarasögur* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985), pp.55-74, here p.67; Einar Ól. ‘Viktors Saga ok Blávus: Sources and Characteristics’, p.cxi.

<sup>33</sup> A thorough exploration of the transformations to romance style is Marianne E. Kalinke, *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest: The Matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1981); a more complicated narrative of stylistic development is presented in Jónas Kristjánsson, ‘The Court Style’, *Les Sagas de Chevaliers: Riddarasögur*, ed. Boyer (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985), pp.431-440.

sunlight. And she could cover her whole body with her beautiful hair. Her cheeks, and her fine mouth, were likewise. All this was so beautifully formed that it was obvious to all that Nature had invested all effort, along with Fortune itself, to make her far beyond other maidens who were then in all the world.]

Similar passages are found in *Nítíða saga* (p.125) and *Victors saga ok Blávus* (p.33).<sup>34</sup> The elaborate stylistic features, including the careful cataloguing of features, movement of gaze, and figurative elements, give the maiden-king a substantial presence in the narrative, and convey much of the desirability associated with some of their names: brightness ('stjörnur'), bloom ('sæt eple'), and preciousness ('gullz lit'). The *Victors saga* passage associates Fulgida with *lilia* [lily] against *steinkol* [coal] and *gull* [gold] against *bly* [lead], while *Nítíða* is described as being as if 'hin rauða rósa væri samtemprað við snjóhvíta lileam' [the red rose were mixed together with the snow-white lily], and associated with *karbunkulus* [the carbuncle] and *fiils bein* [ivory]. Conceptual associations surround these characters, and serve a dual purpose: intra-narratively, they indicate the prize of the bridal-quest plot, and inter-narratively, they signal a maiden-king's position as a romance (particularly *meykongr* romance) heroine.

However, in finding the maiden-king's correct place, this idea of hyperbolic excellence is scrutinised in *Gibbons saga*. The superlative nature of the maiden-king is assumed in other texts, with *Sedentiana* 'langt wm fram adrar meyar' [far beyond other maidens], and likewise *Fulgida* 'ber af aullum kongadætrum ok aullum meyum' (p.33) [surpasses all daughters of kings and all maidens]: they are fitting matches for the male protagonists. Yet *Gibbons saga* creates two central bridal figures and poses the narrative problem of which one Gibbon deserves, and vice versa. Greca, the magical princess of *Grikkland* who has captured and seduced Gibbon, reveals herself from her invisibility:

sa herra Gibbon sitia hia sier eina iungfrv hvn var so fogr sem ein skiær rosa hennar litr var því likr sem blodi veri dreypt j nyfallin snio edr drifhvitr dvkr veri nidr breidr hia ravdvsilki sa hann nv at vænleikr systr hans var sem duft edr dumba hia þessvm gimsteini. (p.11)

---

<sup>34</sup> For other analyses of these passages, see Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp.72-73, and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), pp.155-156.

[Lord Gibbon saw a lady sitting by him. She was as beautiful as a bright rose; her colour was just like if blood were dripped into newly-fallen snow, or a snow-white cloth were spread down by red silk. He now saw that his sister's handsomeness was like dust or ash by this gemstone.]

Greca and the maiden-kings share stylistic features, exhibiting similar rose and snow imagery to that associated with Nítíða, and familiar treasure imagery; Greca likewise exceeds other women to a reductive extreme. She narratively appears the perfect match for the protagonist, providing the impetus for the “bridal-quest” plot. Yet the duplication of the bridal-quest in *Gibbons saga* provides a narrative quandary: why should the hero progress from his perfect match onto another (the maiden-king)? The narrative acknowledges this problem through reflective opposition of the two women. Asper, the dwarf who sends Gibbon towards the maiden-king, refigures the protagonist's and audience's narrative focus: ‘onno er nu gegra i heiminn’ (p.20) [another is now foremost in the world], reworking the familiar paradigmatic trope from within the plot. As Gibbon looks at the image of Florentia, he realises that ‘Greca hans vinnsta var sem dvpt edr dvmba ok allar adrar ivngfrvr hia þessum meykongi’ (p.25) [his beloved, Greca, was like dust or ash, as were all other ladies, by this maiden-king]. The precise reusing of the dust image from the Greca description connects and compares the two figures, and highlights the fundamental drive within these romances for the very best; the text moves to develop the audience expectation that a hero requires a bride of sufficient worth.

However, the maiden-king is not Gibbon's eventual bride, and we can see how the text evaluates the haughty ruler figure, as she is instead eventually forgotten after her son comes to Gibbon, ostensibly to avenge her, only to reconcile with his father. Kalinke notes the confusing direction of the plot, and that ‘the reader is at a loss to find a satisfactory meaning in the narrative’.<sup>35</sup> It is certainly obscure, but it is possible to tease out some potential reflections. The linguistic paralleling of the two women allows the audience a platform to analyse them in relation to each other. Even Greca aligns the two, saying, as she manoeuvres to reconcile Gibbon and his son Eskopart, ‘enn þat mundi Florentia drottning ætla mior at ek mundi hialpa hennar syni, þuiat suo mundi hun giora vid minn son ef hann

---

<sup>35</sup> Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p.139.

þyrfti með' (p.95) [and Queen Florentia must have intended for me that I would help her son, because she would so act towards my son if he needed it]. The pair are united as mother figures as well as lovers. This parallel is emphasised in one manuscript ending, Page's C text, which possibly sought to clarify audience confusion such as Kalinke indicated. Florentia here prefigures Greca's faith in her by telling her rebellious son that Greca 'dygd og dreingskap ber yfir allar frur þær er nu eru samtida. og væntir eg hun sie þier j modur stad ef þu kant til at giæta' (p.101) [carries virtue and heroism beyond all those ladies who are of this age. And I hope that she may be in place of a mother for you if you can manage it]. This version's ending generally is more sympathetic to the two women and places more judgement upon the father and son (see Chapter Three, 'Relative Importance'), but it is also a careful continuation of reflective language to emphasise Greca's superiority over Florentia. The maiden-king herself reinstates Greca's position as the paradigm, and the idea of Greca 'j modur stad' [in place of a mother] for Eskopart repeats (p.102, p.104). In this version, Greca frequently addresses Eskopart as 'son minn' (p.104, p.108, p.111, p.113) [my son], and the narration even describes Eskopart greeting 'sinne modur' [his mother] (p.111). Through this repeated emphasis, Greca, as parallel yet superior, supplants Florentia's role as mother to Eskopart as well as lover to Gibbon, which is concluded when this text has Florentia die in shock at the (false) report of Gibbon and Eskopart's deaths. The C-version solves the issue of Florentia's superiority by connecting the women to the point that Greca can then replace the maiden-king completely. However, even in the main version, audiences are invited to judge their actions: one as a supporter of Gibbon who is united with her lover, and the other as a violent tyrant who is subsequently punished. The text asks its audience to measure the worth of its matches beyond merely superlative beauty, and beyond the romance gaze towards the most beautiful figure. Aesthetic judgement itself is not undermined, as Greca is still exemplary, but physical desirability of the romance heroine is linked to conduct. Doubling the female figure, and splitting the male romantic gaze, places the lens upon the maiden-king role. This narrative shares the dismissive and reproachful perspective on the maiden-king figure with *Clari saga* and much of the tradition, but to a unique extent. The way

Greca and Florentia interact with the idea of the female bridal object results in the conclusion that the maiden-king is so flawed as to be undeserving of narrative fulfilment, regardless of repentance.

Indeed, the maiden-king's tyrannical rule, and the "masculine" pretension to kingship, is often framed negatively. Like *Clari saga*, several texts pair the maiden-king's entrance into the narrative with her flaws or misdeeds. In *Sigurðar saga þögla*, Sedentiana's positive physical description is soon followed by a negative display of character:

þaa tok hennar metnadur og ofse ath þrutna. suo hun forsmade naliga allar tignar frur og tiginna manna sonu suo miog ath þann visse hun avngan fæddan j norduralfunne veralldarinnar ath henne þætti ecki full minkan j ath samteigniazt medur nockurre elsku. (pp.100-101)

[Then her pride and arrogance began to swell so she nearly rejected all elevated ladies and sons of men of station, so much that she thought there to be no man born in the northern region of the world that would not seem a complete disgrace to her to be engaged with in some affection.]

The description parallels and subverts the positive 'huergi j nordraalfu heimsins fannzt hennar jafninge aasionu og veralldligum listum' [her equal in countenance and worldly skills could be found nowhere in the northern region of the world] from her physical description: while she is a physical paradigm, she falsely assumes herself to be above everyone. Sedentiana, as an attractive romance heroine, fulfils the narrative role of bridal object, but her rejection of that role is incompatible with the ideology of this narrative, as the narrative proceeds to humiliate her and bring about the marriage. Similarly, *Dinus saga* foregrounds the princess Philotemia's dismissal of all male company, while Florentia in *Gibbons saga* is associated with the brutal image of her suitors' corpses hung on pillars outside her residence. The general stance of these narratives is to present an aberrant figure whose position on marriage needs correcting, thus establishing the narrative course. As Kalinke notes:

The crux of the maiden-king narratives would seem to be not male misogyny but rather female misogamy, although the portrayal of women as misogynous—considering that the maiden-king romances presumably were written by men—can itself be interpreted as a form of misogyny.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p.79.

The narrative trajectory follows *Clari saga's* corrective and didactic path, creating a repeated audience expectation of how maiden-king narratives function and fit within a requital framework. In one branch of the maiden-king tradition, it is conventional to portray the maiden-king as a desirable object, but, as a subject, in need of correction before the happy ending can be fulfilled.

However, the more progressive texts anticipate an awareness of these structures and subvert expectations. *Nikulás saga leikara*, as both Kalinke and McDonald Werronen note, initially appears to establish a maiden-king narrative; when Nikulás is advised to seek the hand of Dorma, he retorts 'eda hefur þu eigi friett ad þessi kongzdóttir vill önguann mann eýga. og marger kongasiner hafa hennar bedid. hafa þeyr af henne feýngid hina mestu sneypu enn sumer dauda' (p.69) [have you not heard that this king's daughter does not want to marry any man, and that many sons of kings have asked for her? They have received the greatest insult from her, and, for some, death].<sup>37</sup> For surprise and subversion, the text relies upon audience familiarity with the trope of the maiden-king's reputation for violence; the narrative swiftly reveals Dorma's father to be the source of violence and refusal, a change which exonerates the woman. The play in *Nikulás saga leikara* with maiden-king tropes to move audiences away from established tropes of misogyny may be indebted to the earlier *Nítíða saga*. In *Nítíða saga*, the maiden-king's exemplary description is without flaw or undercut. Nítíða is positioned as a protagonist, something McDonald Werronen explores thoroughly, rather than a quest object or antagonist, and therefore it is unsurprising that the text has become attached to a title with a female name, the only example within the insular romance corpus.<sup>38</sup> Unlike the other maiden-king texts, *Nítíða saga* introduces the female character's upbringing first: this repositioning shows the new perspective the text offers on the maiden-king. Nítíða defeats her suitors through a combination of intelligence, trickery, and magic, contrasting with other maiden-kings in both her success and the non-violent methods she uses. The narrative still moves to the fulfilment of marriage, and therefore does not

---

<sup>37</sup> Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp.102-103 and McDonald Werronen, *Popular Romance*, pp.80-81.

<sup>38</sup> McDonald Werronen, *Popular Romance*, pp.127-136.

undermine the ideology of heterosexual monogamy, but the positioning of female autonomy presents a woman looking for a man, rather than a man looking for a woman. For once, the maiden-king is a positive figure deserving fulfilment, not a negative figure requiring retribution.

*Nítíða saga* and similar texts provide a counter-narrative, and an alternative trajectory, to the increasingly replicating formula, offering a new stance on the role. After the initial red herring of Dorma, *Nikulás saga* provides a second subversion by presenting an actual maiden-king, with a very different opening description: ‘enn firer borgenne ried eirn meýkongur. hafdi hun firer litlu mist sinn faudur, verandi harla hrigg. hun var væn og kurteýs’ (p.111) [and a maiden-king ruled over the city. She had lost her father recently, being incredibly sad. She was handsome and courteous]. The introduction of the maiden-king title is accompanied by an unusual comment on her emotional state before even her physical beauty, subverting traditional presentation and evoking sympathy in a way even *Nítíða saga* does not. Her love affair with Justinus is told from her viewpoint rather than an overtly male gaze: ‘enn er þessi meýkongzdóttir leýt riddarann, þá tók hun ad vnna honum med heýtre äst.’ (p.112) [and when this maiden king’s daughter saw the knight, then she began to love him with a passionate desire]. This noticeably unnamed maiden-king is not a protagonist to the same extent as *Nítíða*, and she does not receive a happy ending, but she participates in a broader counter-narrative to the equation of female rule with arrogance and character flaws. Likewise, *Ála flekks saga* presents this alternative of a virtuous and even harmless maiden-king. The wooing of Þornbjörg by Áli is uncomplicated: Þornbjörg takes the assistance of a disguised Áli in exchange for a marriage promise, and they are indeed subsequently married. Her position as an entirely positive figure is more important after the marriage than before, as she acts as an assistant, both literally, in her tending to her sick husband, and narratively, progressing the plot by seeking out the location of the cure. During this phase of the narrative, Þornbjörg is a grammatical and narrative agent, and the sick Áli made passive.<sup>39</sup> Her simple conformity to marriage

---

<sup>39</sup> For instance, ‘Og þá er drottning hefir kannað alla Norðurhálfuna og hafði engan þann fengið, að Ála gæti læknað, heldur nú sínum skipum út í Affríkam og kannar það allt’ (p.147) [And when the queen has explored all the northern region and had found no-one that could manage to heal Áli, she now takes her ships out into *Affrika* and explores it all].

does not present the same proto-feminist autonomy as Nítíða, nor does the saga use the same playful misleading as in *Nikulás saga*, but it equally undermines the frequent presentation of a maiden-king as inherently flawed or sinful. The title of maiden-king invests the narrative with certain expectations, the omission and disruption of which present a female ruler uniting with a husband and using her power to advance rather than disrupt the narrative. These texts support the prevailing cultural narrative of marriage, but even small adjustments to the female ruler question the moral assumptions in place.

The idea that the maiden-king texts are constantly grappling with the morality of the situation is evident in *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, which, despite not presenting a benevolent maiden-king, nevertheless complicates the negative portrayal of the female ruler. Ingigerðr is cursed by a separate antagonist in such a way as to establish precisely the identity and narrative of the maiden-king:

En þat legg ek á þik at þú skalt öngvum trú vera, ok hvern þinn biðil forráða, aldrei er þér svá vel til hans at þú skalt ei æ sitja um hans líf en þú skalt vera svá eigingjörn, at þú skalt allt vilja eiga þat sem þú sér, en allt skaltu þat illu launa (p.107)

[And I place that upon you that you shall be faithful to none, and the foe of each of your wooers; you shall never be so well inclined to him that you shall not seek his life. And you shall be so covetous that you shall want to possess everything that you see, and you shall repay everything badly.]

The curse constructs and evokes the Serena-figure from *Clari saga*, with the familiar elements of monstrosity and greed. This maiden-king is an artificial construct, removing the element of free will, and placing responsibility upon Hlégerðr the stepmother instead. This narrative framing makes the maiden-king simultaneously an antagonist to Sigrarðr and a “damsel-in-distress” victim for him to rescue in his adventure.<sup>40</sup> The role’s incongruity is marked by her claim to the male name Ingi, presumably a reference to *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (where Ingibjörg likewise takes the name Ingi); this name is never used again in the extant text, although Ingigerðr’s pretension to a masculine warrior

---

<sup>40</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson asserts: ‘The author seizes upon the motif of the magic spell as a means of making Ingigerðr’s actions involuntary, thereby giving depth to his story. By making the spell account for her hatred of her suitors he provides the necessary link between the folk-tale and the plot of *Viktors saga*’, in ‘*Viktors Saga ok Blávus: Sources and Characteristics*’, p.cxl.

figure is evoked in the final stages of the curse when Ingigerðr arms herself with Sigrgarðr's possessions.<sup>41</sup> The maiden-king persona is separated from the true character of Ingigerðr. This conflict between the two personas is encapsulated in a powerful image upon the supposed death of Sigrgarðr (who is in fact now disguised): 'Þessi tíðindi komu austr í Tartaría til eyrnanna meykonunginum en hon brosti við [. . .] en þó sáu menn þá at hagl hraut ór augum henni rautt sem blóð' (p.127) [This news came east into *Tartaría* to the maiden-king's ears, and she smiled at it . . . and yet men then saw that hail, red as blood, flowed from her eyes]. The emotive image is obscure and defies precise glossing as incipient romantic feelings, but it emphasises a clash of perspectives associated with these two emotional displays. The moment reminds the audience not merely to align their reading of the character with that of other maiden-kings, but to allow for nuance. This "split-personality" is borne out in the conclusion, when the breaking of the curse sees Ingigerðr crawl to Sigrgarðr and attempt to kiss his feet. Some commentators have attempted to construe Ingigerðr's subservience as a strong political move, but the overall narrative seems to support the idea that female rule is aberrant.<sup>42</sup> The narrative appears more concerned with Ingigerðr the paradigmatic woman over Ingigerðr/Ingi the maiden-king. The structuring of Ingigerðr's journey as a maiden-king is careful, beginning with a justification and emphasising its incongruity, with a reminder in the middle, and ending with a restoration of "correct" character and behaviour. This conclusion can be seen as something of a midpoint between the conceptual poles of *Clari saga* and *Nítíða saga*: female rule is condemned, but not the individual woman. *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* is a useful example of the level of nuance that is inscribed into maiden-king presentations: the precise framing of the shared qualities of the maiden-king allows each text to present its female figure within a specific moral viewpoint.

---

<sup>41</sup> No other maiden-kings fulfil this role of "maiden warrior", for which see Jochens's study in *Old Norse Images of Women*, pp.87-112.

<sup>42</sup> For a summary of these approaches, see Alaric Hall's introduction to the edition, '*Sigrgarðs saga frækna*: A normalised text, translation, and introduction', eds. Alaric Hall, Steven D. P. Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies* 21 (2012-2013), pp.80-155, here pp.97-100.

## Strong Foil: The Male Protagonist

The reading of the maiden-king is intricately tied to the presentation of the suitor, which can assist in supporting or clarifying readings. There is repeated opposition, or equation, of the maiden-king and suitor, and the texts establish and reinforce narrative and linguistic connections. *Sigrarðs saga frækna*'s use of names is a clear example: Sigrarðr and Ingigerðr share similar second components in their dithematic names, shared also with the antagonist Hlégerðr. Ingigerðr and Sigrarðr are paralleled in name and as two flawed figures: a tyrant, and a philanderer who seduces and abandons women. The text repeatedly emphasises the connection of the two as immoral: both are *ríklynd(r)* (p.103, p.108) [resolute], and the impact of their flaws upon the populace is presented in parallel terms. Sigrarðr's promiscuity is described 'þótti þat mörgum mikit at um hans ráð at hann fekk aldrei svá væna konu eðr velættaða at hann sinnti lengr enn þrjár nætr, ok þótti ríkum mönnum mikil smán í at þeira frændkonur eðr dætr váru svívirðar' (p.105) [many were greatly struck by his actions, that he never took such a handsome woman, or one of such high lineage, that he cared for longer than three nights, and this seemed to be a great insult for rich men as their kinswomen or daughters were disgraced] and Ingigerðr's claim as king is similarly framed: 'Nú fréttast þessi tíðindi víða, ok þykir mönnum mikils um vert' (p.108) [Now this news was heard of widely, and its importance greatly strikes men]. Most significantly, the text has Sigrarðr himself parallel the two characters through his words. When Ingigerðr is asked about her reputation for violently rejecting suitors, she justifies, 'þeir einir hafa til orðið þessa mála at leita at oss hefr þótt lítilræði í, nökkut við at skylda' (pp.111-112) [the only men who have happened to seek this matter have seemed inconsequential for us to be involved with]. Sigrarðr refigures this when the protagonist is questioned on his sexual misbehaviour: 'þér megið taka miðan á sjálfri þér, þær einar hafa til valist at oss hefr þótt lítilræði í við at skylda.' (p.112) [you can take an example from yourself; the only women who have presented themselves have seemed inconsequential for us to be involved with]. The two characters are carefully shown as moral reflections of each other within the ideology of the text, as the trajectory of the narrative has to see *both* improve. The critical emphasis on Ingigerðr's placatory behaviour, political or submissive or neither, overlooks

the fact that Sigrgarðr himself reacts to her curse breaking by attempting to injure her, and is restrained and put to sleep; the narrative does not condone his behaviour. Suitor and maiden-king are then peacefully united later. The text is careful to frame the two as parallel figures to allow a more complicated reading in which two characters' defects are corrected. Even if those defects belong to a contemporary ideology which still conforms to the overall maiden-king narrative of women losing power to men, the balanced reading of the two characters together contrasts with the *Clari saga* position and its view of man as undeniably superior to woman. Neither tyrannical rule nor callous promiscuity are supported by the moral gaze of the text.

*Dínus saga drambláta* displays the most expansive paralleling of suitor and maiden-king, presenting the narrative as an adversarial match between two flawed romance protagonists, Dínus and the princess Philotemia (like Serena, a maiden-king in narrative role and authority rather than title or position). The introductory phase duplicates qualities across the two in several stages. From their births, there are parallels: 'þá giordist það efftir vidur kuæme ligumm tijma, ad fruinn fæddi einn son, so frijdann og feskann, ad j þui landi þöttist einginn haffa fregn feingid nie friett þuj sijdur, ad nockurt barn mundi åå jørdu borid vera so vænt, sem þetta' (p.5) [then it happened after the appropriate time that the lady birthed a son, so handsome and fresh that no-one in that land thought they had heard report, or discovered any the more, that any child as handsome as this would be born on the earth]; 'þar fæddist ein döttur so væn og virdulig, ærlig og æskelig sem einskis mannz auga haffdi sied, þui lijkt blöm fædast åå jördina, aff holde og blöde mannligu' (p.12) [a daughter was born there, so handsome and noble, splendid and youthful so that the eyes of no man had seen such a blossom created on the earth from flesh and human blood]. Their physical appeal places them both within the model of romance lovers, while also connecting both to fresh and natural imagery. As each grows up, their education is likewise intertwined, both learning the seven liberal arts, and either 'runer' (p.7) [runes] or 'rwnamaal' (p.12) [the language of runes]. The distinguishing education observes traditional gender conventions in the genre, as Dínus learns chivalric skills while Philotemia learns divination and the nature of plants and

herbs. Their actions as they grow are identical, as each asks their father for a residence constructed and filled for them:

eg bid ad þier laated smijda skamt frá ydare borg einn frijdann og sterkann kastala, og firer jnnann hans steinmur, eina sterka hõll fagra og ferska, og prijdeliga pentada gler gluggan og gimmsteinumm, setta og grædda vel mätuliga, so eg meigi veita dijrum hõffdingiumm, vil eg þä til mijn kalla. Hier med vil eg þier faaid mier til þienustu herra manna sonu, frijda og fræckna listuga og lunpruda, so vier meigumm vorn kost hæverskliga hallda, og þä sem vier viliumm til vor kalla. (p.9)

[I ask that you have a fine and strong castle built a short way from your city, and a strong hall, beautiful and imposing, within its walls, and splendidly decorated windows, set with gemstones and appropriately designed, so that I can host noble chieftains if I want to summon them to me. Along with this, I want for you to deliver me the sons of lordly men for service, handsome and valiant, skilful and splendid, so that we can hold our living courteously, along with those whom we want to call to us.]

eg er bidiande, minn kiæri fader, ad þier lätid smijda mier eitt frijtt og sterkt herberge, med mikille list og velgiort, efftir þeirre mind og forsøgn sem minn hagleikur kann firer ad seigia, hier med vil eg lätä få mier 40 enar frijdustu meijjar mier til þiönustu (pp.13-14)

[I am asking, my dear father, that you have a fine and strong dwelling built for me, with great skill and well made, following that shape and outline which my craft can pronounce. Along with this, I want to have 40 of the most handsome maidens obtained for me, for my service.]

Although the scope of description varies, the language is clearly duplicated, from the initial request to *lätä smiðä*, to the descriptions of those buildings as *friðr* and *sterkr*, to the request to *fä mér* companions *til þjónustu*. The two characters are aligned in station, excellence, education, and surroundings; their future as partners is evident from their birth, and a conceptual link is established for moral judgement to come.

Most importantly, the pair are paralleled in their flaws and reputation, which establishes the narrative trajectory of the text. Dínus's flaws, from which the *drambláti* nickname emerges, are central to the text, and justify some of his future sufferings. The text numbers four facets of his arrogance: vainly covering his face, allowing no-one into his hall without permission, avoiding female company, and a refusal to eat without a new exotic dish being presented to him. These failings provide the

platform for the trickery he will receive: agents of Philotemia infiltrate his court and enchant him through this desire for delicacies. Of particular interest is the third: ‘hann forsmade allar konur og jömfurur j veröldinne, so hann gaff gilda reide j möti eff þad var talad vmm nockurt köngz barn, edur keisara ad væri honum jaffnkosta’ (p.10) [he rejected all women and ladies in the world, so that he reacted with full rage if it was mentioned of any child of a king or emperor that they were an equal match for him]. This directly parallels the flaw of Philotemia: ‘forsmade hun alla könga syne og jalla, og jlla vtliæk, eff þeir freistudu hennar ad bidia, med einhuoruu möti þui sem þeim yrde til hneijsu og suijvirðingar’ (p.13) [she rejected all sons of kings and lords, and poorly tricked them, if they tried to ask for her, by some means which would come to their injury and dishonour]. The misogamy of a maiden-king is duplicated in *Dínus saga*: in order to fulfil the generic expectation of marriage, both characters must abandon their opposition to the opposite sex. Ultimately, the two dismissive and arrogant characters conform to the romance fulfilment of marriage, but at different points, indicating the overall judgement implicit in the narrative. While both experience magic-fuelled desire, Philotemia conforms to the loving role after being raped, but Dínus resists until the end of the narrative. It is clear from the course of the narrative that the ideological support is with the male party, despite shared flaws. Philotemia provides a self-revelation which encapsulates the text’s moral message:

maklega er mier falled seiger hun, og vijst være mier betur, ad eg hefde ei til slijkz ötijma fædd vered, veij sie þeim er j mote brijst fœdurlegumm vilia, og er eg þui verd suivirðingar ad eg ei kunne siälffa mig er eg villde med offbelde þreita vid þann sem mier var meire, og giarnann helldur villda eg nu vera wtleidd og haalzögguinn enn þola leingur brixl og harm, skømm og småån (p.69)

["It has gone fittingly for me," she says, "and certainly it would be better for me had I not been born to such misfortune. Woe upon the one who acts against their father's wishes, and so I am deserving of disgrace, given I did not know myself when I wanted to contest in arrogance with the one who was greater than me. And I would eagerly be cast out and beheaded rather than suffer insult and pain, shame and disgrace any longer."]

The idea of fitting repayment echoes *Clari saga* and the *exempla*, and, in that punishment, Philotemia positions herself in relation to Dínus, ‘þann sem mier var meire’ [the one who was greater than me].

While Dínus and Philotemia begin as equals, and while both learn their lessons, the text, like the *Clari saga* tradition, must see the suitor subordinate the maiden-king. The initial, emphatic connection of the two allows the text to present exactly what it considers to be the relative values of its hero and heroine. Interestingly, the late-medieval/early-modern middle redaction of the saga removes Philotemia's parallel flaws, her education, and her request. Instead, Philotemia is given a nickname to balance Dínus: 'Nu þott langt væri millum Egiptwm og Blaalandz þa hóffdu þö huorer spurn aff audrum Dynus enn dramblate og Philotemja en fagra' (103) [now even though it was far between *Egiptus* and *Bláland*, each had learnt of the other, Dynus the arrogant and Philotemia the beautiful]. This adjustment, whether by intent or transmission, still implies balance and provokes comparison, but presents only Dínus as flawed, despite the same punishment ultimately coming to Philotemia. It further increases the misogyny by changing her from negative *exemplum* into the desirable object of the bridal-quest, but nonetheless reveals the importance of navigating the protagonists' worth in relation to each other.

This drive to adjust the worth of the hero relative to the maiden-king can be seen more broadly in the subgenre. *Victors saga ok Blávus* likewise has a flawed protagonist: Victor is profligate, and the plot commences because of the prospect that 'rikít horfdi til eyzlu' (p.4) [the realm would turn to waste], necessitating Victor leaving. The narrative is more generally framed toward the development of the hero, as the maiden-king narrative forms only part of the exploits which develop him. The paralleling of the suitor and maiden-king is therefore less important, and equally the precise correction of Victor's flaw is not emphasised. The suffering at the hands of the maiden-king is not justified, but given some counterbalance. *Sigurðr of Sigurðar saga þögla* also has the narrative impetus to prove himself, although because of a perceived flaw, as he is mistaken for mute, and therefore 'virde kongr og adrir menn vt j fraa hann eitt fol þat er huorcki mundi faa mal ne minne' (p.98) [the king, and other men out from him, considered him a fool that could not manage speech nor memory]. The initial stages of his plot are unrelated to the maiden-king and wooing, instead detailing heroic exploits, forcing the protagonist to prove his worth before he can obtain the bride. Likewise, Nikulás, in *Nikulás saga leikara*,

is presented as initially flawed when he takes the rule: ‘og með þuý nichuläs kongur var ýngur og bernskur þä för hann enn med leykaraskap. og þötti landzmönnum þad miög j möte’ (p.67) [and given that King Nicholas was young and childish, then he still proceeded with his playing, and it seemed very wrong to the men of the land]. The meaning of *leikaraskapr* in this context appears to be a combination of actual magic and more general childishness and detachment from responsibility. Although this flaw prompts the main plot, as his advisor encourages him to take a wife, the narrative transforms his flaw into a positive, showing his use of intellect and magic to defeat his enemies, perhaps modelled as a male *Nítíða*. His nickname *leikari*, present throughout, therefore undergoes an implicit shift from an insult used by King Valdimar, focused on his childishness, to a marker of his skill and success, focused on his magic. Like Sigurðr, Nikulás has to prove his own virtue against a perception of fault.<sup>43</sup> Although not as closely linked to the *exempla* as *Clari saga*, the maiden-king romances clearly present characters who need to change or prove something. Whilst their relative merits, the moral in question, and the importance of the maiden-king are different from text to text, all the male protagonists are presented relative to their female adversaries, provoking reflection on their development and their value.

As we have seen before, *Nítíða saga* offers the most extreme refiguring of the maiden-king and suitor relationship, and likewise the text focuses on the valuation of suitors to support its ideological position. By focusing on the maiden-king, the text poses a narrative problem: with no initial male protagonist, there is no clear suitor. The audience is placed in the maiden-king role, considering suitors as they appear, and the text plays upon that uncertainty by presenting all suitors for consideration at once, in an extensive and detailed passage:

Hugon er kóngr nefndr; hann réð fyrir Miklagarði. Hann átti drottning og tvö börn. Son hans hét Ingi; hann var allra manna sæmilegastur og best að íþróttum búinn. Hann lá í hernaði hvert sumar og aflaði sér svo fjár og frægðar; drap ránsmenn og víkinga, en lét friðmenn fara í náðum. Lístalín hét dóttir hans; hún var fríð sýnum og vinsæl, og hlaðin kvenlegum listum.

---

<sup>43</sup> Loose parallels in the *exempla* collection include ‘Af riddara Romano’ (*Íslendzk Æventyri*, pp.11-16), whose strange behaviours are eventually explained as part of a secret penance, and ‘Af dauða húsfreyja ok bóndi’ (pp.151-153), where an ill and nearly dumb worker is mocked, but ends up in Heaven, while his beloved wife is revealed as sinful and seen in Hell.

Soldán hét kóngur; hann réð fyrir Serklandi. Hann átti þrjá sonu; hét einn Logi, annar Vélogi, þriðjungur Heiðarlogi—hann var þeirra elstur. Hann hafði svart hár og skegg. Hann var hökulangur og vangasvangur, skakktentur og skjöpulmyntur, og út-skeifr. Annað auga hans horfði á bast en annað á kvit. Hann var hermaður allmikil, og fullur upp af göldrum og gerningum og rammur að afli, og fékk sigur í hverri orrostu. Bræður hans, Logi og Vélogi, voru vænir og gildir menn og herjuðu öllum sumrum.

Blebarnius er kóngur nefndur; hann réð fyrir Indíalandi hinu mikla. Hann átti son er Liforinus hét; hann var væn að álitu, ljós og rjóður í andlitit snareygður sem valur, hrokkinhærður og fagurt hárið, herðabreiður en keikur á bringuna, kurteis, sterkur og stórmannlega. Hann kunni vel sund og sæfarar, skot og skylmingar, tafl og rúnar og bækur að lesa, og allir íþróttir er karlmann mátti prýða. Hann átti dóttur er Sýjalín hét; hún var svo væn og listug að hún mundi forprís þótt hafa allra kvenna í veröldunni, ef ei hafði þvílíkur gimsteinn hjá verið sem Nítíða hin fræga.

Liforinus lá í hernaði bæði vetur og sumar og aflaði sér fjár og frægðar, og þótti hinn mesti garpur og kappi, hvar sem hann fram kom, og hafði sigur í hverri orrostu. Hann var svo mikill til kvenna að engi hafði náðir fyrir honum, en enga kóngs dóttur hafði hann mánaði lengur. (p.126)

[There is a king named Hugon; he ruled over *Miklagarður*. He had a queen and two children. His son was called Ingi; he was the most honourable of all men and most capable of great feats. He spent time in raiding each summer and so accumulated for himself wealth and renown; he killed bandits and vikings, but let men of peace go in safety. His daughter was called Listalín; she was beautiful in appearance and popular, and endowed with womanly skills.

A king was called Soldán; he ruled over *Serkland*. He had three sons: one was called Logi, the second Vélogi, the third Heiðarlogi – he was their eldest. He had black hair and beard. He was long in the chin and thin in the cheek, crooked in teeth and uneven in mouth, and splayed-footed. One of his eyes turned one way, and his other another. He was a significant warrior and imbued with charms and sorceries and strong in might, and obtained victory in every battle. His brothers, Logi and Vélogi, were fine and valued men and raided all summers.

There is a king named Blebarnius; he ruled over the great *Indíaland*. He had a son who was called Liforinus; he was fine in appearance, light and red in countenance, keen-eyed as a falcon, curly-haired (with that hair fair), broad in the shoulder and bent backward in the chest, courteous, strong, and manly. He knew the sea well and sailing, shooting and swordplay, chess, and to read runes and books, and all deeds which might adorn men. He had a daughter who was called Sýjalín; she was so beautiful and elegant that she would have been the prize even if you had all the women in the world, if such a gemstone as Nítíða the famous had not been close at hand.

Liforinus spent time in raiding both winter and summer and accumulated for himself wealth and renown, and seemed the greatest hero and champion, wherever he advanced, and had victory in every battle. He was so popular with women that no-one had peace from him, and he had no king's daughter for longer than a month.

Although, as McDonald Werronen notes, alternative redactions rearrange this structure to reveal characters gradually, the text as we have it presents at once a series of parallels in a structured description, proceeding from king to land to main child to siblings, and in specific connections, as both Ingi and Liforinus ‘lá í hernaði’ and ‘aflaði sér fjár og frægðar’, and, while Heiðarlogi ‘fékk sigur í hverri orrostu’, Liforinus ‘hafði sigur í hverri orrostu’.<sup>44</sup> The replicated suitors conceal the future of the narrative, as there are multiple possibilities and no overt confirmation that Liforinus is the eventual husband; the text asks the audience to navigate these parallels to position the characters in relation to each other. For instance, markers indicate that Heiðarlogi and his brothers are not suitable: there are three of them, with generally indistinct identity, assisted by the repeated *logi* [fire] element of each name. Each brother represents a more extreme fire, indicating their destructive, caricatured nature, similar to the thieves in the *exemplum* ‘Af þrimr þjófum í Danmörk’, who are called Illr [Bad], Verr [Worse], and Verstr [Worst].<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Heiðarlogi is markedly a negative figure, with a catalogue of physical features contrasting with typical romance heroes (such as Ingi and Liforinus), and sorcerous attributes which link him to the role of the magical viking in other Icelandic texts (see Chapter Three, ‘The Opposition’).<sup>46</sup> These disruptions in conventional suitor descriptions allow the *logi* brothers to be discounted by audiences as inappropriate through recognition of generic signs.

Yet this leaves two suitors who must be distinguished, with little to part them. A more expansive physical description, and perhaps the nuance that he raids in winter as well, might hint at Liforinus’s superiority, and indeed McDonald Werronen provides an alternative, and valid, reading that likewise sees paralleling but suggests Liforinus is more obviously the suitor.<sup>47</sup> However, I argue for more ambiguity at this stage of the narrative; both characters are marked by superlative excellence, and Liforinus is associated with a flaw of philandering like that in *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, so that ‘engi hafði

---

<sup>44</sup> McDonald Werronen, *Popular Romance*, pp.31-32, and see more generally her chapter on ‘Manuscript Witnesses’, pp.25-59, for the alternate versions, mostly post-medieval.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Af þrimr þjófum í Danmörk’, *Íslendzk Æventyri*, pp.276-286.

<sup>46</sup> Alternatively, Barnes notes Heiðarlogi ‘typifies the sexually aggressive Saracen predator’, *Bookish Riddarasögur*, p.114.

<sup>47</sup> See McDonald Werronen, *Popular Romance in Iceland*, pp.137-140.

náðir fyrir honum' [no-one had peace from him], which echoes and subverts Ingi's peaceful approach to civilians, where he 'lét friðmenn fara í náðum' [let men of peace go in safety]. The replication of suitors provides a source of narrative tension, akin to a modern "whodunnit", so that, in the maiden-king's need, one last mystery is provided in the obscure description: 'Fer maður af drekanum og allur herliður gengur á land upp með fylktu liði. Hann var digur og hár svo að hans höfuð bar upp yfir allan herinn' (p.138) [A man goes from the dragon-ship, and all the army goes up to land with host arrayed. He was stout and tall so that his head carried up over all the army]. Liforinus is then unveiled as the correct suitor. This replicative structure asks the audience to compare and contrast, and pay attention to details. *Nítíða saga* questions what makes a good suitor by placing the audience in the measuring gaze of the maiden-king. The constant repositioning of female and male protagonists across the maiden-king texts demonstrates the adjustment of moral judgement on the characters' conduct.

### **Support Networks: The Secondary Characters**

However, as Liforinus's fellow suitors Ingi and Heiðarlogi reveal, the maiden-king and suitor do not exist in isolation. The central ideological struggle between maiden-king and suitor is often expanded to involve a range of other characters to compound or complicate the ethical message. In *Nítíða saga*. Logi, Vélogi, and Heiðarlogi are positioned as a homogeneous group of villains due to their names, indicating their inappropriateness as suitors to the maiden-king. The longer redaction of *Mágus saga jarls* employs the same. The servants of the monstrous suitor Príams are introduced: 'Hinn fremsti heitir Baldvini sterki, annar Baldvini frægi' (p.404) [the foremost is called Strong Baldvini, the second Renowned Baldvini]. The only separation between the two brothers is the nickname of each, both of which are also fairly conventional and non-descriptive. Each Baldvini is in turn sent against the protagonist Geirarður and killed, and it is at points unclear which Baldvini is which. They are marked as interchangeable and expendable in the hero's quest, as a means of opposing the virtuous suitor, Geirarður, against the monstrous forces of Príams. Elínborg, having rejected Geirarður, is shown how he is in fact the "correct" husband in contrast to her enemies. Other examples of this phenomenon of

conglomerating villains include Sigrgarðr's encounter with Hlégerðr's servants Kampi, Skeggi, Toppr (all names relating to hair) in *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, and Ingi's magical assistants in *Nítíða saga*, Refsteinn and Slægrefr, whose repeated *refr* [fox] element informs the audience of their nature as tricksters; the two magicians, although appearing in separate parts of the narrative, are functionally the same character. Although these examples contribute less to the navigation of gender and marriage, their common effect is to highlight the individuality and superiority of figures such as Sigrgarðr and Nítíða. The lack of individuality given to minor characters is exaggerated by *Sigrgarðs saga* in the sudden appearance of previously unmentioned uncles of Ingigerðr: 'hét hvártveggi Álfr' (p.147) [both were called Álfr]. The narrative focus is tapered to the main characters: in these texts, the audience is asked to pay most attention to the maiden-king and her suitors.

However, the conflict between the female and male figures often shapes the other characters substantially. Dínus's servants Nicius and Nicianus (introduced p.10, variably spelled) are marked as two characters filling one function, rather than individuals, by the blatant similarity of their names. When Philotemia's servants, Dasius and Dasianus (introduced p.17, likewise spelled variably), are introduced, they not only indicate the same lack of individuality in their equally similar names, but connect to the other pair, whose names they recall aurally (both pairs are introduced with the construction *annar þeira hét . . . annar . . .* [one of them was called . . . the other . . .]). The balance between Dínus and Philotemia, central to the text, affects their supporting characters, and this continues through the narrative, as Philotemia's repeated victories over Dínus are marked in microcosm by the victories of Dasius and Dasianus over Nicius and Nicianus. The audience is guided to position the four servants in constant relation to their superiors, their opposites, and, implicitly, the central struggle of the text.<sup>48</sup> The subtlest indication of this patterning of names to connect the figures in the maiden-king narrative is *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, although it is somewhat problematic. Sigrgarðr's foster-brothers (more on them in

---

<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, the middle redaction of *Dínus saga* first presents Philotemia's servants Patrix and Patrocianus (p.103), and only introduces Dínus's, Nínus and Moranus, when the other pair meet them (p.104). The tautness of their connection has not been preserved from the earlier version, either in the latter pair or across the two, although their narrative function remains identical; elsewhere, as we shall see, the middle redaction instead does *more* to connect its elements than our main text.

Chapter Three, ‘Relative Importance’) are called Högni and Sigmundur (p.103), and when they later, post-exile, appear to Sigrgarðr in disguise, they take names alliterating with their true identities, Hörðr *harðstjól* (p.122), and Stígandi (first introduced as Velstígandi at p.123, but the shortened version is used from p.125 onwards). When they marry the sisters of Ingigerðr, they are likewise paired with an alliterating match, Hildr and Signý (‘Fekk Högni Hildar en Sigmundur Signýjar’ (p.149) [Högni took Hildr, and Sigmundur Signý]). The network runs deeper, for, in the process of rescuing the maiden-king’s sisters and breaking her curse, each brother encounters their opposite, a troll brother of Hlégerðr, whose names form another pair alliterating with the others, Hjalmr and Skjöldr (introduced p.106, their weaponry names, like the other villains above, grouping them into a monstrous cluster). However, in an interesting inversion, Sigmundur/Stígandi encounters Hjalmr, and Högni/Hörðr encounters Skjöldr, which corresponds to the trolls’ previous attempts to marry the king’s daughters, where they tried to match against the alliteration; ‘Hjalmr bað Signýjar en Skjöldr bað Hildar’ (p.106) [Hjalmr asked for Signý and Skjöldr asked for Hildr] provides a discordant prefiguration of the neat final matches. *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* constructs a careful network whereby characters who alliterate belong together – characters, aliases, and matches – and those that disrupt that are in opposition. The single narrative problem is that, in contrast to this pattern, the “wrong woman” is rescued: Hildr is the sow guarded by Hjalmr and Signý the horse watched by Skjöldr – each woman is involved in a narrative showdown between neither her initial wooer nor her eventual husband. Maybe this is one final inversion to the network to some end, or possibly it is one of the assorted “continuity errors” we encounter in the *riddarasögur* (and which we shall encounter in later chapters); it is a frustrating loose end, but in some ways irrelevant.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, what concretely exists of the network is enough in itself: it creates three suitors (Sigrgarðr, Högni, Sigmundur), three women to be rescued and married (Ingigerðr, Hildr, Signý), and three enemies (Hlégerðr, Hjalmr, Skjöldr), connected through names. Like in *Dínus saga*, the central

---

<sup>49</sup> My personal “solution” is to assume the confusion occurred, either in composition or transmission, in the cursing of the women; Hildr and Signý are only associated with those particular animals in Hlégerðr’s initial pronouncement (p.107) and a theoretical emendation to swap the animals would instantly patch the hole.

conflict is replicated and shapes the natures of the secondary characters who inform it. All aspects of the text point towards the idea of rightful matches and marriages.

This reinforcement of marriage as the appropriate social and generic convention is evident through the use of such secondary characters. The proliferation of marriages in the *riddarasögur* has long been noted, with Schlauch commenting:

Not only the stalwart hero, but his faithful friends, must be provided with a wife apiece. This is why rescued princesses often appear in pairs or groups. In any case, the orthodox conclusion revolves itself into arithmetical pairing off of the chief characters<sup>50</sup>

This widespread marriage allocation can be seen broadly within the genre, and *Blómstrvalla saga* and the non-maiden-king portions of *Sigurðar saga þögla* act as examples of this replicative phenomenon, which cannot be fully examined here. However, within the boundaries of the maiden-king narrative, the “spare protagonists”, as they might be called, act within the structure as shadows of the main suitor and the maiden-king. For instance, in *Dínus saga drambláta*, both protagonists have forty companions, headed by a named character – Grammaton among Dínus’ men and Peticula (later in the text called Selicula) among Philotemia’s women. Each figure is marked as closest in station to the relative protagonist: Grammaton ‘gieck næst jungkiærunumm Dijnus, berande mesta magt yffer alla næst honum’ (p.9) [went closest to the young lord Dínus, carrying the greatest power over all closest to him]; Peticula is ‘hin fremsta þiönustu meij’ (p.28) [the foremost handmaiden]. The protagonists are used as the standard by which secondary marriages are judged. In *Victors saga*, Rosida, the character introduced to marry Blávus, is necessarily ‘allra kuenna friduzt þegar Fulgida leid’ (p.45) [the most handsome of all women, once Fulgida is discounted], while in *Gibbons saga*, Gibbon’s assistant Kolr, revealed in fact to be a prince called Pluto, is viewed as ‘þann stolltazsta riddara at eingi fanz jafn nema herra Gibbon’ (p.82) [the proudest knight, so that no equal can be found except Lord Gibbon]. Supporting characters, even in their own narrative arcs, point back to the central couple.

---

<sup>50</sup> Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, p.118.

An extreme example of this tendency to use other characters to magnify the contrast of protagonists is in *Dínus saga*, where the forty men and forty women are matched in the mould of their superiors:

nu tekur huor sem einn þeirra compäna ad skipta þessum vnnustum sijn áá, efftir huorz þeirra mekt og mann liere, ad jøfnu tignar bragde, so ad Grammaton tök ad sier Peticula, og þat næst huor ad ødrum (p.30)

[Now each of those companions as one begins to assign these lovers between them, following the splendour and comport of each, by equal station, so that Grammaton took Peticula for himself, and, after them, each the next one.]

An entire cast has essentially no narrative function other than to participate in the maiden-king plot, and reinforce the ideology of marriages of equal social status. To emphasise, the unifying phrase 'huor sem einn' recurs throughout the text. When Dínus awakes with magically-fuelled desire, Grammaton explains 'þessa sött heff eg feingid, med þui lijkre girnd og ædi, sem þier haffed aff ydur sagt' [I have received such an illness, with the same desire and longing as you have recounted of yourself] and subsequently the rest awaken and 'kiærer huor sem einn hid sama' (p.23) [each, as one, bewails in the same way]. Similarly, 'huør sem einn kastade knijffe og kiere' (p.26) [each, as one, casts away knife and cup] to look at the women, and, when Dínus leaves an enchanted tablet which forces onlookers to remove all clothes and dance incessantly, 'huorr sem ein iungfruin' (p.38) [each lady, as one] is affected. Even the rape which marks Dínus's final victory over Philotemia is equally participated in as 'vikur nu huor sem ein ad sinne vnnustu, skemtande sier med þeim alla þessa nött' (p.65) [now each, as one, turns to his beloved, amusing himself with them all this night]. *Clari saga*, like the exempla, employed overt temporal repetition, but *Dínus saga* extends the replication to characters, amplifying the effect of its conflict; the fate of all the men and women, and, perhaps metaphorically all men and women, is bound into the struggle of Dínus and Philotemia. The text's ultimate ideology of female punishment and submission is emphasised due to this connection between protagonists and their underlings.

Likewise, the ultimate endorsement of harmonious marriage in *Nítíða saga* is inscribed onto its supporting cast. Like its multiple suitors, the saga has multiple doubles of its central maiden-king, in the sisters of Ingi and Liforinus, Listalín and Sýjalín. Their presentation combines several of the methods of replication and connection already noted: the repeated element of *lín* in their names connects them, while Sýjalín is specifically positioned in relation to Nítíða: ‘hún mundi forprís þótt hafa allra kvenna í veröldunni, ef ei hafði þvílíkur gemsteinn hjá verið sem Nítíða hin fræga’ (p.126) [she would have seemed the prize of all women in the world if such a gemstone like Nítíða the renowned had not been near]. The description seems to be a direct borrowing from *Clari saga* in which Tecla ‘myndi þykja hið kurteista konungsbarn, ef engi hefði þvílíkur gimsteinn legið í annað skaut sem var Serena konungsdóttir’ (p.11) [would seem the most courteous child of a king, if there had not been such a gemstone as was Serena, king’s daughter, placed in another lap], which may be an intertextual reference to that story for a familiar audience.<sup>51</sup> If so, the effect foreshadows Sýjalín’s position as Nítíða’s companion, an important role which McDonald Werronen has explored the homosocial and potentially homosexual implications of, but which also has narrative implications for this discussion.<sup>52</sup> Listalín and Sýjalín are parallel, and this is emphasised as both welcome their “triumphant” brothers in possession of the maiden-king back home: ‘Frú Listalín og allur lýður gengur í móti kóngi og drotningu með allri mekt, heiður og veraldar prís’ [Lady Listalín and all the people go to meet the king and queen with all splendour, honour, and display of the world]; ‘kóngrs dóttir, Sýjalín gengur í móti sínum bróður og meykóngi, og allur Indíalands her með allri mekt’ (p.136) [the king’s daughter, Sýjalín, goes to meet her brother and the maiden-king, as do all the army of *Indíaland*, with all splendour]. Similarly, the maiden-king’s escape from *Miklagarðr* parallels her escape from *Indíaland*, with one important difference: ‘bregður hún einum steini yfir höfuð sér, þann hafði hún haft úr eygni Visio. Í þessu líður drottning upp úr höndum þeirra’ (p.130) [she waves a stone, the one she had taken from the island

---

<sup>51</sup> The specific legal meaning of *leggja í skaut* (which is dropped in *Nítíða saga*’s description) is explored by Hughes, ‘*Klári saga* as an Indigenous Romance’, p.140.

<sup>52</sup> See the chapter on ‘Women Helping Women, and Other Minor Characters’, pp.171-193, in McDonald Werronen, *Popular Romance in Iceland*.

*Visio*, over her head. At this, the queen flies up from their hands]; ‘Hún brá þa steininum upp yfir höfuð þeim báðum. Því næst líða þær báðar í loft upp svo að þær voru úr augsyn’ (p.136) [She waved the stone up over the heads of them both. After that, they both fly up into the air so that they were out of sight]. The assorted episodes, and the women involved, are marked as parallel, and yet, with no prior warning, the text includes Sýjalín in Nítíða’s escape. The selection of Sýjalín over Listalín reflects the fact that Nítíða will later select Liforinus over Ingi. The text positions its secondary heroines as a means of placing Nítíða within the teleology of her eventual marriage, which the entire text reflects before the event itself occurs.

As much as the supporting characters can be a reflection *of* the maiden-king and her suitor, they can equally reflect *on* those characters. Implicit commentary on the protagonists occurs through the connection and opposition of them to other characters. Liforinus surpasses Ingi because he, unlike the other, gives up on violence or trickery, while the morality of Geirarður in *Mágus saga jarls* is expressed through an exchange with a minor character:

Galifreyr mælti: “Hví skulum vér eigi taka drottningu með nauðung?”

Geirarður mælti: “Gert hefða eg, þá er konungur lifði, ef eg hefða það viljað, og var þá vasklegra, og aldrei hefir þú jafnilla talað.” (p.403)

[Galifreyr said: “Why shall we not take the queen with force?”

Geirarður said: “I would have acted when the king lived if I had wanted that, and then it was manlier. And you have never spoken as wickedly.”]

The Galifreyr figure vocalises the standard position for maiden-king suitors, and, by opposing it, Geirarður refigures and subverts the trope, expressing to the audience a stance against violent reprisal. Elínborg’s rejection of Geirarður is framed as unreasonable since Geirarður’s virtue has already been demonstrated. Conversely, in *Sigrarðs saga*, Sigrarður’s flaws are emphasised by opposition to his two doubles, Sigmundur/Stígandi and Högni/Hörður; when he attempts to kick the repentant maiden-king, it is they who restrain him and seemingly drug him to bring about the final reconciliation, while also manipulating Ingigerður to bring about the settlement. Their morality within the frame as foster-brothers

and pseudo-suitors reflects Sigrgarðr's imperfection (the morally superior foster-brother is a repeated trope we will be encountering in all of our chapters, which Kalinke has also explored).<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the most substantial contrast is in *Sigurðar saga þögla*, where Sigurðr's brothers initiate the maiden-king plot, unsuccessfully, but provide the groundwork for Sigurðr's success. Hálfðan and Vilhjálmr are presented as closer to paradigms than the initially silent Sigurðr, as the narrative initially follows their heroic exploits. The contrast of Hálfðan and Vilhjálmr is important in itself, and will be examined fully in Chapter Three, but as a pair, their role is to highlight Sigurðr's superiority. They embody standard heroic features, and Vilhjálmr in particular naturally fits the position of suitor; their failure as a result refigures the preconceptions about Sigurðr, who proves himself a better protagonist than they. The interactions between Sedentiana and Vilhjálmr also act as a moment of narrative reflection, because the wise Vilhjálmr hints towards the real retribution and requital to come later:

Satt muntu segja frv at ockr bræðrum mun hamingiu skortur til verða at hefna þessarar skemdar. enn þo kann vera at eigi se suo aldauda konglig kynfylgia at hun uili þola at sliç skemd se hefndalaus. og þess varir mik at þitt dramb og ofse uerde eigi minnar lægdur og forsmadr nockurn tijma. enn nu gasir hann hatt vm fram hofsemd alla (p.128)

[You must be speaking truly, lady, that us brothers will be lacking fortune so that this shame may be avenged, and yet it might be that the royal spirit of luck is not so utterly dead that it will allow for such shame to go unavenged. And I suspect that your pride and arrogance at some point will be laid and thrown as low as it now rushes high above all moderation.]

Like the antecedents of Tecla and Perus, Vilhjálmr performs the role of the secondary character who sees the story better than the lead, anticipating Sigurðr's victory. The two unsuccessful brothers act as a contrast to both Sigurðr, who will exceed them, and Sedentiana, whom they will prove to be wrong in her assumptions.

Even bad suitors form good material for commentary on the central duo, and this is particularly evident in the monstrous suitors like the *logi* brothers or Hjálmr and Skjöldr. In *Mágus saga jarls*, the

---

<sup>53</sup> See 'Fraternal Affinities' in Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp.156-202.

major contrast is between Geirarðr, the virtuous lordling, and his alternative Príams. Elínborg's refusal of the former prompts the consequences of the latter, for the text introduces him with 'Fyrir utan hafið hefir einn frægur konungur spurn til Elínborg, að hún stýrir Frakklandi, en ríkið höfðingjalaust' (pp.403-404) [Out across the sea, a renowned king has learnt of Elínborg, that she rules *Frakkland* and the realm without a chieftain]. Elínborg's lack of male ruler is marked as a fault which, like the requital structure of *Clari saga*, directly causes her punishment. Although Elínborg does not experience physical violation, unlike other maiden-king figures, the text clearly uses the idea of sexual misconduct as a chastisement for Elínborg's "haughtiness". Príams is described with a catalogue of negative and threatening features:

Hann heitir Príams, svo mikill og sterkur hermaður, að engi maður stóð við honum í öllu Afríka, bæði að illsku og frækleik. Hann stýrir Serklandi, heiðinn sem hundur. Hvern drepur hann kristinn mann, sem hann náir. Vinnur hann klaustur og kirkjur og vinnur öll óðáðaverk. Drottningar og konungadætur lætur hann leggja niður hjá sér viku og hálfan mánuð og svo lengi hverja sem honum fellst í þokka. Síðan sendir hann þær heim aftur, sumar með barni, en sumar with annarri háðung. Allar fóru þær brott með harmi nögum, því að engi vildi á hans vald hafa komið. Þykir öllum og nóg svívirða, þeim sem þeirra forráð eiga. Þykir honum sín frægð sem mest, að þær sýti sem flestar. (p.404)

[He is called Príams, such a large and strong warrior that no man stood against him in all *Afrika*, both in evil and valour. He rules *Serkland*, heathen as a hound. He kills each Christian man whom he obtains. He conquers cloisters and churches and performs all disgraceful acts. He has queens and daughters of kings lie with him for a week, or half a month, or as long as each was to his liking. Then he sends them back home, some with children, and some with other mockery. They all went away with sufficient pain, because no-one wanted to have come into his power. It also seems a sufficient disgrace to all those who had the management of them. His renown seems the greatest to him, the greatest number of them who mourn.]

The passage is dense with methods of alienation, including his geographical (and perhaps implicit racial) identity, his heathenism (more on such in Chapter Four, '(En)Countering Paganism'), and the detailed description of his treatment of women. The text clearly demonises and denigrates these actions, but the implicit result is a reflection on Elínborg; it is her rejection of Geirarðr which has left her vulnerable to this attack. The text posits that a maiden-king-like figure produces the prospect of her own rape; it provides a negative *exemplum* on female rule, and promotes marriage to a suitable and virtuous man. Príams in many ways gets more attention than either protagonist in this narrative, but the more that is

explicitly said about him, the more it reflects on them. Similar can be said for the *blámaðr* in *Nikulás saga leikara*. As we have seen, that text plays with tropes of the maiden-king genre, and the same can be said for the monstrous suitor, because, unlike elsewhere, he wins. Nikulás sees ‘ad þessi arme blámadur er kom j borgena til meykongsinz, og hefur heyllad hana suo ad hun ann honum med heýtre äst’ (p.113) [that this wretched *blámaðr* has come into the city to the maiden-king, and has bewitched her so that she loves him with passionate love]. There is no nuance to the ‘arme blámadur’, who undergoes the same demonisation on grounds of race and heathenism as Príams in *Mágus saga jarls*.<sup>54</sup> The *blámaðr* is more caricature than character, but he is significant in his position in the maiden-king corpus. When he is killed, and Justinus and the maiden-king are reunited, their narrative is not fulfilled by marriage, but their entry into cloisters (p.122). Although characters entering religious service are not infrequent in the *riddarasögur* (see Chapter Four, ‘Just Enough’), the disruption of the embedded bridal-quest here is unusual, and points toward a cultural attitude regarding virginity. The maiden-king is here blameless, but irredeemable within a romance context, now featuring as akin to women in the *exempla* who turn to God following sexual misconduct.<sup>55</sup> The *blámaðr* reflects the fulfilment of the threat of sexual violation which Príams promises, with both monstrous suitors used in relation to other versions of the maiden-king narrative to frame the women involved.

Although many of the villains in these texts are straightforwardly evil, the texts, like *Clari saga*, allow characters to swap to the “correct” side to reinforce the righteousness of that position. Álfr in *Ála flekks saga* first appears as an invading suitor with his brother Hugi, allowing the helpful Stutthéðinn (Áli in disguise) to prove his virtue and ability. However, when his brother is killed, Álfr retreats and later reappears as an ally to Þornbjörg and the sick Áli. The gathering of allies for the hero can even be a rhetorical device to highlight the maiden-king’s folly. For example, the maiden-king portion of *Gibbons*

---

<sup>54</sup> Similar to Heiðarlogi and his brothers, the *blámaðr* and his two brothers draw upon Germanic associations of the sorcerous or monstrous vikings: ‘þeýr voru grimmer og störer risar, sterker sem tröll. þeýr vöru aller fuller af gølldrum og giørnyngum’ (p.110) [they were ogres terrible and large, strong as trolls. They were all imbued with spells and enchantments].

<sup>55</sup> See for instance, ‘Af einni ekkju ok syni hennar’, *Íslendzk Æventyri*, pp.76-77, and ‘Af konu úgyptri er drap barn sitt’, pp.126-127.

*saga* could be viewed as the increasing isolation of Florentia and the strengthening of Greca: Greca possesses a developing cast of assistant characters – Kolr and the two dwarves Lepus and Asper – and claims Gibbon’s sister Feritra as an ally and companion. Meanwhile, she has Gibbon enlist her kinsman Alanus by use of a magic ring, and even Eskopart, who acts as the maiden-king’s champion (see Chapters Two and Three) renounces her as he dies:

syster minnar Gire vil ek at þú systir farer til Griklandz til Grecam ok Feritram ok ver her eigi leingr i navist vid meykonginn þviat hennar rad hedan af mvn allt sæta gabbi mvn hvn þat hafa af Gibbon sem henne er makligt en geym þess at þu ver herra trv j þessu mali (pp.56-57)

[My sister, Gira, I want for you, sister, to go to *Grikkland* to Greca and Feritra and be here no longer in proximity to the maiden-king, because her course from here on will completely be worthy of mockery. She will have such as is fitting for her from Gibbon. And make sure that you, lord, are true in this matter.]

Once more, a secondary character announces the requital which will come. Such a change in attitude from the maiden-king’s closest assistant is an overt condemnation of Florentia; Florentia loses both her defender and her companion Gíra. *Gibbons saga* uses the weight of secondary characters behind Greca (and, as a result, Gibbon) to emphasise its moral perspective against Florentia. The use of supporting characters as a mass of moveable pieces is an effective tool in putting the maiden-king in place; the reverse of *Gibbons saga* is *Nítíða saga*, in which Ingi and Liforinus enlist an assortment of characters – Refsteinn and Slægrefr, a dwarf, Liforinus’s aunt Alduria – and Nítíða can counter them on her own initiative, emphasising her superiority, although even there the ultimate goal of marriage requires the maiden-king to seek help eventually. Even if most texts are far from the small cast of the archetype *Clari saga*, their concern with balance and imbalance to propel the plot and adjust the audience perspective remains. Functionally, the characters can often be reduced to representing the two opposing sides of maiden-king and suitor.

As with all the aspects we have discussed, *Dínus saga drambláta* is the text most concerned with balancing its two sides, and its use of assistant characters is one of the most complicated facets of it. Philotemia and Dínus both enlist the services of a magical helper, Anachorita and Heremita, and the

obvious link between their names and religious isolation opens a broader discussion of the characters which deserves full analysis in Chapter Four, but their narrative balance in the maiden-king plot is essential. The plot bounces back and forth between Dínus and Philotemia's magical schemes, and their assistants undoing the respective spells. The balance between them is highlighted in the middle redaction, where each spell is undone by another object central to its casting, and a repeated phrase: 'medur eple mun eg það leysa sem med eple er bundid' (p.126) [that which is bound by an apple, I shall release with an apple], 'med drykk skal það leysa sem med dryck var bundid' (p.128) [that which was bound with a drink shall be released with a drink], and 'það skal med punge leysa sem med punge var bundid' (pp.134-135) [that which was bound with a pouch shall be released by a pouch]. The balance between the two sides is maintained, and while both characters are active, no true victor emerges. The text constructs a narrative rhythm from this back and forth, so that the audience anticipates a final change; the victory is ultimately marked when Heremita beats Anachorita by tricking the king Maximilianus, and subsequently confirmed when Heremita later reveals both his true identity (as a prince) and the captive Anachorita. This moment also turns the entire reflective structure of maiden-king narratives on its head, as Heremita reveals:

Nu giorda ek þessa hluti til þess at stöðva ok stilla þa hinu fulu rada giord er Anachorita giordi þa hann villdi ut hella margs manz blodi ok hræpa sua mörgum til heluitis en ek uillda helldr draga þetta allt saman til settar ok samþyckis sua dyrliga hofdingia j milli (p.91)

[Now I did these things for the purpose of halting and destroying the disgusting plans which Anachorita made when he wanted to spill out the blood of many men and so drive many to hell. And I rather wanted to pull all this together in settlement and agreement, between such noble chieftains.]

Rather than the assistants reflecting the central conflict of maiden-king versus suitor, the implication is that the prolonged battle between Dínus and Philotemia reflects a secret battle between a larger good and evil. Characters such as these show the powerful flexibility of replicative structuring. Supporting figures can be used to reinforce readings of the central figures of maiden-king and her suitor, such as the submission of women or the importance of marriage, or radically refigure them, by questioning

some of the preconceived judgements. The texts are not afraid to use the purely functional nature of characters as pieces in a puzzle, which the composers appear to have confidence the audiences can read to some degree as the narratives progress.

### **Event Management: The Structure**

The framework of a maiden-king narrative may seem simple, generally proceeding through wooing, failure, comeuppance, and eventual marriage, but even within this pattern, the use of episodes en route to the final goal can vary greatly in their employment. Even when Heremita in *Dínus saga* finally brings about his victory by terrifying Maximilianus into surrender and settlement, that one narrative event is stretched into a threefold structure. Maximilianus is thrice seemingly captured by a dragon and then shown a terrifying sight by a white-clothed figure. Echoing *Clari saga*, this dense repetition is evocative of punishment: the experience gets incrementally worse. The dragon ‘flijgur med hann bæde hætt og langt’ (p.77) [flies both high and far with him], then ‘flijgur med hann hálfu hærra enn fir’ (p.78) [flies higher by a half than before with him], and finally ‘flijgur med hann enn miklu hærra, enn nockurn tíjma fir’ (p.80) [flies again much higher with him than any time before]. Similarly, Maximilianus’s physical and emotional state is increasingly troubled by the higher flights, as initially he ‘öttadist hrædeliga mieg’ (p.77) [was terribly afraid], then ‘verdur köngur hræddur ad huor bein skiellfur af ötta’ [the king becomes terrified so that each bone shakes in fear], and eventually ‘liggr hann nu j övite’ (p.80) [he now lies unconscious]. The incessant repetition of his torment performs the torment itself in a way that a single occurrence could not, punishing opposition to the marriage in question. As in *Clari saga*, the repetitive structure itself is inseparable from the punishment and condemnation of its characters.

*Sigurðar saga þögla* employs the most extreme version of this evocative punishment for its maiden-king Sedentiana. She is bewitched by a magic ring into following the knight Amas (Sigurðr in disguise) into the wilderness for three successive days. There is similar signposting to that of *Clari saga* for overt repetition: ‘þarf og eigi langt um at gera ath þenna dag til kuelldz for suo sem enn fyrra dag’ (p.204) [not much needs to be made of it, in that it went that day until evening just like the previous

day]; ‘fara suo þenna dag sem hinn fyrra’ (p.207) [they so travel that day as the previous]. Each night, when a storm appears, Sedentiana encounters a different form of weak shelter – ‘eina litla hæð’ (p.201) [a little mound], ‘einn steinn stor’ (p.204) [a large stone], and a ‘eitt tre uel digurt’ (p.207) [a reasonably stout tree]. Each time, she gets less certain about her chances until she encounters increasingly monstrous figures: an ugly swineherd, a dwarf, and a giant. Each one insults her and forces her to sleep with them for warmth. The text’s grotesque voyeuristic participation in the repeated rape of Sedentiana is possibly more overtly misogynistic than even *Clari saga*, but clearly marks the rhetorical use of repetition; whether unpleasant or entertaining to a contemporary audience, it either way forces its ideology of female submission upon the reader. But this episode of *Sigurðar saga þögla* is only part of the punishment, because it connects to a later threefold structure when Sedentiana is hosting Sigurðr, Vilhjálmr, and Hálfðan (the latter two of whom she has spent three days humiliating in her own use of the model). Across three days, each of the phantasms from before appears in turn before her, announces their sexual claim on her, and attempts to capture her, getting increasingly close to doing so. The private violation of Sedentiana’s earlier punishment is matched by a public humiliation to complete her punishment. This point marks the definite conclusion of her requital, for her son with Sigurðr from those nights in question, Flóres, then arrives and brings about settlement. Sigurðr then acknowledges the conclusion of the maiden-king narrative *per se*: ‘Sigurdur sagdizt adur hafa gert moti hennar uili. “enn upp fra þessum tijma skal hun ollu rada ockar j millum. mun eg nu kennazt þess at eg er fadir þessa sueins Flores”’ (p.246) [Sigurðr said he had previously acted against her wishes, “but up from this time, she shall decide everything between us. Now I will acknowledge that I am the father of this boy Flores”]. Repayment has occurred to its fullest; the text has employed the tools of incessant repetition to convey punishment the character in the wrong “deserves”, a powerful, if unpleasant, rhetorical method.

These repeated structures of incremental amplification seek to emphasise a pre-existing point, but the maiden-king narratives also feature repetition which asks the audience to note something in the inevitable change. For instance, in *Victors saga ok Blávus*, Victor journeys twice to woo Fulgida and

is unsuccessful each time. Each journey is prefaced with a conversation between Victor and Blávus in which the latter advises the former against the journey, and Victor says ‘vilda ek fostbroder at þu færer med mier’ (p.34, and repeated with marginally different syntax at p.37) [I would like, foster-brother, for you to go with me], only to be refused. The subversion therefore occurs in the third instance, where Blávus tells the sorrowful Viktor: ‘ek skal fara heiman ok bidia hennar mier til handa’ [I shall go from here and ask for her for me], suggesting ‘munntu þa betur vid una ef vid erum einn veg leikner bader’ (p.40) [you will then be more content if we are both outplayed in one way]. Blávus and Viktor are connected as suitors on ‘einn veg’ and, in the three-part structure, Blávus succeeds where Viktor did not (aided by being Fulgida’s brother). The structure helps to elevate Blávus’s character and importance as a superior foster-brother and reveal Victor’s inadequacies without him. More substantially, *Nítíða saga* uses repetition, although not as neatly threefold, to engage in its central choice between Liforinus and Ingi. Ingi’s two attempts to kidnap the maiden-king are explicitly paralleled. His two helpers, Refsteinn and Slægrefur, are encountered in replicated scenes:

Það var eitt kveld að þeir lágu undir ey einni, þeir sjá mann einn ganga ofan af eyjunni, heldur mikinn og aldraðan. Kóngur spurði þenna mann að nafni. Hann kveðst Refsteinn heita. (p.128)

[It was one evening that they pulled up to an island; they see a man walking down from the island, rather large and elderly. The king asked that man for his name. He says he is called Refsteinn.]

eitt-hvert sinn síð um kveld leggur hann undir eitt nes, takandi stórt strandhögg. Þeir sjá mann ganga ofan af nesinu. Kóngur spyr þenna mann að nafni. Hann segist Slægrefur heita. (p.130)

[One time, late in the evening, he pulls up to a promontory, beginning a heavy raid of the coast. They see a man going down from the promontory. The king asks that man for his name. He says he is called Slægrefur.]

Similarly, his two kidnappings, after receiving the magic items needed, are parallel. First, Ingi, invisible, ‘gengur að meykóngi og steypir yfir hana kuflinum’ [goes to the maiden-king and throws the cloak over her], taking her to the ship, where ‘Vinda síðan segl og sigla í burt og leggja sín segl ei fyrr en í Miklagarði’

(p.128) [they subsequently pull the sails and sail away and do not lower their sails before they are in *Miklagarðr*]. The second time, once in the hall, he ‘hleypur að og steypir yfir hana svartir sveipu’ [rushes forward and throws the black hood over her], taking the maiden-king (in fact a bondswoman in disguise) to the ship, where ‘Vinda nú seglin og létta ei sinni ferð fyrr en þeir koma til Miklagarðs’ (p.130) [they now pull the sails and do not stop their journey before they come to *Miklagarðr*]. The direct repetitions indicate that Ingi has not learnt his lesson; in fact, his only change is to marry the “maiden-king” immediately the second time, ‘svo að meykóngur mátti eingin undarbrögð hafa’ (p.130) [so that the maiden-king could not have any escape]. The heavy irony of that statement adds to the narrative disapproval of and amusement at Ingi; this text shows that trying to win the maiden-king by force and trickery will not work. Therefore, when Liforinus repeats Ingi’s mistakes, by enlisting a dwarf and kidnapping the maiden-king by means of a ring that sticks to her neck, the lack of overt replicative language does not really matter; Liforinus, paralleled with Ingi, makes the same mistake, and similarly fails. The text is building towards its main reflection on this pair: Ingi will not change, while Liforinus does. Although Liforinus goes to the maiden-king in disguise, on the advice of his aunt, he ultimately does not resort to force, and switches to courtly engagement instead. There is a parallel between his first arrival, when Nítíða ‘setur hann í hásæti hjá’ (p.136) [places him in the high-seat nearby] only for him to pull the ring trick, and the eventual ‘Meykóngur setur Liforinus kóng i hásæti hjá sér’ [the maiden-king places King Liforinus in the high-seat by her] where instead ‘Byrjar Liforinus kóngur nú bonorð sitt við meykóng’ (p.140) [King Liforinus now begins his wooing for the maiden-king]. Liforinus marks himself as the better match, not merely because of the hints in his description or the role of his sister, but because the story shows him changing his approach from trickery and force to non-violence and respect. Like in *Sigurðar saga þögla*, the replicative structure is a microcosm of the overall ideology of the text, and an important means of conveying that viewpoint, even though the two texts occupy near opposite positions. While one amplifies the feeling of punishment to subordinate the woman, the other draws attention to a shifting perspective on the woman’s freedom, and both participate in a subgenre dependent on seeing things more than once.

Not all threefold structures have such strong significance, but marking them evidently formed an integral part of the tradition. For example, the middle redaction of *Dínus saga* has Patrix and Patrocianus journey on Philotemia's missions thrice (supplanting the nameless messengers of the older redaction in the third instance), and has them appear 'ellemoder' (p.104) [elderly], then 'midalldra' (p.117) [middle-aged], and finally 'vnger' (p.118) [young], a pattern that increases the pre-existing sense of rhythm and connectivity in *Dínus saga*. Similarly, *Gibbons saga* uses a repeated trope each time it displays Greca's intervention in Gibbon's life.<sup>56</sup> The first time, 'ser hann a einni lag standandi eina væna hind med fogrum augvm' (p.4) [he sees a fine hind with beautiful eyes standing on a log], and the magical deer appearance, which recalls Marie de France's *Guigemar* (see Chapter Two) is matched when, the second time, 'sier hann ein hiort vndarlíga storan og vænan' (p.18) [he sees a marvellously large and handsome hart]. The trope is a calling card of Greca and the magical world she represents, and each instance also marks the next phase of the narrative. Much later, the magical animal sighting appears in a bizarre form: 'Sia þeir fram vr skoginum hvar hleypr ein leona suo fogr ok frid at all dri lita þeir vænna dyr Litlo sidar sa þeir fram koma einn hiasa med storum eyrum ok klifir vpp a leonit suo sem med nockurum leik' (p.80) [They see where a lion rushed out from the woods, so beautiful and handsome that they never saw a more handsome beast. A little later, they saw a *hjassi* come forward with large ears, and it climbs up onto the lion like in some game].<sup>57</sup> This more fantastical episode recalls but exceeds the previous two scenes; why this scene is so much stranger is unclear, but it indicates the fondness for significant repetitions even over long texts. The frequency of the narrative structure allows Sigrgarðr in *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* to say 'en þrisvar hefir orðit allt forðum. Skal prófa til um sinn ef kostur er' (p.116) [and everything in olden times has happened three times. I shall test once more if there is an opportunity]; sure enough, in the third time in his case, Ingigerðr's trickery is revealed, and Sigrgarðr flees. Repeated structures are so woven into the maiden-king narratives (and *riddarasögur* in

---

<sup>56</sup> For more on Gibbon's passivity in his own bridal-quest narrative, see Kalinke's chapter on 'The Passive Protagonist' in *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp.109-155.

<sup>57</sup> The *hjassi* is only identified by its ears, making other identification difficult, although it also appears with minimal description in the *fornaldarsaga Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, in *Drei Lygisögur*, ed. Ake Lagerholm (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1927).

general) that a late text like *Sigrarðs saga frækna* can self-reflexively comment on what elsewhere is a means of commentary itself.

The seemingly self-aware nature of *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, which probably is a feature of being a later text in our corpus, provides the opportunity to consider the possibility of direct intertextuality with its predecessors. Sigrarðr's comment on threes follows his two nights of misfortune with falling asleep after drinking from a cup. The trope appears in both *Clari saga* and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, the latter being where *Sigrarðs saga* is traditionally associated with having derived it from:<sup>58</sup>

Og frú Serena biður Teclam gefa þeim svefnker; og þá tekur Tecla eina litlu kónnu og lætur í kerid og fær jungfrúnni. Og nú mælti frú Serena til herrans, eftir spyrjandi, hvort hann vill drekka fyrir eða síðar, en hann biður hana fyrri drekka, og hún gerir svo og drekkur af. Síðan lætur hún á kerid annan tíma, en herra Eskelvarð tekur við og drekkur; og þegar í stað fellur hann sofinn aftur í sængina. (*Clari saga*, p.32)

[And Lady Serena asks Tecla to give them a sleeping goblet. And then Tecla takes a little basin and dips the goblet in and delivers it to the lady. And now Lady Serena spoke to the lord, asking whether he wants to drink before or after, and he asks her to drink first and she does so, and drains it. Then she dips the goblet in a second time, and Lord Eskelvarð receives it and drinks. And immediately, he falls back into the bed, asleep.]

ok so sem hann hefer nidr lagzt. ber aulselian honum eina krus at drecka enn Wictor uildi eigi nema drottning drycki fyrri. þuiat hann grunadi at braugd mundi j vera. drottning villdi ok at Wicttor afhendi kistilinn goda huat er hann samþycker. sidan tok drottning krusina ok drack af. vid þui sa Wictor eigi at krwsin var med tuenum golfum ok var falslaus dryckur j þui at drottning drack af. enn þegar Wictor drack þa datt hann nidr sofinn (*Viktors saga ok Blávus*, p.36)

[And just as he has lain down, the cupbearer brings him a vessel to drink. But Victor did not want to drink unless the queen drank first, because he suspected that there must be some trick in it. The queen also wanted for Victor to hand over the good chest, whether or not he agrees. Then the queen took the vessel and drained it. Victor did not see that the vessel was possessed of two compartments and there was harmless drink in the one that the queen drank from. But as soon as Victor drank, he then fell down asleep.]

Jungfrúin var in blíðasta, ok tekr eina gullskál, ok spyr hvárt hann vill drekka fyrir eðr síðar, en hann bidr hana fyrir drekka. Hon gjörir svá, en áðr enn hon hafði af drukkit þá hafði Sigrarðr hallast at hægindum ok var þá svefn á honum (*Sigrarðs saga frækna*, p.114)

---

<sup>58</sup> See Einar Ól., 'Viktors saga ok Blávus: Sources and Characteristics'.

[The lady was most pleasant, and takes a golden cup, and asks whether he wants to drink before or after, and he asks her to drink first. She does so, but before she had drained it, then Sigrgarðr had inclined to the pillow and sleep was then upon him.]

The parallels between the description in *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* and that in *Clari saga* are too strong to be coincidental, and, although the transmission history is unclear, it is possible that the later text is drawing more on the older text than the intermediary for this, even though it uses *Victors saga ok Blávus* for other elements. If not, it might be mimicking the wording of a version of *Victors saga* which itself is mimicking *Clari saga*. Either way, it directly evokes a previous version in circulation, and this is significant for the function of the episode in that text. Although they are using the same scene, each text employs it differently: in *Clari saga*, it is part of a repeated frustration of Eskelvarð's (Clarus's) attempts to sleep with Serena, and the mystery as to what is causing his failure is part of the audience participation in that frustration. It requires the completion of the three-part structure, and the switching of Tecla's allegiance, to reveal that the goblet has a second compartment, and, once that is solved, Eskelvarð wins with Tecla's assistance. In contrast, *Victors saga ok Blávus* employs the scene not as a three-part structure itself, but part of one, in Victor's repeated journeys. The episode is condensed, revealing the information immediately, because the mystery is irrelevant; what matters is Fulgida defeating Victor, even though he suspects something. The episode is a victory for Fulgida where it is ultimately a loss for Serena, fitting for a more sympathetic text. The episode in *Sigrgarðs saga* appears a blind motif, and indeed is considered by its editors one of the 'poorly digested literary borrowings', because the cup is irrelevant.<sup>59</sup> The magic is caused by a pillow, and yet this appears to be very deliberate, particularly if the text is actively echoing *Clari saga*.<sup>60</sup> It signposts the trope to the familiar reader, and subverts their expectations; it relies upon recognition, something that, at the time of *Sigrgarðs saga*'s composition in the fifteenth century, it presumably could do. *Sigrgarðs saga* recaptures the ability of *Clari saga* to surprise, this time by creating a threefold structure where, rather

---

<sup>59</sup> Hall et al. in the introduction to '*Sigrgarðs saga frækna*', p.90.

<sup>60</sup> The *Tristan* analogue of the magic pillow is examined in a note in Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest*, p.75.

than a mystery, the audience is lulled into familiar conclusions before being shocked. Additionally, in a text that makes a wry comment about the threefold structure just before this moment, there is every chance it is intended to be comical. Each text is using this trope in a manner specific to its ideology, to the literary context of the maiden-king of the time, and contemporary audience familiarity.

The developing audience awareness of the maiden-king is best exemplified in a final trope, that of the maiden-king faced with the protagonist in disguise, a motif again with some direct intertextuality. At two extremes we have *Clari saga*, where Serena is tricked by “Eskelvarð”, and *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, where Ingigerðr nonchalantly tells “Jónas” (Sigrarðr) ‘haf góða nótt Sigrarð ok þökk fyrir góða gripi, ok fær mér slíka marga’ (p.121) [Good night, Sigrarðr, and thanks for fine treasures; give me many such] as she steals his magic carpet.<sup>61</sup> A useful bridge between these extremes is *Nítíða saga*, in which Liforinus, on Alduria’s advice, conceals himself as “Eskilvarðr” to infiltrate Nítíða’s court. Eventually, after a three-part charade involving a magic tablet which shows the world, Nítíða says: ‘legg af þér dularkufl þinn. Hinn fyrsta dag er þú komst kennda ég þig. Fær þú aftur gullið Alduria, því yður stendur það lítið lengur með það að fara’ (p.140) [give up your cloak of deception. I recognised you the first day when you arrived. Give Alduria the ring back, because it does not help you much to travel with it any longer].<sup>62</sup> By using the name Eskilvarðr, *Nítíða saga* associates Liforinus with the expectation of Clarus’s success, which provides the perfect ground for a complete surprise. Nítíða is proven, in keeping with the text, to be smarter than even the audience’s expectations, and Liforinus’s cunning disguise is transformed into the moment of his final defeat and acceptance of that. The failed disguise trope also appears in *Nikulás saga leikara*, where it is attached to Dorma, the non-maiden-king female protagonist, when Nikulás visits her as Þórir the merchant and she says: “eigi þurftu nikuläs kongur að diliast firer mier, þuyad firsta sinne, er eg þig leýt j høll fødur mýnz, þekta eg ydur ökiendann’ (pp.125-126) [you do not need, King Nikulás, to conceal yourself before me, because the first time when I saw you in my father’s hall, I recognised you in disguise]. Whether actively signposting *Nítíða saga* or not, it appears

---

<sup>61</sup> This scene which has its origins in the story of Jónatas, probably through *Victors saga ok Blávus*.

<sup>62</sup> The fascinating geopolitical implications of Nítíða’s game with Liforinus are explored in Barnes, *Bookish Riddarasögur*, pp.31-40.

that the text wishes to associate its heroine with some of the esteem of Nítíða's intellect. The text presents a woman who is an actively consenting part of her marriage match (Nikulás's possession of a magical stone to incite love is likewise a red herring, proving unnecessary). Although the actual maiden-king of *Nikulás saga leikara* suffers an unfortunate fate, the saga author has used the associations of the maiden-king to provide a new, intelligent woman who is nonetheless pragmatic about marriage. The composers of the texts interact with a constantly changing tradition, generally marking an increasingly clever and decreasingly negative female figure over time, particularly by the fifteenth century. Each text shapes itself and its episodes in a unique formulation, against the backdrop of texts that have come before.

The texts we have examined show a remarkable variety of approaches, yet they consistently use every aspect of a bridal-quest and maiden-king narrative to inscribe ideology. The methods of framing, particularly surrounding the role of maiden-king and the ensuing questions for gender roles and behaviour, can be eclectic, but all the texts we have examined are concerned with how to position that central woman and how to answer those questions. Mostly divorced from the didactic and moralising structures of the *exempla* which may have influenced them, these texts use replication, reflection, and connectivity between narrative elements to indicate to the audience their specific stances. In some of these methods, these *riddarasögur* even echo the approaches of *exempla* that may be totally unrelated to them, while the spectre of *Clari saga* haunts every subsequent text, invited or not. The texts in any case possess a distinct exemplary strand in the consideration of what it means to be a good or bad woman or man, and what value we can attach to people in match-making, marriage, and the struggles of the familiar bridal quest. Talk of value leads us, in the next chapter, to the social heights of the court, and the translated romances which lurk, not always as simply as expected, behind the insular *riddarasögur*, informing new reflections on what exactly is worthy of note.

## Chapter Two: Reconstructing Romance and the Value(s) of Knighthood

While the maiden-king of the last chapter is a figure specific to Iceland, the knight is the central figure of medieval romance, but the role has a somewhat paradoxical position in the corpus of *riddarasögur*. Despite the *riddari* [knight] purportedly defining the genre, the character type can equally seem inconsequential, given that our corpus can include anything from no knights at all in *Drauma-Jóns saga* to over fourteen central knights in *Ectors saga*, and entire military ranks of knights in *Adonias saga*. Even where a knightly protagonist is standard, the texts can sometimes be more easily distinguished by the miscellaneous other features, whether maiden-kings, monsters, or miracles. This variety is part of the perennial classification problem discussed in the Introduction, but it also seemingly exposes a clash between the associations we bring from knights of Continental romance and the characters in these texts. While the knight himself abounds, the wandering *knight errant* is almost entirely absent, and the Fair Unknown makes only limited appearances. There are bridal-quests across an assortment of texts, but more traditional quests rarely motivate narratives. Plenty of characters can be described as knightly or courtly, yet there is a general absence of direct references to chivalry. Given Iceland's geographical – and at this point chronological – detachment from the contexts of court and codes of chivalry which produced and shaped romance, it is unsurprising that the knight of Icelandic insular romance is an unfamiliar and uncertain figure. However, the relative *tabula rasa* provided by romance offered Icelandic composers opportunities to examine and evaluate the social prestige and entertainment quality of these figures. Fundamental to this reflective approach is the idea of moments of conflict, competition, and comparison which appear in a number of forms, from full-scale battle to games of chess. The range and scale of these methods are dynamic, and the latter part of the chapter will consider how the narrative elements of romance heritage are engaged with in a variety of texts. First, however, we must consider the romance foundations which construct the world of the insular *riddarasögur*, even as the texts themselves reshape those inherited features.

The Icelandic conception of chivalric heroes and exploits is dependent on the importation of romance through the so-called translated *riddarasögur*, yet the relationship is far from simple. This genre is even more nebulous than that of the insular corpus; Kalinke notes: ‘The designation is not exact because it embraces foreign works of diverse form, content, and language’.<sup>1</sup> Translated *riddarasögur* can include works deriving from French romances of Arthurian and quasi-Arthurian material such as the translations of Chrétien’s romances (*Ívens saga*, *Erex saga*, *Parcevals saga*) and Thomas’s *Tristan* (*Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*), from the *lais* of Marie de France and others (preserved as a Norwegian collection of *Strengleikar*), from French *chansons de geste* (including self-contained stories like *Elis saga ok Rósamundu* and cyclical compilations like *Karlamagnús saga*, itself deriving from Latin and Middle English sources in addition to French), and from pseudo-historiographical material of Britain (*Breta sögur*, a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*) and the Classical world (*Trójumanna saga* and *Alexanders saga*). Further inclusions or exclusions can also be made.<sup>2</sup> Historically in the scholarship, there was an oversimplified and problematic narrative that Norse romance started in the court of King Hákon of Norway. Supposedly, in 1226, Hákon started an organised and collective translation of romance with *Tristrams saga*, and these texts were then transmitted to Iceland, where they inspired further translations and ultimately the insular romance genre.<sup>3</sup> However, the translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia* predates Hákon, and was probably itself predated by the Prophecies of Merlin connected with it (which became the *Völuspá*-inspired poem *Merlínuspá*).<sup>4</sup> Christopher Sanders notes that *Bevens saga* (a translation of the Bevis of Hampton material) ‘does not immediately fall into any pattern that would immediately associate it with the Norwegian concept or

---

<sup>1</sup> Marianne E. Kalinke, *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest: the Matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1981), p.9.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Marianne Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) which includes all the texts I have directly mentioned; *Þiðreks saga* is notably not included, and we will tackle its problematic role in Chapter Three.

<sup>3</sup> This history of the genre has in part been maintained through the reliance upon Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), a pivotal early study which remains important in a sparse field, but is now outdated in many assumptions.

<sup>4</sup> See Stefanie Gropper, ‘*Breta sögur and Merlínuspá*’, *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus’ Realms*, ed. Kalinke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), pp.48-60.

with any literary policy that might be associated with King Hákon Hákonarson of Norway'.<sup>5</sup> Add to this the ultimate unreliability of the 1226 date of *Tristrams saga* (although the general attestation to the court of Hákon remains standard in criticism) and the *riddarasögur* are left with a distinctly unstable foundation in romance material.<sup>6</sup>

The instability of the translated corpus is exacerbated by a number of fundamental interpretative dilemmas which have divided criticism on the romances. Firstly, the analysis of so-called Norwegian texts has been challenged by recourse to the almost entirely Icelandic manuscript witnesses, producing two rough camps of scholarship: those arguing that the texts we have are Icelandic redactions substantially different to the original translations, and those who believe they can identify the translator's influence.<sup>7</sup> There are many nuances to this continuing debate and some texts, such as *Erex saga*, are seen more comfortably as Icelandic adaptations, but a by-product of these analyses is the developing implication that Icelandic redactions tend to increase parallelism.<sup>8</sup> A similar divide existed between those who argued the translations associated with Hákon are fundamentally didactic or exemplary, possibly tied to a royal agenda, and those who considered the romances as 'a literature of fantasy and escape intended to amuse and distract', as Kalinke has written.<sup>9</sup> However, more recent

---

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Sanders, 'Bever's saga in the Context of Old Norse Historical Prose', *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition*, eds. Fellows and Djordjević (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp.51-66, here p.66.

<sup>6</sup> See for example a relatively recent collection such as Kalinke's *The Arthur of the North* which demonstrates a range of modern conceptions of the translated *riddarasögur* and their relationship to Hákon's court.

<sup>7</sup> The debate can be focused around the assorted works of Marianne Kalinke and Geraldine Barnes; see, for example, Marianne Kalinke, *King Arthur North-by-Northwest* and 'Sources, Translation, Redaction, Manuscript Transmission', *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*, pp.22-47; Geraldine Barnes, 'The *riddarasögur* and Mediaeval Literature', *Medieval Scandinavia* 8 (1975), pp.140-158, 'The *Riddarasögur*: A Medieval Exercise in Translation', *Saga-Book* 19 (1977), pp.403-441, and 'Some Current Issues in *Riddarasögur* Research', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 104 (1989), pp.73-88.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, see Kalinke's analysis of *Erex saga* (as Jane Aza Kalinke), 'The Structure of the *Erex Saga*', *Scandinavian Studies* 42.3 (1970), pp.343-355, and Constance B. Heatt's consideration of *Karlamagnús saga*'s Icelandic redaction in 'The Redactor as Critic: an Analysis of the B-version of *Karlamagnús saga*', *Scandinavian Studies* 53.3 (1981), pp.302-319; the Icelandic Tristan text *Saga af Tristram ok Ýsoddar* has been the focus of reconsideration by Paul Schach in 'The *Saga af Tristram ok Ýsoddar*: Summary or Satire?', *Modern Language Quarterly* 21 (1960), pp.336-352 and '*Tristrams Saga Ok Ýsoddar* as Burlesque', *Scandinavian Studies* 59.1 (1987), pp.86-100.

<sup>9</sup> Barnes and Kalinke are similarly representative of this debate, as in Geraldine Barnes, 'Arthurian chivalry in Old Norse', *Arthurian Literature* VII, ed. Barber (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), pp.50-102 and 'The "Discourse of Counsel" and the "Translated" *Riddarasögur*', *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, eds. Quinn, Heslop, and Wills (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp.375-97; Kalinke, *Arthur North-by-Northwest*, p.45; see also Hans Jacob Orning, 'The Reception and Adaptation of Courtly Culture in Old Norse Society: Changing Conceptions of Hierarchy and Networks in Two Versions of *Tristrams saga*',

work has seen an increasing synthesis of these two aspects.<sup>10</sup> There is no simple binary, and the importance of this duality of edification and entertainment is also fundamental to the insular romances. As seen in Chapter One, fairly simple morals can shape a narrative in interesting and entertaining ways. A complicated heritage provides the groundwork for new interpretations of romance in the insular *riddarasögur*.

However nebulous an ingredient, the translated *riddarasögur* make an important contribution to the insular romances of Iceland, although this connection should not be overstated. Jónas Kristjánsson, when considering style, notes that there is ‘an unbroken line of development from the translated sagas to the original, from Norway to Iceland’, but influences from other directions must also be considered. As this thesis considers, the *riddarasögur* are products of assorted other literatures including the *exempla*, contemporary legendary material, religious material, and maybe even *Íslendingasögur*. These romances draw on a pool of concepts from romance, adapted in the various translations, and further processed through Icelandic narrative construction. As Bibire notes, ‘the Icelandic Secondary Romances not so much disregard the inherited narratives derived from Primary Romance, as break them up into their constituent motifs, which they then recombine according to their own morphological rules’.<sup>11</sup> In some places, borrowing is obvious, and we will spend some of this chapter considering these striking resemblances and references, although the aim is not to track sources and analogues in the insular *riddarasögur* as some commentators have already done.<sup>12</sup> More

---

*Friendship and Social Networks in Scandinavia, c. 1000-1800*, ed. Sigurðsson and Smaberg (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp.115-151, Stefka Georgieva Eriksen, ‘Popular culture and royal propaganda in Norway and Iceland in the 13th century’, *Collegium Medievale* 20 (2007), pp.99-135, and Paul Bibire, ‘From *Riddarasaga* to *Lygisaga*: The Norse Response to Romance’, *Les Sagas de Chevaliers: (Riddarasögur)*, ed. Boyer (Toulon: Acte de la Ve Conférence Internationale sur les Sagas, 1985), pp.55-74.

<sup>10</sup> See for instance, Carolyne Larrington, ‘The Translated Lais’, *The Arthur of the North*, pp.77-97, and the work of Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, including ‘Translating emotion: vocalisation and embodiment in *Yvain and Ívens saga*’, *Emotions in Medieval Arthurian Literature: Body, Mind, Voice*, eds. Brandsma, Larrington, and Saunders (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), pp.161-180, and *Emotion in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017); see also the more general idea of Norwegian ‘cultural capital’ as explored by Kevin Wanner in *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), in particular, ‘Snorri Abroad: Icelandic Exploitation of Cultural Capital’, pp.53-73.

<sup>11</sup> Bibire, ‘From *Riddarasaga* to *Lygisaga*’, p.68.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, see Margaret Schlauch, ‘The “Rémundar saga keisarasonar” as an Analogue of “Arthur of Little Britain”’, *Scandinavian Studies and Notes* 10 (1929), pp.189-202, and ‘Arthurian Material in some Late Icelandic Sagas’, *Bulletin bibliographique de la Société internationale arthurienne* 17 (1965), pp.87-91, Paul Schach, ‘Some

substantially, the insular *riddarasögur* adopt some basic components of knightly adventure and activity, and reconstruct them into new patterns and presentations. However, the reduction of plots to motifs does not render them meaningless. Although Barnes is right to note that ‘largely absent, for example, is the altruistic ideal which underlies the code of conduct in chivalric romance’, the reflective nature of the romances reveals a lot more beneath the surface than may appear.<sup>13</sup> Barnes’s comments elsewhere that ‘the *riddarasaga* hero has little sense of obligation beyond his own self-interest’ and ‘the ultimate aim in the *riddarasögur* is the acquisition, extension, and legitimization of power’ are simplifications in a dynamic world of judgements and considerations of what makes a hero worthy and worth reading about.<sup>14</sup>

The undefined nature and troubled transmission of the knight allows a space for competing ideas about value. Saga composers and compilers make use of replicative structures and networks linking the assorted romance heritages to figures with a range of virtues and vices. Entertaining and often overtly spectacular showpieces offer implicit commentary on what is interesting or inspiring, and the meticulously constructed patterns provide new ways of reading romance. We shall see how the words and worlds of foreign romance are used as signposts for readers, and how a specific chivalric symbol, such as the grateful lion, can be adapted to an Icelandic framework. Then, we shall explore how expansive the structuring of an Icelandic romance can be, through the example of *Ectors saga*, which uses conflict on a much larger scale. Subsequently, the findings from that text shall be applied to a range of romances from our corpus, considering the use of combat as a narrative tool. Finally, we will broaden our scope to other forms of conflict and competition, which construct the plots of these texts, and their knights, in efficient yet effective ways. The romances that draw most strongly on the chivalric

---

Observations on the Influence of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* on Old Icelandic Literature’, *Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, ed. Polomé (London: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp.81-129, and Frank Hugas, ‘*Blómstrvallasaga* and *Piðriks saga af Bern*’, *Scandinavian Studies* 46.2 (1973), pp.151-168.

<sup>13</sup> Geraldine Barnes, ‘*Rémundar saga keisarasonar*: Romance, Epic, and the Legend of Prester John’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 111.2 (2012), pp.208-223, here p.208.

<sup>14</sup> Geraldine Barnes ‘Romance in Iceland’, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.266-286, here p.268 and p.277.

aspects of romance are themselves competing to present their viewpoints and ideals through the construction of their knightly narratives.

### **Objects of Interest: The Inheritance of Romance**

Starting from the familiar world of Continental romance allows a reader certain access to the texts of the insular corpus; while distinct from that of the translated romances, the world of the insular romances is influenced by that of its predecessors. Although commentators have noted the sparsity of direct Arthurian material in the non-translated romances, *Sigurðar saga þögla* begins ‘A dogum Arturi hins fræga er ríed fyrir Bretlande’ (p.97) [In the days of Arturus the renowned who ruled over *Bretland*]. *Kirialax saga* similarly uses the figure Arthur as a marker of time period: ‘Á þessum tíma herjaði Artus kóngur af Bretlandi á Italiam ok vann undir sik alla norðrálfu heimsins’ (p.89) [In this time, King Artus of *Bretland* raided *Italia* and subjugated all the northern portion of the world under him].<sup>15</sup> Arthurian figures have no bearing on the plot of either, and the illustrious figure is transformed into a touchstone for the texts to position themselves in relation to; as Alenka Divjak notes, ‘In common with other Icelandic derivatives of romance, *Kirialax saga* cannot be closely linked with translated *riddara sögur*, as, in spite of exploiting some of their motifs, it uses them in an entirely different narrative context’.<sup>16</sup> Arthur is a historicised background feature. *Kirialax saga* draws on the Geoffrey of Monmouth material rather than anything resembling Chrétien; Arthur is one of a number of historical figures referenced, including Attila the Hun and Emperor Zeno. The presence of Arthur does not impact the characters, but represents a world that is filled with heroes and achievement, in which these narratives are placed. It is possible that similar positioning is deliberately toyed with in the opening to *Samsons saga fagra*: ‘ARTÚS hét konungur er réð fyrir Englandi. Hann var ríkur og fjölmennur og höfðingi mikill. Hann átti sér drottningu af dýrum ættum, sem honum vel sómdi. Hún hét Silvia, dóttir konungsins af Ungaríá’ (p.347) [A king who ruled over *England* was called Artús. He was powerful, with many followers, and a great

<sup>15</sup> See for instance Kalinke, *Arthur North-by-Northwest* and ‘Arthurian Echoes in Indigenous sagas’, *Arthur of the North*, pp.145-167.

<sup>16</sup> Alenka Divjak, *Studies in the Traditions of Kirialax saga* (Ljubljana: Institut Nove revije, zavod za humanistiko, 2009), p.53.

leader. He had a wife of good lineage, who suited him well. She was called Silvia, the daughter of the king of *Ungaria*]. The opening is an Arthurian red herring, as nothing distinguishes this Artús from the other until the name of his wife. If nothing else, this might point towards an understanding of Arthur as a commonplace “namedrop” (this text even ends with a brief reference to the actual Arthur). Arthur is thus little more than a flavour in the insular *riddarasögur*, and more a part of history than romance.

However, Arthur is only one part of romance as it was received in Iceland, and consequently is only a small part of the world the insular romance composers create. Charlemagne features in the backdrop of the longer redaction of *Mágus saga jarls*, where the redactor posits that the king of France ‘muni verið hafa sonarson Karlamagnús keisara’ (p.137) [must have been the grandson of emperor Karlamagnús].<sup>17</sup> This attribution, which the redactor notes as contentious, marks *Mágus saga*’s unique position in the insular corpus as a text with an inherited plot. The basic narrative originates from the “Four Sons of Aymon” or “Renaud de Montauban” *chansons de geste* material set in Charlemagne’s court, although, as Bibire notes, ‘that source is freely treated in the manner of Secondary Romance’.<sup>18</sup> Absent from the earlier short redaction, Charlemagne is rewritten into the narrative, although now at a distance from the events of the plot. Similarly, the longer redaction introduces Charlemagne and Roland into the expansive recollections of “Skeljakarl”, one of the mysterious guises of the eponymous Mágus, who regales the court of Emperor Karl (the text’s replacement for Charlemagne) with stories of the past. This addition is a clear attempt to canonise Charlemagne in historic legend, as the shorter version’s Mágus, in his guise as Víðförull, memorialises only Germanic heroes (see Chapter Three, ‘Changing Faces’). It follows the historicising trend of the Arthurian references, and reveals the compiler’s attempt both to slot this narrative into the historical world and to revalue Charlemagne as a significant figure of legend and a worthy backdrop to this narrative. The world reflects the reading and the tastes of the composer or redactor in question.

---

<sup>17</sup> Although the presence of figures such as Arthur, Charlemagne, Hector, Alexander, Judas Maccabeus, and David might suggest their collocation in the so-called “Nine Worthies” group, there is no evidence that such a collection is recognised in this corpus.

<sup>18</sup> Bibire, ‘From *Riddarasaga* to *Lygisaga*’, p.56.

Yet Arthur and Charlemagne are substantially dwarfed by the Classical world, which, in the context of Icelandic literary culture, can be viewed as a setting equally appropriate to romance, and perhaps more so. *Blómstrvalla saga* introduces an event happening ‘Í þann tíma sem Alexander Magnus hafði lagt undir sik alla veröldina, þá var hann svikinn í Babilonn af sjálfs síns eiginmönnum, sem segir í sögu hans’ (p.7) [In that time when Alexander Magnus had placed all the world under him, he was then betrayed in *Babilonn* by his own men, as it says in his story]. The direct reference to another text is relatively unusual in the insular *riddarasögur*, and emphasises that the make-up of the romance world is defined by the reading and, more importantly, valuation of the author; it is notable that a text so indebted to *Piðreks saga*, using the same characters and setting as part of it, would choose to reference *Alexanders saga*.<sup>19</sup> Alexander’s conquest is the perfect backdrop for a text about conquering opponents. Unlike the background nature of the previous references, Classical influence often plays an active part in establishing the world of the *riddarasögur*. The setting of *Adonias saga* descends directly from both Troy and Alexander:

Þá ríktu og þeir höfðingjar j Frigia er agætazter hafa verit j fyrra hluta heims sem var Priamus kongr j Tróia og syner hans. Enn Grickia ríki var auflugt miog og áttv þeir vid Tróio menn þá orostu. er mest hefer verit j verolldine. er Gricker vnnv Troivborg. og stod sv orosta .x. vetur, Enn so sem framm lida æfi og alldrar heimsins giordizt mikit umskipti, og minkadizt afl konganna. þar til er Alexandur höfzt og oflgadizt þa af nyv Grickia ríki. og þeir kongar er þadan eflduzt settuzt sidan j Siria (p.76)

[Also, those chieftains then ruled in *Frigia* who have been the greatest in the former parts of the world, being King Priamus in *Trója* and his sons. But *Grikkjaríki* was very powerful, and they had that battle with the *Trójumenn* which was the greatest in the world, when the *Grikkir* conquered *Trójuborg*. And that battle lasted for 10 winters. And just as the life and age of the world advances, a great change happened, and the might of the kings decreased, until Alexander emerged and then strengthened *Grikkjaríki* once more. And those kings who developed from there subsequently settled in *Siria*]

The detailed reference to the events has a number of effects, providing a chronology and historicity to this text’s fictional events, constructing a direct chain between the heroes of Troy, Alexander, and the

---

<sup>19</sup> See Hugus, ‘*Blómstrvallasaga* and *Piðriks saga af Bern*’, pp.151-168.

text's heroes, and, most importantly, creating value judgements. The Trojans are markedly paradigms of the historic world, and Alexander is a direct contrast to the increasing decline in leadership; by implication, the heroes of this text will provide a similar resurgence. In other texts, lineage is even more direct; *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, from the fourteenth or fifteenth century, begins by saying 'Saugu þessa byriar suo at fyrir Einglandi ried sa kongr er Rikardr het. hann var komin af ætt Eneas hins mikla af Troio' (p.5) [This story begins so, that the king who was called Ríkarðr ruled over *England*; he had come from the lineage of Eneas the Great of *Trója*]. Trojan descent is also fundamental to *Ectors saga*, which begins by referencing the fall of Troy and stating 'saga þessi hefzt af einum agiætum kongi huer af þeirra kynsmonnum' (p.81) [this story starts with a noble king, one of their descendants]. The composer, in concluding the text, claims to have 'hann fundit ij bokum meistara Gallteri samsetning Troiomanna sögu og þessa eftirfarandi' (p.185) [found it in Master Galterus's book, the compilation of *Trójumanna saga* and this following]. It is conceivable, although unlikely, that the final note is from a manuscript compiler, who genuinely found the text appended to *Trójumannasaga*; nonetheless, the text defines itself and its characters in relation to that text and tradition for the purposes of elevating both. Kalinke has argued that *Ectors saga* is an essentially Arthurian text in structure and content, using Classical elements outwardly, but this "Classical guise" is fundamental to the value judgements of the author.<sup>20</sup> The Classical world brings a historical association to the text which Arthur and Charlemagne clearly do not.

*Ectors saga* develops these associations through the choice of its protagonist's name. Unlike the maiden-kings considered in Chapter One, few of the protagonists of these texts have particularly symbolic names, but range from Germanic names like Sigurðr and Vilhjálmr to Latinate or Pseudo-Latinate names like Saulus, Kirjalax, and Adonias. Although Sigurðr and his foster-brother Randverr briefly adopt the names Amas and Amilonn, likely a reference to *Amis saga ok Amelius*, the names do not directly impact the meaning of that episode. However, the protagonist of *Ectors saga* is linked directly to the Trojan hero through his name, allowing the audience to project associations from that figure directly onto the hero. This connection is overt, as the Trojan Ector himself appears to Ector's

---

<sup>20</sup> Marianne Kalinke, 'Ectors saga: an Arthurian Pastiche in Classical Guise', *Arthuriana* 22.1 (2012), pp.64-90.

pregnant mother, stating ‘gef eg þat nafn þeim sueini er nu gengr þu med. glediandi þig med þeirri spaasögu ath hann mun aagiætaztur verda ath afli og yfirliti atgerui og öllum kongligum soma’ (p.81) [I give this name to that child whom you are now carrying, comforting you with that prophecy that he will become the most splendid in might and appearance, accomplishment and all kingly honour]. Comparing characters to Hector and other heroes is a recurrent feature, such as in *Gibbons saga*, in which the hero says of his companion: ‘var hann sva sterkr ok fimr at þo at Ector hinn agæsti ridarri son Priami kongs hefði nv lifat mvndi hann alldri meiri dad edr drenngskap synt hafa j sinni vorn’ (p.62) [he was so strong and nimble that even if Ector, the most noble knight, son of King Priamus, had lived now, he would never have shown greater honour or heroism in his resistance]. It is said of the hero in *Bærings saga* that ‘Engi var hans iamningi at hiarta pryði, nema Ektor, son Priami konvungs’ (p.122) [He had no equal in strength of heart except Ektor, son of King Priamus]. The association with Hector had cultural worth. Hector’s position as a specifically romance hero is evident from the list of associations in *Rémundar saga*: ‘Samson var hann líkur að afli, Salomon að viturleik, Absalon að fegurð, Ektor að riddaraskap; málsnilld hafði hann Aristotelis’ (p.234) [He was like Samson in strength, Salomon in wisdom, Absalon in beauty, Ektor in chivalry; he had Aristotle’s eloquence]. However indefinable *riddaraskapr* may be, and whether it maps onto conceptions of chivalry, it is clear that Ector is a model knight whose associations are sought to elevate a protagonist in romance. He is not the only paradigm, for *Mírmanns saga* instead says of its protagonist that ‘engi riddari hefir betri verið á Norðurlöndum fyrir utan Rollant, systurson Karlamagnús keisara’ (p.60) [there has been no better knight in the Northern lands except Rollant, Emperor Karlamagnús’s nephew], the only such use of Roland in the corpus. It is clear that authors and audiences selectively position their heroes through other literary figures, and simple words delineate how to rate the character before us, as equal or near-equal. In the case of Ector of *Ectors saga*, there is even some element of exceeding the association; at his birth, he is described as ‘þeim lijkaztur er het Alexanndur Parijs’ (p.83) [most like that one who was called Alexandur París], allowing Ector to absorb the physical prowess of one figure and the physical beauty of another. Similarly, at the conclusion of the text, the narrator says ‘þenna Ector ecki uantat hafa uit Alexandrum magnum’

(p.185) [that Ector was not lacking against Alexander Magnus], adding another association, and continuing the trend of pairing the Trojans with the Macedonian hero. The associative platform is set for characters to better the cultural models Continental romance literature had provided.

The objective value of heroes as a means of constructing a *riddarasaga* narrative is particularly evident in literal objects which accompany the characters. On a simple level, the objects reinforce the associative choices and value judgements already established in that particular text. For example, *Sigurðar saga þögla* presents a chess set and board which ‘hafdi att hinn frægi kongr Arturus’ (p.156) [the renowned King Arturus had owned], recalling the reference to Arthur at the beginning of the text. The item has little narrative relevance, given to Sigurðr and later given by him at the conclusion, but connects the Arthurian background with the ongoing narrative, and commodifies romance heritage: Arthur is an inherently valuable association. Similarly, just as Mírmann is paralleled with Roland, the sword he obtains is described thus: ‘hefir ekki betra sverð verið með Dýrumdala, sverði Rollands’ (p.27) [there has been no better sword alongside Dýrumdali, Rolland’s sword]. Unlike the tangential chess-set, the sword participates in Mírmann’s accomplishments, and further associates the character with the hero from *Karlamagnús saga*. Specific texts establish their own limited and recurrent pool of associations. The texts which favour Classical paradigms outfit their heroes with objects from the same tradition, with a particular fascination for the spectacle, commodity, and textuality of those items. Ector in *Ectors saga* is given armour which ‘bar hinn sterki Akillas. áá huerium markad var hęd himins og aull himintungl vottnin og hỏfinn med fiskum og allar þeirra natturur. stiornu gangr og oll dyra kynn og allar veralldligar natturur, suo sem segir ij Troiomanna sỏgu’ (p.86) [the strong Akillas carried, on which was drawn the expanse of the heaven and all the planets, the waters and the seas with fish and all their natures, the movement of stars and all manner of beasts and all worldly powers, as it says in *Trójumanna saga*]. This armour reinforces *Ectors saga*’s self-proclaimed connection with *Trójumanna saga* while broadening the range of associations its hero possesses. Vilhjálmr’s shield in *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* is even more heavily textual:

þar uar a skrifut saga Jasons hinns sterka faudr Agamenons Grickia kongs og hertuga Menelaus hins sterka sem atti Elenu stiornu og huersu hann sotti gullreyfir j Kolkoss og huersu þeir drapu Lamidon kong faudur Priamus kongs j Troio. þenna skiolld bar Ektor er beztur riddari hefer uerit. enn a raundinni utan um skiolldinn var saga Alexandurs Macedon er uann alla ueraulldina og huersu hann uar suikinn med eitri j Babilon. þenna skiolld bar burt af Troio Neoptulemus son Akillas hins sterka er Ektor drap. enn sidan feck hann Turnus sem drap Pallas son Enangris kongs af Syrlands er stærstur madur hefer verit (pp.16-17)

[On it was written the story of Jason the strong, father of Agamenon, *Grikkja*-king, and Warlord Menelaus the strong who married Elena the star, and how he sought the golden fleece in *Kolkoss* and how they killed King Lamidon, father of King Priamus in *Trója*. Ektor, who has been the best knight, carried that shield, and outside on the rim was the story of Alexandur the Macedon who conquered all the world, and how he was betrayed with poison in *Babilon*. Neoptulemus, son of Akillas the strong who killed Ektor, carried that shield away from *Trója*, and then he delivered it to Turnus who killed Pallas, son of King Enangris of *Syrland* who has been the largest of men.]

The object physically represents several narratives, including of Jason (from the start of *Trójumanna saga*) and Alexander, and covers the fate of the shield during and after Troy. Such moments of ekphrasis, however inessential to the narrative the item in question is, reveal careful positioning of these texts in relation to previous texts, events, and personalities.<sup>21</sup> These references also offer commentary on those features. As in *Blómstravalla saga*, Alexander's poisoning is given equal weight alongside his conquest, while, like in *Rémundar saga*, Hector's identity is as a paradigm of knighthood specifically; these prior heroes are not just referenced, but valued. Taking this textuality to a further level is *Kirialax saga*, in which the hero visits Troy among a number of destinations on his travels, with a particular focus on the tombs of the heroes involved, one of which proclaims: 'her hviler herra Ektor hin hæste kappi allz heims' (p.26) [here rests Ektor, the most elevated champion of all the world]. As Cook and Divjak have explored, this scene is inspired by *Alexanders saga*, where Alexander likewise visits Troy.<sup>22</sup> A striking addition to the scene is an acknowledgement of Alexander's involvement, as

<sup>21</sup> This ekphrasis clearly derives predominantly from the translated romances, but it is worth speculating on a confluence of traditions due to the prevalence of ekphrasis in Skaldic verse; see Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Stylistic and Generic Identifiers of the Old Norse Skaldic Ekphrasis', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007), pp.159-184.

<sup>22</sup> See Robert Cook, 'Kirialax saga: A Bookish Romance', *Les Sagas des Chevaliers*, pp.303-326 and Divjak, *Studies in the Traditions of Kirialax saga*.

‘þessi verk legsteinana hófdu latid hinu fyri kongar þeira ættmenn, Alexandr magnus ok sidan Iulius Cesar ok adrir keisarar heidnir’ (p.27) [the kings of old, their kinsmen, Alexandr magnus and Julius Cesar, along with other heathen emperors, had these tombstone projects ordered]. This episode compounds its textual inheritance, rewriting Alexander into the scene. The impression of literary and historical weight upon the narrative and characters of *Kirialax saga* is increased. The heroes of romance directly inherit and interact with the heirlooms of their textual predecessors, making simultaneous statements about their own prowess and that of the texts the authors have selected to reference.

The numerous intertextual references do not preclude a range of intratextual connections arising from these conceptual associations. For example, the use of Classical objects in the fourteenth-century *Saulus saga ok Nikanors* connects both the text to its predecessors, and the text’s characters to one another. The parallels between the two protagonists are inscribed in the heavily referential arming scenes each has. Saulus receives a mailcoat which ‘hafdi atta Eneas magr Priamus kongs og flutta med sier af Frigia þann tima sem hann flyde a Italam undan Grickium er þeir hófdu unnit Troioborg’ (p.17) [Eneas, kinsmen of King Priamus, had owned and carried with him from *Frigia* that time when he fled to *Italia* away from the *Grikkir* when they had conquered *Trójuborg*]; his opponent and later foster-brother Nikanor has a helmet which ‘hafdi attan Promenio hinn riki hertugi er uar med Alexandro þa er hann sigradi Darium Serkia kong’ (p.19) [Promenio, the powerful warlord who was with Alexander when he defeated Darius, *Serkia*-king, had owned]. The items are parallel, evoking the frequent collocation of Troy and Alexander, and each involves some degree of inherited narrative. If one character is elevated by an object of romance heritage, his equal must also be. This pattern is then replicated later in the saga. The most substantial ekphrasis in the text is the shield of Abel, which displays stories of various origins, including Biblical ones (see the introduction to Chapter Four), but also including one quarter devoted to the Trojan war, and another to Alexander.<sup>23</sup> Like the Troy visit of *Kirialax saga*, this moment derives from *Alexanders saga*, and the composer has added Alexander to

---

<sup>23</sup> For more on this instance of ekphrasis and others, see Geraldine Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2012), pp.82-96.

the shield. Abel is the foster-brother of Mattheus, the two comprising the major antagonists of the text, and the latter is likewise allocated an item of significance, a helmet which ‘hafdi attan hinn ríki Darius kongr’ (p.83) [the powerful King Darius had owned]. Compared to the substantial description of Abel’s shield, this item seems minor, but although the treatment and relative status of each item may vary, the text has carefully allotted each of the four central characters at least one reference to mark their importance. Among various warriors in the text, the characters of significance are highlighted by their relationship with culturally significant figures. Furthermore, this positioning may have greater significance, given that, while Saulus and Nikanor possess items relating to heroes Alexander and Eneas, Mattheus notably represents Alexander’s opponent Darius, while even Abel’s diverse shield takes an unusual Greek perspective on the Trojan conflict (‘huersu Agamenón Gríckia kongr og hans brædur leidde Grícki um hafit til Tyrklandz’ (p.78) [how Agamenón, *Grikkja*-king, and his brother led the *Grikkir* over the ocean to *Tyrkland*]); it also has a particular focus on the details of Alexander’s poisoning (‘huersu hinn illi drottinsuiki Antepater sueik konginn með þui eitri sem so uar sterkt at ecki hieilt a nema hrosshófur’ (p.80) [how the evil traitor Antepater betrayed the king with that poison which was so strong that nothing except a horse-hoof held it]). In addition to the narrative importance of these four characters, their roles as heroes and villains are demarcated through the employment of references to the heroes and villains of texts the author and presumably audience are familiar with.

Sometimes, however, the nature of this familiarity becomes unclear, and presents a challenge to understanding the intertextual object’s role in the narrative. *Samsons saga fagra* is a troublesome romance; it appears to have incorporated a short, pre-existing *fornaldarsaga* in the second half of the text (see Chapter Three, ‘Local Hero’). This relationship is further problematised by the centrality of a magical mantle to this section, which is analogous to that in *Möttuls saga*, a translation of the French *Lai du cort mantel*, in which a visitor to Arthur’s court brings a mantle which reveals the infidelity of all but one of the women there. *Samsons saga fagra* acknowledges this connection directly in its conclusion:

En skikkju þá góðu, sem Samson fagri átti, gaf hann frú Ingína. En löngu síðar var hún rænt af víkingi þeim, er Grímar hét. Bar hann hana vestur í Affricam. Ein rík frú öfundsjúk, er Elída hét, sendi hana í England Artús konungi, og rís þar af Skikkju saga. (p.401)

[And that good mantle, which Samson the fair owned, he gave to Lady Ingína. And long afterwards, it was stolen by that viking who was called Grímar. He carried it west into *Affrica*. A powerful, envious lady, who was called Elída, sent it into *England* to King Artús, and from that *Skikkju saga* arises]

It is presumed that 'Skikkju saga' refers to *Möttuls saga*, and that this passage is a simple connection between the two texts.<sup>24</sup> It is possible to read the introduction of the mantle as a drip-feed of information, gradually revealing its identity as the Arthurian object. The first reference is the charge to the thief Kvintalín to 'sækja þann guðvef, sem fjórar álfkonar hafa ofið um átján vetur' (p.380) [seek that finery which four elfwomen have woven across eighteen winters]. As Kalinke has noted, the weaving elf-women motif has currency in Norse romance literature, appearing in *Erex saga* and *Elis saga ok Rósamundu*.<sup>25</sup> It appears that *riddarasögur* developed an association between four weaving elf women and a cloak of romance, so it is likely the text is hinting at the Arthurian nature of the mantle from its first reference. *Samsons saga* gradually elaborates, first in the making of the 'skikkju með mörgum litum og náttúrum' (p.384) [mantle with many colours and powers] where its magic is first mentioned, before revealing 'Hún hafði margar nátturar. Hún birti fals kvenna, ef þær fölsuðu bændur sína, eða meyjja, sem ódyggilega höfðu heima setið, sem síðar mun satt verða' (p.390) [It had many powers. It revealed false women, if they betrayed their husbands, or maidens who had remained at home unchastely, as later will prove true]. Finally, this explanation is repeated with further specifics tying the object to the mantle of *Möttuls saga*: 'Hafði hún margar náttúrir. Hún birti fals kvenna, ef þær fölsuðu bændur sína, stytta svo á hverri sem hún hafði mót horft, þá hún lét leggja sig, og á sama hátt meyjjar falsaðar' (p.396) [It had many powers. It revealed false women; if they betrayed their husbands, it so shortened on each where she had turned when she let herself be slept with, and in the

<sup>24</sup> Rudolf Simek argues *Samsons saga fagra* derives from a Lancelot narrative, considering this passage 'obviously the addition of a later scribe', but this is not a common argument: Rudolf Simek, 'Lancelot in Iceland', *Les Sagas des Chevaliers*, pp.205-215, here p.208.

<sup>25</sup> Kalinke, *Arthur North-by-Northwest*, p.218.

same way despoiled maidens]. The text unfurls its relationship with its romance heritage across the length of the second half of the text. Kalinke dismisses the motif's role in the text as 'interesting but extraneous, a blind motif, inasmuch as it serves no particular purpose in the development of the narrative'.<sup>26</sup> Such a reading is understandable, given the chastity-tests are minimal and irrelevant in contrast to the intense voyeurism of *Möttuls saga* and the *Skikkjurímur* which derived from it.<sup>27</sup> However, given the importance of associative meaning and prestige to these romances, the intertextuality may be a fundamental part of this text's adjacency to Arthurian texts. Rewriting and expanding the story of the mantle provides worthy material in itself. If nothing else, it provides a rereading of the mantle in that, unlike the analogous texts, the spectacle is the cloak itself, and its literary heritage, and not the misogynistic trial of female chastity and fidelity. Objects in these texts are turned into commodities of significance and value, providing points of reference through which to understand the world of romance. They are seemingly objective benchmarks that in fact reveal a selective and subjective reading of romance texts in circulation.

Through the lens of insular romance, the items and individuals of romance heritage tend to crystallise into idealisations to a greater extent even than in the source material. The flaws of Alexander, Arthur, or Charlemagne in their texts can be elided, while heroes from both sides of the Trojan war can be used to signal renown without the complications of picking sides. The figures bring value, virtue, and significance to the new characters and events of these texts, with objects providing stand-ins for the characters without requiring the characters and the complications they bring. An exception to this is *Sigurðar saga þögla*, in which Flóres and Blankiflúr directly appear, albeit briefly:

J þann tíma red fyrir Fraclande saa kongr er Flores het. þessi kongr hafdi verit hinn frægazti og hinn aagiætazti er j Fraclandi hefir ríkt. hann var kyniadr utan af Pwl j fodrætt. enn modurkynn hans war allt komit fra frackaakonga hófðingium. fadir hans war Felix kongr af borg þeirre er AAples het. Hans drottning het Blanchiflur er uænne war huerre konu. hun

---

<sup>26</sup> Kalinke, *Arthur North-By-Northwest*, p.225.

<sup>27</sup> On the ideology of the translated mantle material, see Carolyne Larrington, 'Queens and Bodies: the Norwegian Translated Lais and Hákon IV's Kinswomen', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108.4 (2009), pp.506-527 and 'The Translated Lais', *The Arthur of the North*, pp.77-97.

hafdi werit flutt vt j Babilonn. og þangat hafdi Flores kongr sott hana med miklum æuintyrum sem segir j sögu hans (p.99-100)

[In that time, that king who was called Flóres ruled over *Frakkland*. This king had been the most renowned and the noblest who has ruled in *Frakkland*. He was descended from abroad, *Púl*, in his father's line, but his mother's lineage was entirely descended from the chieftains of the *Frakka*-kings. His father was King Felix of that city which is called *Áples*. His queen was called Blankiflúr, who was more beautiful than every woman. She had been carried out into *Babilonn*, and King Flóres had sought her there with great adventures, as it says in his story.]

With references to Arthur, Amis and Amilon, alongside Hector, Alexander, and Þiðrekr, *Sigurðar saga þögla* has a clear interest in tying itself to other romances, but the integration of *Flores saga ok Blankiflúr* is more substantial. The story of the pair generates the maiden-king narrative, as they enter religious seclusion and establish their daughter Sedentiana's rule. Barnes argues that their appearance in this text 'suggests that in later medieval Icelandic literature they were remembered more for their piety than for their romantic passion'.<sup>28</sup> However, an alternative, more secular reading is that Sedentiana's flawed rule as maiden-king is contrasted with the paradigms established by her idealised parents. In the misogynistic narrative of *Sigurðar saga*, Sedentiana represents a disruption of the paradigmatic world established by the romance predecessors, and it is significant that the son of Sedentiana and Sigurðr, who brings peace between his parents, is called Flóres after his grandfather, returning to the associations of success and prosperity. The rare presence of figures from previous romance texts contributes to the presentation of the insular romance's own characters. No other text does this, although it is interesting to speculate on the resonance of *Blómstrvalla saga's Rauði Riddari* [The Red Knight], the disguise of one of the two central brothers in the text. A red knight appears in *Parcevals saga*, where, as in Chrétien's romance, Parceval kills the rogue knight and claims his armour. The link to Parceval seemingly has little relevance directly, but, if considered as a symbol of the inherited romance narratives, there is evident purpose to this choice. Given that *Blómstrvalla saga* presents a world which competes for money and women, as we shall see later in this chapter, this representative

---

<sup>28</sup> Geraldine Barnes, 'Some Observations on *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*', *Scandinavian Studies* 49.1 (1977), pp.48-66, here p.63; also Barnes, 'On the Ending of *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*', *Saga-Book* 22.1 (1986), pp.69-73.

of romance heritage offers an out-of-place response more reminiscent of the Continental knight than his Icelandic equivalent: ‘en ek kom hér ekki til þess, at ríða út fyrir gull ok silfr né fagarar jungfrúr, heldr at prófa minn riddaraskap við þá sem hér byggja, er nú bera lof yfir allar þjóðir’ (p.15) [but I did not come here for the purpose of riding out for gold or silver or beautiful ladies, rather to test my chivalry against those who dwell here, who now bear the praise over all races]. This ideology is one later adopted by the remaining characters, who focus on tournaments and honour rather than acquisition and conquest; the injection of even the echo of a Chrétien knight appears to place judgement on the characters present and prompt a change in perspective. With a recurrent store of romance references indicating supreme achievement and virtue, the people of the insular *riddarasögur* must prove their place in this genre.

### **Lionising Knights: The Lion of Romance**

This framework of comparison can be traced in further detail through a specific motif, as the construction of people in these romances is subverted with the repeated introduction of a non-human figure: the so-called grateful lion. This motif, where a knight saves a lion who then accompanies and supports him, has notable heritage in Chrétien’s *Yvain* via *Ívens saga*, although continuing work on intriguing carving on a door in Valþjófsstaðir has undermined the strength of that connection; commentators have provided solid evidence for the “Germanic” circulation of the motif prior to the imported romances.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, as Kalinke notes, the scene of dragon fighting lion shows influence from *Þiðreks saga*, in the use of a flying dragon instead of a more serpentine creature.<sup>30</sup> However, the essential elements remain parallel and resonant with *Yvain*, although the meaning and function of the lion undergoes a series of translations from Chrétien. Claudia Bornholdt observes of the lion in *Ívens*

---

<sup>29</sup> See for instance Richard L. Harris, ‘The Lion-Knight Legend in Iceland and the Valþjófsstaðir Door’, *Viator* 1 (1970), pp.125-145 and Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, ‘Some Heroic Motifs in Icelandic Art’, *Scripta Islandica* 68 (2017), pp.11-49; the grateful lion also appears in Icelandic hagiographic texts, for which see Marianne Kalinke, ‘The Cowherd and the Saint: The Grateful Lion in Icelandic Folklore and Legend’, *Scandinavian Studies* 66 (1994), pp.1-22 and *The Book of Reykjaholar: The Last of the Great Medieval Legendaries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p.199.

<sup>30</sup> Kalinke, ‘Arthurian Echoes in Indigenous Icelandic Sagas’, pp.145-167.

*saga*: ‘Unlike in Chrétien’s romance, the religious symbolism is more or less lost in the *saga*’; she also notes the transformative description of the lion there as a *berserkr* to familiarise the lion as a warrior companion.<sup>31</sup> Barnes, on the contrary, sees the translated text as having crystallised the morality of the tale, so that ‘The significance of the lion in *Ívens saga* is, therefore, clearly articulated: the lion is God’s gift. Íven, by implication, is God’s knight’.<sup>32</sup> This dilemma of the Norse lion as either more overtly symbolic or less so has subsequent implications for the insular *riddarasögur*. Barnes suggests:

Despite the obvious familiarity with the legend on the part of writers of late medieval Icelandic romance, by the 14<sup>th</sup> century it has become little more than a “de rigeur” motif, either embedded in larger narrative themes, as in *Sigurðar saga þögla*, or, as in *Ectors saga*, appearing as merely an item in a series of deeds of derring-do.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, Kalinke says the motif’s ‘incorporation in the indigenous romances did not have a noticeable impact on their meaning; it was simply one more adventure encountered by the respective protagonists’.<sup>34</sup> In this approach, little has changed since Margaret Schlauch’s brief mention of the trope among “Imitations of French Romance”, who says of these texts:

the heroes are befriended by lions; this may be due to the influence of *Yvain*, or the general idea fostered by bestiaries that the lion is a noble animal and therefore worthy of consorting with a noble hero. In fact, both French romance and bestiary probably made the idea popular.<sup>35</sup>

Scholarship has remained reluctant to read much more into the lion’s appearances than novelty or convention. More helpful is Kalinke’s analysis of the motif in *Sigurðar saga þögla*: ‘The stereotypes of the knight as rescuer and of the grateful lion here become transformed into plastic characters’; this plasticity of approach in fact recurs throughout the corpus.<sup>36</sup> In each of the five texts of our corpus

---

<sup>31</sup> Claudia Bornholdt, ‘The Old Norse-Icelandic Transmissions of Chrétien de Troyes’s Romances: *Ívens Saga*, *Erex Saga*, *Parcevals saga* with *Valvens þáttr*’, *The Arthur of the North*, pp.98-122, here p.98.

<sup>32</sup> Geraldine Barnes, ‘The Lion-Knight Legend in Old Norse Romance’, *Die Romane von dem Ritter mit dem Löwen*, ed. von Ertzdorff (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), pp.383-399, here p.391.

<sup>33</sup> Barnes, ‘The Lion-Knight legend in Old Norse Romance’, p.399.

<sup>34</sup> Kalinke, ‘*Ectors saga*’, p.66.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934), p.167.

<sup>36</sup> Kalinke, *Arthur North-by-Northwest*, p.233.

which utilise the grateful lion episode (*Konráðs saga*, *Grega saga*, *Sigurðar saga þögla*, *Vilhjálmss saga sjóðs*, and *Ectors saga*), there is a dynamic and diverse application of the trope to the demands and designs of the text in question. Through them all, we can see how the lion of Chrétien is made thoroughly a part of Icelandic insular romance, and is thus subject to, and active in, replicative and reflective structures which add subtext to these texts. Even more so than the heirlooms of romance already discussed, this legacy of Continental and translated romance plays an active role in constructing the value and values of the knight of the Icelandic text.

The nobility of the lion is encoded in a common Icelandic term for the creature, *it óarga dyr* [the valiant/uncowardly beast], although the precise origin of this phrase is unclear. This periphrasis makes the lion a representative of a particularly heroic trait, and a rejection of the emasculating concept of *ergi* (encompassing cowardice and sexual deviance) familiar from native Icelandic literature.<sup>37</sup> The ability to read the lion as heroic, and as a double or stand-in for the hero, is clear from *Bærings saga*, despite the absence of the grateful lion episode. In the text, the villainous Heinrekr, having slain his lord only for the wife and son to escape, is troubled by a dream which he describes thus:

Mér þotti, sem éitt leo svimi i anni vpp imoti stravmi ok var komit iamfram Ertina borg. Þa kom imoti honvm einn mikill dreki, er niðr for at anni fyrir stravminvm, ok reð þegar a dyrit, ok bitvz leingi. En þvi nest þotti mer, sem drekin flyði vnðan, en dyrit eptir, ok hefði þat gloandi tenn, ok rifi drekann isvndr. Oll varþ ain ravð af bloði. En þvi nest hliop dyrit at mer a land vpp með gapanda mvnn ok at oss ollvm. Ok syndiz mer, sem þer rynnit fra mer, en leo rifi mig isvndr kvikan. (p.86)

[It seemed to me that a lion swam in the river, up against the current, and had come level with *Ertinaborg*. Then a large dragon came against it, which swam down to the river in front of the current, and immediately attacked the beast, and they bit each other for a long time. And after that it seemed to me that the dragon fled away, with the beast following, and it had blazing teeth, and tore the dragon apart. The river entirely ran with blood. And after that, the beast rushed up on the land to me, and to us all, with gaping teeth. And it appeared to me like you ran from me, and the lion tore me apart, alive.]

---

<sup>37</sup> On *ergi*, see David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp.244-245.

The opposition of lion and dragon, despite the many differences with the standard trope, is likely influenced by the “grateful lion” literature circulating in Iceland at the time. Implied audience familiarity with the trope is clear, because unlike many prophetic dreams in *riddarasögur* and other literature, this moment is not followed by a direct gloss. Instead, ‘Nu þorir engi at raða; en flestir venta, at hann mani hefnd fa fyrir sin rangendi’ (pp.86-87) [Now no-one dares to interpret; but most think that he will receive retribution for his wrongdoing]. The alignment of lion with the hero and dragon with villain is implicit, and the platform is set for the young Bæringr to become the knight the lion corresponds to. The explication of the dream is instead delayed to the conclusion of the narrative, and the fulfilment of Bæringr’s potential:

Hvgsar Heinrekr nc ðrom sinn, þan en ogvrliga, ok hefir nv kent a ser, at hann er rifinn af leoni, er konvngr er allra dyra; ecki dyr þorir vm hans fotspor at ganga eða or þeim ring, er hann dro hala sinn; sva er Bæringr yfir konvngr konvnga, at engi faðiz sa vm hans daga, er hann sigrade eigi. (p.122)

[Heinrekr now considers his dream, that terrifying one, and has now recognised in himself that he has been torn by a lion, which is king of all beasts; no beast dares to walk in its footsteps or from that ring which it drew with its tail. So Bæringr is king over kings, so that no person could be found in his days whom he did not defeat.]

The lion is mapped directly onto the achievements of the hero, and represents an idealised figure inextricably tied to the hero through metaphor. Far from being meaningless, the animal operates as a symbol of achievement for the knight, in just the same way as the figures and objects of legend. Even in this outlier text to the subgroup of grateful lion texts, the lion is more than merely a novelty; it is a means of reading the characters involved. The implicit idealisation of the lion and the parallelism between it and the knight is fundamental to reading the presence of the chivalric beast in these texts.

Consequently, the *riddarasögur* use the lion to indicate an atmosphere of accomplishment and renown. In *Konráðs saga*, the hero Konráðr, tricked by his foster-brother Roðbert into repeated trials, encounters the lion, and, following convention, saves it and shares its company for most of his adventure. Kalinke’s analysis of *Konráðs saga* focuses more on the interactions of Konráðr and Roðbert, implicitly relegating the lion to one of ‘a series of feats, each surpassing the other’, an understandable

reading given the importance of the interpersonal element, but it is vital not to read Konráðr's lion in isolation.<sup>38</sup> The saga uses the image of the lion repetitively and insistently to construct a world of adventure. Konráðr is associated with the lion through his shield, on which 'var skrifað hið óarga dyr' (p.303) [was inscribed the mighty lion], and one of his first challenges in *Miklagarðr* is to enter the city through a gate 'er varðveitir hið óarga dyr' (p.306) [which the mighty lion guards]. The importance of the animal is increased as Konráðr prays to 'almáttkan guð, að hann gefi mér sigur í móti þessu dýri, þann sama, er sér lét soma að veita kraft Davíð, er þá sat á smalabúfu, svo að hann reif kjafta hins óarga dýrs' (p.307) [Almighty God, that He may give me victory against this beast, that Same One, who allowed himself to be honoured in giving power to Davíð, when he sat in shepherding, so that he tore the jaw of the mighty lion]. The lion's pre-existing value is increased through the association of David's (and God's) triumph. So, when Konráðr later finds a dragon and 'sá það, að drekinn hafði undir sér dýr hið óarga' (p.316) [saw that the dragon had the mighty lion under itself], this is not merely the introduction of the circulating motif, but a development of the language and atmosphere of this particular text, in which the lion is a repeated sign of Konráðr's prowess. Konráðr's status as knight has been expressed, among other feats, by the heraldry of, defeat of, and now befriending of the lion. His later quest to seek a stone of great worth takes him through successive lands populated only by specific animals, including elephants and a land of snakes and toads, but the first is once more the domain of 'hin óörgu dyr' (p.316) [the mighty lions], as the lion remains a measure of Konráðr's progress. However, this moment allows the grateful lion itself to become the momentary focus, as Konráðr speaks to it when they encounter a new lion: 'Þú leó, er röskvastur er allra dýra, gakk nú fram sýn þig þessum hinum nýkomna' (p.319) [You, lion, who are boldest of all beasts, now advance; show yourself to this newcomer]. There is an element of humour as 'er hið komna dýr sér leó, nafna sinn, þá nemur hann stað og undrast, hví hann fygir einum manni' (p.319) [when the newly-arrived beast sees the lion, its namesake, then it comes to a halt and marvels why it follows a human]. This moment of replication contrasts the loyal,

---

<sup>38</sup> Marianne E. Kalinke, 'The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance', *Modern Language Review* 78 (1983), pp.850-861, here 861.

clever lion of Konráðr, who understands his master and is therefore somewhat anthropomorphised, with the wild, non-human beast. By the time Konráðr returns, references to lions, including his own, disappear, for they are no longer needed to mark his success. Animals, while undoubtedly an element of novelty in *Konráðs saga*, are also fundamental to navigating the chivalric world; the central knight, and even the grateful lion itself, must interact with icons of prestige to demonstrate their own nature.

Opportunity for the lion itself to prove its worth is a central element in several texts, and shows a repeated conceptualisation of the creature as a character and often hero in its own right. The most overt example of this is *Grega saga*. The text only exists in a small fragment which details the lion and dragon fight and one episode afterwards before breaking off. However, what we have of this text shows a marked focus on the prowess of the lion as distinct from its hero through use of a familiar replicative structure. The distinctly “characterised” version of the lion here is evident from the words Grega uses to address it: ‘felagi’ (p.203) [companion] and ‘fostri’ (p.204 and p.205) [fosterling/foster-brother]. The lion is no different from a range of foster-brothers adopted throughout the *riddarasögur* and other Icelandic literature. Consequently, the character is given its own narrative arc, albeit on a small scale. Upon coming to a nearly deserted village, Grega learns of three giants, who, over the course of three days, emerge from the nearby mountain with one of the three sons of a local farmer. The replicative nature of these events is marked through repetitive language: after the first time when ‘herdi Grega brest mikinn ok þar næst opnadiz fiallit’ (p.204) [Grega heard a great racket and after that the mountain opened], we are later told ‘þa var enn vidlika brest ok hinn fyra dag ok hældri meiri ok klofnadi enn fiallit’ (p.204) [then there was a similar racket to the previous day, and rather greater, and the mountain again split], and finally ‘vm daginn eftir vard hinn sami atburdr. at fiallit klofnadi ok nu miklu mest’ (p.205) [the day after, the same event happened that the mountain split, and now by far the most]. The familiar strategy of incrementally escalating the events is notable, both in the monsters’ entrance and in their appearance: the second is overtly ‘meirr ok fjandligri enn hinn’ (p.204) [larger and more monstrous than the other one]. The near-similes used for each monster, ‘einn mikinn jotun’ (p.204) [a large giant], ‘enn daligra troll’ (p.204) [the horrible troll], and ‘fiandligr diofull’ (p.205) [monstrous devil]

demonstrate a slight increase in monstrosity each time. This intensification impacts the presentation of the hero, in this case the lion, who is repeatedly sent by Grega against each new enemy. The lion's first two fights map onto the increasing stakes, as while, the first time, 'grimligir var þeirra at gangr ok ecki akafa langr' (p.204) [their assault was vicious, but not especially long], the next struggle is 'bædi hart og leingur en fyr' (p.205) [both intense and longer than before]; the prowess of the lion increases as a result. However, the text is concerned with more than just the lion's ability. In the third encounter, Grega asks the lion 'Huort villtu heldr i dag at fara med mer edr vera eptir' (p.205) [Would you rather go with me today or remain behind?], and the text employs narrative focalisation on Grega's perspective. At first, 'ser hann dyrit renna hart eptir ser' (p.205) [he sees the beast running intently after him], but as the giant approaches, 'varðr þat rætt sva at þat hliop i skoginn ok fal sik' [it becomes scared, so that it rushed into the forest and hid itself] to which Grega offers a brief regret. Grega and the audience reach one judgement of the lion's nature and personality, before 'sa Grega dyrit ok var þat þa at baki jotinum ok hellt fast eptir honum' (p.205) [Grega saw the beast, and it was behind the giant and pursued him firmly]: the lion fulfils the anticipated tripartite structure and shows its worth. The quality of the lion is established and judged through this repeated episode in the same way that any character would be. Unfortunately, the text breaks off before the end of this encounter, so the extent of the lion's virtue and accomplishments is unknown, but this small episode reveals how integrated the grateful lion is into the narrative structures and strategies of the insular *riddarasögur*.

The anthropomorphism of the lion is a striking feature throughout the corpus, as texts repeatedly slot the lion into narrative roles equally suited to human characters. Kalinke explores the increased intelligence and humanity of the lion, noting 'In *Sigurðar saga þögla* the lion becomes the companion *par excellence* and demonstrates that he is indeed the wisest of animals – as the author maintains his sources claim'.<sup>39</sup> As Kalinke indicates, this characterisation is enhanced by the distinct learnedness of the text's presentation. The piece of bestiary information attributed to 'Meistare Lucretius' (p.145) that the lion is born dead and subsequently resurrected by its father, and therefore

---

<sup>39</sup> Kalinke, *Arthur North-by-Northwest*, p.231.

‘merkir hann j þessu gud sialfan’ (p.145) [in this, it signifies God Himself], augments the romance associations of the lion: the animal is presented as spiritual and holy. However, the lion’s role in the text is as one of many companions to Sigurðr, who accrues multiple human foster-brothers, and it is helpful to read the lion in relation to them. When the men of Herburt, whom Sigurðr stays with, start a fight that ends with the death of the lion, Sigurðr learns of it and ‘uerdur uit þetta bæde hryggur og reidur og kallar aa sijna menn. bidur þaa taka sijn uopn og segiz uilia hefna sijns fylgiara’ (p.213) [becomes both upset and angry at this and calls to his men; he asks them to take his weapons, and he says he wants to avenge his follower]. In this moment, the lion is indistinguishable from any companion figure in medieval Icelandic literature, for whom vengeance is the natural progression. If the lion represents a ‘companion *par excellence*’, it is in some ways only a reflection of the paradigm of companions in this text, and a representation of the virtuous, and even holy, standard to which the heroes are held. When Herburt makes peace with Sigurðr and becomes yet another of his foster-brothers, it does not indicate the lion motif has been dispensed with, but that the companion has been replaced with an equivalent. This combination of the motif of romance and the narrative motivation of feud marks the thorough interweaving of elements within the insular *riddarasögur*.

This trend is further evident in *Vilhjálmssaga sjóðs*, where the memorialisation of the lion, who dies in battle, is even more extensive. Its emotive impact on Vilhjálmr is stated without any apparent irony, as first ‘bra Vilhialmur suo at hann fiell j outh’ [Vilhjálmr reacted in such a way that he fell unconscious], before announcing ‘suo mikinn skada hefi ek nu fengit at eg mun alldri bætur bida’ (p.117) [I have received such great loss than I will never get a remedy]. The specific resonance of ‘bætur’ [remedy/compensation] in an Icelandic context is worth noting, and the narrative treats the lion’s death as that of a person: a tomb is constructed on which the identity of the lion is written, and Vilhjálmr even follows the trend of naming his son after a deceased person close to him, announcing:

eigi mun ek þeim gleyma sem mier hefer bezt uid ordit og þui skal hann Leo heita. og þar med gef ek honum þat riki sem ek a j Saxlandi. og ef hann likizt nafni þiki mier uon at hann muni afla sier ei minna rikis (p.128)

[I will not forget the one who has proved best to me, and therefore he shall be called Leo. And with that, I give him that realm which I own in *Saxland*, and if he resembles the name, it seems likely to me that he will accrue no smaller a realm for himself]

The lion is more than just a distilled metaphor for idealised chivalry or holiness, but, within the Icelandic narratives, the animal represents a strikingly human element. Its anthropomorphism reflects the Icelandic society's processing of the values of romance, in which vengeance and honour can find a definite place, and the metaphoric relation of knight to lion from Chrétien is reconstructed as a relationship between people. The lion's identity as a paradigm is intricately tied to its narrative positioning as more than just a plot point or pet; at points it is the emotional focus of the text.

*Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* is not, however, blind to the metaphoric potential of the lion, and its death is used to contribute to a central theme in this text: bravery and cowardice. The humanising tributes to the lion are juxtaposed with more symbolic treatment, as Vilhjálmr makes a cloak from the lion's fur. He also cuts its heart out and feeds it to Sjóðr, a local coward, who subsequently becomes brave. The lion becomes symbolically tied to the idea of transformation: Sjóðr is turned from a defective hero ('hann var mikill og sterkr og vel buinn at jþrottum. enn suo uar hann hugblaudur at hann þordi eigi mannsblod at sea' (p.95) [he was large and strong and well equipped with skills. But he was so cowardly that he did not dare to look at human blood]) into the hero he is supposed to be. This transformation is prefigured as Vilhjálmr adopts Sjóðr's identity earlier. Sjóðr meets Vilhjálmr, and asks his name, the latter responding 'Siodur heiti ek' (p.100) [I am called Sjóðr]; the text now playfully opposes 'Heimasiodur' [Local-Sjóðr] and 'Nyisiodur' [New-Sjóðr]. A conceptual association is created between the two characters, increased as Vilhjálmr subsequently takes Sjóðr's place in the battle so that 'undrazt aller huersu Siodur uar akafaur. þuiat landzmenn hugdu at hinn same væri' (p.101) [all marvelled at how enthusiastic Sjóðr was, because the countrymen thought that it was the same one]. The men of "Sjóðr" are dressed in 'grænum guduef og a markad leo med gull' (p.101) [green finery, with a lion marked on in gold], emphasising how real heroism is embodied in that animal. Vilhjálmr, under the symbol of the lion, creates a corrected version of Sjóðr to demonstrate courage in its purest form. This

transformation is then confirmed when the real Sjóðr consumes the lion's heart and becomes the heroic character which has become associated with his name. This metamorphosis of coward into hero reinforces the lion's continued function as a symbol of the chivalric and noble ideals of romance, even when it appears in bizarre places.

In all the texts mentioned, the lion contributes to the atmosphere and ethos of the particular narrative, and shows that the originally Continental model has become insular in presentation, slotted neatly into replicative patterns. Throughout, it acts as an implicit reflection on the other characters and relevant themes. *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* shows the culmination of this hybridisation; the narrative and symbolic potential of the grateful lion motif is more than mere entertainment, uniting the resonance of the lion as a stand-in for paradigmatic chivalry and heroism with the emotive anthropomorphism of the animal-become-character. The only text in which the grateful lion can be considered as merely one of a series of motifs and tropes in a larger whole is *Ectors saga*, and, as we shall now see, even this is rhetorical, merely in a different way. As we move from the more overt inheritance of romance, in the names, objects, and even animals of foreign and then translated romance, to the nuts and bolts of romance material, these questions of worth and self-reflection continually recur, and are addressed with mathematical and almost mechanical precision.

### **By the Numbers: *Ectors Saga* and the Shape of Chivalric Adventure**

*Ectors saga* is a remarkable text, despite no evidence that the work was particularly influential or trendsetting. There has been some recognition of *Ectors saga* as an outlier in the *riddarasögur*, partly for its unusual "frame narrative" approach, in which the individual exploits of seven knights are followed before their reunion. This structure been dubiously called 'the sole Icelandic expression of the medieval frame narrative', but this is an overstatement as many Icelandic texts use embedded narratives of some form, even if not to the same extent.<sup>40</sup> Many *riddarasögur* incorporate smaller narratives, flashbacks,

---

<sup>40</sup> 'Ectors saga', *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Pulsiano et al. (London: Garland, 1993), p.147; *Gylfaginning* is an apt example of narratives within narratives, in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, second edition (London: Viking Society for Northern Research), 2005.

or digressions, including *Sigurðar saga þögla*, in which we return to Sigurðr's upbringing after following his brothers, and a range of texts in which disguised characters reveal their past, including *Blómstrvalla saga*, *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, and *Þjalar-Jóns saga* (see Chapter Three, 'Relative Importance' and 'Changing Faces'). Nor is it helpful to view *Ectors saga* as a series of unconnected stories, for the interrelationship of the episodes prove fundamental to the text's representation of prestige and valour. Additionally, Kalinke has drawn attention to the text's unusual narrative motivation of adventure for adventure's sake; she writes that '[t]he saga adopts the narrative structure of such romances as *Ívens saga* and *Erex saga*: the protagonist sets out in search of adventure and vanquishes a series of opponents', elsewhere arguing '[w]ithout containing even one character associated with Arthurian literature, *Ectors saga* is nonetheless Arthurian in its plot, structure, characterization, and motivation'.<sup>41</sup> Those central knightly attributes are certainly related to the pseudo-Arthurian motivation of the characters, but an over-reading of the text in light of its translated and Continental model risks undermining the goals of other *riddarasögur*. *Ectors saga* is not the only Icelandic romance which is concerned with demonstrating the hero's ability to leave their home and return having delivered on their implicit promise as a character. By making adventure the motivation of the characters, enacted in their literal promise to seek adventure, the text places the focus on what is a recurrent concern of the genre: proving character(s). *Ectors saga* represents less of an exception than an extreme and exaggerated form of the insular romance. Indeed, *Ectors saga* is a thoroughly exaggerated text, in which adventures and adventurers proliferate, but it is also one of the most carefully constructed texts of the *riddarasögur*, with a precise use of replicative strategies to offer readers a perspective on this knightly world. An examination of *Ectors saga*, in which the workings of Icelandic chivalric narratives are made overt, will provide a platform to consider the wide array of concerns and conflicts within the other texts.

The transformation of the central hero figure in *Ectors saga* into a coterie of seven knights is unusual in scope more than nature. The tendency for protagonists to be doubled in some way has been

---

<sup>41</sup> Marianne Kalinke, 'Scribe, Redactor, Author: The Emergence and Evolution of Icelandic Romance', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 8 (2012), pp.171-198, p.195 and '*Ectors saga*', p.67.

a recurrent feature in our analysis of the *riddarasögur*, with foster-brothers or followers often participating in or commenting on the narrative of the hero. The handling of these increased numbers is precise, starting from their introduction, as Ector holds a tournament to find worthy followers:

NU skal segia fra þeim er þa voru brudugastir og bestir riddarar. þar uoru brædur .ij. synir kongs af Armenia og vier nefndum fyr ij þessari sögu Aprival og Trancival. þridi het Alanus .iiij. Fenacius .u. Florencius .uj. Vernacius (p.87)

[Now we must speak of those who were then the most impressive and best knights. There were two brothers, sons of the king of *Armenia*, and we named them before in this story: Aprival and Trancival. The third was called Alanus, the 4<sup>th</sup> Fenacius, the 5<sup>th</sup> Florencius, the 6<sup>th</sup> Vernacius]

The employment of numbers in-text emphasises the importance of placing these knights in order; the text is not just introducing these characters, but ranking them, from most accomplished to least. This hierarchy plays out across the first part of the text, as the adventures of the knights observe this ranking: ‘skulum ver fyrst segia fra þeim er minnzt hattadur er reiknadr er Vernacius het’ (p.91) [we shall first speak of the one who was considered the lowest in station, who was called Vernacius]. The order is followed up to Ector. From their introduction, the knights are positioned by worth, with the narrative structured accordingly. The heroes are contrasted both with the nameless multitude whom they exceed and with each other. Ector establishes his worth from this early stage; as Divjak notes: ‘in *Ectors saga* the tournament helps to establish a hierarchy among the recently knighted princes and proves that Ector is a more accomplished horseman than his six companions’.<sup>42</sup> The narrative achieves this by reinforcing a direct, and mostly fixed, “line of succession”; Ector, entering the tournament, first defeats Vernacius, then Fenacius, Florencius, Alanus, Trancival, and finally Aprival. Notably, the two alliterating knights, Fenacius and Florencius, have swapped places, and this is another of the seeming “continuity errors” we have encountered previously in our corpus; it is impossible to know if this marks a mistake in composition or in transmission (understandable given the relative similarity of their overtly Latinate names), or represents an intentional disruption. As it affects the lower-ranked knights, it does not

---

<sup>42</sup> Divjak, *Studies in Kirialax Saga*, p.77.

particularly matter, as they are clearly intended as less distinct characters than higher up the hierarchy, and so their interchangeability may even be highlighted here. The Armenian brothers Aprival and Trancival, closest to Ector in accomplishment, are introduced more fully as characters, with a father, relationship with each other, and homeland. As we shall see, the hierarchy is so thoroughly encoded into the workings of this narrative that the occasional anomaly does not obscure its existence.

The narrative applies this process of ranking to the composition of the individual episodes. The stories of the first three knights are markedly similar. Each begins with the knight riding through forest: ‘þröngvann skog’ (p.92) [dense forest]; ‘einn skog mikinn og þraunguann’ (p.98) [a large and dense forest]; ‘þyckvar merkr og þröngva skoga’ (p.107) [thick woods and dense forests]. After their adventures, each knight is betrothed to or marries a king’s daughter, at which point they remain in equilibrium: ‘hann situr þar um hrijd’ (p.97) [he remains there for a while]; ‘sath Florencius þar ij godum fagnade’ (p.106) [Florencius remained there in good hospitality]; ‘sat Fenacius þar ij godum soma’ (p.114) [Fenacius remained there in good honour]. They subsequently return to Ector’s castle: ‘[Vernacius] kemur ath aakuednum tijma ij sinn castala’ (p.97) [Vernacius comes back at the designated time into his castle]; ‘komandi heim ij sinn castala ath akuednum tijma’ (pp.106-107) [coming back into his castle at the designated time]; ‘[Fenacius] kemur ath akuednum degi og tijma heim’ (p.114) [Fenacius comes back at the designated day and time]]. The episodes have a clear narrative structure which they must fill to meet the expectations of the text; these adventures are rites of passage. Furthermore, these knights are made parallel to each other through an interweaving of motifs across the three stories. Vernacius encounters ‘einn mann ef mann skyldi kalla, rijdandi einum storum vlfallda’ (p.94) [a man if he should be called a man, riding a large camel], and the third knight, Fenacius, sees where ‘kemur madur ef mann skal kalla og rijdur einum vlfallda’ (p.111) [a man, if he should be called a man, comes, and rides a camel]. Furthermore, the weapon of Vernacius’s opponent, who carries ‘einna digra stöng ij hendi af iarne gerda’ (p.94) [a stout club, made of iron, in hand], is replicated in Florencius’s adventure, where a giant ‘hafdi ij hendi einna stora stöng af iarni gerua’ (p.105) [had a large club, made of iron, in hand]. Similarly, both Vernacius and Florencius encounter enemies immune to

certain weapons: ‘eingi jarnn bita aa hann. nema þath sverð er sialfur hann ber ij orrostum’ (p.95) [no iron cut him, except that sword which he himself carries in battles]; ‘hann þjta einngi iarnn nema þau se miog uaunduth. edur duerga smijde’ (p.99) [no iron cuts him, except that which is carefully constructed or the work of dwarfs]. The flavour and details of each adventure are substantially different, Vernacius encountering a wondrous fountain possibly inspired by *Ívens saga*, Florencius being visited in a dream by his future bride and encountering a Maumet-worshipping *berserkr*, Fenacius saving a dwarf girl and fighting a serpent, among other episodes, but there remains an undercurrent of similarity. The adventures are not identical, but they are equal, as each knight matches the standard set by the previous; these lower-ranked knights are not so much characters as direct representations of variations of knighthood in action. However, while Vernacius has roughly one narrative movement (his fight against Nocerus, including an initial encounter with one of his knights), Florencius first encounters and fights the *berserkr* Kaldanus before an unrelated giant attacks, and Fenacius similarly has one encounter with a monstrous dwarf, before that leads to a bigger and more significant battle with a dragon with a detailed backstory. There is a general escalation, as these episodes are parallel, but incrementally more outlandish and impressive, therefore reflecting on knights of increasing worth. As readers, we are guided through the hierarchy, and given a rhythm and set of expectations with which to approach the knights of higher status.

Characters who are more important receive more complicated narratives and move beyond the stereotype of knighthood which the text itself has constructed. The conceptual clustering of the first three knights is evident from the slight narratorial pause before the fourth: ‘NU hafith þier heyrft fyrir litlu efinntyr af iij riddorum agiætum þeim er huer um sig var hinn heueskazti. enn nu megith þier heyra hit iij efinntyr ef lesit uerdr’ (p.114) [Now you have heard, a little while ago, stories of three noble knights, each of whom were the most courteous in themselves. But now you can hear the 4<sup>th</sup> story, if it is read]. The narrative is poised for a slight change of direction, which it fulfils. Although Alanus starts his adventure like the previous three, there is already evidence of a somewhat more distinctive adventure: ‘Er nu þar til ath taka at fram aa skoginn rijdr riddari Alanus rijdandi suo uij daga ij samt

hugleidandi um sitt efni og huijlandi sinn hest ath hann skylddi eigi springa af mędi' (p.115) [Now there is to turn to that the knight Alanus rides forward into the forest, so riding seven days in total, considering his situation and resting his horse so that it should not burst from weariness]. Alanus's interiority marks a movement towards a character in his own right, and his adventure is unlike any of the others, involving *fornaldarsaga*-influenced encounters with bands of men and a married couple who sacrifice to a wolf of supernatural power. Moreover, Alanus follows other *riddarasaga* protagonists in obtaining a follower, Lucius, who marks part of Alanus's accomplishment: 'settizt Alanus nu wm kyrrt med sinne drottningu. Lucius fylgdi þadan af Alanus og war hans fostbrodir. Sijdann Reid Alanus heim ij sinn castala ath aakuednum tijma' (p.122) [Ananus now settled in peace with his queen. Lucius, from then on, followed Alanus and was his foster-brother. Subsequently, Alanus rode back into his castle at the designated time]. Alanus is more like a protagonist than any of his predecessors, as the narrative gradually increases the focus on each hero. Alanus's improved status in his own story is later matched in the broader narrative, for he, unlike his three predecessors, is given a messenger role later on and even leads a portion of the army. Not only are characters defined by their relationships to each other: the shape of each character's story is dependent on their ultimate importance in the final battle. Alanus is a bridge between the supporting cast of Vernacius, Florentius, and Fenacius, and the central figures of Trancival, Aprival, and Ector, as the narrative once more pauses before continuing, this time with an expansive discussion of the possible incredulity of readers at the prowess demonstrated thus far, reminding its readers of the accomplishments 'af Karlo Magno edur Alexandro Magno' (p.122) [of Karlamagnus or Alexander Magnus] in comparison. The first four knights have provided a general model of paradigmatic, fantastical knighthood, which the text only increases.

The adventures of the final three knights are fundamentally different to those which have preceded them, because they are more distinctive and extreme than those of their predecessors, and more integral to the overall narrative. The episode of the fifth knight, Trancival, is where the grateful lion episode is employed; that trope has been reserved for an important knight. Obtaining the companionship of the lion, as 'fylgdi dyrit honum sijdann suo lengi sem þat lifdi' (p.124) [the beast

followed him afterwards as long as it lived], marks an amplification of Alanus's companion Lucius, given the resonance of the lion. Ector will also gain a companion later, a prince called Jamunt. Trancival furthermore rescues an elf-woman's son, and she promises to answer any questions Trancival has in the future; this promise is then fulfilled after the knights have returned to Ector's castle, when Trancival seeks her to learn of the location of his brother Aprival. These later stories are not self-contained, as the text moves from the episodic nature of the first adventures toward its ultimate narrative. Aprival's story is key to this, and the narrative marks his centrality from its beginning, as it commences with Aprival and Ector going their separate ways:

þaa hugsade Ector og uissi ath meistarar hófdu sagt ath austr ueri hófdingi allra meginna  
 etta. þuij uildi hann ij allfu þaa stefna ath leita ser frægðar. Nu forstod Aprival ath suo sem  
 nordrikt þionar austrinu var hann og suo Ector aa hendr folgin (p.134)

[Then Ector pondered, and remembered that the scholars had said that east was the  
 leader of all the cardinal directions. Therefore, he wanted to head into that region to seek  
 renown for himself. Now Aprival understood that just as the north serves the east, he was  
 also enclosed in Ector's hands]

As commentators such as Barnes and Hendrik Lambertus have noted, the focus on the East is intricately connected to the Trojan heritage of the characters and text.<sup>43</sup> However, the moment also reinforces Ector's superiority and position as the main character, with Aprival as his closest companion, conceptually tied to him. Finally, it reflects the interrelation between Aprival's quest and Ector's overall narrative. Aprival's narrative initially appears to reflect the standard adventures of early knights. For example, 'Aprival reid nu um þröngvar gótur og þyckva skoga' (p.134) [Aprival now rode through dense paths and thick forests]; an opponent of his is a *berserkr* 'enn iarn bita hann ei. nema þau sem uoru uónduth. og duergar gerdu med suo mattugum atkuðum ath ecki matti uith standa. hann hafði einna stóra clumba af iarne gerua' (pp.135-136) [and iron did not cut him, except that which was carefully

---

<sup>43</sup> See Barnes, *Bookish Riddarasögur*, pp.88-93 and Hendrik Lambertus, 'Mirrors of the Self: Deconstructing Bipolarity in the Late Icelandic Romances', *Á austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia: Preprint papers of the 14<sup>th</sup> International Saga Conference*, eds. Ney, Williams and Ljungqvist (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), pp.551-559.

made, and that made by dwarfs which such powerful spells that nothing could stand against it. He had a large club made of iron]. The twist is that the knight does not in fact return from his adventure, but is instead captured in *Mesopotania*. This disruption provides a second narrative movement which is the platform for the elevation of Ector as the representative of superior chivalry within the text, and a symbol for the overall ethos of the narrative. All the pieces of the narrative, however episodic they seem, collectively function as a means to present Ector's triumph.

The land of *Mesopotania* is the reflective centre of *Ectors saga*. Aprival encounters there a double of Ector's court, focused on the figure of Eneas, who, as Lambertus notes:

is characterised as an exact complement to Ector of Tyrkland in every respect: they both have alliterative names, going back to heroes of ancient Troy, and they both are excellent knights in the centre of an assembly of six minor companions.<sup>44</sup>

The narrative strategies applied to Ector are replicated for his double Eneas, providing a narrative impetus to prove the superiority of the side we have been following. Eneas's companions are listed off in a parallel hierarchy to Ector's: 'Saa er mestur er Belius heitir af þeim og gengr kongs syne næst um allar iþbrotti. hann er son Nisti iarls af Arikusia. Anar heitir Julianus. .iij. Maximianus. .iiij. Romalldus. .u. Aluernus. .uj. Malcus' (p.139) [The one who is greatest of them is called Belius, and goes closest to the king's son in all skills. He is the son of Lord Nistus of *Arikusia*. The second is called Julianus, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Maximianus, 4<sup>th</sup> Romalldus, 5<sup>th</sup> Aluernus, 6<sup>th</sup> Malcus]. As with Aprival and Trancival, there is increased focus on the character closest to the central figure and the numbering off of the knights provides each character with an implicit match in Ector's group. The narrative fulfils this twice: firstly, Aprival defeats every knight of Eneas's in order (although, in another anomaly, Julianus and Maximianus have swapped places) until his equal, Belius, defeats him, although not without the narrative stating how close they are: 'þottizt engi mega ij milli sia huarum betur munndi ueita. enn fyrir þaa sök at Aprival uar þedi modr og sar. þaa sotti manlig nattura hann fallandi þo eigi fyrr en hann misti mal og vit' (p.148) [no-one

---

<sup>44</sup> Lambertus, 'Mirrors of the Self', pp.553-554.

thought they could determine which of them would endeavour better; but for the fact that Aprival was both tired and injured, then human nature advanced on him, not falling, however, before he lost speech and awareness]. The text is insistent on viewing Aprival and Belius in their correct place in the hierarchy. Secondly, in the final battle, each of Ector's knights, in their original order, defeat each of Eneas's like-for-like (although Julianus and Maximianus are still swapped), with the exception of Aprival, who is still captured. Instead, Belius is defeated by Ector's new companion Jamunt, discovered during Ector's initial adventure. Jamunt acts as a replacement for Aprival and his failure: he recounts his own adventure, making an eighth embedded narrative and paralleling him with the other knights. Ector even notes: 'eg uil giarna þiggja þijna fylgd, þuij af mijnum felagsmonnum er eingi fregri' (p.160) [I will eagerly accept your service, because no-one out of my followers is more renowned]. The disrupted narrative, and the disrupted hierarchy, are carefully repaired during Ector's own interconnected adventure. The entire narrative is shaped around the ultimate aim of setting Ector's seven proven representatives against Eneas's seven.

The purpose for this expansive paralleling is likewise revealed by Aprival's story, and his relationship with the two princes. Aprival challenges each prince on their status in the world, as the knights' decision to seek adventure is motivated by an interaction between Ector and Aprival: "'huar munu finnast vij riddarar slijkir ath afli og atgerui edur audrum iþrottum aa austurlõndum.'" Aprival quezt ętla ath þeir mundu nockr finnast' (p.90) ["where can seven such knights be found in the eastern lands, in terms of power and accomplishment or other feats?" Aprival said he thought that some such could be found]. Later, on arriving in *Mesopotania*, Aprival is asked by a server in the hall, 'hefer þu nockuth þar komith er meira hof sie halldith en hier' [have you come anywhere where a greater feast than here is held?], to which he responds 'miog ertu ofrodr en unngi madur og lijtith ueiztu af prydi heimsins er þu ętlar eitt suo agiętt at eigi se annad þuicli' (p.141) [you are very unlearned, young man, and you know little of the splendour of the world, since you think one thing is so great that nothing else is like it]. The parallel is clear; Lambertus reads Aprival as 'an uncomfortable respondent who confronts the proud young princes with the perspective that they might be not as unique as they believe' and

argues that these words ‘incite both princes symmetrically to look for an equal counterpart, forming the symmetry axis which makes their mirrorlike encounter possible’.<sup>45</sup> However, a fundamental difference between the replicated princes and courts adds nuance to this comparison. Ector’s response to Aprival’s comment is ‘þess streingi eg heit ath eg skal rijda einn af mijnum monnum ij okunnigt lannd og uinna þar eitthuert ĩuinntyr þat minn framj megi aukazt uith’ (p.90) [I swear an oath that I shall ride alone from my men into unknown lands and achieve some adventure there, so that my fame might increase from it]. He pronounces that pseudo-Arthurian mission central to this text. In contrast, the court of Eneas reacts with scepticism: ‘þaa suarar huer fyrir sig ath  nguir mundu iafnn margir suo godir riddarar ij austurl ndu med einum h fdingia og þo leitad uęri um heiman allan’ (p.142) [then each answers for themselves that as many good knights would not be found in the eastern lands with one leader, even if the whole world were searched]. Aprival’s function as ‘uncomfortable respondent’ is undoubted, but it is the contrasting responses he elicits which speak to the fundamental core of this text: adventure and testing. Ector and his knights are encoded as representatives of knightly prowess expressed through action. Ector is willing to acknowledge the prospect of equals, and determined to outshine them and prove himself. On the other hand, Eneas represents arrogance and complacency. A microcosm of this message appears in Ector’s encounter with Jamunt; when the latter is defeated, he remarks: ‘Eigi er þat viturligt ath treysta svo sijnu afle og ijþrottum ath hyggia ser aunguan fregra. se eg ath hamingiann mun suo skipa ath eg hafi hier funndith mier fregra man’ (p.156) [It is not sensible to rely upon your own power and skills in such a way as to think no-one more renowned than you. I see that fortune will so arrange it that I have found here a more renowned man than me]. Ector and his companions defeat Eneas and his fellows because the concept of knightly prowess developing and proving itself trumps prowess that is static and self-congratulatory. One might say that *Ectors saga* encodes chivalric heroism as something that needs to be shown, not told.

This analysis demonstrates that a very specific view of the world (even just the fictionalised one of romance) can be written into almost every aspect of the construction of an Icelandic *riddarasaga*.

---

<sup>45</sup> Lambertus, ‘Mirrors of the Self’, p.554.

*Ectors saga's* obsession with numbers and proliferative episodes, while doubtless a means of entertainment and novelty, represents a thorough reconstruction of the ideals of romance inherited from Arthurian and similar literature, processed through the Icelandic tendency for patterns and parallels. Audiences are guided through a frame narrative that is in effect a means of writing and rewriting their expectations of knightly accomplishment. The developing episodes show an increased focus on heroes who go beyond the mere staples of the genre, and who stake a claim in the very nature of romance. The small, atomistic elements of each character's romance ultimately feature in a larger contestation of ideas, expressed through the carefully replicated characters.

### **A Combative Approach: Characters in Conflict**

Ultimately, the simple motif of a joust between two knights can become charged with a broader ideological conflict once the conceptual groundwork has been laid. It is this idea of meaningful contest which we shall now explore in a range of particularly "knightly" *riddarasaga* texts. Although they are less expansive than *Ectors saga*, they are no less attuned to the potential to construct value and prowess through contrasting one knight, or one ideology, with another. A number of narrative strategies are used to invest conventional battles with some degree of significance. One of the simplest is the mathematical, not dissimilar to the hierarchy in *Ectors saga*. In *Mágus saga jarls*, the disguised Mágus, presenting himself as a knight with skin of two different colours called the *Hálfliti Maðr*, is accompanied by two warriors, Tosti and Ingimar, and the narrative proceeds with a clearly repeated format: one of the main four brothers in the text rides to challenge these newcomers on four successive days, advancing through their seniority. On the first, Aðalvarðr, the youngest, defeats Tosti, but loses to Ingimar; on the second, Markvarðr likewise loses to Ingimar. Vígvarðr then defeats Ingimar, but the Half-Coloured Man unseats him; on the final day, Rögnvaldr, the eldest, fights Mágus, who reveals himself. The only function of Tosti and Ingimar, otherwise unexplained characters, is to gradually heighten the stakes, so that when we arrive at Rögnvaldr and Mágus, the weight of repetition indicates a level of prowess that does not need stating. The imbalance of this matching of three against four, and

the uneven results it produced, clearly bothered the redactor of the longer version, who, alongside giving Tosti and Ingimar some backstory, adjusts Markvarðr's battle with Ingimar so that they each break their lance, and joust a second time, allowing Markvarðr to show at least an improvement over Aðalvarðr, who is unhorsed first time.

The breaking of lances, or, more generally, multiple charges, is a common technique to achieve a similar increase in stakes and impact. In *Kirialax saga*, the conflict between Kirialax and Romanus, who subsequently becomes Kirialax's companion and therefore needs to be positioned in a way that heightens both, is heavily repetitive. In the first charge, 'setr hvor i annars skiold sitt spiotskapt, ok skar litla iarn ut ur hvorstveggia skildi, ok rennazt hia hestarnar hvor um fram annan' (p.17) [each places their spear-shaft into the other's shield, and cuts a little iron out from both the shields; and the horses each run past the other]. Subsequently, 'ridazt þeir at annan tima, og leggur hvor i anars skiold med svo miclu afle, at hvorstveggia spiotskaupt brustu i sundr svo snart, at kufarnir flugu yfir haufut þeim, ok rennir hvor en fram hia audrum' (p.17) [they ride at each other a second time, and each stabs into the other's shield with such great power that both spear-shafts broke apart so swiftly that the pieces flew over their heads, and each again runs past the other]. The text gradually shows greater deeds on the part of the two; after collecting new lances, 'bua þeir sig i þridia sin ok skaka sin spiotskópt liostandi sina hesta med spórum, ok setr nu hvor i anars skiold sitt digra spiotskapt med frabæru afle' (p.17) [they prepare themselves for a third time and shake their spear-shafts, striking their horses with spurs, and each now places their stout spear-shaft into the other's shield with exceptional force]. A similar episode occurs in *Saulus saga ok Nikanors*, in which the narrative priority is the same: both the eponymous protagonists are elevated. There is similar repetition: 'for enn sem fyrr at huorgi kom audrum af baki' (p.20) [it went as before that neither brought the other from horseback]. Again, the lances represent the increased stakes, as the second one is 'miklu sterkare' (p.20) [much stronger]. Repetition is a simple but effective method of revealing how important the characters are. Unsurprisingly, three times is the standard, such as in *Blómstrvalla saga*, in which the brothers Áki and Etgarð, both in disguise, fight over the course of three days. They are only interrupted by the machinations of the princess Gratiana, who

reveals their true identities to each other. These particular scenes in *Kirialax saga*, *Saulus saga ok Nikanors*, and *Blómstrvalla saga* all end essentially in stalemates, with only external factors concluding the battle, such as other characters or weak horses; this tripartite repetitive approach is particularly useful for stressing the absolute equivalence of the characters. An unusual outlier to the three-times rule is the fourteenth-century *Sigurðar saga turnara*, in which Sigurðr (disguised as Ásmundr) fights a warrior called Hermóðr:

Þaa var honum feingin onnurr staung og ridazt so i moti .iij. sinnum at huorgi kemur odrum af hestinum. Og j fjorda sinn ridr Asmundur fram af mikille reidi og leggr sinne staung j skjollidn greifans med so miklu afli at j genvm gengur skiolldin og so vnder bryniuna (p.207)

[Then he was delivered a second lance and they ride against each other three times, so that neither brings the other from the horse. And in the fourth time, Ásmundr rides forward with great anger and stabs his lance into the margrave's shield with so much force that it goes through the shield and likewise under the mailcoat]

The exaggeration of this particular battle is possibly nothing more than an attempt to exceed the standard pattern, although there is some reason to think *Sigurðar saga turnara* may be somewhat parodic (as we shall discuss later), so this may be intentionally excessive. Regardless, repetitive battles are a stock feature for elevating certain encounters over others, typically marking important characters or relationships to come.

The direct quantification of a hero's ability is another example of this mathematical patterning. For instance, *Gibbons saga* can express its character's prowess as 'Huern dag ridr herra Gibbon vt ok fremr sinn riddaradom yfir vinandi .vi. edr .vij. j sinne at reid' (p.79) [Each day Gibbon rides out and displays his chivalry, conquering 6 or 7 in each charge]; simple numbers convey his prowess. Similarly, Mírmann in *Mírmanns saga* accrues a substantial total across the course of three days: on the first, he defeats 'fimmtán þá, sem mestir þóttust og ríkastir af Rómverjum' (p.58) [fifteen of those who seemed the greatest and most powerful of the *Rómverjar*]; on the second he captures 'tuttugu riddara, þá er allir voru miklir höfðingjar' (p.59) [twenty knights, those who all were great chieftains]; he finally 'vinnur af þeim fimmtán riddarar og umfram jarl, og hafði hann þá unnið fimmtigri riddara' (p.60) [wins from

them fifteen knights and the lord in addition, and he had then defeated fifty knights]. The mixture of repetition, in which his achievements are more significant each day, and quantification conveys Mírmann's importance. In *Kirialax saga*, Kirialax's two main companions, Romanus and Romarik, are numerically equated when introduced: the latter is first introduced when 'Eirn riddari, er Romarik het, van i leiknum LX riddara eirn samt' (p.16) [One knight, who was called Romarik, alone defeated 60 knights in the sport]. Romanus subsequently parallels this directly: 'Romanus ridr nu af baki hvern at odrum riddarana med micilli prydi, þar til at hann hefir af baki ridir LX manna' (p.18) [Romanus now rides each one of the knights after the next off horseback with great splendour until he has driven 60 from horseback]. The relationship between those characters is reflected in their fighting through simple mathematical comparisons.

Indeed, in *Rémundar saga*, Rémundr's superiority is frequently expressed through numbers. An early description notes how 'þó að þrír hinir fræknustu riddarar riði að honum allir senn, þá sat hann kyrr fyrir á sínum goða hesti Brúant' (p.164) [even if three of the boldest knights were to ride at him all at once, yet he remained peaceful on his good horse Brúant before them]. Later, when Rémundr and his two companions fight two lions, Rémundr 'gengur í mót dýrinu hinu stærra, en þeir félagar tveir móti hinu minna' (p.221) [goes against the larger beast, and those two companions against the smaller one]. Rémundr is presented as at least the equivalent, if not more, of the other two, and this is reinforced in a fight with a group of knights, in which 'Rémundr felldi ofan fjóra með skjótum atburðum, en þeir Víðföru og Berald aðra fjóra' (p.269) [Rémundr struck down four with quick actions, and Víðföru and Berald the other four].<sup>46</sup> The contrast of characters creates hierarchies which are clearly articulated. The rest of Rémundr's story progresses with similar acts of numerical superiority, including his final conflict, in which two arrogant brothers are defeated by Rémundr in a moment marked as a

---

<sup>46</sup> This method is notably paralleled in an addition to the Icelandic Tristan text. Tristan, encountering his namesake, has an argument with him about how they will take down the seven usurping brothers: the newcomer says 'þætti mér þín líðveizlu allgóð, ef þú skalt beriaz við þrjá, en ek við fjóra.' [your support would seem good to me if you were to fight with three, and I with four] to which Tristram counters 'ek ætla mér betr vinnaz, at berjaz við fimm, en þér við tvá' [I think there would be more success in me fighting against five, and you with two]. As it transpires, the newcomer only manages to handle one; 'Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd', *Norse Romance I*, ed. Marianne Kalinke (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), p.286.

display of Rémundr's ability: 'Nu getir Rémundur þetta að líta, hvar þeir bræður ríða, og snýr einn í móti þeim tveimur í senn, viljandi, að Indíamenn sæi eitt sinn lítið af hans riddaraskap' (p.331) [Now Rémundr manages to see this, where those brothers ride, and turns alone against those two simultaneously, wanting that the men of *Indía* might see, for one time, a little of his chivalry]. These moments contribute to the overall movement of the narrative, which, as Barnes has explored, aims to establish the global prowess of the central figure.<sup>47</sup> This importance is inscribed into the language of the text throughout. The phrase 'Þó að leitað sé um all veröld' [Even if all the world were searched], very similar to the repeated phrase in *Clari saga* examined in Chapter One, is repeated frequently in *Rémundar saga*, where it surrounds the protagonist, from the character's first accomplishments (p.168) to the final stages of the narrative (p.332). The plot seeks to prove the literal truth of this formulaic phrase, as the hero travels across the known world; the text highlights how 'hans frægðarverk gerðust í öllum þriðjungum heimsins, fyrst í Európa and þá í Affríka, nú enn sem fyrr í Asía' (p.333) [his deeds of renown occurred in all the thirds of the world: first in *Európa* and then in *Affríka*, now, again as before, in *Asía*]. The simple methods by which *Rémundar saga* establishes its protagonist's superiority throughout are fundamental to how the text presents itself: as a proof of the ultimate worth of its knight.

More complicated replication is central to the presentation of the heroes of *Blómstrvalla saga*, in which the escalation of stakes, and the resultant demarcation of the most important characters, forms the motivation of the narrative. The eponymous location of *Blómstrvellir* represents an almost inverted world in which equilibrium is marked by constant competition: in between major events, we are told that 'þar var sett turniment hvern dag' (p.11) [there a tournament was established every day] and 'hvern dag ríða þeir í turniment' (p.14) [each day they ride in tournament]. The heroes consequently exist against a backdrop of prowess, and the text makes the goal of "one-upping" their predecessors evident. The founder of *Blómstrvellir*, Arnos, constructs an elaborate set-up for a challenge: 'hann lætr reisa upp í sínum höfuðkastala eitt merki mikit' [he has a great standard erected

---

<sup>47</sup> See Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, pp.126-145.

in his citadel], to which he attaches ‘sex tigu marka gulls’ (p.10) [sixty marks of gold] and also places a woman by it. The conditions are clearly established:

hverr sem hennar vill fá ok eignast þetta gull hitt mikla, þá skyldi hann ríða út við þann frægasta riddara sem í kastalanum væri: ok ef hann vinnr kastalariddarann, þá á hann merkit ok frúna ok allt þat fé sem þar er við bundit ok undir þessu merki liggr (p.10)

[whoever wants to obtain her and possess this great gold, he should then ride out against the most renowned knight in the castle. And if he defeats the knight of the castle, then he owns the standard and the lady and all that wealth which is bound to it and lies under this standard]

An element of circularity is injected into proceedings by the stipulation that ‘væri sá nökkurr innan kastala sem hon vill heldr eignast, þá skal hon biðja hann at ríða í móti þeim sem til kemr ok unnit getr merkit með sama skilmála sem fyrr var sagt’ (pp.10-11) [should there be someone within the castle who she wants to possess instead, then she shall ask him to ride against the one who arrives and manages to win the standard, with the same stipulation as was said before]. The careful outline of the challenge seems to establish how the narrative will progress, but the first challenger we follow, Hernit, defeats the resident champion Helmiðan and summarily conquers the entirety of *Blómstrvellir*. Hernit then builds ‘einn kastala miklu sterkara en þá sem áðr váru’ [a much stronger castle than those which were before] and, paralleling Arnos, ‘lætr hann reisa einn steinstólpa’ [he has a stone pillar erected]. He subsequently rewrites the challenge:

við hans [a statue’s] södulboga bundu þeir einn mikinn fésjóð ok í hundrað marka gulls ok setr þann skilmála, at hverr sem vinna vill hans systur, at sá skuli ríða at stólpanum ok leggja í gegnum skjöldinn ok brynjuna ok festa spjótit í stólpanum ok þá skyldi hann eignast þat fé sem við stólpanum væri ok jungfrúna, nema nökkurr kæmi sá ur kastalanum sem hana frelsaði ok ryddi þann af baki sem festi spjótit í stólpanum’ (p.13)

[They bound to the statue’s saddlebow a large purse, with a hundred marks of gold inside, and he sets that stipulation, for whoever wants to win his sister, that they should ride to the pillar and stab through the shield and the mailcoat and stick the spear into the pillar; and then he shall possess that money which was on the pillar, and the lady, unless someone were to come from the castle who were to free her and tumble the one who stuck the spear into the pillar from horseback.]

The language directly recalls Arnos' challenge, but there has been an increase in the value associated, quite literally with regard to the quantity of money. *Blómstrvalla saga* uses the replicative strategies we see in individual combats and applies it to the narrative as a whole, to produce a drive towards not merely matching expectations, but exceeding them. The text and characters are engaged in constant generation of new spectacles. So, when the paradigm of knighthood, the Red Knight, arrives, he likewise defeats the challenge and reworks it, as 'setr hann sinn gullvönd ok kallar hárrí röddu ok sagði hvárt at nökkurr væri svá djarfr, at hann vildi til þess gullvandar vinna og ríða út víð sik þar á vellinum' (p.15) [he puts down his golden rod and calls with a loud voice and asked whether anyone was so bold that he wanted to compete for that gold rod and ride out against him there on the field]. The elevation of the Red Knight to the top of the implicit hierarchy accords with the central position of him and his brother in the narrative (more on these brothers in Chapter Three, 'Relative Importance'), but the text is not finished with this series of contrasts. When a heathen invader threatens *Blómstrvellir*, he does so by interacting with this latest challenge: 'hann grípr upp gullvöndinn ok kallaði hárrí röddu ok bað Mahomet svá hjálpa sér, at ef nökkurr væri svá djarfr at þyrði at ríða út víð sik af kasatalmönnum, at hann skyldi flengja af hánum húðina alla með þessum gullvendi' (p.21) [he picks up the gold rod and called with a loud voice, and asked Mahomet so to help him, that if someone from the men of the castle was so bold as to dare to ride out against him, that he should flay all the flesh from him with this gold rod]. The vulgar and irreverent subversion of the Red Knight's words represents an appropriation and bastardisation of the prior behaviour of the characters, and highlights him as wrongful. The narrative now turns to the united forces of *Blómstrvellir* defeating the threat of these aberrant figures. Moments of challenge progress the narrative, highlighting both the superiority of each successive victor and the inferiority of those who stand against this model.

As in *Ectors saga*, these conflicts can be transformed into representations of larger issues. In *Adonias saga*, Adonias and Constantinus are parallel figures. Through trickery, the villain Constancius conceives Constantinus with the wife of Adonias's father the king, who himself sleeps with Constancius's daughter to conceive Adonias; this all occurs on the same day, and the fates of Adonias

and Constantinus are therefore intertwined. The two knights end up in a typically repetitive battle, across two days, in which it is only Constantinus's tiredness which causes his defeat. However, the text glosses the victory in light of the broader narrative, first when Adonias's adoptive father Lodovikus predicts 'þó at þeir Constantinus finnizt j bardaga sem fyrr at hamingian skipte réttlíga þeirra j millí' (p.207) [even if he and Constantinus should meet in battle as before, Fortune should decide correctly between them]. The defeated Constantinus likewise comments 'j ockru vidskipti syner hamingian sitt réttlæti. þviat þv ert þess kongs son er réttlíga var til rikiss kominn' (p.219) [in our interactions, Fortune shows its justness, because you are the son of that king who had rightfully come to power]. The text relates its moment of narrative climax to its overall concerns with inheritance and loyalty. As Sverrir Tómasson writes, 'The ideological overtones of *Adonias saga* stem from the ideal of the just and feudal king: he should reign and divide his kingdom with his lords and they should be absolutely faithful to him'.<sup>48</sup> In this moment of conflict between two marked equals, it is their social positions and accompanying destinies which decide matters. Smaller scale matters of virtue can equally be portrayed: in *Bærings saga*, a conflict with a minor character Jón is nevertheless indicative of a commentary on conduct. When Jón and Bæringr, newly dubbed as knights, seek to fight, Jón displays a focus on women and humiliation, saying 'Sá okkarr, er annan ríðr af baki, skal taka spora af fótum honum ok víkja hesti hans, svá at dróttningin sjái ok Elena, dóttir hennar' (p.91) [The one of us who rides the other from horseback shall take the spurs from his feet and turn his horse, so that the queen and her daughter Elena might see]. However, Bæringr rebukes Jón and analyses his motivations: 'Af kappi viltu nu leika, enn þó skaltu ráða' (p.91) [You now want to compete out of arrogance, although you have to decide]. After a long battle, Jón refuses to take back his words, and Bæringr immediately unhorses him: a swift and efficient demonstration of the foolishness of arrogance. Divjak's analysis of the repeated tournament scenes in *Kirialax saga* similarly concludes 'In all three cases the tournament is a military

---

<sup>48</sup> Sverrir Tómasson, 'The *fræðisaga* of Adonias', *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, eds. Lindow, Lönnroth, and Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp.378-393.

and a moral test'.<sup>49</sup> In *Blómstrvalla saga*, the father of Áki and Etgarð, also called Áki, angrily challenges Hernit over his betrothal to Áki's daughter after the major conflict of the text is over; he acts unchivalrously when he loses by tipping Hernit's horse over. The condemnation of this action is hinted at in a narratorial comment: 'En litlu síðar tók hertuginn sótt ok andaðist: hvárt því hefir valdit meir elli eða tog þat hit mikla er hann tók á Blómstrvelli, vitum vér ekki' (p.49) [And a little later, the warlord became ill and died; whether that was caused more by age or that great exertion which he suffered on *Blómstrvellir*, we do not know]. Despite the feigned uncertainty, this gesture plants the seed that his death may be a direct result of his impetuous and wrongful behaviour. It is a recurrent feature of the *riddarasögur* that, large or small, knightly encounters mark moments when the true nature of characters is revealed.

The particular focus on wrongful or aberrant knights belies the assumption that chivalry as a concept is forgotten in the insular *riddarasögur*. In the fifteenth-century *Sigrarðs saga ok Valbrands*, the text portrays a typically repetitive combat between its protagonist Sigrarðr and the villain Valbrandr to emphasise the latter's failings. After the first round, in which both lances break, Valbrandr offers: 'nu kíðs tvo koste, annad hvort þu seigest yfir komenn, eda vid tókum onnur spiot miklu sterkare' (p.144) [now choose from two options: either you declare yourself defeated, or we take a second, much stronger, spear]. When Sigrarðr instantly agrees to continue, leading to a more intense, but equally drawn second joust, the contrast between the two is more starkly displayed:

Valbrandr mælti þa enn til Sigurgards "Ef þu freistar enn i þridia sinn þa hefur þu tapad allri þinni magt, því haf ráð mýn og hætt þier ei leingur minn riddaraskap, því þu ert med ollu yfirkomenn, og hefe eg leiked vid þig hingad thil, enn nu skal eg gióra þier allt hid vesta ef þu fysest ad reina vid mig i þridia sinn", Sigurgardur mælti "eg vil þier satt seigia Valbrandur ad þu talar þetta af bleidi og aungvum sannleika, þvíad þu hefur i framme haftt allann þinn frækleik og ef þu et ecki sannur ad þessu, þa reinum til likta ockar leik" (p.145)

[Valbrandr then spoke again to Sigrarðr: "If you try again, for a third time, then you will have lost all your splendour. Therefore, take my advice and do not risk yourself any further against my knighthood, because you will be entirely defeated. And I have played with you up to this point, but now I shall treat you worst of all if you desire to compete with me for a third time." Sigrarðr said: "I will speak truly to you, Valbrandr, that you are saying this

---

<sup>49</sup> Divjak, *Studies in Kirialax Saga*, p.93.

from cowardice and no honesty, because you have put forward all your ability. And if you are not true in this, then we should push our contest to a conclusion”]

Valbrandr is increasingly depicted as cowardly and treacherous, confirmed when he takes a poisoned spear which he is wont to use ‘þa hann villdj mirða frækna riddara’ (p.145) [when he wanted to murder bold knights]. The space created by their repetitive combat allows an exploration of Valbrandr’s villainous character in several ways, and likewise highlights Sigrgarðr’s virtue. Far from a mere spectacle, this scene is fundamental to the presentation of two characters, and resonates throughout the text. When, unusually for the *riddarasögur*, the protagonist is killed midway through, as Valbrandr takes his revenge, the demonisation of the figure is complete, and the narrative turns to bringing vengeance. It is Sigrgarðr’s son of the same name who ultimately defeats this paragon of wrongful knighthood, the younger assuming the role and paradigm established by his father. Their shared names allow for shared association; as Bibire notes, Sigrgarðr ‘satisfactorily completes the narrative pattern’.<sup>50</sup> The ultimate revenge is a fusion of the maintenance of the moral code of chivalry and the native Icelandic traditions of revenge so familiar to literature. All in all, it is in moments of contest that narrative roles such as hero and villain can be clearly defined and outlined.

However, there remains room for disruption of expectation in the encoding of chivalric conduct. A fascinating replicated motif in *Adonias saga* is the enemy asking for death after defeat. In the course of one battle, it appears three times, each time described as *embætti* (p.217, p.220, p.222) [gift/remedy], and each time a different result occurs. Gorgonius, one of a series of monstrous brothers opposing Adonias and his companions, now deprived of his family, is killed by Albanus, who recognises ‘hann villdi ecki nema deyja’ (p.217) [he wanted nothing but to die]. Constantinus, Adonias’s near-equal, is not allowed to die, and instead is honoured. Constancius, the villain, receives a distinctly Icelandic treatment: ‘lætr kongr velia hina vitrvztu menn .xij. er til woru j landinu. réttléta og vřfęgiarna. og skipar þa dómendr yfer ollvm vandamálvm þeim sem til herydi kongdóminum’ (p.225) [the king has the wisest

---

<sup>50</sup> Bibire, ‘From *Riddarasaga* to *Lygisaga*’, p.66.

12 men, just and not greedy, who were in the land selected, and places them as judges over all those felonies which related to the kingship]. Chivalry is intertwined with Icelandic law, even if the result is a particularly brutal execution for all of Constancius's sins. Notably, this same process is applied to Valbrandr in *Sigrarðs saga* after the young Sigrgarðr has defeated him. These three variations on the mercy-kill mark an interrogation of the place of violence within literature of this sort.

The same cannot be said for *Sigurðar saga turnara*. In this text, the protagonist's recourse is constantly towards violence, to the point that it suggests some direction of the narrative gaze towards it. First, he attacks his father's treasurer to obtain money, and later, when asked what to do with Hermóð's group of defeated knights, he 'sagdi at skyllði drepa hann og alla þaa er med honum voru' (p.208) [said that he should be killed, along with all those who were with him]. He also disrupts a ball game to kill one of the soldiers playing and take his identity. Furthermore, Sigurðr's violence and greed are repeatedly highlighted through the central replicative episode of the text. Three times, Sigurðr seeks money from the local king's treasurer Þrándr, reveals in exchange that he is sleeping with the king's daughter, and is betrayed by Þrándr, who brings the king and guards to the room, only for them to be thwarted. The king's anger with Þrándr increases every time, to the point that (in keeping with the senseless violence of the text), he at one point strikes at Þrándr and the latter pulls a nameless man in front of him to take the blow and die instead. In each instance, Sigurðr declares his desire to fight, but is dissuaded by his increasingly struggling lover, who suggests a new hiding place. In another context, we might read these events as indicating the triumph of intelligence (particularly female) over hyper-masculine violence, and a reflection on Sigurðr's flaws. However, after this episode, Sigurðr is once more tricked, this time into revealing everything about his stay in the land to the disguised king, and this time, Sigurðr, once alerted to the ruse, kills Þrándr, threatens the king while his men battle outside, and receives the king's daughter as his bride. This reward for excessive repetitive violence could be read as a translation or even misreading of romance, but the possibility of parody is worth considering. Parody is near impossible to prove in such texts, as the ongoing debate about the nature

of *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* indicates.<sup>51</sup> There is not space for a full discussion of that text, but one moment that has sparked this debate involves Tristram tricking an entire ship of people into killing each other so that he arrives in Ireland as the sole survivor. When the queen of Ireland asks him about it, he immediately explains everything, rendering the obscure act meaningless. The similarity with *Sigurðar saga turnara*'s use of violence as both excessive, and, most importantly, without consequence, is notable, and contrasts with the range of nuance and responses in *Adonias saga*. We cannot be conclusive, but, given all the subtle considerations of behaviour, valour, and value which fighting prompts in the *riddarasögur* in numerous ways, it is tempting to consider that the *riddarasögur* provided a literary atmosphere of considerate conduct ready for a text like *Sigurðar saga turnara* to knowingly and flagrantly break all the rules.

While no text shows a preoccupation with organised structures to quite the extent of *Ectors saga*, the methods of replicative conflict are widespread throughout the corpus. Where knights meet, the result often reveals something about the combatants, and may even offer a glimpse into the state of chivalry in late medieval Icelandic conception. There are simple stylistic tools that allow texts to position their major characters as superior to someone or something and there are also moments in which it is ideas that are in conflict, embodied in the characters on display. There is a recurrent recognition that audiences attuned to reflective dynamics can be shown a lot more than a text deigns to say. In a literary environment where texts like *Sigurðar saga turnara*, can, for whatever reason, stand as stark contrasts to the rest of the genre, these moments of intratextual conflict allow each *riddarasaga* to stake a claim in a broader intertextual conflict about the value and values of knighthood.

## Gaming the System: Courtly Activities in Action

This approach to conflict extends beyond the battlefield to a range of courtly competitions inherited from romance, which can each become a site for contestation of ideas. While the fighting of the

---

<sup>51</sup> See Schach, 'The *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*: Summary or Satire?' and '*Tristrams Saga ok Ýsoddar* as Burlesque' for the development of the parodic approach; for oppositions to this approach, see M. F. Thomas, 'The Briar and the Vine: Tristan Goes North', *Arthurian Literature* 3 (1983), pp.53-90 and Conrad van Dijk, 'Amused by Death? Humour in *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar*', *Saga-Book* 32 (2008), pp.69-84.

*riddarasögur* may provide dynamic centrepieces and climaxes for their respective texts, there are many efforts to ensure that other activities share the limelight. They sometimes even prove more revealing than the physical clashes. Kalinke writes compellingly about *Konráðs saga's* promotion of language-learning as essential to knighthood, as she notes its uniqueness 'in that the plot is generated by the protagonist's monolingualism and the antagonist's multilingualism'.<sup>52</sup> Her reading can be situated within this study of language and narrative, through the text's insistent focus on the idea of *íþróttir* [skills/feats], a recurrent word in the *riddarasögur*. *Konráðs saga* repeatedly refers to these deeds or feats, starting with a description of its hero:

Þessar voru íþróttir Konráðs: Þá er hann var í herskrúða sínum og hleypti sínum hesti sem ákafast, að hann tók upp gullhring með spjótsoddi sínum, er lá á götu hans, og renndi á hönd sér. Og svo nam hann hverja íþrótt, að hann þótti framar leika en hinn, er honum kenndi. Sú var önnur íþrótt hans, þá er hestur hans hljóp sem skjótast, að hann kastaði upp bæði senn skildi sínum og sverði og hendi á þann veg á lofti, að hann tók meðalkafla sverðsins með þeirri hendi, er áður hann hélt á sverðinu. Hann reið svo á burt, að engi landsmanna mátti við hann keppa. Sú var hin þriðja íþrótt hans, að þá er hann hleypti hestinum sem mest og óðlegast, að hann stakk niður spjótinu og hljóp svo langt, að breiðar ár gat hann með þessum hætti yfir stiklað. (pp.273-274)

[These were Konráð's feats: when he was in his attire and raced his horse the most intently he could, he picked up a gold ring which lay on his path with the point of his spear, and slipped it onto his hand. And he learnt every skill in such a way that he seemed to perform better than the one who taught him. A second feat of his was that when his horse rushed its fastest, he threw both his shield and sword at the same time, and caught them in the air in such a fashion that he caught the middle of the sword with the hand which previously held the sword. He rode tilts so that none of the men of the land could contest with him. It was the third of his feats that when he raced his horse its greatest and wildest, that he stabbed the spear down and leapt so far, that he managed to fly over broad rivers in this way.]

This expansive description glosses his skills as decidedly chivalric and overtly spectacular, each feat possessing a clear element of display. Yet none of these skills have any direct function in the narrative. The contrasting description of Roðbert, while marking his inferiority, includes language-learning as an *íþrótt*: 'Roðbert er og næmur að íþróttum og kemst þó hvergi nær Konráði. Og er hann getur það að líta, leggur hann fyrir sér að nema að tala allar tungur, og verður hann alger í þessari íþrótt' (p.273)

<sup>52</sup> Kalinke, 'The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance', p.80.

[Roðbert is also so talented in his feats, and yet comes nowhere near Konráðr. And when he manages to see that, he puts it on himself to learn to speak all languages, and he becomes accomplished in this feat]. Despite the extravagance of Konráðr's abilities, this compensatory ability of Roðbert's proves central to the text, as he repeatedly betrays Konráðr, pretending to be Konráðr and using the knight's strengths against him. The repetitive trials of Konráðr, and attempts to kill him, start by Roðbert claiming that Matthildr, before a potential betrothal, 'lézt þó sjá vilja áður nokkurar íþróttir þínar, því að eg hefi þar mikið af sagt' (p.298) [expressed, though, that she wanted first to see some of your feats, because I have spoken much of that]. Later, he insists: 'Mikils þykir keisara vert um íþróttir þínar og atgervi og vildi enn oftár sjá þína leika' (p.306) [the emperor is greatly impressed with your feats and ability and would like to see your sport again]. The inherent spectacle of Konráðr's *íþróttir* is used against him repeatedly. Konráðr does prove the power of his traditional chivalric skills across the narrative in increasingly challenging trials; eventually, he proves his superiority through a symbolic joust with 'nafna sinn' (p.337) [his namesake] to take back his appropriated identity. However, this movement is accompanied by his learning of Greek, which he does with ease befitting his superiority. The narrative trajectory of Konráðr and Roðbert can be read both as a contrast of virtuous and villainous foster-brothers, with the inherently noble Konráðr repeatedly winning, and also as a rebuttal of Konráðr's foster-father's view 'að maður týndi þeim íþróttum, er hann hafði áður numið, ef hann tæki að nema þær, sem ekki væri þeim líkar' (p.273) [that a man would lose those skills which he had learnt before, if he began to learn those which were not like them]. Language-learning is viewed of a kind with jousting and adventure, and not dissimilar in the slightest. As Kalinke concludes: 'The fictional heroes reflect a traditional Icelandic reverence for learning and the pragmatism of an insular people with an uncommon language and devoted to travel'.<sup>53</sup> The nature of knightly skills is rewritten across the course of *Konráðs saga* to reflect a simultaneously more insular and more worldly view.

Other skills, of a more traditionally courtly nature, mark techniques of establishing the identity of those engaged and the place of that particular skill within this literary environment. Despite its

---

<sup>53</sup> Kalinke, 'The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance', p.861.

presence in influential texts like *Tristrams saga*, hunting is sporadic and unimportant in the corpus, although Adonias in *Adonias saga* demarcates himself as superior by selecting a fitting creature to hunt out of a large group: ‘þat woru flest hirter og birner og rauddyri og einn visundr so stór at þeir hófdu aungan slíkan sied. honum fylgdi marger visundar smærri og yngri’ (pp.145-146) [it was mostly harts and bears and red deer, and a bison so large that they had seen none such; many smaller and younger bison followed it]. The bison, as exceptional in quality and a leader, is a clear parallel to Adonias, so this small episode contributes to the narrative’s overall elevation of the rightful heir. More frequently, hunting is used as a narrative catalyst and a space in which to encounter the supernatural; Adonias meets the knight Albanus after killing the bison, and is led to the newcomer’s father, who gives Adonias magical spears. Gibbon’s repeated pursuit of marvellous animals, which we discussed in Chapter One (‘Event Management’), takes place while hunting; it offers a moment of isolation and liminality for the hero in which to introduce the marvellous. Sigrgarðr in *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands* hunts a hind which transpires to be the wife of the helpful dwarf Gustr. Hunting does not rise to the top of courtly endeavours in the *riddarasögur*, nor provide the same level of reflection as other endeavours. Rather, the hunt is an occasional space from which more significant events occur.

Other courtly activities show a greater parallel to combat. For example, harp-playing, shared by *Gibbons saga* and *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands* (current consensus is that the latter is indebted to the former), is used in almost direct parallel to knightly combat in both texts.<sup>54</sup> The challenges for the protagonist in wooing their respective women (although Florentia, as a maiden-king, is far more adversarial than Florida) are to defeat a warrior in combat (Eskopart and Valbrandr, respectively) and the woman herself in harp-playing. In both, the harp-playing is tripartite, gradually increasing in quality in the same fashion as jousts we have discussed. The gendering of combat as male and music as female is particularly evident in *Gibbons saga*, in which Gibbon’s victory over Florentia is disregarded because of the magic harp Greca has given him; Florentia remarks ‘eigi er þetta þinn list helldr at kvædi glofanna

---

<sup>54</sup> ‘In structure and content, there are clear parallels with *Bærings saga* and *Adonias saga*, and influence from *Gibbons saga* is also evident’, in ‘Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands’, *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Pulsiano (London: Garland, 1993), p.583.

þeirra er Greca drottning gaf þeir' (p.50) [this is not your ability, rather the magic of those gloves which Queen Greca gave you]. This replicative battle of music is more symbolic of the clash and comparison of Gibbon's two lovers than indicative of his prowess, and he subsequently progresses to defeat Eskopart to reinforce his traditional masculine ability. In contrast, *Sigrarðs saga ok Valbrands* flips the order of these trials, so that the heavily reflective defeat of Valbrandr, discussed above, precedes Sigrarðr's contest with Florida; the result is the reinforcement of music as an equal and important skill in the knight. The friendlier role of Florida in the narrative allows Sigrarðr's conclusive victory in the contest to bear a distinct mark of approval after the repetitive, intensifying back-and-forth: 'giefst nu upp þeirra leikur með þeim urskurdi herrana og allrar alþjunnar, að Sigurgardur hefði leikenn vinnu, og sannar það sialfur kongur og kongsdóttir' (p.148) [now their contest is given up with the decision of the lords and all the people that Sigrarðr had won the game, and the king himself and the king's daughter attest to that]. The encounter marks a moment of Sigrarðr proving himself both to the audience and to the other characters. Music is at least as decisive as fighting, if not more so.

The association of the hero with music is never absolute. Sigrarðr remains indebted to an external supernatural force, Gustr, from whom he buys the magical harp and gloves; the narrative highlights Gustr's ability by a prior repetitive contest of harp-playing between Sigrarðr and Gustr, which the latter wins. Like hunting, harp-playing appears to have become intimately tied to supernatural influence on the narrative rather than solely the reflection of the individual's ability, perhaps reflecting some degree of exoticism associated with these hallmarks of foreign courtly romance. There even appears to be a thread of threatening eroticism interwoven into the presentation of this particular skill. The first round in Sigrarðr's and Florida's contest has complementary results: at the sound of Florida's music, 'fliktust þeir menn allir undir turnenn að heira þann fagra hórpu-slátt' (p.147) [all those men moved under the tower to hear that beautiful harp-playing]; it is noted of Sigrarðr's playing that 'alldrei var so gömul kjerling kaupt eða karlæg að ecki skride ur synu hrese, allar þess erendis að heira þann fagra saung hórpu' (p.147) [there was never such an old woman, decrepit or lame, that would not slink out of her cot, all on that mission to hear the beautiful song of

the harp]. While *allir menn* does not guarantee a male group, it is interesting to speculate on the implied impact of Florida on men and Sigrgarðr on women, representing music as potentially a sexually charged skill. Some evidence for this is in *Samsons saga fagra*, in which Valentína is twice nearly kidnapped by Kvintalín through the sound of his harp-playing, which repeatedly has a hypnotic effect on her: ‘heyrðist þeim slegið undir annarri [tree], og hlupu þær svo lengi, að konungsdóttir mæddist’ (p.355) [they heard playing under another tree, and they rushed so long that the king’s daughter tired]; ‘Gengur hún þá enn eftir hljóðinu, þar til hún sér hörpuslagarann á einum sléttum velli’ (p.358) [She then walks again after the music, until she sees the harp-player on a flat plain]; ‘Og nú heyrir hún hörpusláttinn sem fyrr, og hleypur hún þegar eftir þeim vonða slag og gleymdi ráðum sinnar fósturu’ (p.358) [And now she hears the harp-playing as before, and she races immediately after that wicked playing and forgot the advice of her fosterer]. The text positions harp-playing as a sexual threat which, from Kvintalín’s first mention, is associated with the rape of women: ‘Hann var mikill meistari á hörpuslátt, og þar með villti hann margar hæverskar konur í skóginn til sín og hafði þær við hönd sér slíka stund sem honum sýndist’ (p.353) [He was a great master in harp-playing, and, with that, he drew many courtly ladies into the forest to him and had them in his power for as long as it pleased him]. Whether this is influenced by the “rash boon” episode of the Tristan tradition, in which a musician kidnaps Iseult through his exceptional playing and the foolishness of the king, or from other literature or traditions, *Samsons saga fagra* marks a decidedly antagonistic presentation of this courtly feat. This uncertainty is present in the other texts that associate harp-playing with femininity, the supernatural, and seduction. That particular skill is only ever partially integrated into the character of the central hero.

In contrast, one skill is recurrently associated with the knights of the *riddarasögur* as a representation of their general prowess: chess. The employment of chess games in these texts in repetitive narrative structures marks heavily reflective moments. Hans Jacob Orning, considering the importation of the courtly world into Scandinavia, references the game: ‘The courtly universe was separated from the life of ordinary people by a multitude of signs, such as chess, manners and even

emotions'.<sup>55</sup> His casual grouping of the three is surprisingly apt, because manners and emotions are united through chess, alongside the issues of identity and accomplishment that have recurred throughout this discussion. Chess is vital to *Mágus saga jarls*, because, like in its literary ancestor *Renaud de Montauban*, a death following the fallout of a chess-game propels the four brothers into outlawry and further adventures. However, the presentation of *Mágus saga* is completely transformed, not only changing the particulars of the scene, but turning it into a replicative set-piece. The game's position within courtly accomplishments is marked from the introduction of emperor Játmundr at the start of the text; he is 'jþrotta madvr mikill, svo at einge stodzt honvm; en áá tafle var honum mestvr metnadvr' (p.1) [a man of great skill, so that no-one matched him, but he was reckoned greatest in chess]. Chess is integral to his character, and a means of expressing his power, as he repeatedly demands games, a synecdoche for his general tyranny. His arrogance and complacency are condemned in his inevitable defeat by Rögnvaldr (and subsequent murder by Vígvarðr). The emperor's retainer, asked about Játmundr's superiority, responds:

Fátt er sva gott, þat er stundlict er, at eigi megi verða annat slíct. Er ok sva um keisara várn; þott hann tefli vel, þa er eigi órvønt, at faiz sa nockur her ilanndi at nockur ahavlld hafi við honum um tafl (p.9)

[Few things, which are temporal, are so good that another thing cannot be like it. It is also the case with our emperor; even though he plays chess well, yet it is not impossible that such a person here in the land could be found that might have some competence against him in chess]

However, *Mágus saga jarls* invests more in the characterisation of its repeated chess games than simply this defeat of self-satisfaction. The decisive game between Játmundr and Rögnvaldr is prefigured by one between Játmundr and Lord Íringr, later revealed to be an agent of Játmundr's shunned wife Erminga (and in the longer redaction, is actually her in disguise). Their match is a carefully constructed game of signs pointing towards the internal nature of the characters:

---

<sup>55</sup> Hans Jacob Orning, 'The Reception and Adaptation of Courtly Culture in Old Norse Society', p.126.

Nu setia þeir tafl ok tefla; ok var þat tafl langt; ok feck keisari hróks mat. Iarl mællti: “Nv þickiumz ek eiga havkinn, herra! ok vil ek, at vid teflim eigi fleirr ok hafa ek hann, enn þv eigir hina gripina.”—“Ecki þarftu nv at renna,” segir keisari, “undan máti; þui at ek skal nv allhęðiligv mati mata þig.” Tefldu þeir tafl annat; ok var þat sýnv skemra; ok feck keisari peð mát. Iarl mællti: “Nu vil ek, at við skilim; ok eig þv nu einn gripinn, þann sem þu vill!” Keisari reiddiz nu oc mælti: “Þott þu uilir nu renna með fangi ok ser sua blauðr ok huglaýss, at þu þorir eigi at tefla hit .iij. tafli, þa skal ek þo raða.” Settu þeir tafl hit þriðia; ok var þat allskamt; ok feck keisari fretstertu mát. Þa stendr Iarl vpp ok mællti ecki við keisara ok tok gripina til sin ok geck í brótt. Keisar sat eptir oc var allreiðr. (p.5)

[Now they set up the chess and play; and that game was long, and the emperor received rook’s mate. The lord said: “Now I think I own the hawk, lord. And I want for us to play no further; and I will have it and you have the other treasures.” “You do not need run away from losing,” says the emperor, “because I shall now defeat you with a humiliating checkmate.” They played a second game, and it was notably shorter, and the emperor received pawn’s mate. The lord said: “Now I want for us to part; and you can have one of the treasures, whichever you want.” The emperor now got angry and said: “Even though you now want to run with a struggle and are so cowardly and spiritless, that you do not dare to play the third game, still I have to decide.” They set the third chess game, and that was terribly short, and the emperor received false-start mate. Then the lord stands up and said nothing to the emperor and took the treasures to himself and went away. The emperor remained behind and was incredibly angry.]

The replication at work here shows the gradual degradation of Játmundr’s ability, both in the increasingly short duration of each game and in the nature of his defeat, which is worse each time. Despite the chess jargon, it is likely that an audience could, regardless of knowledge, detect the development of Játmundr’s humiliation from the other cues. Furthermore, this encounter provides an insight into the respective characters of its combatants: a courtly figure who repeatedly seeks to console his opponent, and a figure whose constant recourse is to insults and expressions of his authority. The chess game is an expressive sequence of characterisations which reveals the nature of the emperor with minimal direct exposition; the episode is an important tool for the text to convey its perspective. Consequently, in the longer redaction, which is more concerned with the direct antagonism of Ermenga with her husband, “Lord Hirtingr” more openly mocks the emperor: ‘Eigi mun það og þurfa að spara að gera þig sem hraklegastan í mátinu’ (p.173) [There is no reason to hold back in treating you most painfully in the checkmate]. The emphasis is instead on the king’s anger as a wrongful response, because ‘Við þat illmæli varð konungur reiður, svo hann gáði ekki að taflinu’ (p.173)

[At those nasty words, the king became angry so that he paid no attention to the chess]. The redactor has shuffled the line of causality to increase the monstrous anger of the emperor, and likewise the cunning of Ermenga. In both redactions, this scene, which could easily be dismissed as a needless duplication of the central chess match, is instead a fundamental set-up of Játmundr's character in anticipation of his defeat.

The subsequent match with Rögnvaldr employs the same techniques, directly recalling that initial encounter:

Þeir tóku til at dagmalum; enn þú tafl var lokit at hádegj; ok varð hinn litli tafls munr; ok varð keisari berr. Rögnvaldr stoð upp ok mælti: "Nu hefi ek hlotið tafl þetta vist," segir hann, "ok er þat ad engu nema af glapteflum keísara, ok þat, er hann hefir ecki at hugat ok hefir eigi frammi haft taflbravgð sin hin stæri. Mun ek ecki heimta taflfeit; þúiat mer þickir allvel niðr komit, þott keisari hafi." Síðan settiz Rögnvalldr niðr. Settu þeir tafl annat ok tefldu; var því lokit fyrir non; feck keisari biskups mát. Rögnvalldr stoð enn upp ok mælti enn með sama móti sem fyr: þarf eigi þat at klifa optar. Keisari reiddiz. Settu þeir tafl hit .iij.; ok var þú lokit, er skamt var að noni; ok feck keisari fuðruttu mát. (p.11)

[They began at mealtime, and that chess game was concluded at midday, and there was little difference in the game, but the emperor ended up empty. Rögnvaldr stood up and said: "Now I have certainly won this game," he says, "and that is because of nothing except the toying of the emperor, and the fact that he has not really focused and has not brought out his greater chess tactics. I will not claim the prize, because it seems perfectly well placed should the emperor have it." Then Rögnvaldr sat down. They set up a second game and played; it was concluded before *nones*; the emperor received bishop's mate. Rögnvaldr stood up again and spoke again, in the same way as before; it does not need to be described again. The emperor got angry. They set up the third game, and it was concluded when it was a short time from *nones*, and the emperor received fool's mate.]

The text replays the prior match in a different fashion; shortening matches are now expressed via the time of the day, and the text uses a new set of chess terms for the emperor's increasingly bad defeats. Furthermore, the text uses significant elision, supplying neither Játmundr's response nor Rögnvaldr's words each time; it is enough to display Rögnvaldr's humility and emphasise its repetition. The associations established in the previous match are evoked, as we expect both Játmundr's behaviour and his loss. Instead, the focus is on the aftermath of this match, in which Rögnvaldr refigures his previous words:

Nu mun vita við öðru viss enn aðr. Vil ek þui lya fyrir yðr, at keisari hefir latid .iij. tavfl. Hefir hann nu við haft óll sín taflbraugð, þav er hann kann. Þickiumz ek allvel komin til tafl fearins. Hefir keisari ecki við mer itaflinu; mun sua fara um fleiri iðrottir, þott við reýnim. (pp.11-12)

[Now we can see it differently than before. I will reveal before you that the emperor has lost three chess games. He has now brought out all his tactics, those which he knows. I think I am perfectly entitled to the prize. The emperor has nothing compared to me in chess; it will go the same in many skills, if we were to compete.]

The chess match is turned into a microcosm for Rögnvaldr's superiority over his opponent, because the text established the importance of chess to Játmundr's identity and interactions and its place amongst the *íþróttir* of this text. Given the conceptual association between the two chess matches, there may be an implicit contrast between Íringr's silent and prudent departure, and Rögnvaldr's prideful boasting, because some of the later narrative of the text concerns Mágus having to step in to fix the problems made by the overconfidence of Rögnvaldr and his brothers. Játmundr subsequently hits Rögnvaldr with the chess pieces, and even this marks a moment of contrast between the two figures, as Rögnvaldr responds 'Ecki reiðumz ek við þessu; ek veit, at keisara er þetta gaman' (p.12) [I am not angry at this; I know that this is entertainment to the emperor]. Rögnvaldr's rejection of anger highlights the emperor's weakness. Játmundr's two chess matches represent a thorough exploration of his folly and interior motives in the face of more virtuous opponents. This time, it marks a literal fatal flaw, as Rögnvaldr's impetuous brother Vígvarðr does take issue with Játmundr's response and stays behind to kill him. These scenes can be viewed as a thoroughly insular reworking of the chess motif inherited from its distant *chanson de geste* source, transforming a moment of narrative development into a network of repeated moments directly tied to the presentation of each character involved.

This transformation of chess into a space for characters to contrast their natures can be read in a number of the *riddarasögur*. In *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, after the eponymous hero's father wins a chess match against a troll woman, and consequently obtains a marvellous ring which the trolls subsequently endeavour to get back, Vilhjálmr finds himself repeating his father's actions, engaging in a series of matches against a different troll. The matches are intricately tied to Vilhjálmr's development as a knight.

After his first victory, he obtains the armour of a knight, and, after the second, which is established ‘med sama skilmala og fyrr’ [with the same stipulation as before] and subsequently ‘for sem fyrr’ (p.18) [went as before], he gets a noble steed with the appropriate harness. However, the matches are also tied to negative attributes of Vilhjálmr’s, as his foster-father Dixin (reminiscent of the “knowing assistant” in Chapter One, ‘Support Networks’) repeatedly predicts something bad: ‘af honum munu ver þunckt hliota’ (p.14) [we’ll end up in trouble from him]; “þat uggir mig” sagði Dixin “at uit hliotum illt af honum. og eigi skaltu einn finna hann optar ef ek ma Rada” (p.19) [“I am afraid,” said Dixin, “that we will end up badly from him, and you shall not meet with him alone again if I can decide”]. Dixin even disrupts the third match by charging in when Vilhjálmr meets the troll, only for Vilhjálmr to sneak away at night for the rematch. Typical of many tripartite structures we have considered, this third match provides a turning point, and offers further insight into the character. First, Vilhjálmr is tempted by a magnificent chess-set as ‘alldri hafði kongsson slíkan grip síð og gjarna uillde hann taflit fa’ (p.21) [the king’s son had never seen such a treasure before, and he eagerly wanted to obtain the chess-set]; he is thus tricked into playing without his father’s magical set. Second, a beautiful woman appears, constructed as desirable in parallel fashion: ‘suo faugr at kongson hafði aungva síð slíka’ (p.21) [so beautiful that the king’s son had seen none such]. The narrative progresses that ‘suo mikit leiddi honum af fegurð hennar at hann liet taflit’ (p.22) [he was so distracted by her beauty that he lost the chess game]. In contrast to the previous chess matches, signs of victory and development, this game highlights Vilhjálmr’s greed and desire as fundamental flaws, and catapults him into a series of quests in the world of trolls and similar to prove himself (see Chapter Three, ‘The Opposition’). Again, the narrative catalyst of chess is given space to offer reflections on the characters.

Similarly, although less overtly, the repercussions of a simple chess match resonate throughout the course of *Saulus saga ok Nikanors*. Like Játmundr, Saulus is presented as an arrogant figure who cannot stand the idea of an equal, precisely what Nikanor offers, as their men engage in an inconclusive *mannajafnaðr* [comparison of men]. Saulus likewise offers a game of chess as a means of disputing this. The game is described simply in the narrative: ‘þeir settu nu til og tefldu leingi dags með mikilli list so

at eingi ma sia huor uinna mundi' (p.14) [they now set up and played chess for a lot of the day with great skill, so that no-one could see who would win], with the emphasis on the two knights' continued equivalence. The effect of this repeated association is to emphasise, in consequence, the resultant actions which distinguish the two, firstly when Saulus is mocked by one of Nikanor's retainers:

Nu uerdr kongs son aullungis reidur uid þessi ord og af þeim metnadi sem hann hafdi a taflinu og þessum ordum stemmer reidinn so rúm uizkunnar fyrir honum at hann tapar skynseminni til leiksins og gefur upp riddarann fyrir ecki. og sem þess kemur a skackinn þa uerdr skiott um taflinu og unnur hertuginn enn kongs son fær mat (p.15)

[Now the king's son becomes utterly enraged at these words, and from that arrogance which he had in chess and from these words, the anger so limits the space for intelligence in him that he loses his judgement in the game and gives up his knight for nothing. And when this happens on the board, then the chess proceeds swiftly, and the warlord wins and the king's son gets checkmate.]

As with Játmundr and Vilhjálmr, the impact of some flaw upon the loss is emphasised, and there is likely some symbolism in him losing 'riddarann' [his knight] as a representative of his failure to be chivalric. The contrast with Nikanor then follows, because Saulus, like Játmundr, uses the chess-set as a weapon and strikes his opponent, 'Enn hertuginn uard akafliga reidur og stillti sig þo heidarliga. biodandi sinum maunnum aullum aungum mein at giora' (p.15) [And the warlord became incredibly angry, and yet he controlled himself honourably, ordering all his men to do no harm]. The similarity between the young men continues in the extreme anger each feels, but the fundamental difference is Nikanor's control of that emotion, which is coded as 'heidarliga', honourable or even courtly. This small moment represents an entire narrative strand in the text, because, although Saulus is the central figure and ultimately displays greater prowess, he is repeatedly shown as the more rash and less chivalrous character. When Saulus's betrothed and Nikanor's sister, Potentiana, is kidnapped, Saulus suggests gathering an army: 'skulu uer hallda ut yfir hafir ok sækja jungfruna med oddi og eggju og lata alldri af fyrr enn uer naum henni edur liggium dauder ella' (p.46) [we shall head out over the oceans and seek the lady with point and edge and never give up before we get her or else lie dead]. Nikanor's suggestion is parallel but more pragmatic: 'uid skulum lata bua eitt litit skip med gnogum kosti uijns og uista. og þar skulu uid a

stiga með .xx. maunnum og fara so vt yfer hafit einskipa og ef uid naum henni eigi so med einhuerium æuentyrum þa mun ockur þat eigi lagit' (p.47) [we shall have a little ship prepared with plenty of wine and food, and we shall board that with 20 men and so travel out over the sea alone. And if we do not get her so by some occurrence, then it is not meant to be for us]. Similarly, when Saulus and Nikanor retrieve Potentiana from the sleeping Matheus, Saulus recommends Nikanor take revenge and kill him, but his foster-brother responds: 'eckí þarftu fostbroder þetta at tala þuiat þat ueit eg at þetta er þier eigi aluara at eg giore þetta at drepa sofanda mann og þann þo sem ockur truer' (p.55) [you do not need, foster-brother, to say this, because I know that you are not sincere in this, that I should act so as to kill a sleeping man, and one who even trusts us]. The chess game at the start is a microcosm of the entire relationship between these two characters, in which two equals are repeatedly distinguished by their conduct. Chivalry has a clear presence in this text, embodied in Nikanor and expressed through this initial competition. Like jousting and combat, chess provides the audience a chance to get to know their heroes and villains, offering rare glimpses into the interior workings of the characters and the ideologies of the texts. This foreign game has been repackaged as a sign not merely of courtly culture in abstract, but of character itself.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, insular *riddarasögur* do not passively receive the inheritance of romance, be it foreign or translated, but use every opportunity to actively engage with the material and its components. This interrogation is sometimes in the tangible links to the big names, texts, and topics of the past, and sometimes in the harnessing of jousting and courtly display and contest en masse or in microcosm. The replicative structures of *riddarasögur* provide a means of reading romance, however strange their content may have seemed. The alien world of knights is deconstructed and then reconstructed in familiar ways that speak directly to the Icelandic audience. Topics such as chivalry and conduct are not excised from this material in Iceland, but instead revealed through implication and contrast, alongside a range of concerns including prowess, inheritance, emotional restraint, and identity. The figure of the knight at the centre of this genre is never fixed, but is constantly constructed by each new text, through each new perspective. In the next chapter, we turn

to consider the ways the insular romance genre navigates this world of knights and romance to find a place for the strange yet closer-to-home world of the *fornaldarsögur*, legend, and Germanic heritage and identity.

## Chapter Three: Navigating the Romance World through the Scandinavian Past

Part of the distinctive flavour of the *riddarasögur* among European romance is the large quantity of, and attention given to, features which we might instinctively consider alien to stereotypical romance. Monsters like trolls and warrior figures such as vikings and *berserker* are commonplace in these texts. Similarly, we can point to small but telling differences in presentation as seemingly native, such as the dominance of ship-based travel in Icelandic romances or the role of dwarfs as magical smiths rather than mere servants. The insular romances are reliant upon the fusion of romance tropes and priorities with those that we might variously call “Scandinavian”, “Germanic”, “Legendary”, “Heroic”, or even “Mythical”, although all of those terms are problematic. A large and eclectic pool of motifs and narrative structures unite somewhat artificially to create a world which can be opposed to or intertwined with the (equally nebulous) world of romance. If the knight, and the world that surrounds the figure, is in a process of adaptation and evaluation throughout the insular romance corpus, then its counterparts, in the native traditions of Iceland, Scandinavia, and broader heritages, are likewise shifting in each text to interact with these courtly motifs and structures. However troublesome, these interactions are fruitful, and point to a literary culture using the familiar to explore the new and strange, and, through that, even re-analyse those more traditional elements. Replication, reflection, and the conceptual connection of disparate parts, which we have considered in relation to the novel subgenre of maiden-kings and the imported concept of romance, are equally at work in the employment of local textual features. Motifs and techniques found in a range of places in Icelandic culture beyond these romances are used here for the construction of ideology, meaning, and value that we have seen throughout the corpus.

Establishing the basis for this “native world” requires some untangling of traditions. Scholarly attention given to the extraordinary pieces of Icelandic literature exploring the pagan mythology and legends of the past, such as the *Poetic Edda* or the works of Snorri Sturluson, might lead us to consider

those texts the backdrop to the “legendary” features of the *riddarasögur*. However, the reality is that the dominant expressions of the traditions and beliefs of the Scandinavian past at the time of the *riddarasögur*'s formation are the so-called *fornaldarsögur*, the popular prose stories of heroes of Scandinavia (or some wider Germanic sphere), likely composed from the thirteenth century onwards.<sup>1</sup> This genre has numerous methodological and generic issues, starting with its lack of currency in the medieval period, with neither terminology nor manuscripts supporting the conceptualisation of it as a genre.<sup>2</sup> The choice of texts has mainly followed the decisions and divisions of nineteenth-century editors and early commentators; Hermann Pálsson writes with understandable frustration: ‘It is simply not good enough to set up categories like ‘fornaldarsögur’, ‘riddarasögur’, ‘lygisögur’, ‘konungasögur’ and ‘Íslendingasögur’, only to discover that certain tales cannot be readily accommodated in any of them’.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, various attempts to challenge, adjust, or nuance the choice of texts in this grouping can be seen, such as Elizabeth Ashman Rowe’s assorted work, including consideration of *Áns saga bogsveigis* as a “generic hybrid” and the discussion of *Helga þáttr* in relation to so-called Conversion *þættir*.<sup>4</sup> However, the concept of the genre has remained irresistible, and is still useful, even if the choice of texts, and consequently the conclusions and patterns likely to be drawn, are variable. Stephen A. Mitchell, considering the texts of this corpus alongside the later ballad tradition, is naturally drawn to the texts as ‘a cultural hybrid’, while Torfi H. Tulinius, focusing on the earlier texts, considers the corpus a distinct product of native tradition and social realities of the thirteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Both are valid studies

---

<sup>1</sup> For the declining influence of Eddic material, see Shaun F. D. Hughes., “Where Are All the Eddic Champions Gone?” The Disappearance and Recovery of the Eddic Heroes in Late Medieval Icelandic Literature, 1400-1800’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 9 (2013), pp.37-67.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Terje Spurkland, ‘*Lygisögur, skröksögur and stjúpmaðrasögur*’, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Lassen, Ney, and Ármann (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), pp.173-184; Ármann Jakobsson, ‘The Earliest Legendary Saga Manuscripts’, *The Legendary Sagas*, pp.21-32.

<sup>3</sup> Hermann Pálsson, ‘Towards a Definition of *Fornaldarsögur*’, *Fourth International Saga Conference, München, July 30th — August 4th, 1986* (München: Institut für nordischen Philologie der Universität München, 1979), pp.2-18, here p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, ‘Generic Hybrids: Norwegian “family” sagas and Icelandic “mythic-heroic” sagas’, *Scandinavian Studies* 65.4 (1993), pp.539-554, and ‘*Borsteins þáttr uxafóts, Helga þáttr Þórissonar*, and the Conversion *þættir*’, *Scandinavian Studies* 76.4 (2004), pp.459-474.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p.43; Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, trans. Eldevik (Odense: Odense University Press, 2002).

and reveal aspects of these texts even if the definitions are contradictory. Something about the world of these texts has proved helpful in framing the material, even if any definition of them in relation to time period, geography, function, length, structure, or form seems doomed to fail. Carl Phelpstead's application of the theoretical concept of the chronotope to *Yngvars saga víðförla*, a disputed text in the *fornaldarsaga* corpus, is a useful starting point:

A *fornaldarsaga* can be defined chronotopically as an Old Icelandic prose narrative set in the Viking or 'northern' world *and* in a time that is not so much chronologically distant as qualitatively different from the present: not so much a saga of ancient times as a saga set in a *different kind* of time, a different world, in which adventures happen – the kind of world in which dragons fly through the air, beautiful maidens turn out to be death traps, and heroic quests are achieved.<sup>6</sup>

It would be easy to find texts to contradict Phelpstead's definition which are not in a distinctive world (Ashman-Rowe can demarcate "hybrid texts" like *Áns saga bogsveigis* precisely because they do not evoke a substantially different atmosphere), but nonetheless there is something about the *feel* of the world on display which is appealing and useful.<sup>7</sup> This instinctive concept of "heroic-ness" provides a helpful counterpoint to the chivalric in this study of the insular *riddarasögur*, but we must accept that this "world" fluctuates.

Part of the difficulty in the "heroic" or "legendary" identity presented by the *fornaldarsögur* is that commentators approached these texts for numerous purposes, often with clear goals and expectations, with varied success. The old drive to recover genuine pagan practices is now outdated, as Mitchell notes: 'In some cases the texts may indeed contain mythological residue, but in general they are not so much repositories of ancient pagan data as products of a renewed antiquarian interest in such material brought about by specific Icelandic conditions'.<sup>8</sup> Paganism is increasingly viewed as symbolic rather than representative, as in Catharina Raudvere's analysis of episodes in *Völsunga saga*:

---

<sup>6</sup> Carl Phelpstead, 'Adventure-Time in *Yngvars saga víðförla*', *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. Ney (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009), pp.331-346, here p.342.

<sup>7</sup> Ashman Rowe, 'Generic Hybrids', pp.539-554.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell, *Legendary sagas and ballads*, p.66.

‘None of these are religious in any conventional sense, but their function is rather to be signifiers of ancient times’.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the connections to legendary material such as that concerning Sigurðr *Fáfnisbani* and related figures of the Edda and the German *Nibelungenlied* make it tempting to use *fornaldarsögur* to reconstruct Germanic tradition and history. However, as Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir suggests, ‘the common Norse core does not form a material connection between all the sagas that are classified as *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, but only some of them’, and so studies have moved toward analysing how and where the echoes of legendary material manifest.<sup>10</sup> This Germanic element is furthered by the use of these texts for Old English scholarship in providing interesting but overstated analogues for texts such as *Beowulf*.<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, the *fornaldarsögur* have been heralded as stores of Celtic tradition and motifs, with a range of analyses highlighting these potential connections, but Ralph O’Connor, while advocating such a connection in *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ölvérs*, is wisely sceptical: “‘Gaelic/Celtic influence’ can never be invoked as a general explanation, merely as a possible viewpoint from which to examine individual cases’.<sup>12</sup> The *fornaldarsaga* world is far from straightforward, and encourages frequent reinterpretations, such as Gottskálk Jensson’s consideration that they may be indebted to Latin traditions.<sup>13</sup> It is vital to recognise that this identity which we might variously call heroic, Scandinavian, legendary, Germanic, or mythical often includes all of these terms, and equally is

---

<sup>9</sup> Catharina Raudvere, ‘Myth, Genealogy, and Narration: Some Motifs in *Völsunga saga* from the Perspective of the History of Religions’, *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, eds. Hermann, Schjødt, and Kristensen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp.119-131, here p.127.

<sup>10</sup> Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, ‘The Origin and Development of the *Fornaldarsögur* as Illustrated by *Völsunga saga*’, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, pp.33-58; see Tom Shippey, ‘*Hrólfs saga kraka* and the Legend of Lejre’, *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur*, eds. Arnold and Finlay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2010), pp.17-32, Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, ‘*Fornaldarsögur* and Heroic Legends of the Edda’, *Revisiting the Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Heroic Legend*, eds. Acker and Larrington (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp.202-218, and Shaun F. D. Hughes, “‘Where Are All the Eddic Champions Gone?’ The Disappearance and Recovery of the Eddic Heroes in Late Medieval Icelandic Literature, 1400-1800’, pp.37-67.

<sup>11</sup> See for example, Magnús Fjalldal, ‘*Beowulf* and the Old Norse Two-Troll Analogues’, *Neophilologus* 97.3 (2013), pp.541-553, Helen Damico, ‘*Sörlapáttr* and the Hama episode in *Beowulf*’, *Scandinavian Studies* 55.3 (1983), pp.222-235, and Margaret Schlauch, ‘Widsith, Vithforull, and Some Other Analogues’, *PMLA* 46 (1931), pp.969-987.

<sup>12</sup> See James Milroy, ‘The story of Ætternisstapi in *Gautreks Saga*’, *Saga-Book* 17 (1968), pp.206-223 and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, ‘Celtic Elements in Icelandic Tradition’, *Béaloideas* 25 (1957), pp.3-24; Ralph O’Connor, “‘Stepmother Sagas’”. An Irish Analogue for *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ölvérs*, *Scandinavian Studies* 72.1 (2000), pp.1-48, here p.32.

<sup>13</sup> Gottskálk Jensson, ‘Were the Earliest *fornaldarsögur* Written in Latin?’, *Myter og virkelighed*, pp.79-91.

not entirely any of them. As we consider the romance employment and adaptation of these features, it is undeniable that the elements have already been processed and reprocessed in literary tradition.

The romances' relationship to these texts is indeed so close that the distinction between the genres remains contentious. Hermann's solution to the genre issue is to claim both *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* (as well as other texts or even sections of texts) under the broader heading of romance.<sup>14</sup> This grouping was anticipated decades before in Margaret Schlauch's study *Romance in Iceland*, which did not distinguish between the two; Marianne Kalinke has been a recent advocate of reconsidering the boundary between the genres.<sup>15</sup> This confusion is in part founded on the hybridity of *Þiðreks saga*, a pivotal text which has been counted among both genres and neither, not included in the foundational editions of the *fornaldarsögur*, nor in modern bibliographies of either *riddarasögur* or *fornaldarsögur*.<sup>16</sup> Many of the features and strategies we considered in Chapter Two are shared with or reliant on *Þiðreks saga*, a text heavily concerned with knights and contest (like its analogue the *Nibelungenlied*), but much of the subject matter is Germanic/heroic. The influence of *Þiðreks saga* is undeniable, if difficult to categorise. Consequently, identifying tropes as typically *riddarasaga* or *fornaldarsaga* can be a difficult, and even circular, task.

Whether the distinction between the two genres is meaningful or if they should be collapsed are important questions for the future, although not the main concern here. However, one potential difference may be useful for our purposes: the weight and proximity of tradition. The *fornaldarsaga* world is geographically closer to an Icelandic audience, and equally closer to their pool of knowledge. Figures from history or legend, however diluted, are likely to bring certain associations. The texts are likewise intricately tied to each other, such as the complicated history of *Ragnars saga's* connection to

---

<sup>14</sup> Hermann, 'Towards a Definition of *Fornaldarsögur*', pp.2-18.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934); Marianne E. Kalinke, 'Riddarasögur, Fornaldarsögur, and the Problem of Genre', *Les Sagas de Chevaliers: Riddarasögur*, ed. Boyer (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985), pp.77-91.

<sup>16</sup> *Þiðreks saga's* omission from in Kalinke and Mitchell's *Bibliography of Old Norse/Icelandic Romance* was mentioned in Chapter Two, and the text is also absent from the online project *Stories for all time: The Icelandic fornaldarsögur* (Copenhagen: The Arnamagnæan Institute, 2019); Peter Hallberg considers *Þiðreks saga* as a *fornaldarsaga*, and an important one, in 'Some Aspects of the *Fornaldarsögur* as a corpus', *Fourth International Saga Conference*, pp.1-41.

*Völsunga saga*, or the “Matter of Hrafnista” collection of texts, and *fornaldarsögur* abound in genealogical references to characters from other texts, or to historical figures, who, importantly, may have descendants in medieval Iceland.<sup>17</sup> The romances are not without connections to each other and to historical figures, but they are comparatively rare. As Jón Viðar Sigurðsson observes: ‘Even though there is a strong resemblance between the *fornaldarsögur* and chivalric sagas, e.g. style and vocabulary, there is one significant difference: the Icelandic aristocracy never tried to create any link with the heroes in the latter’.<sup>18</sup> These romances are freed from any expectations of history or heritage, and can exist further along a spectrum of fictionality, allowing space for the exaggerated patterned structures and connections that are characteristic of our corpus. Some *fornaldarsögur* (and *Íslendingasögur*), or isolated episodes from them, might verge on a similar level of fictionality; indeed, some studies highlight substantial patterns and repetition in *fornaldarsögur*.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, some *riddarasögur* more obviously resemble *fornaldarsögur* and are sometimes labelled “borderline *fornaldarsögur*”.<sup>20</sup> Despite these complications, a wide variety of our *riddarasögur* allow Germanic and heroic elements

---

<sup>17</sup> See Rory W. McTurk, ‘The Extant Icelandic Manifestations of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*’, *Gripla* 1 (1975), pp.43-75 and Carolyne Larrington, ‘*Völsunga Saga*, *Ragnars Saga* and Romance in Old Norse: Revisiting Relationships’, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, pp.251-270; Helen F. Leslie, ‘The Matter of Hrafnista’, *Quaestio Insularis* 11 (2011), pp.169-208 and Shaun F. D. Hughes, ‘The literary antecedents of *Áns saga bogsveigis*’, *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 9 (1976), pp.196-235.

<sup>18</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, ‘Historical Writing and the Political Situation in Iceland 1100-1400’, *Negotiating Pasts in the Nordic Countries: Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Memory*, eds. Eriksen and Sigurðsson (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2009), pp.59-78.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough explores how Greenland became increasingly fictionalised and made supernatural in ‘Sailing the Saga Seas: Narrative, Cultural, and Geographical Perspectives in the North Atlantic Voyages of the *Íslendingasögur*’, *Journal of the North Atlantic* 7 (2012), pp.1-12, and ‘From Eiríkr the Red to Trolls in the Wilderness: The Development of Supernatural Greenland in the Old Norse Sagas’, *Imagining the Supernatural North*, eds. Barraclough, Cudmore, and Donecker (S. Edmonton: Polynya Press, 2016), pp.77-94; for patterns and repetition, see Manuel Aguirre’s analysis of *Völsunga saga*, which uses a specifically developed vocabulary, but there are striking similarities between his findings and what this study is examining, in ‘Narrative Structure in The Saga of the Volsungs’, *Saga-Book* 26 (2002), pp.5-37; see also Dennis Cronan, ‘The Thematic Unity of the Younger *Gautreks saga*’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 106.1 (2007), pp.81-123 and Christopher Sanders, ‘*Sturlaug’s saga starfsama*: Humour and Textual Archaeology’, *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. McKinnell, Ashurst, and Kick (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), pp.876-885.

<sup>20</sup> As “borderline *fornaldarsögur*”, Massimiliano Bampi mentions *Ála flekks saga*, *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, and *Samsons saga fagra* in ‘The Development of the *Fornaldarsögur* as a Genre: a Polysystemic Approach’, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Developments*, pp.185-199, at p.193, while *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Pulsiano et al. (London: Garland, 1993) lists *Ála flekks saga*, *Hrings saga ok Tryggva*, *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, *Sigurðar saga fóts*, and *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, p.528.

to be played out in a realm much more heavily dictated by the imagination and inspiration of the composers.

Many of the ideas of conflict and contest central to the analysis of knights in Chapter Two recur in new forms; this chapter will examine the apparent alternatives to the romance hero offered by our corpus. The contrast of these conceptual figures reflects the relationship between romance and native traditions. A number of other facets of these texts and the adjacent *fornaldarsögur* influence this discussion, and so we will progress to considering the enemies, of assorted monstrosity, which populate these texts, and how they function to construct the figures around them. Subsequently, we will move onto the family structures which give the romances a decidedly Icelandic/Scandinavian twist, culminating in an examination of *Mágus saga jarls*, a story transformed from its *chanson de geste* roots into a distinctly Icelandic story of family and legend. The act of reading these texts, and navigating romance, draws upon the expectations of an Icelandic audience entrenched in a literary culture filled with this nebulous heroic world. This stock of ideas and expectations provides the groundwork for each narrative to make use of and sometimes question those assumptions.

### **Local Hero: Alternative Protagonists**

The comfortable fusion of the contests and practices of romance tradition with this Germanic alternative can be seen in the king of the fourteenth-century *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, who ‘henti mikit gamann ath knattleikum ok burtreidum’ (p.2) [had great pleasure in ball games and jousting]. This juxtaposition is understandable, as Anna Hansen notes:

Gathering young men together for a tournament was comparable to gathering young men together for a game, a popular custom in Iceland, if the depictions of such games in the *Íslendingasögur* are to be believed and can be extrapolated to fifteenth-century Iceland.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Anna Hansen, ‘Crossing the Borders of Fantastic Space: The Relationship between the Fantastic and the Non-Fantastic in *Valdimars saga*’, *Parergon* 26.1 (2009), pp.57-74.

Even if the jousts and knightly combats discussed in Chapter Two were outwardly alien, the underlying concepts of competition and display were recognisable, and so it is natural that the same narrative processes we saw employed can be uncovered in episodes with a Germanic or legendary veneer. The choice of a *hólmganga* [duel] rather than joust appears in texts such as *Victors saga ok Blávus* and *Bærings saga*, both of which reserve the practice for combat against figures who themselves express a non-romance identity. While the former text places the duels within the confines of a *feldr* [canvas], the latter takes the more literal approach of staging the encounter on boats and an island, suggesting that in late Iceland, the *hólmganga* is decidedly antique and uncertain (duels were outlawed in Iceland in 1006); it acts as a marker of the legendary duels fought in past times.<sup>22</sup> There is a clear awareness of the symbolic potential of different types of encounter: while some moments, such as Victor and Blávus meeting each other or Bæringr publicly proving himself, require the knightly joust, other situations clearly suggest that the protagonists prove themselves in a “heroic” context. Sometimes the more native tradition is the dominant mode of expression, such as for Eirekr, one of the protagonists of *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, whose set-up draws on similar numerical techniques to those in Chapter Two (‘A Combative Approach’), but they are tailored to a more Scandinavian image. Eirekr’s first engagement in warrior activity is introduced: ‘Þá er Eirekr var xv vetra, feck fader hans honum v herskip ser til skemtanar, vel skiput ath mǫnnum ok fiarhlutum; helt hann þeim j hernat, ok vard gott til fiar’ (p.1) [When Eirekr was 15 winters, his father gave him 5 warships for his amusement, well equipped with men and items of wealth; he took them raiding, and it was a good source of wealth]. Eirekr is not knightly at all, and his prowess is expressed through ships and conquest, as ‘ath hausti hafdi hann x skip’ (p.1) [in the autumn he had 10 ships]. The character’s value is quantified metonymically through his fleet, and this is replicated in quick succession in this opening. The process repeats as ‘ath vorum lætr hann bua þessi x skip’ [in the spring he has these 10 ships prepared] and ‘ath hausti hafdi hann xv skip’ [in the autumn he had 15 ships], then ‘lagdi hann j hernat ith þridia sumar þessum vx skipum’ [he engaged in raiding

---

<sup>22</sup> For more on the history of duels, see Marlene Ciklamini, ‘The Old Icelandic Duel’, *Scandinavian Studies* 35.3 (1963), pp.15-194.

for the third summer with these 15 ships], and finally ‘Hith fiorda sumar var buin ferd hans med xx skipum’ (pp.1-2) [The fourth summer, his journey was prepared with 20 ships]. The text constructs its protagonist’s ability through very simple equations of raiding with achievement and number of ships as an indicator of worth. The idea of sailing as in some way metonymic of Icelandic identity has been explored by Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough with reference to the *Íslendingasögur*, and this conceptual association is distilled in this sequence, where quantity of ships is directly paralleled to quality of character.<sup>23</sup> Fundamentally, this practice is no different to Mírmann’s accumulation of defeated knights as seen in Chapter Two, but it conveys a different, although analogous, heroic identity. Carolyne Larrington has observed a similar method in *Örvar-Odds saga*, suggesting the influence of chivalric models on the presentation of heroes; there is a clear interaction and exchange of methods to present heroes.<sup>24</sup> In *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, the value of a more “Scandinavian” hero is emphasised.

The use of these familiar structures for a radically different ethos to chivalry and virtue is exemplified in *Sigurðar saga fóts*, a short text notably lacking magic or much in the way of knights. Despite the more “native” appearance, the text is structurally arranged around the same crux as texts we have considered: the contrast of two protagonists and eventual foster-brothers. The two characters, Ásmundr and Sigurðr, are – unusually – kings from the outset, but otherwise paradigmatic and parallel:

Ásmundr er kong nefndr. hann ried fyrer Hunalandi. wngur ok okuæntur aurr ok agætur uitur ok uopndiarfur rikr ok raduandr. frækn wm allt ok fullhugi hinn mesti. hann hieilt mikla hird ok merkiliga (p.234)

[A king is named Ásmundr. He ruled over *Hunaland*, young and unmarried, generous and noble, wise and skilled with weapons, powerful and sensible, valiant in everything and of the greatest spirit. He hosted a great and impressive court]

Sigurdr hefer kongr heitid sa er styrdi Ualandi. hann var ungur madur ok okvæntur ok hafdi nytakit vid fodrleifd sinni epter Hring kong fodr sinn. Sigurdr var aurr kongr ok agætur hardr ok hermadur mikill ok so frækin madur til uopns at fær edr aunguer stoduzt honum j bardagum edr einuigium (p.236)

---

<sup>23</sup> Barraclough, ‘Sailing the Saga Seas’.

<sup>24</sup> Carolyne Larrington, ‘A Viking in Shining Armour? Vikings and Chivalry in the *Fornaldarsögur*’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4 (2008), pp.269-288.

[There has been a king called Sigurðr, one who ruled *Valland*. He was a young and unmarried man and had recently taken his inheritance following his father King Hringr. Sigurðr was generous and noble king, a stern and great warrior, and such a valiant man in weaponry that few, or none, withstood him in battles or duels]

Using the framework of this study, we can anticipate a conflict between the two and some observation on the characters' different personalities and worth. This method of comparison has equally been observed in *fornaldarsögur*, as Ashman Rowe observes in *Egils saga einhenda og Ásmundar berserkjabana* 'the need to contrast the two protagonists as the doubled heroes of the *fornaldarsögur* are never fully equal'.<sup>25</sup> Sure enough, the comparison between the two is realised in the figure of Signý, whom both protagonists betroth, in radically different fashion. Ásmundr visits Signý, and when she is uncertain, betroths her forcefully and swears to fight any potential suitors; Sigurðr meanwhile is a successful figure and arranges a marriage to Signý with her father. The need for the audience to contrast the two is highlighted by the reunion of Signý and her father, as the latter 'sagðizt hafa gipt hana miklu rauskara manni' [said he had betrothed her to a much more impressive man] and she responds that 'agætur madur mun Sigurdr kongr vera enn þo hefer ek ætlat at eiga Asmund' (p.238) [King Sigurðr must be a noble man, and yet I have thought to marry Ásmundr]. The perspective appears to be favouring Ásmundr, given his first claim, his actual meeting with Signý, and her preference. Signý even responds to her father's anger at her choice with the fatalistic 'þu munt rada fader minn ordum þinum, enn audna mun Raada huern mann ek a' (p.238) [you will decide your words, my father, but fate will decide what man I marry], hinting that we are going to see him disproved. But this expectation is then completely frustrated when, against the logic we have built, Ásmundr does not marry Signý, despite defeating Sigurðr in a typical repeated combat which marks their similarity: 'var þat langan tima at ecki matti j millum sea' (p.242) [it was a long time that you couldn't determine between them]. Ásmundr triumphs, normally a sign of superiority. To make sense of this, we have to understand what the characters are framed as representing. Kalinke aptly notes that Sigurðr's introduction ironically

---

<sup>25</sup> Ashman Rowe, '*Fornaldarsögur* and Heroic Legend of the Edda', p.211.

focuses on ‘physical prowess’ and Ásmundr’s on intellect, which Kalinke suggests is undercut as he ‘appears to lack common sense when he so readily hands Signý over to Sigurðr’.<sup>26</sup> However, the combat is framed in very different terms. Ásmundr’s approach towards the duel is an almost hyperbolic series of settlement offers:

Asmundr mundi unna Sigurdi so mikils fiar j gulli ok brendu silfri sem sialfur hann vildi haft hafva enn Asmundr ætti Signyiu. Enn ef hann villdi eigi þenna kost. þa skylldi Sigurdr eignast allt Hwnaland enn Asmundr þo Signyiu sem adr. villdi hann huorigann þenna kost þa skylldi Sigurdr kongr gefa allt Valland enn eiga Signyiu (p.240)

[Ásmundr would grant Sigurðr as much wealth in gold and burned silver as he himself wanted to have, but Ásmundr would have Signý. But if he did not want that option, then Sigurðr should possess all *Hunaland*, although Ásmundr would possess Signý as before. Should he want neither of those options, then King Sigurðr should offer all *Valland* but have Signý]

Despite Sigurðr’s statement that ‘eingin þessi kostabod Asmundar vil ek þiggia. er hann annars makligr fra mier enn setta nockura’ (p.241) [I will have none of these offers of Ásmundr’s; he is deserving of something else from me than any settlements], the narrative repeatedly emphasises Ásmundr’s position in relation to settlements. Before the battle, Ásmundr comes ‘biodandi Sigurdi fót aull hinu saumu bod huerium er Sigurdr neitadi’ (p.242) [offering Sigurðr fótr all the same offers, which Sigurðr rejected]. Midway through the battle, Ásmundr ‘baud honum þa enn sætter ok fostbræðralag’ (p.242) [then offered him settlements and fosterbrotherhood again]; eventually, after Sigurðr has been defeated and recovers, ‘Asmundr baud honum hinar saumu sætter ok fyrr en Sigurdr kuad ecki mundi af sættum verda’ (p.243) [Ásmundr offered him the same settlements as before, but Sigurðr said nothing would come from settlements]. It is only when Sigurðr states emphatically that he will never be loyal to Ásmundr while he has Signý that Ásmundr offers him the marriage. The combat itself is not really the emphasis, but rather the repetitive battle of wills between Ásmundr, in some ways the more chivalrous or romance figure, capturing (admittedly by force) the heart of a lady and defending it with honour, and Sigurðr, who negotiated a lawful match and refuses settlements. Sigurðr, and therefore

---

<sup>26</sup> Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p.194.

the text, stands by what it sees as the correct way of doing things, favouring the binding agreement of Sigurðr and Signý's father, and subordinating compromise and the female perspective, actively shunning Signý's wishes. Breaking with expectations from romance texts, Sigurðr stands out as a subtly different hero, whose stubbornness is not a flaw but the quality that elevates him in this text. This Scandinavian-heroic world respects legality and steadfastness over impulse and courtliness.

This sense that texts are producing or preserving particularly Germanic/heroic brands of hero within romance recurs throughout the corpus. It can be as simple as the hero of *Ála flekks saga* disregarding the unspoken rule that romance protagonists are flawlessly attractive: 'Sá sveinn var bæði mikill og vænn; hann hafði flekk á hægri kinn' (p.126) [That boy was both large and handsome; he had a mark on the right cheek]. His blemish does not contradict his positive appearance, nor does it ever factor into the narrative after his brief naming sequence later, but it recalls figures such as Grímr loðinkinni in the eponymous saga. Indeed, the name Áli flekkr has some currency in the world of the *fornaldarsögur*, being mentioned at the end of *Hálfðans saga Brönufóstra*. Elsewhere, it is worth noting that Sigrgarðr of *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* achieves his success not as himself, the promiscuous prince, or as Jónas the rich merchant, but as Knútr the viking, whom he seeks out, defeats, and impersonates. Hörðr even makes a self-aware comment that 'þat væri enn meiri frami ok mannaun, at berjast við hann heldr enn við konur, þó at þær láti mikinn' (p.123) [it would be a greater achievement and accomplishment to fight against him rather than against women, even if they act mightily]. The ongoing maiden-king plot is contrasted with this traditional contest against an illustrious raider.

In *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, the kind of figure more familiar in *fornaldarsögur* is elevated, as with Sigrgarðr's foster-brothers, who in some ways trump the protagonist himself (as examined in Chapter One, 'Support Networks'). The two characters draw on the *fornaldarsaga* tradition and *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* in particular, itself a text noted for 'a narratological self-awareness and stylistic elaboration'.<sup>27</sup> This heritage offers a counterpart to Sigrgarðr and the romance aristocracy: Högni and Sigmundr (later

---

<sup>27</sup> Annette Lassen, 'Origines Gentum and the Learned Origin of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*', *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, pp.33-58.

disguised as Hörður and Stígandi) are the sons of a farmer. Furthermore, they differ from stereotypical romance protagonists in appearance, behaviour, and popularity: ‘Þeir váru stórir menn ok sterkir, ok ófyrirleitner þegar í uppruna sínum [. . .] Þeir væru sjaldan vinsælir. Þeir váru lítt settir at klæðum, en þau sem váru rifur hirðmenn af þeim’ (p.103) [They were large and strong men, and reckless from the start of their upbringing . . . They were seldom popular. They were poorly equipped with clothing, and what there was the courtiers ripped from them]. Direct borrowing from *Bósa saga* sees the brothers outlawed after killing someone at a ball game, in this case a slave sent to kill them, and their reappearance is also inspired by that saga, in which Bósi reappears at a cliff and jumps to the boat. This scene is doubled in *Sigrarðs saga* by applying it to both characters, as their appearances are made clearly parallel:

Einn dag sigldu þeir mikit veður ok urðu nærri björgum nökkurum. Maður kom fram á bjargit. Hann var mikill vexti ok undarliga skaptr. Hann hafði kring mikinn ok var í gráum veipustakki. Þat bar þó meir við hversu þjóabratr er hann var, því var líkast sem klæðsekkur væri laginn um þverar lendar honum ok tók ofan í knésbot. Hann beiddist fars. Sigrarður spurði hvat honum væri til lista gefit en hann kveðst vel aka segli. [. . .] Hinn stökk af berginu ok út á skipit, ok gekk skipit niður um nagla. Þetta hlaup var þrettán álna af landi. [. . .] Þeir spurðu hann at nafni. Hann kveðst Hörður heita ok vera kallaður harðstjölur (p.122)

[One day, they sailed in heavy weather and ended up near some cliffs. A man came forward onto the cliff. He was large in stature and remarkably formed. He had a large hump and was in a grey cloak. Yet it was more significant how thick he was in the thighs, because it was like a bag had been placed across his loins and came down to the knees. He requested passage. Sigrarður asked what talents he was endowed with and he said he could control the sails well . . . That man leapt from the cliff and out onto the ship, and the ships went down to the nails. This jump was thirteen ells from the land . . . They asked him for his name. He says he is called Hörður and was called hard-rump]

Annan níunda dag eptir sigldu þeir enn með landi fram. Þar var útgrynni mikit. Þar stóð maður á landi. Sá beiddi fars, hann var hár vexti ok í vargskinns stakki. Hann sagðist heita Velstígandi. Sigrarður spurði hvað honum væri til lista gefit, en hann kveðst troða vel marvað. [. . .] Hann sté út á sæinn; alda var mikil en þó rann hann til skipsins ok tók honum aldrei upp yfir skó, ok mundi þat vera sex tigu faðma frá landi. (p.123)

[Another nine days later, they sailed again along the land. There was a great outcrop. There stood a man on shore. That one requested passage; he was tall in stature and in a cloak of wolfskin. He said he was called Velstígandi (Good-walking). Sigrarður asked what talents he was

endowed with, and he says he can walk the ocean well . . . He stepped out into the sea; there were large waves and yet he ran to the ship and it never came up above his shoes, and that must have been sixty fathoms from the land.]

These characters embrace and exaggerate qualities antithetical to the typical romance hero, using grotesque or unruly appearance, strange feats, and blunt names to mark their identities; their connection to each other is also implicit. Their strange abilities are used for novel and humorous purposes, such as when Hörðr kills spying men behind a wall by crushing them with his rump, but there is also significance in having three non-romance figures, a viking and his strange associates, complete the impossible quests. Högni and Sigmundr are the moral superiors of the text, and it is notable that this accolade is given to the children of a farmer. Ashman Rowe notes that *Áns saga bogsveigis* is distinctive in being 'defiantly on the side of the comfortably-off and hard-working' rather than the aristocratic, and there appears to be a similar element of that here.<sup>28</sup> The markedly non-romance figures, adapted directly from *fornaldarsögur*, are eventually recognised as worthy, even by the maiden-king herself: 'þa stóðu upp tveir ungir menn á bekknum. Eigi hafði hon sétt aðr vaskligri menn. Hon spurði hvat þessir menn heiti. Annarr kveðst heita Högni harðstjölr en annar Sigmundr stígandi' (pp.143-149) [Then two young men stood up on the benches. She had not seen more gallant men. She asked what these men were called. One says he is called Högni hard-rump and the other Walking Sigmundr]. Although they now outwardly resemble paradigmatic romance heroes, the preservation of their alliterative bynames suggests that the playful heroic identities they adopted remain fundamental. *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, without supplanting the protagonist entirely, appears to ensure there is space for more local and less aristocratic heroes in the spotlight.

*Victors saga ok Blávus* shares the interest of *Sigrarðs saga* in contrasting the hero, unfavourably, to more traditional hero figures, in a remarkably powerful encounter. The two foster-brothers, substantially prior to the progression of the maiden-king plot, seek to prove themselves, first wanting to know 'hvar þeir siokongar edur uikingar edr hermann at frægastur eru ok uti liggja j

---

<sup>28</sup> Ashman-Rowe, 'Generic Hybrids', p.548.

hofunum ok fieuonar væri mestar' (p.12) [where those sea-kings or vikings or warriors are that are the most renowned and lurk out in the oceans and had the greatest prospect of wealth]. The choice of words, particularly *sjókongar* [sea-kings], is explicit in drawing on Scandinavian traditions, even though one of the figures is called Öundur *grikk* [the Greek]. For romance enemies, they are presented in very positive terms:

bader eru þeir væner menn at aaliti. sterker ok storer ok grimazter allra herkonga ok reyndr j framgongu. Randuer hefir fellt .xxx. berserkia j einuigum enn Aunundr .xx. [. . .] .ij. aunguar finnast adrar jafnstorar suo at menn hafi spurn af ne agætare at aullu smidi (p.12)

[they are both handsome men in appearance, strong and large and the most vicious of all warrior kings and tested in assault. Randver had slain 30 *berserkir* in single combat and Öundur 20 . . . no other two of such stature can be found, as far as men have report of it, nor nobler in all formation]

Ruth Righter-Gould notes that 'The typical viking hero of the legendary sagas is either ruthless and materialistic or a romantic figure', and *Victors saga* clearly draws on the latter tradition.<sup>29</sup> The two vikings are doubles of the protagonists, and there is even a numerical differentiation between the two: the man who has killed the greater number of *berserkir*, Randver, is matched with Victor, the main protagonist.<sup>30</sup> The conceptual associations between the heroes and their enemies are clearly established.

The inevitable duels are set up to allow the protagonists to prove themselves, but it does not work out that way. Firstly, the vikings have magical weapons which the protagonists have to enlist a dwarf to steal and replace. Secondly, during the ensuing combat, the narrative is explicit about the opponents' superiority even in the protagonists' success: 'þess at þo var audsied at Randver var miklu sterkari. enn þo var Uiktor suo vopnfimur at Randver kom aungu saari a hann enda dugdi brynþvarinn hardla jlla' (p.23) [even though it was obvious that Randver was much stronger, yet Victor was so skilled

<sup>29</sup> Ruth Righter-Gould, 'The *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*: A Structural Analysis', *Scandinavian Studies* 52.4 (1980), pp.423-441, here p.420.

<sup>30</sup> Hendrik Lambertus also comments on this contrast as part of a discussion of the self in 'Mirrors of the Self: Deconstructing Bipolarity in the Late Icelandic Romances', *Á austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia: Preprint papers of the 14<sup>th</sup> International Saga Conference*, eds. Ney, Williams and Ljungqvist (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), pp.551-559.

with weapons that Randver did not bring any injury onto him, and the halberd availed him very poorly]. In each of the two duels, the respective protagonist is only saved by the intervention of their magical assistant: ‘Suo hafdi Randver hartt til lagit at hann hafdi borit þa baada Victor ok Skeggkarl allt wt a felldarskautit suo at þeir hefði fallit baader aa bak aptur ef Dimus hefði eigi hlaupit undir herdar þeim ok riett þa’ (p.23) [Randver had stabbed so hard that he would have carried them both, Victor and Skeggkarl, all the way to the edge of the cloth so that they would have both fallen, if Dímus had not leapt under their shoulder and straightened them]; ‘suo lagdi Aunundur fast til at þeir Blauus baaruzt wt a felldarhornit ok bwner til fallzs aadr Dimus dugdi þeim sem Victor fyrri’ (pp.24-25) [Önundur stabbed so powerfully that Blávus and he would have been carried out onto the corner of the cloth and at the point of falling before Dímus availed them, as with Victor before]. Nothing in the narrative framing of this episode presents the protagonists as particularly impressive, and this is acknowledged by the characters themselves. Despite the defeated Önundur’s assertion that ‘nu hofum wid fundit þa .ij. at bædir eru meiri ok maatkari’ (p.25) [now we have found those two who both are greater and more powerful], the protagonists consider the episode in a different way:

Blauus mælti þa “litil frægd hefer mier aukizt j þott at ek hafa Aunund at velli lagt. þuiat þat var meir af viel en karlmennsku”. “satt er þat” kuad Victor “at sidr war ek jafn Randuer at hann hefði lagit at jordu slika .ij. sem ek er ef suikalaust hefði verit. enn huat mun nu giora at syrgia þa dauda. enn vid þat ma hellzt una at slíker prydimenn munu aunguer fædazt aa minum daugum. læt ek þat wm mælt at þeim sie fridr ok værd enda skilimzt ek þar vid” (p.26)

[Blávus then said: “Little renown has been accumulated for me even though I have struck Önundur to the ground, because that was more from trickery than manliness.” “That is true,” said Victor, “I am less of an equal to Randver, for he would have struck to the earth two such as I am if there had been no treachery. And what can be done in mourning those dead? For that, we must be most of all satisfied that no such men of splendour will be born in my days. I let it be said that may they have peace and calm, and I leave it there.]

The analysis the characters themselves perform supports the narrative structure of the episode, which uses the contrast of combatants as other texts have, but to highlight the superiority of the viking enemies. The tone is strikingly melancholy, as each viking laments, asks for their opponent’s firstborn child to take their names, and is buried with their weapons in a moment of memorialisation. Their

spectre looms over the rest of the narrative. This micronarrative of the courtly princes cheating against the noble vikings is not necessary for the larger movement towards the maiden-king and marriages for the protagonists, but is seemingly an homage to the legendary heroes not traditionally favoured as protagonists of romance. The encounter acts as a powerful expression of something like a counterculture within the romances.

These texts are willing to juxtapose romance heroes with a Germanic/heroic alternative and allow their interactions to inform value judgements. In *Blómstrvallasaga*, the two central brothers, who are separated and reunite in disguise unknowingly, each take on an exaggerated persona. The *Rauði Riddari*, discussed in Chapter Two, is a Chretienesque embodiment of chivalry. His brother, on the other hand, becomes Trémann, a wild figure, who lives with an old couple in a farm. Trémann draws on a similar pool of visual signifiers as the brothers of *Sigrarðs saga*: ‘kom fram ur skóginum maðr mikill vexti ok friðr: hann var í vargskins stakki ok hafði um sik silfrbelti ok stóra bítskálm í hendi með miklum göddum’ (p.17) [a man, of large stature and attractive, came from the forest and had a silver belt around him and a large knife in hand, with great spikes]. He clearly embodies a different tradition to his brother, but he is equally impressive: ‘sáu menn at hann var afbragð flestra manna’ (p.19) [men saw that he was a paradigm of most men]. The brothers of *Blómstrvalla saga* show the co-existence of figures of two worlds, different but equal. This is the spirit of *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, which uses extensive structuring to convey the distinct identities of two traditions united in one text.<sup>31</sup> The protagonist, Vilmundr, appears late in the text, but the world of the text anticipates his arrival. The symbolic centre of the text is the birth of the two central sisters, who are at first mention indistinguishable: ‘hun fæddi tvau meybaurn og uoru bædi mikjl og faugr’ (p.140) [she birthed two baby girls and both were large and beautiful]. However, they are soon demarcated by a scene with a *völva* who is brought to bless the children:

---

<sup>31</sup> For more on the co-existence of conceptual worlds within texts, see Bampi, ‘The Development of the *Fornaldarsögur* as a Genre’ and Fulvio Ferrari, ‘Possible Worlds of Sagas: The Intermingling of Different Fictional Universes in the Development of the *Fornaldarsögur*’, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, pp.271-289.

uðluan tok við meyiunum. og leggja þær niðr á eina blæiu. er á uoru markadar allra handa saugr. þar lét hun upp á bera bæðj gull og dýrgripe. blom og allden jardar. meyiarnar hófdu haund j þui sem hia þeim lá. og tok su er fyrr kom til ein skarefifel og bar j munn ser. aunnur tok eirn gullbaug. og rann hann upp á hennar fingr. uoluan bar þa börnen til drottningar og mælti mǫrgum heillauænlígum ordum yfer þeim. hun sagdi drottningu. at sv sem gullbaugen tok. mundj uerda kynsælle. og mundj gipt agiætum kongs synj “þuiat gull merker kongatign. en su sem alldjnet tok. mun uera fesæl og arsæl. og mun gipt bonda synj af berserkja kyne. þuiat jardar áuðxtr merkjr almugan. og mun sa madr mikell fyrir ser. þuiat eckj allden er jafnramt edr beiskara en skarefifell” (pp.140-141)

[The seeress received the girls, and places them down on a cloth, on which were decorated all kinds of stories. There she had both gold and treasures placed on top, blossoms and fruits of the earth. The girls put their hands on that which lay by them, and the one who came first took a hawkbit and put it in her mouth; the other took a golden ring and slipped it up onto her finger. The seeress then carried the children to the queen and said many promising words over them. She told the queen that the one who took the gold ring would be more fortunate, and would be married to a noble king's son, “because gold represents the status of kings. And the one who took the plant will be rich and fertile, and will be married to a farmer's son of the kindred of *berserkir*, because the product of the earth represents peasants. And that man will be impressive in himself, because no plant is as sturdy or more bitter than the hawkbit”]

The two children, Gullbrá and Sóley, are separated into the aristocratic world and the rustic world, and, from that point on, everything surrounding those two characters matches that. The two are repeatedly differentiated: Gullbrá is ‘miklu fridare’ [much more attractive] while Sóley is set to be ‘skapmikel oh hyggilig j bragdj’ (p.142) [intelligent and thoughtful in deed]; Gullbrá is ‘blid og hýr og þýd uid alla og vnnv henne allir hugastum’ [pleasant and mild and amenable with all and all loved her deeply] while ‘Sóley uar nóckut fálatare. á fannga mikel og ueitul af fe. og spardj ecki uid uine sina. og uilldj hun og hafa þat af huerjum sem hun kalladj’ (p.142) [Sóley was somewhat more reserved, with a lot of possessions and stingy with money, but she did not hold back with her friends; she also wanted to have whatever she claimed]. There is a striking contrast between Vilmundr's first encounter with Gullbrá, as he enters a tower and ‘sa þar sitia meir enn .LX. meya. þær haufdu allar bertt háár. og gullband wmm haufud. Ein bar lángt af audrum, og sat hun i midit’ (p.158) [saw sitting there more than 60 maidens; they all had uncovered hair and golden bands across their heads. One far exceeded the others, and she sat in the middle], and his first face-to-face with Sóley who is hiding in a kitchen ‘j klædum slitnum

ðllum' (p.162) [in completely torn clothes] and who wrestles him. The text constructs two stereotypes of women contrasted against each other: the courtly, demure figure focused on physical beauty and popularity, and a spirited figure more focused on a combination of self-interest and loyalty and marked by intellect. The juxtaposition of romance and non-romance radiates out from these two characters to affect everything else. Hjarandi, the girls' half-brother, performs a role we have seen in other texts as the defender of a woman, but only for Gullbrá: 'Hjarandj streingdj þess heit at hann skal þeim einum manne gipta systur sina Gullbra sem jafn være honum at ollum riddara skap' (p.144) [Hjarandi swore an oath that he shall betroth his sister Gullbrá only to that man who was his equal in all knighthood]. The reference to *riddaraskapr* there is notable, as Gullbrá's role as romance heroine influences her surroundings; the fact that Sóley has a fostermother instead of a knightly protector is a further reflection of this patterning. The text is deeply aware of its movement between two traditions, and the roles associated with each.

The *völva's* prophecy and the late introduction of its protagonist allow some tension and ambiguity in who will marry the sisters, as each has false suitors who anticipate the real matches and continue to mark two different worlds. Sóley's narrative involves her using trickery to avoid various suitors (not dissimilar to a maiden-king), such as getting one to kill another, and switching places with a bondswoman. Her suitors draw clearly on native traditions. One is a slave with the typical name Kolr who has a grotesque appearance: 'hann uar mikell uexte og liotr miog. háret uar brunnet af honum og skoklædjn nedan at hne. hann hafdj kistel miken a herdunum og lutr j halsenum. hann uar jlla eygdr en uerr tennt.' (p.143) [he was large in stature and very ugly; the hair was burned off him, as were the shoes from the knees down. He had a large hump at the shoulders and a bend in the neck. He was evil-eyed and worse toothed]. Another is a farmer's son called 'Ulfr jllt eitt. hann uar hermadur mikell og opýdr. stirdlynnndr og fegiarn. og siálfhælen og þo manna vaskaztur' (p.146) [Úlfr Only Evil. He was a great and tempestuous warrior, stubborn and greedy and boastful, although the most valiant of men]. There are likely *berserkr* resonances to his name, appearance, and personality. In contrast, Gullbrá's suitor is a romance invader: Buris, 'son Rodian kongs af Blaukmannalandj' (p.172) [son of King Róðian

of *Blökmannaland*] is marked by his foreignness and the monstrosity of his army composed of *berserkir* and *blámenn*, seemingly used here interchangeably to suggest monstrosity. He arrives and demands Gullbrá and needs to be fought off by the heroes. The cast of minor characters is shaped around a juxtaposition of motifs from different genres.

These suitors, drawn from different traditions, are used to contrast with the sisters' real suitors, overtly in the case of Gullbrá. The arrival of Guðifreyr, another king's son, is marked as a replication of Buris's invasion, but positive. The eavesdropping Vilmundr first hears how 'sá menn skip at landj sigla. voru saman .xu. og .xx. og uoru flest drekar og dromundar. og þotte monnum sem þat mundj komen eirnhuer bidill Gullbrar [. . .] og þickir monnum sem nu mune Hjarandj reyndr uerda' (pp.171-172) [men saw ships sailing to land; there were 15 and 20 and most were dragon-ships and galleys, and it seemed to men that a suitor for Gullbrá must have come . . . and now it seems to men that Hjarandi will be tested]. He later overhears a markedly similar exchange: "[“]uær sãm skip at landi sigla .xx. þau uoru skrautlig og uel buen. og eirn drekj suo uænn at aungan sã eg fyrr honum likan [”] [. . .] “auditad mun þat” seger kelling “at þar mun komen eirn huer bidell Gullbrar”. “þa mun Hjarandj uerda reyndr” (p.184) [“we saw ships sailing to land. There were 20, splendid and well dressed, and one dragon-ship so handsome that I never saw any like it before” . . . “It's obvious,” says the old woman, “that a suitor for Gullbrá must have arrived there.” “Then Hjarandi will be tested”]. Guðifreyr represents the true romance suitor who fits into this pattern of trial and performance. In contrast, Vilmundr represents a more positive figure from native tradition, a twist on the *kolbíttr*, in this case an ignorant youth brought up in isolation with his family who only leaves home by chance. His description is positive but not hyperbolic: 'hann uar mikjll uexte en sterkr at afle. og fridr sýnum. hærdr manna bezt og eygdr uel. skartsamligr á allan uoxt og uoro þo menn andliz fridare' (p.152) [he was large in stature and strong in might and handsome in appearance, the best-haired of men, with good eyes, impressive in all formation, and yet men could be more attractive in the face]. Furthermore, his clothing marks him in the same way as characters like Stígandi and Trémann: 'hann var i biarnskinz stacki Raudvm lodnum og saumadr med miklvm hagleik. digurt silfur bellti hafdi hann vm sig. og á storan saxhnif buinn silfr

oturskinnz kuf á hófdi og var slegin um silfur giord' (p.156) [he was in a red, hairy cloak of bear-skin, sewn with great craft; he had a stout silver belt around him, and a large knife on it, adorned with silver, a hood of otter-skin on his head, and it was bound around with a silver strap]. Unlike Kolr and Úlfr, he is not a demonised version of Icelandic identity. This outward appearance and behaviour is also not a guise or ploy; although Vilmundr's father is revealed to have been one of the king's champions in the past, it does not dent the homegrown identity of the protagonist. It appears that the saga straightforwardly presents a native hero to match its non-romance heroine.

The clearest evidence of this text's aim to put chivalric and local worlds and characters on a par is once more expressed through contest. Hjarandi, Gullbrá's protector, forms the link between Vilmundr, representative of the native world, and Guðifreyr, the romance visitor. Hjarandi is one of the first characters introduced, and is marked as an exceptional figure: 'hann uar fridr madr synum og sterkur at afle og suo uel buen at j þrottum at fáer menn kuomuzt til jafns vid hann. hann uar skiotrádr og skaurunglyndr uinfast og suo snarr j ollum atburdum huort hann uar j bardaugum edr burtreidum' [he was an attractive man in appearance and strong in might, and so well equipped with skills that few men came to his level. He was quick-thinking and authoritative, popular and so sharp in all activities, whether he was in battles or jousts]; defeating him is established as a clear achievement. Both Vilmundr and Guðifreyr, at their own point in the narrative, compete with Hjarandi in three events, most of which are constructed in a back-and-forth replicative manner which emphasises the challenger's ability. For example:

Hjarandi spyr nu huersu hann kynne steine at kasta. Vilmundr bad hann taka steinen. og ætla kasted. Hjarandj tok upp þann steinn er stod skippunnd. og kastar j fystu .xx. fet. og bad Vilmundr epter kasta. hann gerer suo. og kastar fram yfer tuær stikr. Hjarandj tok steinen j annat sinn. og kastar tolf fet og .xx. Vilmundr tok þa steinen. og kastar fram yfer þriar stikr. [. . .] Hjarandj reidizt nu. og gripr steinen. og sparer nu eigi af. og kastar nu .xl. fota. og bidr Vilmundr epter kasta. hann gerir suo. og snarar fram yfir fimm stikr. Hjarandj uill þa eigi leingr til ganga [. . .] Vilmundr tok þa steinen. og setr á fot ser. og kastar mann hædar upp j hallar vegginn. suo fast at hann feste sig þar. og stendur þar en j dag til synezt' (pp.167-168)

[Hjarandi now asks how well he could throw stones. Vilmundr asked him to take the stone and indicate the throw. Hjarandi took up such a stone that weighed a ship-pound, and first throws

it 20 feet and asked Vilmundr to throw next. He does so, and throws it over two measures. Hjarandi took the stone a second time and throws it 24 feet. Vilmundr then took the stone and throws it over three measures . . . Hjarandi now got angry and grasps the stone and does not hold back, and now throws 40 feet and asks Vilmundr to throw next. He does so and launches it over five measures. Hjarandi then doesn't want to engage any longer . . . Vilmundr then took the stone and places it on his foot and throws it the height of a man up into the wall of the hall, so firmly that it got stuck there, and remains there to this day as a mark]

The increasing achievements of each, the rising frustration of Hjarandi, and Vilmundr's eventual success form a typical replicative and reflective combat that tells the audience of Vilmundr's prowess. This structure is the model for all of Vilmundr's trials, and most of Guðifreyr's. What is most significant is that the choice of sports is tailored to the identity of the characters: along with stone throwing, Vilmundr engages in spear-throwing and swimming. Guðifreyr first engages in spear-throwing, seemingly connecting him to Vilmundr, particularly as the narrative notes the spear is 'þat sem þeir Vilmundr hófdu fyr skoted' (p.189) [the one which Vilmundr and Hjarandi had flung before]. However, the same feat is recoded as courtly, because Hjarandi shoots at an apple and Guðifreyr at a chesspiece. Subsequently, 'profudu þeir arbystis skot ok adra hæfne. og uar suo nærre um med þeim. at menn kunnu þar eigi mvn at gera' (p.189) [they competed in shooting crossbows and other marksmanship, and it was so close between them that men could not find a difference]; finally, they sport on horses and joust. There is a recognition of the distinct differences between the local and courtly worlds, but both are ultimately marked as entertaining and worthy. Although Vilmundr has slightly more success against Hjarandi than Guðifreyr, the text moves generally towards satisfaction and achievement for both of these representatives of cultural worlds. Vilmundr and Sóley are married, as are Guðifreyr and Gullbrá, both sides having conquered the respective villains of their tradition. The saga as a whole shows a deep engagement with the meeting of different traditions, and possibly a greater generic awareness than we anticipate. The casts of two different but parallel types of stories interact together, each contributing to the overall narrative.

If *Vilmundar saga* represents the careful interweaving of two worlds into one narrative, then *Samsons saga fagra* presents a fascinating counterpoint, in a text which collides two worlds

haphazardly. The main narrative movement of *Samsons saga* appears to be facilitating the union of Samson and his beloved Valentína, frustrated by kidnappings and disappearances. However, upon the conclusion of this, the thief Kvintalín is sent on a quest for redemption, seeking the chastity-testing mantle discussed in Chapter Two. The text becomes a new narrative, even noting: ‘Hér byriar nú annan hlut sögunnar’ (p.380) [Now here begins a second part of the story]. This section is possibly a pre-existing *fornaldarsaga* which the Samson narrative is written or added around, or a pastiche of *fornaldarsögur* written to contrast the Samson romance narrative (or vice versa); in the absence of any evidence of separate circulation, the most that can be said is that the section is markedly different. Fulvio Ferrari notes of *fornaldarsögur* that ‘Each story [. . .] can be divided into smaller narrative segments, and here develops the possibility to move the action into a different fictional world’, and this is clearly applicable to *Samsons saga*.<sup>32</sup> Despite the focus on the romance-influenced mantle, the section is filled with stereotypical giants (there is a King Skrímnir who rules *Jötunheimir*), and we have a very different protagonist to our first hero Samson. Samson was given a typical romance description focused on beauty and perfection: he ‘var kallaður Samson hinn fagri, og var hann það sannefndur, því á hans líkama sáust engi lýti’ (p.347) [was called Samson the beautiful, and that was an accurate name for him, because no flaw could be seen on his body’]. Sigurður, the abandoned son of the legendary Goðmundr of Glæsivellir, is also given a reason for his name, but it is comically underwhelming in comparison: ‘Þau kölluðu sveininn Sigurð af sugunni [in his mouth]’ (p.383) [They named the boy Sigurður after the sucking toy in his mouth]. He is a much more negative figure throughout his story, starting from his introduction, where he is marked as ‘furðu mikill’ [remarkably large] and a trouble to his adopted parents. This negative depiction continues through his departure, where he is ‘illa settur að klæðum. Hempa var honum ger af úlfaldahárum og ofin sem brekásfletja, hökulskór á fötum af bolrefsskinni loðnu, kylfu í hendi’ (p.384) [poorly equipped with clothes. A robe was made for him from the hairs of camels and woven like bench-straps, with cloak-shoes on his feet from hairy foxskin, a club in hand]. Sigurður’s repeated feature is his violence, a stark contrast to the remarkably non-violent first

---

<sup>32</sup> Fulvio Ferrari, ‘Possible Worlds of Sagas’, p.286.

section of the text. Sigurðr's killings culminate in a disagreement with his father-in-law 'er Sigurðr tók í hönd mági sínum, hóf hann upp stafinn ok rak við eyra honum, svo hausinn brotnaði' (p.394) [when Sigurðr took his in-law's hand, he lifted up the staff and struck against his ear, so the skull broke]. The text plays out this world of monsters with even Sigurðr being monstrous, aided by an inhuman lifespan which eventually sees him try to arrange a third marriage to a woman centuries younger than him. When Kvintalín the thief reappears in the narrative, he gives Sigurðr a fitting ending: disguising himself as Sigurðr's bride, Kvintalín 'grípur stafinn ok steypiti konungi áfram, en hún rak stafinn við eyra honum og það tröll eiga hann' (p.396) [grasps the staff and threw the king forward, and she struck the staff against his ear and bid the trolls have him]. Sigurðr is given a death that echoes his treatment of his kinsman. Whether or not this section was composed by the same person as the rest of the text, the two sections have been clearly juxtaposed and intertwined. It is likely that the stark contrast between the two is the main aim: the courtly hero and his romance world are shown to be markedly less monstrous and violent than the native figure and the world of giants he inhabits. These two nebulous genres crystallise in the contrast between them within a single text.

However, *Samsons saga* is not simply the story of the romance world visiting and undermining the legendary world. Even after the second main narrative is over, and Kvintalín returns the mantle, the text has a third movement. Úlfr, the son of Sigurðr, intrudes into the happy ending of the romance world and kills the semi-redeemed Kvintalín along with the respected King Garlant; the saga continues to put these two traditions into conflict. The final resolution is striking, as it sees the women of both worlds uniting to solve the conflict. Hrafnborg, Sigurðr's kidnapped bride, comes to Ólympía, Samson's magical Breton foster-mother, and asks for her to help bring about settlements. The final implication of the saga seems to be the elevation of female sense against male violence, and the union of these two warring traditions. It is a thought-provoking finish that allows room for the saga to be reconsidered as highlighting the achievements of Ólympía, who in a markedly replicated episode twice tricks Kvintalín into taking home animals instead of Valentína, and who later sends Kvintalín on his quest before eventually resolving this crisis. Whether she represents the civility of the romance world or a hybrid of

romance sensibility with the magical foster-mother traditions of Icelandic literature, Ólympía ultimately comes out of the text as more impressive than either “protagonist”. The text’s strange composition allows the clash of genres to create drama and amusement in the strange interactions of different heroes and different worlds.

These texts navigate a foreign but increasingly popular world through native heroes. In the interactions between “native” and “courtly” characters, the position of these motifs and traditions is interrogated. The impulse can be seen in large scale narratives such as *Vilmundar saga* and *Samsons saga*, or in smaller moments, such as when a scribe of *Ectors saga* lists Icelandic names as waggoneers of Ector’s army, or when Norwegian characters in *þjalar-Jóns saga* are used by the princes there to fake what is almost a family saga conflict, even involving *sjálfðæmi* [self-judgement].<sup>33</sup> Whether it is trying to fit more traditional figures into an otherwise chivalric text, or evaluating inherited expectations, the insular romance genre incorporates characters from two separate worlds into replicative structures, placing them into dialogue. The examination of these heroes reveals some interconnected elements, such as monstrous opponents, significant family structures, and references Germanic legendary heritage. Each of these areas deserves to be considered in full to uncover how the heroes of these texts fit into their surroundings.

## The Opposition: Villains and Monsters

Heroes are one side of the story, but the contrast with antagonists allows further reflection; in the insular romances, a stock of native villains is employed alongside more typical romance enemies. However, to approach either *riddarasögur* or *fornaldarsögur* with the intention of producing a taxonomy of monsters or a catalogue of folk beliefs and pagan traditions is a flawed and outdated approach. Modern commentators, such as Ármann Jakobsson, acknowledge the interchangeability of monstrous terminology and presentation, and focus more fruitfully on the symbolic or functional

---

<sup>33</sup> For more on the manuscript in question, see Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, ‘Ideology and Identity in Late Medieval Northwest Iceland. A Study of AM 152 fol.’, *Gripla* 25 (2014), pp.87-128.

purpose of these figures.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the historical *berserkr* figure has little relevance to *riddarasögur* or *fornaldarsögur*, as Otto J. Zitzelsberger notes: ‘What happens in the *fornaldarsögur* is often a total enlargement, often to the point of a spectacular grotesqueness, of the *berserkr* figure’.<sup>35</sup> These monsters and enemies are ultimately signifiers of certain perspectives on the past or on evil and act as signposts for how to read and process the characters presented. Consequently, our corpus often benefits from approaching these texts and their monsters not through what uncertain traditions they are drawing on, but how they are using those figures to convey the meaning of the text. So, in *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, the eponymous king, who is at this point on the opposite side to the “heroes”, has an uncle appear with ‘tólf berserkir; á þá bitu eigi járn; þeir grenjuðu sem hundar, og skildi engi þeirra mál, og engi var þeirra skemmtan utan að drepa menn’ (p.87) [twelve *berserkir*; no iron cut them. They howled like dogs, and no-one understood their speech, and there was no entertainment for them except killing men]. Everything about this description confirms that Flóres is on the villainous side. These *berserkir* unite typical features of *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur berserkir*, including protection against weapons and animal noises, while adding some hyperbolic elements to complete their demonisation. We have already seen in both Chapter One (‘Strong Foil’) and Chapter Two (‘A Combative Approach’) how these kinds of figures form unworthy suitors and worthy antagonists for the purposes of each narrative, and marking their monstrosity in clear terms acts towards this goal, regardless of whether they represent a single, unified tradition. Bæringr’s enemy in his *hólmganga*, Skaðivaldr, as described by his own brother, is markedly more influenced by native traditions than other opponents in the text, but still blends a number of aspects. He is ‘hinn vaskazti ok hinn bezti riddari’, but the description continues:

---

<sup>34</sup> Ármann Jakobsson, ‘Identifying the Ogre: The Legendary Saga Giants’, *Fornaldarsagaerne*, pp.181-200.

<sup>35</sup> See for example Jens Peter Schjødt, ‘The Notion of *Berserkir* and the Relation between Óðinn and Animal Warriors’, *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. McKinnell, Ashurst, and Kick (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), pp.886-892, Arwen van Zanten, ‘Going Berserk: in Old Norse, Old Irish and Anglo-Saxon Literature’, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 63 (2007), pp.43-64, and Ralph O’Connor, ‘Monsters of the Tribe: The Berserk Fury, Shapeshifting and Social Dysfunction in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, *Egils saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*’, *Kings and Warriors in Early North-West Europe*, eds. Rekdal and Doherty (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2016), pp.180-236; Otto J. Zitzelsberger, ‘The *Berserkir* in the *Fornaldarsögur*’, *Fourth International Saga Conference*, pp.1-13, here p.6.

En hann er illgiarnn maðr, ok líkiz í því moður sinni; því at hvern var gygr ok þó vndir forsi einvm í Saxelfr; kom hvern með golldrvm at feðr minvm, ok var hvern drottning hans, ok vnni hann henni mikit ok yfir alla lvti. Hvern drygði ok mikinn trolldom, meðan hvern lifði. En sonr hennar hefir halfo meíra; því at hann er stvndum í dreka líki; ok í bardavgvm hefir hann eítr imvnni ok spýr á vuni sína, sva at eingi þó lír við, nema enn helldr flyia allir. Ok með hans krapti erv morg lond skattgild feðr minvm. (p.108)

[the most valiant and best knight. But he is a malicious man, and in that resembles his mother, because she was an ogress and dwelt under a waterfall in the *Saxelfr*; she came upon my father with sorcery, and she was his queen, and he loved her greatly and above all things. She also performed a great deal of trollishness while she lived. But her son has more by half, because he is sometimes in the form of a dragon, and in battles he has poison in his mouth and spits it at his enemies, so that no-one survives it unless everyone flees instead. And with his skill, many lands are tributes to my father.]

Monstrosity does not exclude the possibility of being a knight, but the overwhelming impression is negative yet powerful, linked to poison, dragons, and the ogress under the waterfall trope, which also appears in *Samsons saga fagra*, prompting *Beowulf* connections.<sup>36</sup> The text draws on a series of markers of Skaðivaldr's otherness and strength in order to provide a climactic encounter with its hero, and so there is no inconsistency in Skaðivaldr boasting that 'morg lond hefi ek vnnit til handa þer, bæði af riddaraskap ok trólldomligri kvnandi, er moðir mini kende mer' (p.178) [I have won many lands for your hands, both with knighthood and trollish magic which my mother taught me]. Likewise, a demonic aspect is equally fitting, when Skaðivaldr arrives for the duel 'gernenga fvllr ok eitrblandinn, ok með honvm fianðenn' (p.118) [full of sorcery and blended with poison, and the devil with him]. The *riddarasögur* use monstrosity, of any sort, to signal to the audience.

The semiotic nature of monsters is frequently hinted at by the widespread use of signifying names. Sometimes these names draw directly on legendary or mythic material, such as King Skrímnir in *Samsons saga fagra*, whose daughter, Gerðr, is an object of desire and a bridal-quest in what may be a reference to *Skirnismál* and related traditions. More generally, the texts use lexical associations and relationships to present caricatures. In Chapter One, we saw the monstrous suitors in *Nítíða saga* united

---

<sup>36</sup> See George Norman Garmonsway, *Beowulf and its Analogues* (London: Dent, 1980).

and characterised by the *logi* element of their names, and the troll brothers Hjálmr [Helmet] and Skjálmr [Sword] in *Sigrarðs saga frækna* whose rhyming weaponry names convey their interdependence and violence. *Sigrarðs saga frækna* uses names to present cartoonish enemies particularly frequently, with the three interchangeable herders with hair-themed names (Kampi, Skeggi, and Toppr), while one of Knútr the viking's two associates (to mirror Sigrarðr and his two foster-brothers) is given a crude nickname, Jógrímr *skít í andliti* [shit-in-face]; even the other follower, Grábolli [Greybull], draws on animalistic imagery to convey his monstrosity. In *Blómstrvalla saga*, the name of a highwayman, Lupus, may be a pun on *vargr* [wolf] as criminal, while the family of giants which Trémann stays with is given a semantic cluster, being called Steði [Anvil], Brynja [Mailcoat], and Smiðja [Smith]; the son Þollr [Tree] is probably still linked, although more obscurely. Names are important to express relationships as well as individual identities, such as the dwarf man and woman Svammr and Svama in *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, with the inhuman world often characterised by the role and function of collectives rather than single figures. The most extreme version of this is *Vilhjálmss saga sjóðs*, where the first portion of the narrative revolves around the quest to find the names of ninety trolls, almost none of which have any individual purpose in the narrative and all of which are defeated by the act of naming. The so-called *Allra flagða þula*, an alliterative list of trolls which may have circulated before the composition of the saga, contains various recognisable names from broader myths, legends, and texts, such as Surtr, Glámr, Grímnir, and Gerðr, as well as signifying monstrous names such as Skítinkjapta, Ljótr and Stórverkr, and names that (alongside the central alliteration) connect to each other, such as Fenia and Menia, Frusk and Tuska, and Hnydia and Brydia. The simple feature of names and wordplay is central to the presentation of monsters.

The legendary world is openly semiotic, and characters that interact with it sometimes adopt the same features when they enter such worlds. In *Ála flekks saga*, Áli and Þornbjörg venture into the realm of Jötunoxi, an otherworld where 'þar eru engir menn nema jötnar og flagðkonur. Þar er jafnmykrt nótt og dagur. Þar eru flest illkvikindi og eiturkvikindi' (p.149) [there are no men except giants and ogresses. There it is equally dark night and day. It is mostly evil and poisonous creatures there]. In

this realm, there is widespread wordplay: Jötunoxi's brothers Leggr [Leg] and Liðr [Joint] have alliterative and bodily-themed names; the servants Mandan and Andan rhyme; the protagonists, pretending to be siblings, take the connected names Gunnvör and Gunnvarð. In the fourteenth-century *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*, the foster-brothers infiltrate a monstrous world which, despite being in *Serkland*, is markedly northern, being literally 'norðast' (p.217) [northernmost] in the land. It is filled with *tröll*, *álfar*, and *smáfólk* who are led by the ogress Þorbjörg *in digra* [the stout]. In order to enter this monstrous world, the brothers accordingly take allusive names as wanderers called Norðsunnan and Austvestan. When we consider the presentation of monsters in these texts, it is vital to understand that they are frequently presented with full acknowledgement of their interconnectivity and symbolic nature.

This open networking of characters allows for the stark monstrosity of assorted villains to be put to use in replicative structures. In *Victors saga ok Blávus*, a monstrous encounter against two *berserkir* called Falr and Sóti is used as a double of the hollow duel against Randver and Önundr. As Lambertus notes, 'Falr and Sóti are reflections of Randver and Önundr in a distorting mirror, bearing all signs of monstrosity the heroes might have missed when meeting the sea kings'.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to the positive depiction of Randver and Önundr, Falr and Sóti are associated with various markers of monstrosity: 'þeir eru blaer berserker ok suo miklar hamhleypur at þeir bregdazt j ymissa kuikinnda liki. eru ymizt j iordu edur aa. spyia þeir eitri j bardogum ok eingi jarn bita þa' (p.27) [they are dark *berserkir* and such great shapeshifters that they transform into the form of various creatures. They are variously inside the earth or on top; they spit poison in battles and no iron cuts them]. The contrast of the two pairs of enemies is fundamental, as this provides a corrective course for the protagonists (and further heightens the noble vikings) in a combat that proves the heroes' superiority. Similar to Victor's fight with Randver, in his duel with Falr 'war þeirra atgangr bædi hardr ok langur. var Falr storhoggr en Wictor uigfimur' (p.29) [their assault was both hard and long; Falr was heavy in blows and Victor skilled in combat]. In this case, it is Falr who "cheats", turning into a dragon when he realises he cannot win. The

---

<sup>37</sup> Lambertus, 'Mirrors of the Self', p.558.

confirmation that the foster-brothers' victory here is legitimate (regardless of the supernatural aid they still received from their allies) is marked by the comment that 'aattu þeir fostbrædur þa miklum sigri at hrosa' (p.30) [those foster-brothers then had a great victory to celebrate]. This use of a more monstrous alternative to previous enemies occurs in various places in the corpus, both to suggest increased stakes and to offer commentary on the nature of those villains and their opponents.

Some of these networks of monstrous figures can be difficult to trace entirely. *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* makes repeated use of a trope from the romances, the arrival of representatives of an invading leader seeking a marriage, by force if necessary. The descriptions are simple, particularly in the younger redaction, but there is a clear parallel between Jarlmann encountering such a force ('og sem hann er kominn nokkuð svo frá borginni, þá ríða í móti honum tólf menn furðulega stórir' (p.187) [and when he had come some distance from the city, then twelve remarkably large men ride towards him]), and Hermann being visited by the same ('sem Hermann konungur sat í sinni höll með hirð sinni, og var þar þá gleði mikil, þá var lokið upp hallardyrum, og gengu þar inn tólf menn í ríkulegum búningi.' (p.198) [when King Hermann sat in his hall with his court, and there was then much revelry, the hall doors were then opened, and twelve men in expensive clothing walked in there]). A pattern is set by this formulaic appearance of twelve individuals in distinctive clothing. These are foreign invaders drawing predominantly on romance tradition, but the saga presents different figures the third time: 'Það bar nú þessa næst til tíðinda, að til hirðar Hermanns konungs komu tólf menn; þeir voru allir í svörtum kuflum; þeir höfðu síða höttu' (p.217) [The next event that it came to was that twelve men came to the court of King Hermann. They were all in dark cloaks; they had low hoods]. These figures perform the same function as the previous threats, even in the older redaction where the number twelve is not used as consistently for these parties. The audience is positioned to anticipate that these characters represent another villainous incursion, particularly given their enigmatic appearance. The cowls give an Odinic quality to the figures and signal a decided otherness not present in the other parties. Sure enough, the figures marked to the audience as antagonistic kidnap Hermann's betrothed Rikilát, commencing the quest to return her. This adventure leads to the troll-infested mountain of

Þorbjörg *in digra*, representing a clear step into the world of *fornaldarsögur*. This signal to the audience of the *Kuflungar*'s immediate threat allows the foolishness of Hermann to be highlighted (see Chapter Four, 'Just Enough'), as he welcomes these figures that are enemies, which is obvious to the audience. Audience recognition of patterns and signs relating to villains and monsters allows the audience perspective to be contrasted with that of the characters within the story.

The same motif of the threatening messengers is employed in *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, the second portion of which is predominantly focused on Vilhjálmr's attempts to recover kidnapped nobles. This trope is introduced earlier in the text, in which Vilhjálmr and his eventual companion Reginbald see the arrival of men 'oliker audrum maunnum at vexti og uopnabuningi [. . .] Nu ganga tolf men fra herbudum miklir uexti. og bar þo einn langt af audrum' (pp.29-30) [unlike other men in stature and weaponry . . . Now twelve men, of large stature, walk from the warcamps, and yet one far exceeded the others]. They represent two stereotypical princes from *Bláland* with alliterative names, Artimund and Armidon, who are subsequently defeated. When later, in the hall of Reginbald's father, 'kuomu .xij. menn j haullina suo storer at aunger uoru þar sliker' (p.76) [12 men came into the hall, so large that there were none like such], the previous episode is replicated, with another two alliterative foreign princes, Erkules and Errek. These two are implied to be more imposing and threatening, which is confirmed when they kidnap Reginbald and his sister. However, the continued reuse of the trope reverses some of our expectations while continuing to increase the stakes. The court of Arkistratus, father of these foreign princes, is repositioned in our understanding:

þat bar nu til tidinda ein dag jNinve at Arkistratus kongr er a leikuelli. enn hans syner a skogi. þeir sea huar .xij. menn rida huatliga at borginni. þeir voru suo storer at aungua hofdu þeir slika sied og bar þo einn langt af odrum og undrudu þeir þo meir digurd hans enn hæd. þeir hofdu þa reidskota sem dromidarie heita (p.90)

[It now came about one day in *Ninive* that King Arkistratus is on the sporting fields, and his sons in the forest. They see where 12 men ride eagerly to the city. They were so large that they had seen none such like it and yet one far exceeded the others, and yet they marvelled more at his width than height. They had the mounts which are called dromedaries]

The previously foreign and antagonistic characters are refigured as parallel to the very court they invaded. This new batch of enemy messengers echoes the previous instances; the dromedary is often the mount of trolls and *blámenn* in romances, which, coupled with a grotesque leader, contributes to an impression of greater monstrosity. The army of the new invaders, Frollo and Griffin, is later explicitly confirmed as monstrous: ‘uoru þat risar og illþydi. þeir uoru .c. þusunda at taulu. og uar þar engi mennzkur madur j’ (p.93) [it was giants and evil races. They were 100 thousand in number, and there was not a single human man amongst them]. The effect of their appearance is to allow a change in characterisation of Erkules and Errek from antagonists to supporting figures. Erkules states: ‘eigi getum uer þat nu aptur tekit sem ver haufum adr gert. enn til heilla sáttu býd ek þier brædra lag og mina systur’ (p.94) [we cannot now take back that which we have previously done, but I now offer you brotherhood and my sister as wholesome settlements]. The introduction of increased monstrosity allows the increased humanisation of the former enemies, who subsequently die noble deaths against the giants. Trolls and monsters are used as a benchmark of evil which subverts our expectations of the typical binary of heroes and villains: whatever the violence of humans, monsters are still worse. This replication of a simple motif reveals the perspective of the text towards degrees of monstrosity. There is even what may be a fourth use of the twelve representatives episode, as another monstrous duo, Balbumba and Sisigambr (variously described as sisters of Frollo and Griffin or sister and mother), repeat the kidnapping that prompted this narrative phase, taking the princesses of both courts: ‘þeir fara nu j borgina .x. saman hustrunar og .ij. drottningar at auki’ (p.118) [they now go into the city, 10 women together and the two queens in addition]. This implied twelve might be an error in transmission, as only eight additional women are named, but, regardless, it reflects a further increase in the monstrosity of the narrative. The women are described as *tröllkonur* [trollwomen], and each of the additional women has a nickname, mostly obscene. The narrative has progressed from twelve soldiers of a romance army to twelve grotesque women, presenting the exaggerated subversion of the trope. *Vilhjálmssaga sjóðs*, in both main sections of its narrative, whether the naming game or the rescue mission, presents trolls as a monstrous absolute against which the flaws of humans are rendered insignificant.

Where this method of contrast is further complicated is in the relative ranking of different monsters. In *Sigurðar saga þögla*, an encounter with two ogresses, named Fála [Giantess] and Flegða [Ogress], signposting their monstrous nature, does not go as we might anticipate. Sigurðr ultimately spares them and they host him at their home. Helpful ogresses are not absent from the *fornaldarsögur*, a notable example featuring in *Hálfðanar saga Brönufóstra*; however, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir aptly notes: ‘The giantess sisters, perhaps surprisingly, display aristocratic female behaviour – an acquired set of skills more frequently, although not exclusively, associated with human women’.<sup>38</sup> This union of native monster and courtly ideal is notable, because the juxtaposition is elsewhere more jarring, such as Þorbjörg *in digra* of *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermann* whose other nickname is *in hæverska* [the courtly], notably ironic. Þorbjörg constructs a mock-court, in which, ‘til gamans’ [for amusement], elves and smallfolk dance as ‘mikil skemmtan’ (p.221) [great entertainment], and then wrestle, causing the earth to shake. The visiting king then notes, ‘Lítið ætla eg að um batni héðan af’ (p.222) [I think it is going to improve little from here on], and, when the women sing, ‘þykir Austvestan nú sýnt versna’ (p.222) [it now seems to Austvestan to get significantly worse]. Þorbjörg’s subsequent singing is the culmination of this mock-courtliness, as ‘hún kvað bæði hátt og hvellt, svo að dvergmála kvað í hverjum hamri, og kvað þetta upp á þeirra vísu: / “Brúsi átti byggð í helli, / oft var hann síð á ferli.”’ (p.223) [she sang both loud and shrill, so that echoes sounded in every crag, and sang aloud with that verse: “Brúsi had a dwelling in a cave: he was often up and about late”]. The marked excess of her singing, coupled with the underwhelming couplet she provides, complete the image of a grotesque distortion of courtly ideas. This perversion is only increased later when Jarlmann, as Austvestan, parodies lovesickness for this giantess in order to get closer to the trapped princess. As Ralph O’Connor notes, ‘*Fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* often made comic capital out of comic contrasts between the courtly south and the rustic

---

<sup>38</sup> Jóhanna Katrín, ‘Ideology and Identity in Late Medieval Northwest Iceland’, p.118.

north'; the ogresses of *Sigurðar saga þögla* therefore stand apart as positive presentations of figures whose appearance is misleading.<sup>39</sup>

This impression is confirmed by the opposition of Fála and Flegða to other enemies, Börkr and Brúsi: 'mega þeir varla menn heita fyrir illzcu sakir og kynngi [. . .] þa bita enngi jarnn. þeir fara j iordu og aa. þeir ganga fram j hueria orustu hljifalausir. [. . .] þeir hafa hart lid blaameenn og berserke og mart illþydis folk' (pp.165-166) [they can hardly be called men because of their evil and magic . . . no iron cuts them. They travel inside and atop the earth. They go forward without armour in every battle . . . they have a hard host of *blámenn* and *berserkir* and many people of evil race]. Notably, these individuals are not strictly identified as non-human: saying they barely qualify as human in fact simultaneously confirms their humanity while disregarding it. When Fála and Flegða are summoned to deal with Brúsi, who has transformed into a whale and is merely 'þessu illa kykuendi' (p.171) [this evil creature], the two pairs are implicitly compared: the courtly monsters defeat the monstrous humans. The opposition of monster against monster allows the romance to reflect on behaviour rather than appearance.

*Valdimars saga*, a late romance from the fifteenth century, shows a particular interest in reversing humanity and monstrosity through the opposition of two sides. Valdimar, on a quest to rescue his kidnapped sister, becomes gradually more involved with a family of giants, even sleeping with the daughter and impregnating her. The giants are presented as progressively more monstrous and unsettling in appearance: the daughter is merely 'afburdarsstora' (p.55) [exceptionally large] and is later described as 'mikjl ok uæn' (p.57) [great and handsome]; her brother, in contrast, is 'kollotr ok eckj stor vexti' (p.56) [bald and not large in stature]. Their father, labelled 'þetta troll' (p.59) [this troll], puts Valdimar on his knee, indicating his extreme size; finally, the grandmother is revealed: 'gengr þar ut ein kelling suo liot ok leidjlig ful ok fiandligat einskis mannz auga sa skringligri skepnu. hun uar j skaurpum skinnstakkj hófdi ollu hæri en risen' (p.63) [there walks out an old woman, so ugly and hideous, disgusting and devilish; no man's eyes saw a more monstrous being. She was in a rough skin-cloak, an

---

<sup>39</sup> Ralph O'Connor, 'Astronomy and Dream Visions in Late Medieval Iceland: *Stjörnu-Odda draumr* and the Emergence of Norse Legendary Fiction', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 111.4 (2012), pp.474-512, here p.502.

entire head taller than the giant]. The outward appearance suggests monstrosity, but the audience is repeatedly reminded of their humanity in their treatment of Valdimar, to the extent that both daughter and father express their support through the phrase ‘er nu manndómur j’ (p.55, p.60) [now there is humanity/common courtesy in it]. The grandmother, Nigra, is constructed as good through her opposition with Lupa, the text’s antagonist. Lupa has a similar ambiguity to Brúsi and Börkr in often evading direct labels: when the story of her appearance in the land is described, the giant father says ‘þetta folk var trollum líkara en menskum monnum’ (p.61) [these people were more like trolls than human men]. While her abilities to steal things and transform into a dragon is glossed as ‘hennar trolldomj’ (p.63) [her trollishness], the focus is in some ways more on her conduct (somewhat reminiscent of a maiden-king): ‘Eftir höfitt tók drottning öll ríkisráð. hún var stjórnlaus og harðlynd. hún lét þegar handhugguá og fothugguá og drepa ef mótj hennj var gert’ (p.62) [After the feast, the queen took all the government of the realm. She was a firm ruler and unbending: she immediately had hands or feet struck off, or people killed, if anything was done against her]. Nigra and Lupa are frequently associated, with her grandson noting ‘er þat sannast at þar hefir fiandjinn fundit móðir sína er þær eiga út’ (p.66) [it is most true that the devil has found his own mother there when those women engage each other]; Lupa herself positions Nigra as her enemy, being ‘hueriu trolli armari er j er veröldjinnj’ (p.69) [more wretched than every troll which is in the world]. After the climax of the text, the giant Asper reveals of his deceased wife that ‘soktj móðir mín hana á þann hátt sem Lupa soktj Marmorju’ (p.76) [my mother stole her in the very manner that Lupa stole Marmoria]. Lupa and Nigra are the embodiments of this conflict between two parallel sides, which culminates in a battle where convention is subverted: the enemy army is human, and the hero’s side is composed of ‘margan ögrligan jötun með tveimur höfðunum ok aðrar skringiligar skepnur’ (p.73) [many terrifying giants with two or three heads, and other monstrous beings]. This battle is won through the contest of Lupa and Nigra, in which they are positioned as parallel: ‘ur borginnj flygur einn hræðjligur dregj’ (p.74) [a horrible dragon flies from the city]; ‘sá maður fljúga frá sjó niðan undarligan stóran gamm’ (p.74) [men see a remarkably large vulture flying up from the sea]. The two figures are equated, merely

described as ‘þessir fiandr’ [these devils], ‘þessara flagða’ [these ogresses], and ‘þesse troll’ (p.75) [these trolls]. The emphasis on their equal might is constructed typically through highlighting the closeness of the battle: ‘menn þickiast eigi vita huort flagdit driugara mun verða’ (p.75) [men do not think they know which of the ogresses will come out on top]. The eventual triumph of Nigra over Lupa, although it results in Nigra’s death as well, marks the triumph of humanity over tyranny, despite the two combatants being inhuman. In an otherwise courtly world, *Valdimars saga* has used the monsters of Scandinavian legend to elevate the supportive family structure of many Icelandic texts over wrongful (probably specifically female) power and rule.<sup>40</sup> The romances use replicative structures to force the audiences to judge the villains on display by more than merely their stereotypical appearances.

Although *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* can be readily viewed as existing within worlds of stark moral contrast between good and evil, which Righter-Gould characterises as a ‘penchant for exceedingly sharp contrasts, for perceiving the world in terms of black and white’, there appears to be a fascination in subverting or questioning some of those assumptions.<sup>41</sup> Another trope contributes to this interrogation: the curse. The *álög*, which was discussed in Chapter One as a means of complicating the presentation of the maiden-king in *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, has been linked to the Celtic *geis*, Margaret Schlauch opining that ‘the tremendous vogue of *álög* seems to me to be an imitation of Irish lore’, and this has remained generally in favour.<sup>42</sup> Whether it is Celtic or otherwise, its appearance in *Jóns saga leikara* contributes towards the unsettling of audience expectations. Midway through the narrative, the protagonist Jón hears the news that ‘vargur sä hinn mikle er drepid hefur hiörd kongins væri nu geinginn jnn j millum mura tueggia þar sem hann mættj huorgj vndan kömast’ (p.14) [that great wolf which has killed the king’s flock had now walked in between two walls where it could not get away]. Despite the abruptness of its introduction, the wolf is a recognisable monster in this literature, with such creatures encountered and killed in *Ectors saga* and *þjalar-Jóns saga*. It establishes certain

---

<sup>40</sup> An interesting parallel is the genre-defying *Íslendingasaga Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, which Barraclough reads as a form of parody in placing the focus on an ogre figure: ‘Following the Trollish Baton Sinister: Ludic Design in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4 (2008), pp.15-43.

<sup>41</sup> Righter-Gould, ‘The *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*’, p.427.

<sup>42</sup> Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, p.126; see Hall et al. in the introduction to *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, p.86.

expectations which are immediately frustrated as Jón asks for the wolf as a gift; when this is granted, the narrative focalises on the king's perspective: he 'vill fjírer förúitniz saker prófa huad Riddarinn giordj vid uarginn' (p.16) [wants to determine out of curiosity what the knight would do with the wolf]. When he subsequently sees Jón free it, he grows angry. The audience probably shares the confusion, as this subverts the monstrous exterior, and it is only at the end of the saga that an explanation is given:

Vargur sä er herra jon gaf lijf var eirn kongz sön af Flemingia landj og hafdj ordid fjírer hörðum a Lögum af sinni stiuþmóður hafdj hon Löstid hann med vlf hanska og sijndit hann af þuj vargur vera Enn hann var þö agiætur madur og hiet sigurdur hefdj hon so fjírer mælt ad hann j þeim alogum skilldj vera þar til ad nöckur værj so heimskur ad hann kijse helldur varginn enn mikid veralldar gull edur sæmder. Enn þesse säme sigurdur för a fund herra Jönz þä hann hafdj tekid kong döminn oc sagdj honum þennann att Burd giorandj honum miklar þacker fjírer sijna lijf gíof Herra Jon Tök honum med fremst fagnadj og fögnudu Bader Framar enn ordum meigi skjira at huor hafj ödrum lijf gefid sem Ríettlega mattj seigia tok sijdann þad Räd ad forust j fostbrædra lag for Jon þegar heim med sigurdj til flemingia landz og toku stiuþ möder hanz og drogu Belg a höfud hennj oc Bördu med grioti til bana Brennandj sijdann ä Bäle hennar herfilega hræ og kostudu öskunnj j siafar diup för Jon kongur ei fjír aptur j sitt Ríjki prijddur agiætum gíofum Enn han hafdj feingid föst Brödur sijnum agiætt Könfang Lijfdu sijdann Langa tíjma med mikillre gledj huor j sijnu Ríjki og ättu mörg börn epter sig med sijnum frum halldandj sæmilega sitt föst Brædra Lag sendi og huor ödrum opt sinniz agiætar gíaffer allt till dauda dags' (pp.19-20)

[That wolf which Lord Jón gave life to was a king's son of *Flæmingjaland* and had ended up under harsh curses from his stepmother. She had struck him with a wolf-glove and, from that, he appeared to be a wolf. And yet he was a noble man and was called Sigurðr. She had so pronounced that he should be under those curses until someone was so foolish that he rather chose the wolf than large amounts of the world's gold or honour. And this same Sigurðr went to meet Lord Jón when he had taken the kingship and told him that event, offering him many thanks for the gift of his life. Lord Jón received him with the foremost pleasure and both rejoiced more than words can explain, since each has given the other life, as it may be correctly said. They subsequently took that counsel to enter into foster-brotherhood. Jón immediately went home with Sigurðr to *Flæmingjaland* and took his stepmother and pulled a bag over her head and struck her to death with stones, subsequently burning her wretched corpse on a bale. And they threw the ashes into the deep sea. King Jón did not go back into his realm, adorned with noble gifts, before he had delivered his foster-brother a noble match. They subsequently lived a long time with great pleasure, each in their realm, and had many children after them with their ladies, holding their foster-brotherhood honourably; each also often bestowed noble gifts to the other all the way until death.]

The text almost launches into an entirely different narrative, cramming an entire subplot into the last part of the saga and rewriting the previous events to present this text as the story not of Jón, but of two foster-brothers, much like other texts in the corpus. It is notable that this does not particularly explain Jón's choice to free the wolf other than possibly stupidity; although the question of parody is tempting, these concerns do not really impact the main point. The saga very simply sets up our expectations to match those of the king, that the wolf is nothing but a monster, and reveals that there is a whole story behind that simple motif. It is almost a rebuke to the simplicity of some *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*. The *álög* [curse/enchantment], whatever its origin, appears to have been a useful tool to present a world which is a little more complicated, and a lot weirder, than we might expect. In *Nikulás saga leikara*, there is an even more throwaway *álög* in the character Þórir *einræni* [peculiar], of whom it simply says 'hann var sýnkur so hann mætti önguann hlutt veýta. hann mætti og öngua konu eýga' (p.139) [he was enchanted so he could give nothing; he also couldn't marry any woman]. The character himself later elaborates on this curse: 'margt er ä mig lagt, first það ad eg mä öngua kona siä, það annad ad eg mä önguann hlut veýta' (p.145) [many curses are upon me, first that I cannot look at any woman, a second thing that I cannot give anything]. The entire purpose of this strange character is difficult to comprehend, but there is evidence that the saga is playing with this figure in some way. Nikulás's alias is also Þórir, so that the text presents an exchange: 'huad er nafn þitt. þórer kaupmadur heýti eg seýger hann, enn huad heýter þu. þórer heiti eg og lýka seýger hann, og er kalladur þórer einræne' (p.144) ["What is your name?" "I am named Merchant Þórir," he says, "and what are you called?" "I am also named Þórir," he says, "and am called Peculiar Þórir"]. To distinguish the two, they are referred to as Þórir *kaupmaðr* and Heima-Þórir, comparable to the two characters claiming to be called Sjóðr in *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* (see Chapter Two, 'Lionising Knights'). This strange figure, whose peculiar behaviour is described in detail, is in some inexplicable way a double of the protagonist; if nothing else, it may simply represent the sense that there is an explanation for everything, however strange.

In *Ála saga flekks*, Áli is victim to a similar fate to the king's son from *Jóns saga leikara*, turned into a wolf and falsely hunted. This single instance of *álög* is less important than the macrostructure of the text, in which Áli is repeatedly cursed. Áli encounters a family of trolls, who are either described in terms of social exclusion or monstrosity: Blátönn is 'ambátt einn, er var í konungsgarðinum. Hún var að öll illa fallin' (p.129) [a bondswoman who was in the king's court. She was badly disposed in everything]; her brother Glóðarauga is a *þræll*; of Nótt, however, it is said that 'Enga skepnu þóttist Áli ferlegri séð hafa.' (p.132) [Áli thought he had seen no more monstrous a creature]. Each time, a new phase in the narrative is marked by the troll in question cursing Áli, a replication most evident in the first two instances:

"Þú Áli," segir hún, "hefir mig aldri kvatt með góðum orðum, og skal eg nú launa þér það: Þú skalt þegar í stað verða að fara á skóg og eigi fyrr léttu en þú kemur til Nóttar, systur minnar; henni send eg þig til bónda." (p.129)

["You, Áli," she says, "have never spoken to me with pleasant words, and I shall now repay you that: you shall immediately, on the spot, be impelled to travel to the woods and not stop before you come to Nótt, my sister; I send you to her as a husband."]

"Gott hyggur þú nú til, Áli," segir hann, "að sofa hjá meykönungi. En nú skal eg launa þér það, er þú lagðir á Blátönn systur mína, og því legg eg á þig, að þú verðir að vargi og farir á skóg og drepir bæði menn og fé, og á það fé grimmastur, er meykönungur á, og að því mest leggjast." (p.138)

["You now consider it good, Áli," he says, "to sleep by the maiden-king. But I shall now repay you that which you cast upon my sister Blátönn, and therefore I put a curse upon you, that you must turn into a wolf and travel to the woods and kill both men and cattle, and most violently against that cattle which the maiden-king owns, and engage in that the most."]

These are not complicated monsters like some we have seen. On a basic level, these curses are utterly functional: what each allows is the introduction of a novel new episode, drawn from assorted traditions (such as entering a troll-woman's lair, as in *Illuga saga Gríðarföstra*, or the werewolf story similar to both the translated Marie de France text *Bisclaretz ljóð* and more native texts like *Völsunga saga*). It is a useful way of partitioning the text while uniting it, and the use of family structure is vital to that sense of the connection of disparate parts. The element of retribution and feud is clear from the curses,

which, for all the formulaic language of invocation, also repeats ‘skal eg nú launa þér það’ [I shall now repay you that]. Áli, reporting Nótt’s cursing of him in a dream, notes her intention to ‘hefna mér, er eg hljóp í burt frá henni úr hellinum, og það annað, er eg lagða á Glóðarauga, bróður hennar’ (p.144) [get revenge on me since I ran out of the cave from her, and for a second thing, that which I cast upon Glóðarauga, her brother]; the final curse-giver, Jötunoxi, mentions ‘Hefir þú og áður drepið tvö systkin mín’ (p.154) [You have previously killed two of my siblings]. The interconnectivity of enemies is expressed through the familiar concept of family feud; multiple enemies compose one overall opposition for Áli and the maiden-king to face. This replicated cursing even allows room for some comical reflection on the main character, who is increasingly powerless against these trolls: in the first case, he curses Blátönn back; although he does the same with Glóðarauga, the latter then adds a second layer to the curse. Against Nótt there is no mention of a countercurse. The fulfilment of this decline is in the final curse by Jötunoxi, where his former servant Mandan immediately says ‘Látum hann nú eigi fleira rausa!’ (p.154) [Let us not allow him to chatter anything more!] and immediately attacks the troll, foregoing any elaborate countercurse. This violent and simple recourse suggests that, amongst worlds of complex contrasts of monsters and men, this text at least recommends the uncomplicated route.

### **Relative Importance: Family Structures**

The use of familial relationships to structure narrative, as seen in the curse-giving trolls of *Ála flekks saga* and the sisters Gullbrá and Sóley in *Vilmundar saga víðutan*, is a recurrent feature. Several texts use the connections that exist between family members in order to provide some sort of reflection. More broadly, this technique exists across medieval Icelandic genres, as Jóhanna Katrín notes of a manuscript containing *riðdarasögur*, *fornaldarsögur*, and even *Íslendingasögur*: ‘Wisdom, foresight, moderation, loyalty and prudence are juxtaposed against hotheadedness, impulsiveness, impetuosity and lack of responsibility and self-control, personified in pairs of brothers’.<sup>43</sup> One of these pairs of brothers is Vilhjálmr and Hálfðan of *Sigurðar saga þögla*. As noted in Chapter One, the

---

<sup>43</sup> Jóhanna Katrín, ‘Ideology and Identity in Late Medieval Northwest Iceland’, p.105.

main protagonist of the text, *Sigurðr þögli*, is initially deemed inadequate due to his muteness, and instead the text establishes his brothers as more conventional heroes:

Halfdan hinn ellzti brodir þeirra var mikill ofbeldismadur og þotti honum nær einginn sinn jafningi finnast mega. var hann j ordum akafaur og wuitur. þo war hann sterkur madur og vijgur vel. Wilhialmur brodir hans war vinsæll. þui at hann war manna órvastur. sterkur og algior vm allar jþrottir vopnfimur og vænn ath aalite. og j óllum hlutum war hann langt framar ath sier gior enn Halfdan brodir hans. Ecke hafdi hann miog aa hræsne sijnar jþrottir og þo war hann radagerdarmadur um marga hlute (p.99)

[Hálfðan, the eldest brother of them, was a man of great arrogance and it seemed to him that nearly no equal to him could be found. He was hasty and unthinking in words, although he was a strong man and very martial. Vilhjálmr, his brother, was popular because he was the most generous of men, strong and fully equipped with all skills, nimble with weapons and handsome in appearance, and in all things he was far more equipped in himself than his brother Hálfðan. He did not boast about his skills very much, and yet he was an accomplished man in many things]

The two brothers are opposed and explicitly compared, with Hálfðan the inferior despite his advanced age, and Vilhjálmr representing the more typically courtly, romance figure in appearance and popularity. This contrast of characterisation continues throughout the two characters' appearances in the text. In the final stages of the narrative, Hálfðan is killed because he fails to heed *Sigurðr's* orders not to attack a rampaging giant too soon, while Vilhjálmr is subsequently married to a princess and confirmed as 'uirduligr madur og giðrr ath ser uel um allar jþrottir' (pp.254-255) [a noble man and well equipped in himself in all skills]. However, this comparison of family members is symbolically embodied in a brief replicative episode in which both brothers interact with the supernatural world. Hálfðan encounters a small monstrous creature subsequently identified as a dwarf's child, and reacts characteristically:

Halfdan tok upp einn steinn og sendi til þessi kuikindis og kom aa kialcann. geck hann j sundur. enn duergsbarn þetta bra vit med suo jllre raust ath slict þottizt hann eckj sied hafa og þui næst war þat horfit og uissi hann alldre huat af þui uard (p.114)

[Hálfðan took up a stone and threw it at this creature and it landed on the cheek; it split apart, and this dwarfchild reacted with such an unpleasant noise that he thought he had never seen such. And after that, it had disappeared and he never knew what became of it]

The needlessness of this violence is twice outlined in the ensuing scenes, first as Vilhjálmr rebukes Hálfðan for his treatment of the inhuman creature, and secondly in a dream, where the dwarf himself appears, and condemns the act: ‘þat sem þu giordir j dag war med sanninndum allmikit niðings uerc er þu slott med steini sunndur kialcann j barne minu’ (p.115) [that which you did today was truly a huge disgrace, when you struck apart the cheek in my child with a stone]. He subsequently curses Hálfðan so that ‘eingi kongsson skal hafa farith meire suiuirðingar ferd aa norðrlondum enn þw. og allðri hedan af skaltu þickia utan lijtillenue hia odrum hófðingia sonum’ (p.115) [no king’s son will have made a journey of greater dishonour in the northern lands than you, and, from here one, you shall never seem anything except insignificant compared to other sons of chieftains]. His negative character arc, humiliated and mutilated by the maiden-king, outshone by his younger brothers, and eventually killed by a giant, is framed as a direct result of his own personality, represented in the way he interacts with the (magical) world. The contrast with Vilhjálmr is emphasised as the entire sequence repeats: Vilhjálmr sets out and ‘kom j þann stad er Halððan hafði aður komit enn fyrra dag’ [came into that place where Hálfðan had come before on the previous day] and ‘saa hann somu syn sem Halððan broðir hans hafði aðr sed ath duergbarnit sat við lækinn’ [he saw the same sight that his brother Hálfðan had seen before, that the dwarfchild sat by the brook]. However, he acts in a characteristically generous fashion: ‘Vilhjálmr toc gullhring af hendi sier og rennde at barninu’ [Vilhjálmr took a gold ring off his hand and passed it to the child]; the child responds with a contrast to its scream from before as it ‘skelldi upp og hlo og greip þegar hringinn og hafði burt og huarf þui næst’ (p.115) [burst out laughing and immediately grabbed the ring and took it away and after that disappeared]. The verbal echoes and signs of replication are consistent and they reflect and perform the difference between the two brothers that was described from the outset. This parallelism continues as the dwarf visits Vilhjálmr in a dream and states ‘wel giordir þu j dag Wilhialmur er þu gaft suo mikit gull barne minu’ (p.116) [you did well today,

Vilhjálmr, when you gave so much gold to my child], bestowing him with a sword guaranteeing victory. The narrative clearly positions Vilhjálmr as the moral superior of the brothers, and promotes generosity even in the face of monstrosity, using the duplication inherent in two brothers to play out the different alternatives.

However, there is one further telling element in the dwarf's dream visit to Vilhjálmr, as he notes 'þat sem eg hefir aa lagt aa Hálfðan brodur þinn maa eg nu eigi aptur taka. enn þaa eina ohamingiu munntu faa er þu hlytur af honum til' (p.116) [that which I have cast upon your brother Hálfðan cannot now be taken back, but you will only receive such misfortune as you get from him]. While Vilhjálmr balances out some of Hálfðan's bad, Hálfðan will balance out some of Vilhjálmr's good: indeed, Vilhjálmr is repeatedly brought down by his continued choice to associate with Hálfðan. First, their father disapproves of Vilhjálmr supporting Hálfðan's plan to seek Sedentiana, and secondly, Sedentiana herself punishes Vilhjálmr alongside Hálfðan for carrying his suit to her. The text had constructed Vilhjálmr as a stereotypical protagonist, and in an earlier episode his defiant speech to a viking and his rescue of Hálfðan in the ensuing fight supports an initial reading of him as a worthy paradigm. However, *Sigurðar saga þögla* draws on the negatives inherent in family links to suggest that Vilhjálmr's fatal flaw is an unwillingness to distance himself from his brother. It provides the platform for the rejected and underestimated Sigurðr to prove himself in numerous ways as the true protagonist of the text and greatest of the brothers, providing a hierarchy which reverses the order of birth. Furthermore, despite its seeming isolation within the broader narrative, the dwarfchild episode has continued importance in this movement to elevate Sigurðr. Vilhjálmr expressed his disapproval of Hálfðan's behaviour through an interesting characterisation of the monstrous world: 'nær aull troll og alfar eru hefnesóm ef þeim er missradit edur misbodith. og eigi sijdur leggja þau kapp aa at launa uel ef þeim er vel til gort' (p.114) [nearly all trolls and elves are vengeful if offended or mistreated, but no less do they invest effort to repay well if good things are done to them]. It is easy to speculate on some degree of folk belief manifested here, but, within the narrative, it first cements the difference between Vilhjálmr and Hálfðan, and later marks Sigurðr's personality too: when he meets the ogresses Fála and Flegða, the

text notes that ‘Sigurdur hafde heyrt fraa þui sagt ath troll morg woru dreinnglunndut og logdu kap áá ath launa vel ef þeim uære wel til gert’ (p.150) [Sigurðr had heard it spoken of that many trolls were noble at heart, and invested energy to repay well if good things were done to them]. This small aside connects Sigurðr to Vilhjálmr, and this moment of mercy echoes the explicit link between generosity and success from the dwarfchild episode. Although only one of many of Sigurðr’s achievements, it is thematically resonant, as Fála and Flegða provide the tools for Sigurðr’s later successes, particularly against the maiden-king, where he clearly exceeds his brothers. Causality is linked subtly but insistently to behaviour. The intertwining of the functional use of legendary monsters with an interest in family structures not only allows Sigurðr to prove himself as the better figure, but also proves what exactly makes that figure positive.

The contrast of brothers does not always have to prove negative, such as in *Blómstrvalla saga*, where the reunion of Etgarð and Áki is a major arc in the narrative. Unlike Hálfðan and Vilhjálmr, these brothers are introduced as markedly similar to each other and their broader family: ‘Þeir váru miklir menn at íþróttum, vænir ok friðir sýnum: líktust þeir mjök um afl Samson riddara afa sínum ok Áka föður sínum’ (p.3) [They were great men in skills, handsome and attractive in appearance; in strength, they greatly resembled Samson the knight, their grandfather, and their father Áki]. Samson and Áki are characters from *Þiðreks saga*, and Etgarð and the younger Áki (which are the names of Áki’s murdered children in *Þiðreks saga*) are marked as part of a heroic family lineage, all sharing positive qualities which audiences can associate directly with the courtly and renowned world of *Þiðreks saga*.<sup>44</sup> Such intertextual family connections echo certain *fornaldarsaga* traditions, such as the Hrafnista texts, Helen F. Leslie noting: ‘Certainly, the comparisons between the men suggests that in the world of the Hrafnista men, kinsmen were expected to be alike’.<sup>45</sup> Family offers a conceptual space for easily transferrable attributes from character to character. The differences between the brothers emerge in their adoption

---

<sup>44</sup> For more on the relationship between these texts, see Frank Hugus, ‘*Blómstrvallasaga* and *Þiðriks saga af Bern*’, *Scandinavian Studies* 46.2 (1974), pp.151-168, although Hugus’s specific answer to reconciling these two conflicting narratives is overly literal and unhelpful.

<sup>45</sup> Leslie, ‘The Matter of Hrafnista’, p.188.

of the guises of the *Rauði Riddari* and Trémann and the text increasingly builds toward the contest between the two, but the idea of unity remains throughout. Hernit, whom the *Rauði Riddari* seems to follow, highlights the brothers' connection after the first round of the disguised brothers' combat: 'þat lízt mér sem þú hafir nú fengit vaskan leikbróður ok ekki fæ ek þat skilit, hvárr ykkar betr má, ok þit berizt ekki nema fyrir kapp eitt ok ofmetnað ok vildu vit, at þit værit sáttir ok víst er hann vaskr maðr' (p.33) [it appears to me that you have now obtained a valiant brother in arms and I cannot manage to determine which of you has better abilities, and you are fighting out of nothing except just spirit and arrogance, and we would like you to be reconciled; certainly, he is a valiant man]. The *Rauði Riddari* rejects this, but the call for peace is then replicated with Trémann and his companion Eddelon, as 'Slíkt hitt sama talar Eddelon konungsson við Trémann ok er sem ekki hafi at seggja' (p.33) [Eddelon, the king's son, says just the same to Trémann, and it was like nothing was being said]. The repetitive combat between the unknowing brothers, working in the same replicative fashion as many discussed in Chapter Two, is cast as negative, as these two figures are increasingly bloodied. Ultimately, the wisdom of a female figure, Gratiana, resolves the conflict. She invites the *Rauði Riddari* first to question him about his knowledge of the world, and later Trémann: 'fór á sömu leið með orðum ok atvikum eins ok við Rauða riddara' (p.36) [it went in the same way with words and event, just like with the Red Knight]. Each figure, when questioned about the sons of Áki, will only name the *other* brother and not themselves, which convinces Gratiana of their real identities. Instead of a decisive third round of battle, each brother is coaxed to tell their full stories, with parallel beginnings: 'þat er upphaf sögu minnar, at fyrst ek reið heiman frá föður mínum: reið með mér minn bróðir' (p.37) [It is the beginning of my story that first I rode from home, from my father; my brother rode with me]; 'Ek reid heiman frá mínum födur ok minn bróðir sá er Áki hét' (p.41) [I rode from home, from my father, along with my brother who was called Áki]. This repeated storytelling allows the narrative opportunity to explore the distinct legendary and chivalric worlds of the two characters, but it also marks the ultimate unity of the brothers. The characters are representatives of broader traditions who are both fundamentally similar and intriguingly different, but in the eyes of the narrative, remain equal.

Storytelling provides a useful narrative tool for these romances, with characters such as Jón from *Þjalar-Jóns saga* and Pluto from *Gibbons saga* delaying the explanation of their plotlines until audiences have spent some time with their mysterious guises “Gestr” and “Kolr” respectively. In particular, the connection between storytelling and family features in *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*. Again, we have a tale of separated brothers who later reunite and discover their mutual heritage through the act of storytelling, but the overall presentation is slightly different from *Blómstrvalla saga*. Difference is outright exaggerated with these triplets:

Sá fyrst kom til var hvítur bæði á hár og hörund; þann lét hann kalla Felix eftir sínum föður. Annar var rauðlitaður á hár og skinn; þann lét hann kalla Fenix eftir sínum broður, hinn þriðja Ajax eftir föður Flóres konungs; hann var dökkur bæði á hár og skinn. (p.76)

[The one who arrived first was white, both in hair and flesh; he had that one called Felix after his father. Another was red-coloured in hair and skin; he had that one called Fenix after his brother, the third Ajax after King Flóres’ father; he was dark, both in hair and skin.]

The striking physical differences may be inspired by *Þiðreks saga*, in which a number of the heroes have markedly different colours of appearance, but, in any case, the text emphasises a strange mixture of connection and marked separation. Their names share some aural elements, but their bodies are physically distinctive. This blurring of similarity and difference continues in their later reappearance in the narrative, which signposts the true nature of these figures as they each appear:

sá hét Sekúndus. Hann var merkismaður hans, íþróttamaður mikill og svo sterkur, að hann hafði vel tólf karla megin, hvað sem reyna þurfti. Hann var fyrir litlu kominn til hertugans með mikla sveit manna. Hann átti fagra konu, og hélt hertuginn mikið til þeirra. (p.85)

[He was called Sekúndus. He was his marksman, a man of great skill and so strong that he easily had the strength of twelve men, whatever needed to be tried. He had come to the warlord a little while ago with a great retinue of men. He had a beautiful wife, and the warlord had high esteem for them]

þar réð fyrir einn hertugi; sá hét Tertíus. Hann var stór maður vexti, karlmannlegur og dökklitaður og svo sterkur, að honum varð aldri aflafátt, og svo mikill íþróttamaður, að engi komst til jafns við hann. Hann var kvongaður og átti þrjú börn við konu sinni, tvær dætur og

einn son. Hans kona var svo stór sem hann eða mikið stærri. Þau höfðu þar fyrir ráðið fimm vetur. (pp.85-86)

[A warlord ruled over it; he was called Tertíus. He was a large man in stature, masculine and dark-coloured and so strong, that he never ended up lacking in power, and a man of such great skill, that no-one managed to equal him. He was married and had three children with his wife, two daughters and a son. His wife was as large as him, or much larger. They had ruled there for five winters.]

Víð ey þá, er Kordó hét, frétti hann til eins mikils kappá; hann hét Únus. Hann hafði þrjú skip. Hann var fríður sýnum, hvítur á hár og hörund, sterkur að afli og að öllum íþróttum vel búinn og svo kappsamr, að hann mundi aldri flýja né friðar biðja. (p.86)

[By that island which was called *Kordó*, he heard of a great champion; he was called Únus. He had three ships. He was handsome in appearance, white in hair and flesh, strong in power and well equipped in all skills and so spirited, that he would never flee nor ask for peace.]

The Latin names, which map onto the order of the brothers' birth (but interestingly not their order of appearance here), make their connection clear and remind the audience that these individual characters function as part of a larger structure. The mention of the distinctive colours of Tertíus and Únus is the clearest evidence that audiences are meant to register who these characters are, unlike the mysteries of some other texts. Each brother is also characterised by positive traits, each having shared attributes, such as strength and an aptitude for *íþróttir*, with a repeated *svo . . . að* construction to emphasise some extreme ability. Some subtle differences are drawn between their specific skills and their social situations, which provide mysteries to be answered in their eventual storytelling. The text positions these three brothers as constantly connected and yet remarkably unique.

This set-up is vital to the use of the story-telling motif, which is told in ordinal sequence from Únus through to Tertíus. Each brother increasingly marks the connectivity of the tales: Sekúndus commences 'Eitt er upphaf á sögu okkarri Únus' (p.102) [The stories of me and Únus have one beginning] and Tertíus starts 'Eg byrja sögu vora á einn veg' (p.107) [I begin our story in identical fashion]. These connections are important, as the stories directly play off each other. Both Felix and Fenix end up in parallel courts, with a king who has both a daughter and a son, and the lexical echoes are noticeable: 'Eg nefnda mig Únus, en ekki vilda eg fleira mæla, því að eg skilda eigi þeirra tungu'

(p.98) [I named myself Únus, but I would not say more, because I did not understand their language]; 'eg nefndist Sekúndus. Eigi vilda eg fleira mæla. Var mér eigi kunnug þeirra tunga' (p.104) [I named myself Sekúndus. I would not say more. Their language was not known to me]. Each brother is also given a foster-mother, one named Silvía and the other Sylven. The two brothers' development into knights is both different and the same: 'Þar óx eg upp, þar til eg var fimmtán vetra. lét konungur kenna mér íþróttir, og kom svo, að engi sat í söðli fyrir mér' (p.98) [I grew up there until I was fifteen winters. The king had me taught skills, and it came about that no-one sat in a saddle before me]; 'Óx eg þar upp, þar til eg var tólf vetra. Konungsdóttir lét kenna mér riddaraskap, og kom svo, að enginn riddari sat í söðli fyrir mér um allt Gaskónía.' (p.104) [I grew up there until I was twelve winters. The king's daughter had me taught chivalry, and it came about that no knight sat in a saddle before me in all *Gaskonía*]. The ages at which they achieve such feats are different (with the numerical decrease in years suggesting a relative increase in ability for Sekúndus), and the guiding figure is distinct, but otherwise audiences can process Sekúndus's story as a reiteration of Únus's. Both characters grow close to the king's daughter ('Vel var með okkur konungsdóttur' (p.98 and p.104) [It was good between me and the king's daughter]) and as a result unintentionally antagonise the king's son: 'öfundaði konugssonar það og að eg var meir lofaður en hann' (p.104) [the king's son envied that, and that I was higher praised than him]; 'öfundaði hann mig, er eg var lofaður' (p.104) [he envied me that I was praised]. This cultivated *déjà vu* effect is significant in the overall characterisation of the brothers. Únus's story proceeds with him tricked into facing a dragon, successfully killing it, but being forced to leave his beloved; they split a dragon claw as a token of their love with a promise that she will not marry anyone else unless she receives his part of the claw. This sequence is a tragic pastiche of romances like the *Tristan* texts. Sekúndus's story acts not merely as a repeat of this event, but a correction of sorts, as, when he is likewise betrayed by the king's son, Sekúndus responds with a bluntly different tactic: 'Gengum vér þá að höllinni, þar sem konungur var inni. Sló eg þá eld í höllina, og brann þar inni konungur og sonur hans og hirðin öll. Tók eg þá konungsdóttir á mitt vald' (p.106) [We then went to the hall, where the king was inside. I started a fire in the hall, and there burned the king and his son and all the court inside. I then took the king's daughter

into my power]. Sekúndus provides a potentially humorous alternative to the idea of romantic tragedy, through violent self-determination, with the method of “burning inside” echoing Icelandic sagas. The two brothers represent diverging paths of the same narrative.

Tertíus’s story does not follow the same points of plot, but is nonetheless tied to the story of his predecessors. While Sekúndus begins trapped in a tree until ‘sá eg, hvar fimm konur gengu um skóginn, og var ein bezt búin’ (p.103) [I saw where five women walked through the woods, and one was the best dressed], Tertíus reuses this motif of five women, but increases the marvel, as he is rescued from an island: ‘reri skip að eyinni; þar voru á fimm konur; þær voru allar bláklæddar. Þær tóku mig til sín, en eyin hvarf í sjóinn. Þetta voru sækonur; þær eiga eðli í sjó sem fiskur, en sýnast á landi sem menn’ (p.108) [a ship rowed to the island; there were five women on it. They were all in dark clothes. They brought me to them, and the island disappeared into the sea. These were mermaids; they have the nature of fish in the sea, but appear like people on land]. Tertíus immediately inhabits a more supernatural narrative than his brothers, and this continues as he is taken in by a family of giants, which nonetheless has strange parallels to the courts of his brothers:

Óx eg þar upp hjá þeim, þar til að eg var þrettán vetra gamall, og lá eg hjá rísadóttir hverja nótt, og unnumst við mikið. Þá bað eg fóstra minn gef mér meyna, og það veitti hann mér; og var nær um afl okkart, en stærri var hún vexti. Risinn kenndi mér íþróttir, og vorum við nú með honum þrjá vetur. (p.109)

[I grew up there with them until I was thirteen winters old, and I lay by the giant’s daughter every night, and we loved each other greatly. Then I asked my fosterfather to give me the maiden, and he granted me that; and it was close regarding our power, but she was larger in stature. The giant taught me skills, and we were now with him three winters]

The words echo the previous stories in growing up to a certain age and in being taught *íþróttir*, but the ease and harmony of this story shows up his brothers. After witnessing two versions of the same court collapsing around the respective hero, the audience is now introduced to a world which, despite its monstrosity, ultimately exceeds the courtly world. The close proximity of these three stories allows us to place them into dialogue through the parallel figures of the brothers. This distinctive characterisation

remains to the final stages of the narrative, where each brother is offered a boon by their captor (in actuality their father Flóres), and each responds in a manner suitable to their stories: peaceable Tertíus asks for their fellow captive Sintram to be given the match he sought, the tragi-romantic Únus asks that the claw be sent to his beloved to free her from her oath, and the violently pragmatic Sekúndus gives a suitably bathetic response: ‘Mér þykir lítið fyrir að deyja. Láttu stinga úr þér bæði augun, og muntu þá við klæki lifa’ (p.112) [Dying does not seem very imposing to me. Have both your eyes stabbed out, and then you will live in disgrace]. The interplay of these brothers, and their remarkably different approaches to the same issues, is at the heart of this narrative.

However, *Flóres saga konungs* balances this intragenerational dialogue with a broader movement across the text contrasting subsequent generations. The brothers’ father, Flóres, is a markedly negative character. His approach to a bridal-quest for a king’s daughter called Elína involves violence, kidnap, and rape. When Flóres makes his initial request, King Kastus responds with a refusal:

Trúlegt þykir mér, að sú kona muni vel gift, sem þú fær, en beðið hafa hennar þeir menn, er bæði eru víðlendir og oss kunnigir að miklum höfðingskap, og hefir oss eigi sýnzt að gifta hana, og er þeirra styrkur nær oss en gifta hana í ókunnig lönd þeim mönnum, sem vér vitum engi deili á. (p.70)

[It seems believable to me that such a woman would be well married if you got her, but such men have asked for her who are both of expansive lands and known to us for great leadership, and we have not been inclined to betroth her, and their strength is closer to us than betrothing her into unknown lands to those men whom we know zero details of]

Elína agrees with this rejection, but Flóres ignores this and takes her unwillingly. Unlike maiden-king texts considered in Chapter One, the rape is framed negatively from the text’s perspective, as it notes ‘ekki skipast hennar skaplyndi til betra, og hefir hún saman grimmdarhug til konungs’ (p.72) [her inclination does not change for the better, and she has the same viciousness towards the king’]. Other texts like *Clari saga* have the woman abruptly change affection. Elína subsequently disappears with her three sons, and, unlike them, never returns, so the narrative sympathy with her seems limited, but the framing of Flóres is vital. As time passes, he recreates the same scenario that he entered into: he names

his daughter Elína after his own love, and, just like the first Elína's father, then rejects suitors for his daughter. This parallel culminates in his answer to Sintram, which directly replicates Kastus's answer:

vel þykir mér það trúlegt, að þér munið eigi fyrirmuna yður slíkrar giftingar. En til hafa orðið slíkir höfðingjar að biðja minnar dóttur, sem bæði eru ríkari og meiri höfuðburða en þú og oss kunnigir að góðum hlutum, og er þeirra styrkur oss nálægur, og mun eg eigi gifta mína dóttur í ókunnig lönd þeim manni, sem eg veit engi deili á, og þurfið þér ekki þessara mála að leita. (p.84)

[It seems very believable to me that you will not disregard yourself for such a marriage. But such chieftains have emerged to ask for my daughter who both are richer and more nobly born than you and known to us for good things, and their strength is close to us, and I will not betroth my daughter into unknown lands to that man whom I know zero details of, and you do not need to seek this matter.]

Flóres fulfils the exact same role as his previous antagonist, and, just as in the later stories of the three brothers, the audience is prepared for a new take on the same issue. The focus shifts to prince Sintram who features as a minor character in *Þiðreks saga* (which he reveals in the same storytelling sequence as the brothers'); he takes a similarly martial approach to Flóres in gathering armies, but without the element of rape. Sintram represents the more heroic version of a suitor overcoming a stubborn king. The emphasis that Flóres is wrong in rejecting the suit is ultimately highlighted by the younger Elína, reintroducing the female element and the idea of consent which *Flóres saga* seems interested in. In a summation of the theme of the text, she tells her father: 'Sintram bað mín fyrri, og vildir þú eigi gifta mig honum, og var þessara mála þá ekki við mig leitað. En ef mín ráð hefði þá höfð verið, þá væri sá margur góður drengur nú á lífi, sem vér höfum nú misst' (p.117) [Sintram asked for me before, and you did not want to betroth me to him, and this matter was not sought with me then. But if my counsel had then been taken, then many a good man would now be alive, whom we have now lost]. The first Elína's refusal validated her father's decision and condemned Flóres's actions; the second Elína's implied consent likewise condemns Flóres by invalidating his judgement. Including the three brothers, this saga presents five versions of the same essential premise, a man and a woman meeting and the prospect of marriage. Repeatedly, consent is framed as the key: the courts of Únus and Sekúndus, as well as Flóres

himself, are punished for opposing a happy match, while Tertíus's blissful giant domicile is harmonious in supporting the couple, and Flóres's actions against the first Elína are disastrous and ultimately hypocritical. The structures and causality of family relationships are a method of guiding the audience through the connections and contrasts of various stories to arrive at the judgement of the text.

The specifically Icelandic nature of this intergenerational approach to romance is relatively easy to support, with the repeated interest in genealogy and developing families evident in *fornaldarsögur*. For instance, Hans Jacob Orning reads the Hrafnista texts as presenting 'how a centre gradually expanded at the expense of a magical periphery, which becomes progressively more marginal and negatively loaded'; another example is the returning name Angantýr in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, which eventually goes to a man who does not throw his life away in violence.<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere, the Icelandic *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* is highly unusual in introducing a child of Tristram and his wife, who receives the name of Tristram's father, Kalegras, and goes on to win the happy marriage and life that neither of his forebears achieved. Audiences of these romances are clearly attuned to these connections, and so it is unsurprising that names recur and roles contrast throughout the corpus; Flóres returns *Sigurðar saga þögla* to its romance heyday like in the time of Flóres and Blankiflúr and Sigrgarðr replaces and avenges his deceased namesake and father in *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands* (see Chapter Two, 'A Combative Approach'). These contrasts can be highly malleable, as is evident in *Gibbons saga*. The defeated enemy Eskopart asks for his name to be given to Gibbon's child with the maiden-king, and that child eventually embodies his predecessor: just as the former Eskopart was 'mikill sem risi sterkr sem iotnar' (p.22) [large as an ogre, strong as giants], so too is the new Eskopart 'stor sem risar en sterkr at afli' (p.89) [big as ogres and strong in might]. In addition, the young Eskopart swears an oath to encounter his father: 'þess streingi ek heit at ek skal fara til Grikklands ok bioda herra Gibbon einuigi ok drepa hann ok hefna þinnar suiuirdu ella falla a holmi fyrir honum' (pp.92-93) [I swear an oath that I shall go to *Grikkland* and offer Lord Gibbon single combat and kill him and avenge your disgrace, or else

---

<sup>46</sup> Hans Jacob Orning, 'The Magical Reality of the Late Middle Ages: Exploring the World of the *Fornaldarsögur*', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 35.1 (2010), pp.3-20, here p.5.

fall in a duel before him]. This oath-taking echoes both of Eskopart's parents who had sworn oaths in such a way: 'þess hefir Florentia heitt streingt at eiga eingan man nema þann er ynni Eskopart i einnvið ok sigradi hana i horpvsælætti' (pp.22-23) [Florentia has sworn an oath to marry no man except the one who defeats Eskopart in single combat and conquers her in harp-playing]; 'þess streingi ek heit at ek skall þessa ivngfru eiga ella af blomga hanna sinvm meydómmi' (pp.25-26) [I swear an oath that I shall have this lady or else deprive her of her maidenhood]. Ultimately, young Eskopart represents a brave but inadequate challenger to his father, whose sword must be replaced by outside forces to prevent a fatality, and the text (and Greca) peacefully reunites the two after they fight to a stalemate. However, the C-version ending takes an entirely different approach to the premise: Eskopart (spelled Eskupart) is notably more violent, hot-headed, and ambitious than in the other version. A different intergenerational connection is established, as the former maiden-king notes 'uggir mig at vm þessa hlute bregdi þier nogu miog til min' (p.101) [I fear that in these things you are taking after me too much]. Unlike the story of two heroes reuniting, this version, which has a decidedly heavier female interest (see Chapter One, 'Suitable Women'), frames Eskopart and his father as unruly figures whom the women seek to pacify, the father and son launching into an actual war. There is even a greater sense that Eskopart represents the hero that Gibbon once was; even though the switching of Gibbon's sword is still eventually revealed, Asper gives Eskopart a magical drink before the battle and notes 'Slikt sama af þersu horni drack þinn fadir j Inndia landi aadr hann bardist vid Eskupart þann sama sem þu ert eptir kalladr' (p.109) [Your father drank from this horn just the same in *Indialand* before he fought with that same Eskupart whom you are named after]. The young Eskopart represents the metaphorical reincarnation of the prowess of both his father and his namesake. As he becomes milder, he is more notably a moral victor over his stubborn father, who, in this version alone, is given some sense of retribution for his killing of the noble Eskopart and rape of the maiden-king. Eskopart acts as a double of Gibbon to challenge the original hero.

It is even through family that the *riddarasögur* channel some part of the tragic impulse which has been identified in some of the *fornaldarsögur*. As Richter-Gould says: 'Instead of the luck which

dominates *Abenteuersagas* and *Wikingersagas*, *Heldensagas* are governed by tragic fate'.<sup>47</sup> Although the usefulness of those traditional categories in criticism is contentious, this sense of doom is certainly evident in texts such as *Örvar-Odds saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and even makes an appearance in *Victors saga ok Blávus*. The plea of the defeated vikings, Randver and Önundr, to their opponents is 'at þu lieter heita epter mier' (p.24, p.25) [that you name someone after me], with the belief that the association of their names will be promising: 'verdi eigi ecki at manna er hefer nafn mitt en er son þinn' (p.24) [it won't be that nothing comes of a man who has my name and is your son]; 'mun heidr fylgia nafninu' (p.25) [honour will follow the name]. However, the story told at the end of the narrative is more melancholy:

Blauus aatti þann son med drottningu sinni er Aunundr het en Wictor aati þann son at Randuer het ok þegar þeir hofdu aldr til þa giorduzt þeir fostbrædur ok laugdu j hernad. þesser hinu wngu menn sottu kesiuna ok brynþuarann j hauginn sem Randver hafdi raad fyrir giort. woro þeir j hernadi langa tima ok þottu hinu frægaztu menn. þar til at þeir mættu þeim herkongi er Geirminir het. hann aatti at raada fyrer Danmorku. hann war aagætur af sinum hernadi suo at ovist er at uita huer meire kappi hefer verit wm hans daga en hann j nordrhaalfunni. þeir baurduzt þria daga fulla ok fasta. Enn med þui at Geirmini vard eigi þat lagat at verda vopndaudum. helldr anndazt wr sott med naaturligu edli heimsins ok deya vegliga j sinum kongdomi þa fiellu þeir fostbrædur fyrer honum bader Randver ok Aunundr med godum ordztir ok mikilli hreysti. (p.49)

[Blávus had that son with his queen who was called Önundr, and Victor had that son who was called Randver, and as soon as they had the age for it, then they became foster-brothers and engaged in raiding. These young men sought the spear and halberd in the mound which Randver had arranged made. They were in raiding for a long time and seemed the most renowned men until they met that warrior king who was called Geirminir. He had the rule of *Danmörk*. He was excellent in his raiding so that it is uncertain that a greater champion than him has been known in his days. They fought for three full and intense days. But given that Geirminir was not destined to be killed by weapons, rather to perish from illness in the natural way of the world and die honourably in his kingdom, then those foster-brothers fell before him, both Randver and Önundr, with fine glory and great heroism]

The namesakes of the tragically-slain vikings fulfil the same roles as their predecessors: they become foster-brothers, claim their distinctive weapons, and experience success in raiding. Yet the younger

---

<sup>47</sup> Righter-Gould, 'The *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*', p.423.

generation likewise parallels the previous heroes in eventually meeting with an enemy that they could not defeat. Although their deaths are marked by more glory and praise than the previous vikings, there is nonetheless a tragic note which the text dwells on, echoing the mournful treatment of Randver and Öundur from much earlier. Although family connections may be powerful, there is no guarantee that they will be positive. In these texts, it can vary whether the next member of the family has the freedom to correct the mistakes that have come before, or are doomed to repeat the same fate. Nonetheless, it is clear that family frames these romances in meaningful ways that draw on legendary heritage and a distinctly Icelandic literary identity.

### **Changing Faces: *Mágus saga jarls*, Tradition, and Legend**

We can use these collected observations about the techniques of intertwining the romance and native worlds to explore a particularly challenging text. The path that the *Maugis d'Aigremont* material took from *chansons de geste* to *Mágus saga jarls* is unknown, but the result is a striking example of the influence of these narrative structures and frameworks. Given that it is the text in our corpus with the most obvious heritage in Continental romance, *Mágus saga* is remarkably insular in presentation. It mostly dismisses the trappings of its own past (the shorter version in particular) and adopts a new past and present: that of Scandinavian/Germanic history and Icelandic social identity. Not only are the names of the central brothers, Renaud, Guichard, Allard, and Richardet changed into Rögnvaldr, Vígvarðr, Markvarðr, and Aðalvarðr, but their introduction frames them in the manner considered in this chapter, connecting and contrasting them:

Einn hét Vígvarðr; hann var .xviiij. vetra, þa er saga þessi górdiz. Hann var mikill ok sterkr ok skapbráðr, sva at hann sazt ecki fyrir, hvat hann hafðiz at, þegar hann reiddiz. Hann var svartr á hárslit, breiðleítr oc ravðleítr ok hinn harðmannligzti maðr. AnnaR son hans hét Rögnvalldr; hann var .xiiij. vetra gamall. Hann var manna friðaztr synum, vitr ok vinsæll, goðgiarn ok forsiall; hverium manni likaði uel við hann. Hann var allra manna bezt górr at ser um iðrottir; [. . .] Markvarðr het hinn þriði son larls; hann var mióg líkr Vigvarði bróðr sinum, bęði at yfirliti ok skaplynndi; hann var .xij. vetra gamall. Enn fiorði het Aðalvarðr; hann var .ix. vetra; hann var miog líkr Rögnvalldi, bróðr sinum, bęði at yfirlitum ok skaplynndi. (pp.7-8)

[One was called Vígvarðr; he was 18 winters when this story happened. He was large and strong and impulsive, so that he did not abide what was going on, as soon as he got angry. He was black in hair colour, broad-featured and reddish and the most tumultuous man. His second son was called Rögnvaldr; he was 14 winters old. He was the most attractive of men in appearance, wise and popular, benevolent and foresighted; he made a good impression on everyone. He was the best equipped in himself of all men with skills . . . The lord's third son was called Markvarðr; he was very like his brother Vígvarðr, both in appearance and temperament. He was 12 winters old. And the fourth was called Aðalvarðr; he was 9 winters. He was very like his brother Rögnvaldr, both in appearance and temperament]

The central contrast is clearly between the two eldest brothers, opposing the familiar issue of hot-headedness (associated with physical strength) and intellect (connected to benevolence and therefore popularity). These internal characteristics are mapped onto physical stereotypes, with Vígvarðr dark and conventionally unattractive, while Rögnvaldr's attractiveness is superlative. As we have seen before, one character is constructed as more stereotypically "romance" than the other. The narrative with the chess game examined in Chapter Two bears this out: Rögnvaldr refuses violence, but Vígvarðr resorts to murder. The two brothers encapsulate a central ideological conflict between sense and rashness. One example of their opposition is when their father Ámundi is horrified by his sons' actions and the problems they have caused for his oath of loyalty to the emperor. He circumvents his oath by running to the forest and offering advice to four trees as stand-ins for his sons: Vígvarðr reads the situation too literally, thinking his father 'er ęr orðinn; þui at hann ętlar, at eikrnar muni gōra þat, er hann talaði' (p.13) [has become mad, because he thinks that the trees will do what he said]; Rögnvaldr correctly interprets his father's actions as a helpful ruse. From their introduction, the brothers are presented to the audience as in implicit dialogue with each other.

The remaining brothers contribute to this juxtaposition. Rögnvaldr and Vígvarðr each have a younger double (Aðalvarðr and Markvarðr, respectively) who reinforces the connection between appearance and personality. Markvarðr and Aðalvarðr confirm the binary nature of this family. We navigate this family through signposts of their nature, and the use of this method in broader Icelandic literature is evident from the famous concluding remarks of *Egils saga*:

Þat var sundrleitt, því at í ætt þeirri hafa fœsk þeir menn er fríðastir hafa verit á Íslandi, sem var Þorsteinn Egilsson ok Kjartan Ólafsson, systurson Þorsteins, ok Hallr Guðmundarson, svá ok Helga in fagra, dóttir Þorsteins, er þeir deildu um Gunnlaugr ormstunga ok Skáld-Hrafn; en fleirir váru Mýramenn manna ljótastir.<sup>48</sup>

[It was a split in appearances, because in their lineage, those men who have been the most handsome in Iceland have been born, like Þorsteinn, son of Egill, was, and Kjartan, son of Óláfr, Þorsteinn's nephew, and Hallr, son of Guðmundr, Helga the beautiful just the same, the daughter of Þorsteinn, whom Gunnlaugr serpent-tongue and Poet-Hrafn disputed over; but most of the *Mýramenn* were the ugliest of men.]

This contrast of appearance is used throughout *Egils saga* as a means of connecting the attributes of one generation to another, such as Egill's cantankerous nature shared with his likewise unattractive ancestors, and the comparative excellence of figures named Þórólfr across two generations. In *Mágus saga*, the interest in such a dichotomy is also evident in minor characters, such as the sons of the villainous Ubbi, who have similar names to each other but contrasting characterisation: 'Erlingr var miðg i hátt sem faðir hans ok var ellri þeirra bréðra; Erlendr var vel at ser' (p.7) [Erling was much in the model of his father and was the elder of the brothers; Erlendr was good in himself]. The text uses the associations of family connections and contrasts throughout, but particularly to frame the four brothers inherited from *chansons de geste* as an Icelandic network of family members sharing qualities which the audience can process quickly.

Furthermore, *Mágus saga* uses the brothers as a means of structuring the entire narrative, firstly through the replication of a brother's captivity. In two separate episodes, one of the younger brothers is unhorsed during an encounter with the emperor and captured: 'Aðalvarðr var rekinn af hesti sinum ok fęrðr Karli keisara. Hann let setia hann upp a einn hest ok varðueita' (p.19) [Aðalvarðr was driven from his horse and delivered to Emperor Karl. He had him placed up on a horse and guarded]; 'Þeir riðuz at keisari ok Markvarðr; keisari lagði til hans sua fast, at hann fell þegar af baki. Let keisari þegar taka hann oc varðueita' (p.26) [They, the emperor and Markvarðr, rode at each other; the emperor stabbed at him so powerfully, that he immediately fell from horseback. The emperor

---

<sup>48</sup> *Egils saga*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), p.182.

immediately had him taken and guarded]. In both situations, the rescue attempt proceeds in the same way. First, the narrative describes the mysterious disappearance from the emperor's court of each brother: 'Litlu síðar hvarf Aðalvarðr íbrótt, sua at eingi vissi, hvat af honum varð.' (p.20) [A little later, Aðalvarðr disappeared, so that no-one knew what became of him]; 'Litlu síðar hvarf Markvarðr, sua at eingi vissi, hvat af honum varð' (p.26) [A little later, Markvarðr disappeared, so that no-one knew what became of him]. Secondly, the narrative rewinds as Mágus is coerced into helping by his wife, the sister of the brothers: 'Nu kastar Makthilðr fęð a Magus. Hann fann þat bratt' (p.20) [Now Makthilðr acts coldly towards Mágus. He noticed it quickly]; 'Maktilldr kastar nu fęð a Magus. Hann fann þat skiótt' (p.26) [Makthilðr now acts coldly towards Mágus. He noticed it swiftly]. Subsequently, Mágus visits the emperor in an outlandish guise: first as 'karl einn gamall. Hann var í fatækligum buningi; enn alla uega utan a hans tótrum var, sem ecki væri nema kufungar einir ok skeliar' (p.30) [an old man. He was in poor attire, but everywhere on the outside of his rags it was like nothing except snailshells and seashells only]; then as a man 'mikill ok sterkr, hvítr fyrir hęrum' (p.27) [large and strong, white in the hair] who later reveals his height as '.vij.alna.' (p.28) [7 ells]. Shenanigans ensue until Mágus eventually reveals himself to the captured brother: 'Karl bra af ser yfir hófn, ok var þar kominn Magus.' (p.23) [The man pulled his disguise off himself and Mágus had arrived there]; 'Hann ser, hvar maðr geíng, ok kennir, at þar er Magus.' (p.32) [He sees where a man goes and recognises that Mágus is there]. The narrative is progressed through the connections between brothers, who each suffer for Vígvarðr's initial mistake. The function of Aðalvarðr and Markvarðr as doubles is reflected in these episodes, as Aðalvarðr is lost because of a mistake made by Rögnvaldr and Markvarðr is captured because Vígvarðr falls for a trick. Subsequently, each lost brother is mourned by their equivalent: 'Rögnvaldr uar longum ukátr; þuiat hann vissi eigi, hvat leið um Aðaluarð, broður hans' (p.20) [Rögnvaldr was unhappy for a long time, because he did not know what was happening with Aðalvarðr, his brother]; Vígvarðr 'quez engiss niota mega fyrir þui, er hann vissi eigi, hvat orðit var af Markvaraði, broður hans.' (p.26) [says he can enjoy nothing because he did not know what had occurred with Markvarðr, his brother]. This duplicated sequence places a strong emphasis on causality and responsibility; each character is punished for their

folly by the loss of their double. The text frames this exile originating in Continental tradition as something of a feud, with the complicated interconnectivity of individual family members within a broader conflict. There is even some evidence that the composer conceives of this clash between parties in Icelandic cultural terms, as Mágus comments in each episode on the difficulty of facing the emperor directly: ‘mun oss þat þungt veita: þuiat bræðr þinir hafa ill mala efni’ (p.20) [it will be heavy for us, because your brothers’ case is poor], repeated as ‘oss munu öll skipti þungt veita við keisara; þuiat hann hefir mala efni mycklò betri.’ (p. 27) [all interactions with the emperor will be heavy for us, because his case is much better]. The concept of *málaefni* [the situation/the details of a case], with its specifically legal resonances, suggests this struggle is framed as a legal case, a distinctly Icelandic concept, even if the content is alien.

Mágus represents a degree of rationality, challenging both the violence of Vígarðr and the foolhardy heroism of the romance hero Rögnvaldr. The repeated captures heighten the implication of Mágus’s intellectual superiority: he notes the second time, ‘slikt er nu ecki iafnhégt sem hit fyra sinn’ [such is now not as easy as the previous time], and echoes the chess games of the earlier narrative as he explains, ‘Hefi ek nu öll brògd min frammi haft’ (pp.26-27) [I have now brought forward all my moves]. The chaos of these brothers is offset by repeated emphasis on trickery and peaceful resolution; in the second rescue attempt, Mágus essentially states the moral of this contrast to his companion Einar: ‘Eingi manndrap villda ek at af mer hlytiz, ef ek mætti raða.’ (p.27) [I would like for no killing to come from me, if I can decide it]. The text has emphasised through replication the importance of Mágus and his intellect in the face of a complicated network of family liability. From this platform, the text is more subtle, but nonetheless appears to continue this framework. There is no third capture, but there is further repetition. When Mágus appears to die, and then a new inhuman character appears, the sheer idiosyncrasy of his appearance suggests to the audience that this is the third of Mágus’s schemes and disguises:

lþeim flokki sa þeir mann einn, er nóckut var braugðuligr; þat þottiz keisari skilia, at þessi munndi uera flocks foringi þeirra. Auga hans var annat blátt ok snart ok vel um sik, enn

annat var morautt, sem i kauptum. Aunnur kinn hans ok sua nef var halft sniohvítt, enn halfmoraútt; ok skiott orði yfir at fara, var hans likami allr halfitr, snióhvítr ok moraúðr, ok allr auðrum megin vel uorðinn, sem hveurr mundi sik kíósa; enn óðrum megin var hann allr unndarliggr ok amatliggr. (p.34)

[They saw a man in that group who was somewhat noticeable; the emperor thought he perceived that this must be the leader of that group. One of his eyes was dark and sharp and pleasant in itself, but the other was golden like cats' eyes. One of his cheeks, and half the nose also, was snowy white, and half golden; and to progress quickly through words, his body was entirely dual-coloured, snowy white and golden, and all of one side well-formed, as anyone would choose for themselves, and he was entirely remarkable and unpleasant on the other side]

The only supernatural figure in the shorter redaction of *Mágus saga* is the eponymous character, so much so that Andrew Hamer notes the 'troll-like nature of the magician-hero' which the longer and later redaction plays down as it 'rationalises the character of Mágus by creating a genealogy for him'.<sup>49</sup> However, the ambiguous monstrosity of the character functions here as a signpost of his identity, and, by implication, that this is the third triumph of Mágus's trickery. The logic of Mágus's plan as the *Hálfliti Maðr*, whose knightly exploits against the brothers were covered in Chapter Two, is less important than the elaborateness of it: in his third disguise, Mágus has once more exceeded expectations in aid of helping the brothers. It is possible to map this third episode loosely onto the rescue of Rögnvaldr, who is in the most danger at the moment of Mágus's characteristic revelation: 'þa bar hialmynn upp af andliti hinum Halflita Manni, ok kennir Rögnvalldr, at þar er Magus kominn, magr hans' (p.36) [then the helmet came up from the Half-Coloured Man's face, and Rögnvaldr recognises that Mágus has arrived there, his kinsman]. More generally, after this third disguise, three brothers are saved from the conflict, each reconciled with the emperor and given a reward appropriate to their age and character.

Mágus's rescue of Vígvarðr, to complete this structure, is even less overt. In the face of some new enemies, Mágus manipulates the emperor to seek Vígvarðr's assistance, and the implication that this is a fourth replicated episode is conveyed in a few verbal echoes. Mágus's visit to the emperor is

---

<sup>49</sup> Andrew Hamer, '*Mágus saga* — Riddarasaga or fornaldarsaga?', *Fourth International Saga Conference*, pp.1-19, here p,5.

framed like one of his revelations – ‘var þar kominn Magus Iarl’ (p.40) [Lord Mágus had arrived there] – and the climactic battle also echoes his earlier rescues – ‘Sigurðr reið at Markvarði sva fast, at hann fell þegar af hestinum; ok let hann þegar taka hann oc varðueita. Asmundr riðr af baki Aðalvarð oc let varðueita hann’ (p.41) [Sigurðr rode at Markvarðr so powerfully, that he immediately fell from the horse, and he had him immediately taken and guarded. Ásmundr rides Aðalvarðr from horseback and had him guarded]. Although Mágus is not consistently non-violent, jousting against the brothers and engaging in the final battle, the text nonetheless uses his cunning as a recurrent counter to the brothers. Across four episodes of varying extremity, he manages to ultimately free each of the four brothers and untangle the complicated network of feud and legal dispute which this text has been constructed around. Mágus becomes a morally superior hero with as much place in Icelandic culture as his original Continental French one.

The transformation of Mágus into a partly Scandinavian figure is particularly evident in his choice of disguises. While the *Hálfliti Maðr* draws predominantly on *blámaðr* imagery and chivalric presentation, the figure of Víðföruull, Mágus’s second guise, is completely different. The ancient wanderer who claims memories of the Germanic heroes of the past has led to valid comparison to *Widsiðr*, although the details of this connection are uncertain across the gap of time and culture.<sup>50</sup> The Víðföruull persona also appears in *Rémundar saga*, where he is described as ‘mikill vexti og mjög digur. Hann var í dökkum kufli fótisíðum, eigi af vaðmáli, heldur af skruði’ (p.191) [large in stature and very stout. He was in a dark cloak, down to the feet, not of plain woollens, rather of fabrics]. Although no direct link to Germanic tradition is mentioned, his appearance may be somewhat Odinic. Yet this legendary wanderer figure has greater currency in Icelandic literature, such as in a number of *þættir* sometimes considered *fornaldarsögur* including *Norna-Gests þáttr* and *Tóka þáttr*. These stories of guests who connect to the pagan past have elicited numerous studies of their generic identity and their purpose, but a recurrent conclusion is that these represent a means of interacting with pagan

---

<sup>50</sup> Schlauch, ‘Widsith, Vithforull, and Some Other Analogues’.

inheritance, and determining whether it can be reconciled with the Christian present.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of religious influence (for which see Chapter Four, '(En)Countering Paganism'), the link between an unusual guest and the heroic past is evident in *Mágus saga* and elsewhere.

In *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, the story of Jón, who initially appears as a mysterious figure called Gestr, is repeatedly connected to legend and mythology. He issues a riddle to Eirekr and quotes verse, which is absent from the rest of our corpus except for Þorbjörg's couplet in *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*. He uses a mythological idiom that 'Fenrir vlfann vissi, huath hann taug, þa er hann beitt höndina af Ty Odinnsyni' (p.8) [Only the wolf Fenrir would know what he tasted when he bit the hand from Týr, son of Óðinn]; direct mythological references are likewise absent from the corpus except for mentions of Óðinn in an introductory "apologia" to *Sigurðar saga þögla* shared with the *fornaldarsaga Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, and a description in *Sigrarðs saga frækna* of Skjöldr's spear with 'geir Óðins markaðr á framan verðum' (p.139) [marked with the spear of Óðinn on the front]. Furthermore, Jón's backstory includes a version of the she-wolf and honey episode from *Völsunga saga*, and focuses on a legendary ring called Gáinn which is used as a test of the greed of individuals; the first portion of *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* likewise revolves around the greed for such a ring, and that narrative movement only concludes when Vilhjálmr returns the ring to its rightful owner. This ring motif evokes Andvaranaut from legendary tradition, and the ring in *Þjalar-Jóns saga* is part of a trio of treasures with legendary heritage: 'einn er hringin Gainn, ok drypr af honum hina ix huerir not gull, suo ath madr ma sik sæmiliga halda med þui fe; annar er sverd, er hann kallar Sigrvanda, ok áá sa jafnann sigri ath hrosa, er þat ber; þridi gripr er hialmr, er heiter Æger' (p.41) [one is the ring Gáinn, and every ninth night gold drips from it, so that a man can honourably keep himself with that wealth; the second is a sword which he calls Sigrvöndr, and the one

---

<sup>51</sup> See for example Joseph Harris, 'Gestr's "Prime Sign": Source and Signification in *Norna-Gests þáttr*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 104 (1989), pp.103-122, Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, '*Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts*, *Helga þáttr Þórissonar*, and the Conversion *þættir*', pp.459-474, Merrill Kaplan, 'The Past as Guest. Mortal Men, Kings' Men, and Four *Gestir* in *Flateyjarbók*', *Gripla* 15 (2004), pp.91-120, and Sheryl McDonald, 'Pagan Past and Christian Future in *Norna-Gests þáttr* and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*', *Bulletin of International Medieval Research* 15-16 (2011), pp.164-178.

who carries it always has victory to celebrate; the third treasure is a helmet, which is called *Ægir*].<sup>52</sup> The literal interpretation of *æghjálmr*, elsewhere in Old Norse a more metaphorical representation of intimidation, shows the exoticisation of the heroic past, coalesced in powerful treasures.<sup>53</sup> Even in the *riddarasögur*, there is a frequent association between mysterious wandering guests and the pagan and Germanic past, an association which *Mágus saga* draws on.

In these texts, we can see some dramatisation of the question of the legendary past's threat. In both *Rémundar saga* and *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, the introduction of these guests provokes rejection from the ruling kings, both expressing some form of rebuttal suggesting idiom or common practice: 'það er vant að taka við ókunnigum mönnum, þeim sem menn vita eigi, hvað mönnum eru, og hefir það mörgum að illu orðið, að hverju sem þér verður' (p.194) [It is folly to receive unknown men, those for whom men do not know what kind of men they are, and that has ended up bad for many in what you're doing]; 'Vandhæfui nockot syniz mer áá, ath veita þer vetur vist, er þu vil huorki segia æt þina ne odal jord; hefi ek ok ecki lagt þat j vana minn, ath taka vid þeshattar mönnum' (p.3) [It seems something of a bad approach to give you winter-lodgings, when you will say neither your lineage nor homeland; I have also not held it as my custom, to receive that kind of men]. In both cases, the guests then prove their value as guiding forces for the local prince, ultimately disregarding the suspicion of such figures. However, the exploration of this figure in *Mágus saga* is more thorough and complicated. The initial impression is the spectacle of the past, as Víðförull describes, categorises, and ranks legendary figures from texts such as *Þiðreks saga* and *Hálfs saga konungs ok Hálfsrekka*. King Hálfir is the top of a hierarchy, as 'Engan hefi ek slikan seð, ok hefi ek farit um allan heíminn. Hann var sva mikill sem risar' (p.28) [I have seen none like it, and I have travelled through all the world. He was as large as giants], while Þiðrekr 'var mikill maðr at þui, sem nu er mannfolk, ngr at vexti, ok ek em' (p.29) [he was a large man by what humans are now, close in stature to what I am]; Víðförull subsequently says of Gunnarr:

---

<sup>52</sup> See *Völsunga saga* in *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda I*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954).

<sup>53</sup> A prime example is Hrafnkell's intimidating actions in *Hrafnkels saga*, in *Austfirðinga sögur*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1950).

‘Ecki uar hann mikill maðr’ (p.29) [He was not a large man]. Legendary history is also processed through these contrasts of family extremes, as while Gunnar is ‘naliga allra manna friðaztr synum’ [nearly the most attractive of all men in appearance], Högni ‘var manna lioótaztr ok ausku faulr at lit’ (p.29) [the ugliest of men and pale as ashes in colour]. Víðförull represents an intriguing connection to a fantastic past, as the king, an audience substitute of sorts, engages in this ranking process, asking ‘Hvarr þotti þer meiri fyrir ser, Ísungr konungr eða Þiðrekr konungr?’ (p.29) [Who seemed more impressive in themselves to you, King Ísungr or King Þiðrekr?] a reference to the combat between their courts in *Þiðreks saga*. Víðförull allows an element of ambiguity and interpretation, as he says: ‘Þat skolut þer meta, herra! Annar valði sinn mann af hverio lanndi naliga, þann sem hann feck fréknaztan; enn annar tok .i. mann til annan enn sonn sina’ (p.29) [You shall judge that, lord! One selected a man from each nearby land, the boldest one he could obtain; but the other took only one man in addition to his sons]. The king and the audience become caught up in the spectacle of the heroic past brought by this stranger.

This spectacle is made literal as Víðförull makes an elaborate reconstruction of the heroic past. He brings the king’s court to a glass ceiling upon which the heroes of the past appear. This episode is constructed with heavy repetition to gradually heighten the intensity of the ghosts of the past. First:

heyra menn brókun mickla iþann stolpann, er til austrs var idalnum [. . .] Þui næst sa þeir, at menn komu upp a glerhimininn; þeir ridu allir; þeir stigu af hestum oc settuz niðr; þetta var mikil sveit manna (pp.30-31)

[men hear a great clatter in that pillar which was in the east of the valley . . . After that, they saw that men came up onto the glass roof; they all rode. They climbed from their horses and sat down; this was a great host of men]

The king identifies Gunnar and Högni. Subsequently, Víðförull’s previous hierarchy is gradually introduced, with a marked intensification. Ísungr and Sigurðr *sveinn* appear:

Þui næst heyrðu þeir braukun mickla ok meri enn fyr; ok þui næst koma menn upp a glerhimininn; þessir voro .xii. sama; þeir voro bæði micklir oc sterkligir; þessir komu upp or þeim stolpa, er vestr var idalinn; þeir stigu af baki ok settuz niðr (p.31)

[After that, they heard a great clatter, and greater than before, and after that men come up onto the glass roof; these were 12 together. They were both large and strong; these ones came up from that pillar which was in the west of the valley. They climbed from horseback and sat down]

Sigurðr here, as in the *riddarasögur* as a whole, draws on his appearance in *Þiðreks saga* and not his more legendary identity as Sigurðr Fáfnisbani.<sup>54</sup> This repeats another two times as Þiðrekr's retinue emerges and finally King Hálfir and his champions; the cowardly Ubbi is scared, which is a repeated feature of Mágus's ploys. Víðförull even writes himself into the legendary past as Innsteinn, one of the characters from *Hálfs saga*; in the longer redaction, distance is maintained, as Víðförull remains separate. Víðförull offers an opportunity for audiences, within the text and without, to witness the legendary past brought into the present of the romance.

What proceeds from there is a back-and-forth battle between the assorted heroes, allowing an imaginary contest between heroes from different texts; Ísungr defeats Gunnar only for Þiðrekr to join the latter's side, and the subsequent imbalance is then corrected as Hálfir opposes Þiðrekr. The text plays with inherited conflicts and brings together heroes from the traditions of *Þiðreks saga* and *Hálfs saga* to create this extreme spectacle. However, the impressive wonder of this moment transforms into increasing horror as the glass roof itself gradually shows signs of breaking, and this reveals the true nature of the audience within the text. In the first stage of the battle, 'sua gòrðiz braukun mikil, at Vbbi larl flyr oc mart lið með honum' (p.31) [such a large clatter occurred that Lord Ubbi flees, and many people with him]. All sides are then involved: 'Nu taka til sterklig haug ok storir brestir, sua at þat var eingis vert, er fyr var; ok keisari atlar nu, at þa oc þa muni glerhimininn bresta ofan' (p.32) [Now strong blows and heavy crashes begins, so that what was before was of no note; and now the emperor thinks that the glass roof will break downwards at any moment]. This playful sport has turned into threatening

---

<sup>54</sup> For more on the reception of the Sigurðr figure in Icelandic literature, see Ashman Rowe, 'Fornaldarsögur and Heroic Legends of the Edda', and Hughes, "'Where Are All the Eddic Champions Gone?'".

and imposing chaos, and this culminates in the monstrous subversion of the previous appearances of legendary figures, using the same verbal cues:

Oc er þetta er sem mest um, þa heyra þeir sua ogurligan gny i þann stólpann, er i miðium var dalnum, at yfir brázt allt þat brak ok bresti, er varð af orrostunni. Hann ser, at upp or þeim stolpa koma .iiij. risar; þat þickiz hann kenna at frasògn, at þar ferr fyrstr Aspilian risi, þa Aventroð, broðir hans, þa Egeirr risi. Siðazt kemr vpp Viðolfr mittumstangan; hann hefir staung sina i henndi; hann ok bręðr hans slóguz i leikinn; þeir kólluðu með sua mikilli rauddu oc ogurligri, at keisari þottiz eingi slik odómi heyrta hafa. (p.32)

[And when this is at its greatest, then they hear such a terrifying din in that pillar which was in the middle of the valley, that it resounded over all that clash and noise which came from the battle. He sees that 4 giants come up from that pillar; he thinks he recognises by report that first goes the giant Aspilian, then his brother Aventroð, then the giant Egeirr. Last, Viðolfr bound-to-the-post comes up; he has his post in hand. He and his brothers engage in the sport; they yelled with such great and terrible voices, that the emperor thought he had heard no such marvel.]

The troll characters, also lifted from *Þiðreks saga*, represent the monstrosity of the past. It does not matter that, within *Þiðreks saga*, these figures are defeated by the other characters, or that one of them is human, because here they are framed through this replicative structure as the most extreme force, driving even the emperor away. Viðolfr smashes the ceiling with his staff, destroying the entire spectacle, and this is the cover for Mágus to rescue Markvarðr. This sequence functions within a broader narrative of Mágus's ploys and impressive magical abilities, but its individual implications are worth dwelling on. It is a marker of how thoroughly the text has adopted a new heritage from its actual origins, with Mágus slotting into this recurrent image of a wandering guest who connects the present with the past; the narrative also stages some of the questions inherent in the reproduction of legendary material in a contemporary, Christian culture. The entertainment value of this scene, both to the characters (at least initially) and to the audience, is undeniable, yet the intensity of this repetitive, incrementally worsening presentation of the heroes of the past carries a palpable sense of threat. However impressive and familiar the figures and tropes of legendary heritage are, there might be something to be feared in the world of history.

These *riddarasögur* comfortably use the structures and motifs of a range of traditions that we can loosely call Scandinavian/heroic. There is a wide range of purposes that those structures can be put to: the empowerment of a particularly northern hero, the demonisation of either the monsters of the otherworld or the humans of the romance world, and even the use of family as a decidedly Icelandic means of framing individuals. These romances are both inheriting and interacting with this material as they attempt to establish what parts of the local traditions are still useful and relevant. A final mention should be given to *Hrings saga ok Tryggva*, a text of which two small fragments remain and whose story is reconstructed from later *rímur*: even in that small extract, we can see the workings of this cultural interrogation.<sup>55</sup> A woman called Brynhildr, forced to marry someone not her first love, is praised for her fidelity in an ending that ultimately unites her with her first love; we can speculate on the spectre of the legendary Brynhildr, and an attempt to rewrite that story in the way it should have been in the eyes of that text – a happy ending. Consequently, the *riddarasögur* attest to a process of cultural re-evaluation. A world of heroic and native features coalesces in these romances, made stereotypical and obviously different from the courtly norms of the romance narratives. The ways in which these two worlds are clearly juxtaposed suggest a keen awareness of the conflict of these traditions, even as other texts more harmoniously blend the different tropes of *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*. The “old world”, however fictional, is an important presence in these texts. As we now turn to the final chapter of this study, this attempt to rewrite the morals of an inherited tradition returns, as the *riddarasögur* use Christianity to add new meaning, and sometimes new resolution, to the characters and conflicts which comprise the insular romances.

---

<sup>55</sup> See Agnete Loth, ‘Preface’, *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances V*, pp.ix-x for the history of the manuscripts and the *rímur*.

## Chapter Four: Refiguring Romance for Religious Ends

At first, religious material and the insular romances can appear to be at odds. The opening to *Flóres saga konungs* makes a clear distinction between itself and what are typically termed *heilagra manna sögur* [sagas of holy people/saints]:

Ef menn girnast að heyra fornar frásagnir, þá er það fyrst til að hlýða því, að flestar sögur eru af nokkuru efni. Sumar eru af guði og hans helgum mönnum, og má þar nema mikinn vísdóm. Eru þeir þó fleiri menn, er lítil skemmtun þykir að heilagra manna sögum.

[If men desire to hear old stories, then the first thing to hear is that most stories are of some particular matter. Some are of God and his holy people, and great wisdom can be learnt there. Yet there are more men for whom there seems little entertainment in the stories of holy people.]

The text subsequently elaborates the virtues of stories about old kings and heroes to justify its own existence against accusations of fictionality. The distinction is understandable, as texts like *Flóres saga* and several others examined in the last chapter, such as *Ála flekks saga* and *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, contain limited or no references to God, Christianity, or any spiritual matters in their exploration of the pagan past. However, this absence of religion is far from the norm, and such a sharp dichotomy between sacred and secular figures is unrepresentative of the broader genre, and an unhelpful approach to our texts. Kathryn Hume's measured study of the Norse Amicus and Amelius material attempts to untangle the two genres of romance and hagiography, as she argues: 'The saint's life is by nature didactic; the romance is primarily (though not exclusively) entertaining. This difference of purpose affects the tone of the two forms, particularly at the end'.<sup>1</sup> Her approach is effective in placing that translated *riddarasaga* within its European context, but, as we have seen throughout, the insular *riddarasögur* frequently inhabit that grey area between entertainment and exegesis. Religion is merely another facet of these texts, like marriage and gender, chivalry and accomplishment, and local identity

---

<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Hume, 'Structure and Perspective: Romance and Hagiographic Features in the Amicus and Amelius Story', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 69 (1970), pp.89-107, here p.92.

and mythology. Like the other aspects, it comes with a range of ideological stances that leave their mark on the structure and style of these texts. In this chapter, we shall see how paganism, from both home and abroad, is interrogated in the face of Christianity and conversion, and how the darker and demonic side of the world is incorporated into the struggles of a romance hero. We shall examine how protagonists can evoke and emulate the saintly, and even how religion's seriousness and pomp can be undermined for other, more worldly ends. Replicative structures continue to juxtapose differing ideas, whether the religious and the irreligious, or two views on the same spiritual issue. The underlying reflections on spiritual matters accompany and often interact with the messages and morals we have already seen written into the fabric of the texts. A spectrum exists from texts like *Flóres saga*, where God is quietly omitted, to *Dámusta saga*, where the entire story is spiritual in nature. In between, there are worlds of nuance in which the secular concerns of these heroes and nations collide with the larger issues that contemporary literature and culture were pushing.

Detaching Icelandic literature from Christian culture is notoriously difficult, as the very literacy upon which much of it was founded is dependent on the Conversion, which occurred centuries before the majority of extant texts. By the time of the insular *riddarasögur*, a wide variety of religious material had been introduced, had circulated, and had undergone numerous developments. This material includes Biblical translations, sermons, learned tracts, and the *exempla* encountered in Chapter One.<sup>2</sup> All of these genres and modes impacted the romances, and numerous examples can be found which are indebted to them, such as the holy meaning of the lion in *Sigurðar saga þögla* (see Chapter Two, 'Lionising Knights') and the moral discussion appended to the beginning of *Adonias saga*.<sup>3</sup> However, it is the genre of hagiography that deserves attention, for, as a body of texts which circulated even more widely than the romances, the influence of the saint's life on Icelandic literature cannot be overstated.

---

<sup>2</sup> For a useful summary, see Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'Prose of Christian Instruction', *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp.338-352; see also Régis Boyer, 'The Influence of Pope Gregory's Dialogues on Old Icelandic Literature', *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference*, eds. Foote, Hermann, Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1973), pp.1-27.

<sup>3</sup> For more, see Sverrir Tómasson, 'The *fræðisaga* of Adonias', *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, eds. Lindow, Lönnroth, and Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp.378-393.

Since Gabriel Turville-Petre's now widely-quoted words that 'learned literature did not teach the Icelanders what to think or what to say, but it taught them how to say it', numerous scholars have attempted to support, challenge, or nuance the idea that hagiography is the fundamental basis for saga literature: Jónas Kristjánsson has furthered the premise by tracking stylistic development across time, while Peter Foote questioned the scope and intentions of Turville-Petre's words.<sup>4</sup> More recently, fruitful studies have been produced by scholars willing to posit a more flexible and symbiotic relationship between religious and native literature. In Carl Phelpstead's work with *konungasögur*, he notes 'perhaps hagiographic "influence" is too weak a term: so far as we can judge from the texts which survive, hagiography was one of the most important ingredients in a mixing of traditions which took place right at the beginning of saga-writing'; in Siân Grønlie's much-needed re-evaluation of the hagiographic elements in the *Íslendingasögur*, she concludes that 'interaction with the saint's life should be recognised as a self-conscious literary act: the saga can only define its own horizons in interaction with other types of narrative prose'.<sup>5</sup> The importance of hybridity has become a recurrent feature in modern study of medieval Icelandic texts, and it is this approach, rather than any specific stance on hagiography's position as an origin for saga literature, which best informs this study of the *riddarasögur*. Within this corpus, hagiography and religion form a distinct voice among many; the relationships between these competing and conversing perspectives warrant analysis.

An important step towards the synthesis of hagiography and other literatures is the recognition that so-called *heilagra manna sögur* form a varied and complicated collection, not helped by the genre being relatively understudied, much like the insular romances themselves. Phelpstead was partly reacting to a critical tradition which mostly disregarded the hagiographic nature of kings' sagas. Various studies have teased out the extent to which Snorri and other compilers adjusted the religious

---

<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p.142; Jónas Kristjánsson, 'Sagas and Saints' Lives', *Cultura Classica e Cultura Germanica Settentrionale*, eds. Janni, Poli, and Santini (Macerata: Herder, 1985), pp.125-143; Peter Foote, 'Saints' Lives and Sagas', *Saints and Sagas: A Symposium*, eds. Bekker-Nielsen and Carlé (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), pp.73-88.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings: Saints' Lives in the Old Icelandic Kings' Sagas* (Tempe: Arizona, Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), p.202; Siân Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero: Hagiography and Early Icelandic Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), p.257.

depictions of kings such as Óláfr *helgi* and Óláfr Tryggvason in relation to potential sanctity.<sup>6</sup> Other distinct strands of hagiographic material exist, partially codified by the editorial practices of nineteenth-century scholars such as C. R. Unger, who demarcated *heilagra manna sögur*, being lives of assorted saints from the Christian world, and *postola sögur*, which chronicle the specific stories of Jesus's apostles, their proselytising missions, and martyrdoms; there is also a distinct *Mariu saga*, in reality a compilation of the Marian life stories and a large assortment of miracles attributed to Mary.<sup>7</sup> These distinctions have retained a degree of usefulness, but have also deservedly been reassessed. Scholars have recognised that this very large of pool of material contains a range of different concerns, with varying relevance to Icelandic life. Margaret Cormack argues that '[a]lthough virgin martyrs are hardly viable role-models for Icelandic women, the literature about them presents a coherent and positive model of female behaviour which can be contrasted with that of Eddic heroines or the 'female inciters' who promote violence in the sagas of kings and Icelanders'; Margaret Clunies Ross shows how Marian material brought with it a licence for taboo topics relating to sexuality and transgressive behaviour.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Jonas Wellendorf explores the focus on martyrdom in early texts, while Philip Roughton argues that *postola sögur* demonstrate a particular fascination with the pagan world that spoke to the legendary past of Scandinavian culture.<sup>9</sup> The deeply political importance of saints, particularly those close to Iceland, is fundamental to texts such as the *konungasögur*, contemplating complicated issues

---

<sup>6</sup> See for instance, Sverrir Tómasson, 'The Hagiography of Snorri Sturluson especially in the Great Saga of St Olaf', *Saints and Sagas: A Symposium*, pp.49-71, Natalya Yu Gvozdetskaya, 'Sanctity of a Christian King in *Heimskringla* in Narratological Perspective', *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages: Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference Bonn/Germany, 28th July-2nd August 2005*, eds. Simek and Meurer (Bonn: Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn, 2003), pp.207-210, and Lars Boje Mortensen, 'Writing and Speaking of St Olaf: National and Social Integration', *Saints and Their Lives on the Periphery: Veneration of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe*, eds. Haki and Garipzanov (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp.207-218.

<sup>7</sup> C. R. Unger edited *Heilagra Manna sögur*, two vols. (Christiania: Trykt hos B.M. Bentzen, 1877), *Postola sögur* (Christiania: Trykt hos B.M. Bentzen, 1974), and *Mariu saga*, two vols. (Christiania: Trykt hos B.M. Bentzen, 1871); see also *Biskupa sögur*, ed. Jón Sigurðsson, two vols. (Kaupmannahöfn: S.L. Møller, 1958-1978).

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Cormack, 'Sagas of Saints', *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.302-325, here p.314; Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Love in a Cold Climate - with the Virgin Mary', *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland*, eds. Wolf and Denzin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp.303-317.

<sup>9</sup> Jonas Wellendorf, 'The Attraction of the Earliest Old Norse Vernacular Hagiography', *Saints and Their Lives on the Periphery*, pp.241-258; Philip Roughton, 'Stylistics and Sources of the *Postola sögur* in AM 645 4to and AM 652/639 4to', *Gripla* 16 (2005), pp.7-50.

of sacral kingship, and just as much to certain *biskupasögur* relating to Icelandic figures such as Þorlákr, Jón, and Guðmundr, who were being assessed and negotiated as figures worthy of canonisation.<sup>10</sup> As Margaret Cormack argues: ‘Although to speak of ‘nationalism’ in twelfth-century Iceland is anachronistic, cults of native saints could have political or local, as well as devotional overtones’.<sup>11</sup> The stakes of this are attested by Adolph B. Benson: ‘In Iceland there appears to have been a posthumous rivalry between their two principal saints’.<sup>12</sup> It is vital to remember the sheer scope of religious engagement in Icelandic literature. The *riddarasögur* absorb and consider these ideologies and debates, from matters of sexuality and conduct, to processing society’s pagan heritage, to the reinforcement or reassessment of existing power structures. As with their inheritance of romance and legendary material, the *riddarasögur* employ replication and reflection to dramatise and highlight undercurrents of agenda and conflict.

And as we have seen elsewhere, the heritage which the romances draw upon has its own stock of rhetorical parallels, connections, and contrasts, as well as distinct structural tendencies. The centrality of typology to saints’ lives is frequently observed, with Grønlie noting: ‘The doctrine of the ‘communion of saints’ informs the literary personality of the saint, so that the acts and miracles of each individual are treated by hagiographers as interchangeable’.<sup>13</sup> This tendency is evident in native productions, as Pernille Hermann outlines: ‘In participating in a literary tradition where the main character is an imitation of Christ, *Þorláks saga* re-actualises past models in the present and re-constitutes a biblical paradigm in a new temporal setting’.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the importance and development

---

<sup>10</sup> See Jeffrey Alan Mazo, ‘Sacred Knowledge, Kingship, and Christianity: Myth and Cultural Change in Medieval Scandinavia’, *The Sixth International Saga Conference 28/7-2/8 1985*, eds. Louis-Jensen, Sanders, and Springborg (Copenhagen: Det Arnsmagnænske Institut, 1985), pp.751-762.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Cormack, ‘The Economics of Devotion: Vows and Indulgences in Medieval Iceland’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (2009), pp.41-63, here p.36; see also Cormack’s comments on the political role of foreign saints, ‘The sagas of S. Ambrose and S. Thomas Becket may have been intended to carry political messages in the struggle for the control of Icelandic churches’, *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1994), p.51.

<sup>12</sup> Adolph B. Benson, ‘Scandinavian Saints and Legends: A Resumé’, *Germanic Review* 31 (1956), pp.9-22, here p.18.

<sup>13</sup> Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, p.7.

<sup>14</sup> Pernille Hermann, ‘The Icelandic Sagas and the Real: Realism in *Þorláks saga*’, *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. McKinnell, Ashurst, and Kick (Durham: The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), pp.372-380, here p.374; Jørgen Højgaard Jørgensen considers *Þorláks saga* ‘the most typical and

of metaphor in religious material is attested by Peter Hallberg's examination of imagery, in which he argues 'the doctrine and ethics of Christian faith could hardly be illustrated otherwise than by a language of a more or less metaphorical cast'.<sup>15</sup> Phelpstead contrasts a non-religious "metonymic" history with hagiography, which 'is organized metaphorically: it works by analogy or resemblance, stressing the similarities between non-contiguous events and people', and a similar approach has been explored by Bernardine McCreesh in a range of texts which explore the Conversion of Iceland, as she sees such narratives as structured around and mirrored across that moment in history.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, stark contrasts are common, as Régis Boyer explains: 'The opposition human-divine gives the explanation of a real passion in the vitae for contrasts, clear-cut oppositions and, on a stylistic level, antithesis: light and shadow, good people, almost perfect, and wicked people, awfully bad, hell and paradise, etc.'.<sup>17</sup> The prevalence of this strategy in Norse works is supported by individual studies such as Roughton's observation on the *postula sögur* that 'Parallels and contrasts are exaggerated by the translators' use of rhetorical devices such as anaphora or polyptoton' and Andy Orchard's work, which asserts: 'All the Norse versions of the Life of Mary of Egypt self-consciously exploit the potential of a tale based largely on contrast between opposing principles: male versus female, flesh versus spirit, the eremitic life versus the coenobitic life'.<sup>18</sup> The importance of arranging and framing material in effective ways is fundamental to these texts on multiple levels: Birte Carlé has explored both the patterning within certain saints' lives, and elsewhere the structuring of an entire manuscript as a means of creating a hierarchy of saints; Simonetta Battista has noted the chronological development of *postula sögur* from

---

schematic life of a confessor saint one could think of' in 'Hagiography and the Icelandic Bishop Sagas', *Peritia* 1 (1982), pp.1-16, here p.8.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Hallberg, 'Imagery in Religious Old Norse Prose Literature: An Outline', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 102 (1987), pp.120-170, here p.129.

<sup>16</sup> Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings*, p.49; Bernardine McCreesh, 'Structural Patterns in the *Eyrbyggja saga* and Other Sagas of the Conversion', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11 (1978-1979), pp.271-280 and 'Contrasting Christian and Pagan Motifs in Certain Family Sagas' *The Sixth International Saga Conference*, pp.763-774.

<sup>17</sup> Régis Boyer, 'An Attempt to Define the Typology of Medieval Hagiography', *Hagiography and Medieval Literature: A Symposium*, eds. Bekker-Nielsen, Foote, Højgaard Jørgensen, and Nyberg (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), pp.27-36, here p.35.

<sup>18</sup> Roughton, 'Stylistics and Sources of the *Postula sögur*', p.25; Andy Orchard, 'Hot Lust in a Cold Climate: Comparison and Contrast in the Old Norse Version of the Life of Mary of Egypt', *The Legend of Mary of Egypt in Medieval Insular Hagiography*, eds. Poppe and Ross (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), pp.175-204, here p.203.

faithful translations to texts with ‘a more compilatory character, [which] bear witness to a wider choice of sources and a higher degree of restructuring’.<sup>19</sup> An audience familiar with saints’ lives is likely to possess the ability to read in precisely the symbolic and interconnected ways that the *riddarasögur* require. Given the full scope of fictionality available, the creators of the *riddarasögur* merely exaggerate this system of cognitive associations in narratives which continue to draw attention to their own fundamental workings.

Some of the discussions of previous chapters are augmented by religious elements which complement already discussed structures. Religious material, whether Biblical or hagiographic, forms a complementary backdrop to romance and legendary references. In the encyclopaedically inclined *Kirialax saga*, temporal references to Arthur are matched by references to the story of St. Ursula and her maidens, or a brief reference to King Dagnus who ‘let pina fyrir gudz nafn Kristeforum risa’ (p.12) [had the giant Kristeforus martyred in the name of God]. Similarly, just as Kirialax visits Troy to interact with romance heritage, so too he encounters Jerusalem, at which point the text incorporates long and learned descriptions of the assorted churches and sights in a form of textual tourism.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the ekphrasis of the shield in *Saulus Saga ok Nikanors* (detailed in Chapter Two, ‘Objects of Interest’) has religious material alongside its classical images; it includes the image of Judith and Holofernes, in addition to depictions of ‘Nabbogoddonossor Serkia kongr’ (p.79), and ‘Antiokus illustris’ and ‘Judas Machabeus’ (p.80). As with the Classical references, these selections directly connect to equipment of the heroes: Saulus ‘uar gydr suerde þui sem att hafdi Anthioku illustris er bardizt uid Judas Machabeus og uar allra suerda bezt’ (pp.17-18) [was armed with that sword which Anthiokus *illustris*, who fought against Judas Machabeus, had owned, and was the best of all swords]; Nikanor is armed with ‘þui suerdi sem att hafdi Nabagodonosor konge’ [that sword which King Nabagodonosor owned]. The conceptual

---

<sup>19</sup> Birte Carlé, ‘Some Observations Regarding Narrative Patterns in the Medieval Sagas of Holy Maids’, *Les Sagas des Chevaliers (Riddarasögur)*, ed. Boyer (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1985), pp.393-404, and ‘Men and Women in the Saints’ Sagas of Stock. 2, fol’, *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, pp.317-346; Simonetta Battista, ‘The Compiler and Contemporary Literary Culture in Old Norse Hagiography’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (2005), pp.1-13, here p.28.

<sup>20</sup> For more on this, see Alenka Divjak, *Studies in the Traditions of Kirialax saga* (Ljubljana: Institut Nove revije, zavod za humanistiko, 2009).

linking of the characters is strengthened by the religious references. *Saulus saga* also navigates the world geographically through Christian references. Examples include ‘ein agæt borg sem heiter Liberum Donum j huerre at huiler heilgru guds postuli Iachobus’ (p.4) [a splendid town which is called Liberum Donum, in which Holy God’s apostle Iachobus rests] and Mesopotamia, where ‘flydi forðum Jacob undan sinum brodur Essau af Judea’ (p.62) [in olden times, Jacob fled from Judea away from his brother Essau]; another character comes from ‘borginni Tarso j huerre at hinn heilagi Páll uar fædur’ (p.62) [the city Tarsus in which the Holy Páll was born]. The setting of *Dínus saga drambláta* is likewise spiritually inflected, as *Egiptaland* is first placed within Asia, where ‘stendur hid helga Jörsalaborg, er øll hin stæstu stormerke haffa giorst j hingad burde vors herra Jesu Christi, og vmm holldgan hanz og pijnu, vmm hanz vpprisu og vppstigning, og morg ønnur tijkn’ (p.3) [the holy *Jörsalaborg* stands, where all the greatest events had happened in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in his incarnation and passion, in his resurrection and ascension, and many other miracles]. Furthermore, Alexandria specifically is linked to sanctity: ‘I þeirri borg øx vpp og var fundinn hin helga Catrijna döttur Konstantijnus köngr’ (p.4) [In that city the holy Catrína, daughter of King Konstantinus, grew up and was condemned]. *Adonias saga* instead follows the lineage of its setting from Noah. Similar geographic placement is used in *Rémundar saga*, but there also the elevation of Rémundr’s character is built heavily on religious associations as well as his chivalric link to Hector: ‘Samson var hann líkur að afli, Salomon að viturleik, Absalon að fegurð, Ektor að riddaraskap’ (p.234) [he was like Samson in might, Salomon in wisdom, Absalon in beauty, Ektor in chivalry]. We have already seen an even heavier invocation of typology in *Konráðs saga* when Konráðr associates his situation with when God ‘sér lét soma að veita kraft Davíð, er þá sat á smalapúfu, svo að hann reif kjafta óarga dýrs’ (p.307) [allowed himself to be honoured in giving power to Davíð, when he sat in shepherding, so that he tore the jaw of the mighty lion]. Often, the religious elements form a seamless part of the fabric of the texts and cannot be truly separated from the other material; this chapter picks up several threads from other chapters. The added twist of a religious or spiritual element often adds to the previous analysis, or sometimes develops it in radical directions.

However, the *riddarasögur* also contain narrative strands and entire texts where distinct religious matters are given priority, and this will be the primary focus of the chapter. Firstly, we shall consider how paganism is constructed throughout the corpus, sometimes in monstrous ways we have already encountered, and sometimes with surprising sympathy, while the process of conversion is analysed for its structural impact on narratives in which it features. Secondly, the idea of spiritual antagonists is developed by looking at the scenes in which pagans, and sometimes even seeming Christians, descend towards the diabolic; in these moments, the stark contrast between good and evil comes to light. Turning back to our heroes, we will examine how these narratives intersperse elements of saintliness amongst characteristics of knights and warriors to distinguish the protagonists from their surroundings. Finally, we examine the instances where religious material is appropriated to the point of mockery or irreverence and question whether such playfulness precludes more sincere messages. Across these texts, pillars of Christianity are supported or deconstructed, moral messages are pushed or sometimes pulled back from, and the flexibility and dynamism of the stylistic features we have examined throughout this study remain evident.

### **(En)Countering Paganism: Other Faiths and Conversion**

The representation of heathen characters and races in the romances poses some challenges, because the direct line of influence is, by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, rather muddled. On the one hand, negative portrayals of non-Christians can derive from hagiography, with martyr stories, including those of the apostles, rife with monstrous figures who oppose the saint's faith. However, presentation of Saracens, and by extension a generic form of inhuman pagan, owes its debt to Continental romance and *chansons de geste*. These two strands are themselves obviously related, but both enter Iceland already formed. To add to this, the language and imagery of these figures can echo characterisation of monsters more traditionally Germanic, such as those examined in Chapter Three: Battista examines the

relationship between the terminology used for native traditions and Christian evils.<sup>21</sup> The assimilation of foreign faiths, such as Islam, with the paganism of the Scandinavian past further complicates the situation, so that, as Sverrir Tómasson notes: ‘In Icelandic texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there was a prevalent image of paganism that showed little variance regardless of whether the heathens in question were Muslims or followers of a pre-Christian Nordic faith’.<sup>22</sup> In the later insular romances, there exists a pool of assorted conceptual features which could be used variously and indiscriminately to evoke the otherness of pagans. These associations participate in a range of traditions, and do not possess overall consistency. Direct associations with the devil are common, such as in *Bærings saga*, in which the chieftain Livorius is ‘synv likari fianda en manni’ (p.98) [seemingly more like a demon than a man], or in *Blómstrvalla saga*, in which two Mahomet-worshipping brothers are from ‘því fjalli sem Diabolus hét’ (p.20) [that mountain which was called *Diabolus*]; as one of these diabolical brothers charges, ‘sýndist öllum sem sjálfr fjándinn væri þar kominn í manns líki’ (p.25) [it seemed to everyone as if the devil himself had come there in human form]. Livorius evokes racial otherness tied to the idea of the *blámaðr*, which across the corpus blurs monstrosity with nationality and race (sometimes simply meaning something like Ethiopian): ‘Svartr er hann sem ketil botn iandliti ok nefbivgr’ (p.98) [He is black as a kettle bottom in countenance, and curved in the nose]. However, the physical features of Lucanus of *Blómstrvalla saga* could arguably be as trollish as traditionally “Saracen”: ‘hans augu váru gull sem i ketti og tennr bláar sem nætrkalt jarn’ (p.20) [his eyes were gold like in a cat, and his teeth dark like newly-cooled iron]. An interesting reference to the mountain *Diabolus* suggests ‘þar skein aldri sól’ (p.20) [the sun never shines there], implying quite the reverse of *blámaðr* narratives where the sun is given as the cause of their difference in colour (for instance, *Ynglinga saga*).<sup>23</sup> The specifics do not particularly matter: as with the monsters in Chapter Three, the functional purpose of such language is to dehumanise the characters and prepare the audience for

---

<sup>21</sup> Simonetta Battista, ‘*Blámenn, djöflar*, and Other Representations of Evil in Old Norse Literature’, *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, pp.113-122.

<sup>22</sup> Sverrir Jakobsson, ‘Saracen sensibilities: Muslims and Otherness in Medieval Saga Literature’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 115.2 (2016), pp.213-238.

<sup>23</sup> See *Heimskringla* I, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1941), pp.9-10.

their necessary defeat. The emphasis on physicality is in stark contrast to some of the textual predecessors, as Sverrir notes ‘there is in these sources an emphasis upon the notion of the deceptiveness of appearances. Little is made, for example, of any differences in the appearances of Christians and infidels in courtly romance, including *Karlamagnús saga*’.<sup>24</sup> In the insular romance texts, on the contrary, appearance is essentially all that matters, and one of the main forms of indicating paganism.

Likewise, religious specifics are ignored in favour of referencing a range of godly figures which mark the enemy’s faith. Sometimes, that multiplicity is an important distinguishing factor against the monotheistic identity of Christianity, as the same pagan armies will invoke different gods. In *Kirialax saga*, Kirialax’s opponent refers to Mahumet while Romanus’s ensuing duel is against an enemy who bewails that Romanus does not believe ‘á himna gudin Jubuter’ (p.44) [in the heavenly God Jubuter]; Romanus responds with the euhemeristic ‘þat vita menn, at Saturnus ok Jubiter voru menn ok af monnum komnir’ (p.44) [men know that Saturnus and Jubiter were men, and descended from men]. In the longer *Mágus saga*, the monstrous suitor of Elínborg and his two indistinguishable brothers called Baldvini (see Chapter One, ‘Support Networks’) pray to both ‘Hinn ágæti Júpíter’ (p.411) [the noble Júpíter] and ‘Maúmet, guð minn’ (p.414) [my god, Maúmet]; they also wish for the princess to ‘trúa á Þór og Óðin’ (p.405) [believe in Þór and Óðinn]. *Rémundar saga* emphasises polytheism as ‘sverja þeir allir í senn við Maúmet og Terrogant, Júpíter og Apolló’ (p.188) [they all swear at once by Maúmet and Terrogant, Júpíter and Apolló]. In some texts, the specific identification with another faith is less important than their opposition to Christianity, such as in the versions of *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*. In the younger text, the specific motivation of a violent bridal suit is religious jealousy – ‘eigi viljum vér, að kristnir spenni svo væna jungfrú’ (p.188) [we do not want for Christians to hold such a handsome lady] – but the older version represents their invasion as more overtly missionary:

---

<sup>24</sup> Sverrir, ‘Saracen Sensibilities’, p.218.

enn nu hefer hann [the invading prince] frett at þer truit aa huita Krist. uill hann ydur tuo koste giora. annat uort at þer kastid kristnni. edur gangid áá hans ualld. ellegar eyder hann yduart land med herskilldi. enn kvgar ydur sialfa fra kristni. enn hefer ydra systur fyrir frilla (p.27)

[and now the invading prince has learnt that you believe in the white Christ. He wants to give you two options: either to discard Christianity, and go into his power, or else he will destroy your land with warfare, and force you personally from Christianity, and have your sister for a concubine]

Sexual threat is subordinated to a danger facing the faith of the society; also evident is the similarly conventional ways in which Christianity was constructed, as relating to light and whiteness through “the white Christ”. This particular encounter channels hagiographic traditions, which Lindow notes:

the confrontation between paganism and Christianity [is] essentially one of two proselytizing or missionary forces. The apostles and saints work to convert pagans to the new religions, but at the same time they are confronted with powerful pagans who would have them worship the old pagan gods.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, this is a matter of surface detail, a variety of effective signifiers that these are enemies, and that they will be defeated. Pagan is often merely metonymy for antagonist.

Nevertheless, the romances do not present a completely uniform evaluation of pagans, and it is in the contrast of different types of heathens that these texts pose questions about what specifically is immoral. In *Mírmanns saga*, the clash of Christian and pagan worlds is indicated from the opening:

Á dögum Klemens pápa var ágætur konungur í Frakklandi, sá er Hlöðvir hefir heitið. Hann var í heiðnum sið einn hinn spakasti höfðingi. Hann var kvongaðr og átti eina jarlsdóttur, er hét Helena. Hún var ættuð af Ungaralandi. Þá var allt fólk heiðið fyrir norðan Mundíufjöll (p.3)

[In the days of Pope Klement, there was a noble king in *Frakkland*, one who has been called Hlöðvir. He was the wisest leader in the heathen faith. He was married and had a lord's daughter who was called Helena. She was of lineage in *Ungaraland*. Then all people north of the *Mundíufjöll* were heathen.]

---

<sup>25</sup> John Lindow, ‘Norse Mythology and the Lives of Saints’, *Scandinavian Studies* 73 (2001), pp.437-456, here p.437.

With paganism the initial default, the means of positioning characters cannot be simply pagans opposing Christians; instead the text is forced to create good pagans in anticipation of their conversion. For the protagonist, this is achieved through an almost saintly intuition that the idols his family worships are not gods. His opposition to paganism does not change across conversion. As a child, he ponders: 'Eg ætla, ef eg hefða þvílíkt ríki sem faðir minn, að ekki skyldu margir dagar líða, áður eg skylda brjóta í sundur hverja spík, er í þeim er, svo að ekki skyldi þrífast í landinu' (pp.10-11) [I think, if I had such power as my father, that not many days would pass before I would break apart every splinter which is in them, so that they should never succeed in the land]. When he returns baptised, he repeats nearly identical words: 'En ef eg ná þeim hinum fúllum goðum, er þú faðmar, þá skal eg brjóta í sundur hverja spík, er í þeim er, og hafa til eldibranda' (p.33) [But if I obtain those disgusting gods, whom you embrace, then I shall break apart every splinter which is in them, and use them as firewood]. Mírmann is set apart from his pagan surroundings through channelling Christianity ahead of time, unlike his mentor and patron Hlöðvir. Complimented in the opening, despite the caveat of being heathen, Hlöðvir's superiority must be distinguished from the villainous pagans of Mírmann's family, and so his heathenism is nuanced: 'Hlöðvir konungur var vitur höfðingi og ágætur. Hann hafði Gyðingatrú, elskaði guð, en fór ekki með blót sem Saxar eða Spánverjar vestur' (p.12) [King Hlöðvir was a wise and noble leader. He had the Jewish faith, loved God, and did not go to sacrifices like the Saxar or the Spánverjar in the west]. The "Jewishness" of his faith is completely irrelevant in the narrative, as he performs no acts specifically associated with medieval conceptions of Judaism, but it stands as a symbol of his pseudo-Christianity. Judaism here represents an intermediate stage between outright heathenism and Christianity: it rejects the sacrificial aspect of the former and recognises a God who is identified with the latter religion. In contrast, the faith of Mírmann's father Hermann is depicted as detached and unconnected to the Christian God, as he marvels at Mírmann's suggestion 'að eg muna fyrirláta Maúmet, goð mitt, það er mér hefir gefið sigur og heilsu og mörgum öðrum, og eg munda gera það umskipti á að þjóna dauðum manni, þeim er ekki gat sér forðað, en er kallaður guð' (p.3) [that I would abandon my god Máumet, the one who has given me many others victory and health, and I would make such a change as to serve

a dead man, one who didn't manage to save himself, but is called God]. The contrast between 'goð' and 'guð' is fairly typical, and this outburst reveals how the composer envisages Christianity from the outside, as a less martial and bounteous faith, appearing almost emasculated to unbelievers in the idea of worshipping a victim. This parody of the faith highlights Hermann's folly. Hlöðvir represents the learned and benevolent non-Christian, who merely waits for the opportunity to convert (much like the Jew in the *exemplum* 'Af sýslumanni ok fjánda', who is a helpful figure who converts once he sees God's work), as opposed to the unintelligent pagan figure who ultimately dies clinging to his beliefs.<sup>26</sup> Within an initially pagan world, the audience navigates the characters through the specific nature of their faith in a way that is not always evident in other texts.

Even more nuanced in its contrast between heathens is *Rémundar saga*. The text is heavily concerned with the defeat of pagan nations by Christianity, to the extent that Geraldine Barnes argues: 'Only *Rémundar saga* [. . .] successfully integrates the values of chivalric romance and crusader epic'.<sup>27</sup> Putting aside ideas of success or failure, it is clear that the narrative repeatedly shows the triumph of Christianity and the denigration of its pagan opponents, culminating in cleansing Rémundr's homeland of invaders as Christian princes defeat heathen kings one after the other. Rhetorically, this is achieved through contest (see Chapter Two, 'A Combative Approach'), through outright undermining and demonising the pagan faith – 'Fellur nú margur heiðingi dauður til jarðar með stóran búk ok bannsetta sál, því Maúmet gerir þeim tál' (p.217) [now many heathens fall dead to the earth, with large bodies and condemned souls, because Maúmet tricks them] – and through a repeated trope of the underlings of a defeated warrior returning to their leader to announce their inferiority:

Þá sverja þeir allir í senn við Maúmet og Terrogant, Júpíter og Apolló, að þeir megi eigi sannara segja. "Og er það einskis manns færi við hann að berjast," segja þeir, "og gerið fyrir goðanna skyld og vora bæn og leitið þessa ekki að hefna, því að það er ekki yðvart færi og einskis manns í veröldu hann að yfirkoma vopnsóttan, og skiljum vér þar við." (p.188)

<sup>26</sup> 'Af sýslumanni ok fjánda', *Íslendzk Æventyri*, ed. Hugo Gering (Halle a. S: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1882), pp.154-160.

<sup>27</sup> Geraldine Barnes, 'Rémundar saga keisarasonar: Romance, Epic, and the Legend of Prester John', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 111.2 (2012), pp.208-223.

[Then they all swear at once upon Maúmet and Terrogant, Júpíter and Apolló, that they could not speak more truly. “And is it not in the ability of any man to fight him,” they say, “so act for the sake of the gods, and our appeal, and do not seek to avenge this, because it is not in your ability or any man’s in the world to overcome him in battle; we conclude with that.”]

Og svo fór hann með vorn hermann, þann sterkasta kappa, Klibanum, sem eitt lítið barn, hvern er engi yfirkom áður í allri austurhálfu heimsins. Því gerið fyrir skyld hins máttuga Maúmets og hins mikla Terrogants og hins ágæta Jovis og allra sannra guða, að þér sem tíðast burt farið héðan með öllu yðru herliði, því að slíkan dauða fáíð þér eða verra sem Klibanus konungur, ef þér viljið eigi vorum ráðum hlíta (p.292)

[And he so treated our warrior, that strongest of champions Klibanus, like a little child, a man who previously no-one in the entire eastern realm of the world defeated. Therefore act for the sake of the mighty Maúmet and the great Terrogant and the noble Jovis and all the true gods, so that you go away from here as fast as possible with all your army, because you will receive a similar death to King Klibanus, or worse, if you do not want to listen to our counsels.]

There is a double effect in these moments, as, on the one hand, the pagans are correct, and this reinforces Christian superiority embodied in the undefeatable Rémundr. On the other hand, despite the truth of their statement, the context of these moments within a romance of warfare makes these pagans appear as cowards for not wanting to fight; the infantilising rhetoric of their champion being treated ‘sem eitt lítið barn’ [like a little child] is reinforced. Everything about the scenes presents the pagans as inferior; as Schach notes of anti-pagan tendencies in *Íslendingasögur*, ‘Ridicule was a favourite means of attacking pagan worship, and it assumed various forms, ranging from the most discreet form of irony to heavy-handed sarcasm’.<sup>28</sup> The way these individual episodes are constructed, as well as the narrative as a whole, promotes an ideology of invulnerable and utterly superior Christianity.

However, this overarching agenda of crusade makes the nuances within the text more interesting. Barnes notes that in *Rémundar saga*, there is a distinction between heathens ‘of two different kinds: those from the African kingdom of Enéás, who pose no threat to Christendom, and those from Tartary, who mount an invasion of Europe’.<sup>29</sup> This judgement along racial and geographical

<sup>28</sup> Paul Schach, ‘Antipagan Sentiment in the Sagas of Icelanders’, *Gripla* 1 (1975), pp.105-134, here p.125.

<sup>29</sup> Barnes, ‘*Rémundar saga keisarasonar*’, p.212.

lines is an oversimplification, as the contrast between good and bad pagans recurs throughout the text. The African kingdom Barnes mentions certainly stands out as embracing a more courtly form of paganism: the prince of that land Akillas, who befriends Rémundr, uses his heathenism in polite forms clearly built as echoes of Christian formalities: ‘Og hinn helgi Maúmet og hinn mektugi Terrogant gefi það, að þér fengið yðra heilsu með þeirri gleði, sem þér hafið mesta!’ (p.202) [And may the holy Maúmet and the mighty Terrogant grant that you receive health for yourself along with the greatest joy you can have]. Rémundr, entering the court, subsequently imitates this language in a greeting to the king that sounds close to Christian: ‘Maúmet, sá er öllum heimi ræður, geymi yður og yðvart ríki!’ (p.202) [May Maúmet, the one who rules all the world, protect you and your realm!]. The non-violent language indicates a milder form of heathenism, which does not guarantee that these figures will be defeated. However, to classify that entire society as benign is to ignore the false accusation of rape from the king’s daughter and the army the king consequently sends after Rémundr, which Akillas then opposes. The contrast of good and bad pagan relates to conduct and not merely culture; in this situation, good paganism is aligned with chivalry and loyalty, and so we see Akillas as a more positive figure than his surroundings. On the other side, a bad Christian is clearly portrayed, as an invading knight comes to the court of King Jóhannes and demands his daughter, Rémundr’s beloved:

Einn ágætur junkeri, Geiraldus, sonur konungsins af Sikiley, sendir yður guðs kveðju og sína og það með, að hann vill með sæmd púsa yðra dóttur. Viljið þér eigi það, þá ætlar hann að herja á yðvart ríki og eyða allt með oddi og eggju, brenna allt og bæla, en drepa sjálfa yður (p.237)

[A noble prince, Geiraldus, son of the king of Sikiley, sends you God’s greetings, and his own, and, in addition to that, the knowledge that he will marry your daughter with honour. If you do not want that, then he intends to raid on your realm and destroy everything with point and edge, burning and blazing everything, and killing you in particular]

What is remarkable here in the use of the familiar invading suitor trope in this crusading narrative is the clear indication of the Christian faith of the opponent; his violence makes him a more negative figure than someone like Akillas encountered earlier. *Rémundar saga* clearly presents the superiority

of Christianity, but it likewise asks the audience to distinguish between good and bad individuals, regardless of faith.

The sense that religion is less important than personality even occurs in the most heavily crusader portions of the narrative. In the latter stages of *Rémundar saga*, the impending threat of the army of *Tartaría* looms, but the pagan perspective is shown: two of the king's advisers give protracted speeches in a meeting. The first is introduced in overtly negative terms which indicate his villainy: 'Við þessa ræðu stendur upp einn konungsins ráðgjafi, sem Menon hét, mikill vexti, en illur kosti, stór sem risi, en sterkur sem tröll' (p.293) [At this speech, one of the king's advisors, who was called Menon, stands up, large in stature, but of bad material, hefty as a giant and strong as a troll]. His physical unpleasantness, coupled with his invocation of his god in a violent and boisterous declaration, draws on those familiar conceptual fields of monstrous paganism: 'Og þess sver eg við minn guð, hinn fagra Apolló, að eg skal eigi renna undan Rémundi svo langt, að það sé þvers fótar, þó að allir séð þér svo dáðlausir, að engi þori að fylgja sínum höfðingja. Og verði þeim vei og svei!' (p.293) [And I swear it by my god, the handsome Apolló, that I shall not run away from Rémundr as much as the pace of a foot, even if all of you are so honourless, that no-one dares to follow his leader. And may there be woe and misfortune upon them!]. In contrast, the presentation of the second adviser is markedly positive: 'Því næst stendur upp sá konungur, er Márus hét. Hann var mjög virðulegur og að öllu stórmannlegur. Hann var allra manna vitrastur og málsnjallastur og þróttamaður mikill og hinn stýrst klerkar á heiðnar bækur og hinn mesti vísindamædur' (p.293) [After that, the king who was called Márus stands up. He was very splendid and impressive in everything. He was the wisest of all men, and the most eloquent, and the most accomplished scholar in heathen books, and the greatest sage]. This description predisposes the audience to consider his perspective more worthy. His speech subsequently criticises his opposite and hints at a belief that the Christians are better: 'En Franzeium mun ganga að málaefnum, en hverjir þau hafa betri, þegi eg um að sinni' (p.294) [And it will go as appropriate with the *Franzeisar*, but regarding which ones will have it better, I remain silent for now]. Hermann Pálsson observes a similar trope elsewhere in saga literature: 'One of the recurrent elements in saga accounts of the coming of

Christianity is a wise old pagan predicting that the new faith will be better than the old one'.<sup>30</sup> The implicit values in a good heathen appear to be honour and valour: 'Er það endir á minni ræðu, að hver dugi með drengskap og hjartaprýði' (p.294) [It is the conclusion of my speech, that each person should avail with heroism and determination]. This ideology is borne out by the ensuing battle, in which the fates of Menon and Mǫrus are contrasted. Menon, contrary to his boasts, is presented as a coward as after his first defeat: 'þegar hann var á bak kominn, þá snýr hann burt og varð fegnastur, er hann kom undan, léttandi eigi sinni ferð, fyrr en hann kemur fyrir höfuðkonunginn' (p.300) [as soon as he was on horseback, he then turns away, and was most happy when he came away, not halting his journey before he comes before the high king]. In contrast, Mǫrus's bravery is evident: 'var fyrstur og fremstur Mǫrus. Hann sat á góðum hesti; hans herklæði voru öll hvít og svo hans hestur' (p.302) [Mǫrus was first and foremost. He sat on a good horse; his armour was entirely white, and his horse too]. The white accoutrements reinforce his moral inclination. Mǫrus subsequently duels Víðförull and 'lætur sitt líf við góðan orðstir' (p.303) [loses his life with true glory] while Menon ultimately 'sneri undan. En Rémundur hjó eftir honum, og kom á öxlina vinstri og tók af höndina og niður í frá alla síðuna. Féll Menon svo dauður til jarðar og hafði mörgum manni bana veitt' (p.307) [turned away. But Rémundur struck after him, and it landed on the left shoulder and took off the arm and all the side down from there. Menon fell so dead to the earth, but had given death to many men]. In these two figures, we are presented with a consideration of conduct and personality; the moral of this text is not merely the superiority of Christianity, but the superiority of a certain type of person, whom we might identify as the archetypal knight. Faith is merely one facet of the dialogue in this text.

The idea of using the contrast of Christianity and paganism to inscribe value judgements about behaviour is fundamental to the workings of some of these texts, and even applies where the paganism is little more than implied. In *Bærings saga*, the monstrous Skaðivaldr is not described as overtly pagan by his brother, but instead 'eigi kann ek þat segia, hvart hann er skirðr eða eigi; alldregi kemr hann til

---

<sup>30</sup> Hermann Pálsson, 'The Transition from Paganism to Christianity in Early Icelandic Literature', *The Sixth International Saga Conference*, pp.483-498, here p.497.

kirkiv, ok alldri ma hann heyra gvðs getid; ok oll því, er illt er, þa velldr hann því ok hans raðgiafer' (p.108) [I cannot say, whether he is baptised or not; he never comes to church, and he can never hear God mentioned; and he brings about, along with his advisors, everything that is evil]. The uncertainty performs the same function as outright denunciation, as it still contrasts the figure with the pious hero Bæringr, and it directly associates bad deeds with a lack of interest in God. Consequently, Bæringr is given the moral virtue of facing pagan stand-ins in Skaðivaldr and presumably his father, the main antagonist, without the text needing to explain why a pagan would hold a high position in a Christian society. Bæringr embodies his religion, ergo his enemies embody irreligion.

The same can be said of the central conflict in the short *Drauma-Jóns saga*, a text which is less of a *riddarasaga*, with a complete absence of knights and combat, than an exemplum in itself. The central concept from which the narrative develops is the interpretation of dreams, a trope which is clearly indebted to some combination of Biblical stories, such as Joseph and Daniel, and native traditions.<sup>31</sup> The contrast is between two interpreters, Heinrekr and Jón, who prove themselves to be vastly different throughout the narrative. The text is broadly structured around two dreams, which offer counterpoints to each other, across social positions (the first dreamer is a landowning farmer, while the second is the emperor), import (the first is positive, while the second proves negative), and narrative function (the first initiating the conflict, the second resolving it); both dreams are also loosely linked through elemental imagery (fire in the former, water in the latter). A degree of careful construction is evident, and so we can examine the contrast of characters for some significance. In the first words of the saga, Heinrekr's character is introduced conventionally: 'Heinrekr er maður nefndur, jarl að tign, og sat í Saxlandi; hann var forvitri og nokkuð harðráður, draumamaður svo mikill, að það alfrægðist um öll lönd, að sá draumur mundi eigi fyrir hann koma, að henn réði eigi sem eftir gekk' (p.149) [Heinrekr is the name of a man, a lord in station, and he resided in *Saxland*. He was

---

<sup>31</sup> For more on Icelandic prophetic dreams, see Bernadine McCreesh, 'An Examination of the Prophecy Motif in Old Icelandic Literature', *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages: Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference*, pp.355-365, and 'Prophetic Dreams and Visions in the Sagas of the Early Icelandic Saints', *Verbal Encounters: Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Studies for Roberta Frank*, eds. Harbus and Poole (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp.247-268.

foreknowing and somewhat tyrannous, a dream interpreter of such skill, that it was reported through all the land, that such a dream could not come before him that he would not explain it in line with what subsequently occurred]. He is not overtly pagan, but the contrast with his wife is stated: ‘Voru þau ekki mjög skaplík, jarl og keisara systir, því að hún var hinn mesti heilhugi, kristin vel og guðhrædd’ (p.149) [the lord and the emperor’s sister were not very similar in nature, because she was most sincere, a good Christian and God-fearing]. He exists in the area of uncertainty that functionally presents him as deviant and non-Christian. Jón, by contrast, lacks much of a description at all; he merely is encountered by a character, and, when asked, describes himself as ‘Lítill bóndason, er hér situr í þorpinn’ (p.151) [An insignificant son of a farmer, who resides here in the village]. The central contrast is between a lordly figure, in many narratives an important and positive role, and a man of no social significance or station. Jón specifically contrasts himself with the more impressive lord:

“Eigi eru það mín orð,” segir Jón, “að eg þykist jafnvitur jarli, enda mundi það svo fara, þótt eg fátækur þýddi draum eigi verr en hann, þá mundi engi trúa fyrir manna mun, af því að hans frægð flyzt um öll lönd, en eg ligg á litlum kotbæ í húsi föður míns” (p.153)

[“Those are not my words,” says Jón, “that I consider myself as wise as the lord; in any case, it would happen, even if I, a poor man, interpreted a dream no worse than him, that no-one would believe it on account of the difference between people, because his renown spreads through all lands, and I lie in a little cottage in the house of my father.”]

The crux of the plot is that Jón can not only interpret dreams, but also know them without being told, whereas Heinrekr cannot; Heinrekr’s jealousy at Jón’s ability leads him to claim this ability too, which he cannot prove. The specific ability of Jón matters less than its implication, that a poor individual can overcome their social superior. Faith is at the core of this through the implied contrast of Heinrekr the non-Christian with Jón. The ultimate moment of ideological conflict occurs when Heinrekr asks Jón to teach him how to guess dreams: ‘En svo oft sem hann leitar eftir blítt eða strítt, svarar Jón æ sama til, að hann fær eigi kennt honum, því að hann segist með gjöf þegið hafa þetta lán, en eigi með list’ (p.158) [But as often as he seeks it, kindly or harshly, Jón always answers the same way, that he cannot teach him, because he says he has received that blessing as a gift, and not through skill]. The importance of

God to Jón's ability is only lightly hinted at in this statement, but to an audience familiar with hagiography and exempla, that is enough. McCreesh notes the idea that prophetic dreams and dream interpretation 'were considered natural gifts and had their counterparts in the Bible', and thereby did not fall under pagan or wrongful magic and abilities.<sup>32</sup> The dichotomy of Jón and Heinrekr is not merely poor and rich, or humble and boastful, but God-given talent and heretical knowledge-seeking. This small text uses a simple premise of dreams as a means of constructing Christianity in the face of its opposite, presenting power-seeking arrogance as in some ways non-Christian.

The idea that someone can be symbolically pagan, even if not literally so, is important to the overall movement of *Mírmanns saga*. The hero begins as a pseudo-Christian and quickly adopts the faith when possible; the description is offhand, because the literal moment of conversion matters little for this figure who already embodies Christianity: 'En Mírmann tók trú og skírn af fortöllum Hlöðvis konungs, fóstara síns' (p.20) [And Mírmann took the faith and baptism from the advice of King Hlöðvir, his foster-father]. However, Mírmann is later tricked, by both deceit and possibly magic, into abandoning his wife Cecília and entering a second marriage with the treacherous Katrín. This turning away from his righteous faith matters more than his actual conversion. The hagiographic elements of *Mírmanns saga* have been noted by Sverrir Tómasson, in such instances as Mírmann's expansive speech to his father, when he explains various Biblical events and challenges his father's faith; as Sverrir notes: it 'is very similar to the historical summaries found in the younger sagas of the apostles, for instance in *Tveggja postola saga Jóns ok Jakobs*'.<sup>33</sup> Sverrir, pointing to hagiographic conventions, reads a distinct structure in the text:

The bipartite structure is, however, obvious: 1) Mírmann's sinful youth and his suffering from the disease [which his mother inflicts on him for killing his father], and 2) his life after he has been cured. It may be argued that Mírmann's life is determined by three women: Brigida, Katrína, and Cecelia (p.326)

---

<sup>32</sup> McCreesh, 'An Examination of the Prophecy Motif in Old Icelandic Literature', p.364.

<sup>33</sup> Sverrir Tómasson, '*Mírmanns saga*: The First Old Norse Icelandic Hagiographical Romance?', *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland*, eds. Wolf and Denzin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp.319-334, here p.333.

The importance of the three women, whose names Sverrir identifies as those of saints, cannot be overstated, and his formation of the bipartite structure around these events has some aptness, but an alternative can be provided. The dominant sin occurs late rather than early, revealed through replicated episodes. Mírmann in youth has two near identical encounters with pagans, one as himself with Hlöðvir, and one as “Justínus” after being cured:

Nú líður nótt sú, og er Hlöðvir konungur í mikilli áhyggju og svo allur herinn, og þótti öllum þessi maður látinn. Um morguninn þegar í dagan stóð Hlöðvir konungur upp og Mírmann og lesa tíðir sínar, og síðan létu þeir syngja messur, eina *de spiritu sancto* og *de sancta Maria* og *de omnibus sanctis*. En síðan herklæddist Mírmann og gyrði sig sverðinu Ylfingi. Hlöðvir konungur herklæddist og allur herinn og ríður með honum til vígvallar. En Bæringur jarl var þar kominn og með honum átján þúsund riddara og mikið fólk annað af Spanía (p.39)

[Now the night passes, and King Hlöðvir is in great distress, and all the army as well, and this man seemed lost to all. In the morning, first thing in the day, King Hlöðvir got up, and Mírmann, and they read their prayers, and subsequently they have masses sung, first *de spiritu sancto*, and *de sancta Maria*, and *de omnibus sanctis*. And subsequently Mírmann armoured himself and equipped himself with the sword Ylfingr. King Hlöðvir armoured, as did all the army, and rides with him to the battlefield. And Lord Bæringr had come there, and eighteen thousand knights with him, and a large other host from *Spanía*]

Nú ríða þeir hvorirtveggju til landtjalda. Nú líður af nótt sú. Og um morguninn eftir stóð Vilhjálmr konungr þegar upp í dagan og Justínus og létu lesa sér þrjár messur, eina *de spiritu sancto*, aðra *de domino*, þriðju *de omnibus sanctis*. Síðan herklæddist Mírmann og allur her Vilhjálms konugs og riðu með honum til vígvallar. En þar var kominn Lúcidaríus konungur og mikill her heidingja með honum. (p.66)

[Now both sides ride to the tents. Now the night passes. And in the morning afterwards, King Vilhjálmr got up, first thing in the day, as did Justínus, and they had three masses read for them, first *de spiritu sancto*, secondly *de dominco*, thirdly *de omnibus sanctis*. Then Mírmann armoured himself, as did all of King Vilhjálmr’s army, and they rode with him to the battlefield. And King Lúcidaríus had come there, and a large army of heathens with him.]

The language is certainly formulaic, but this should not preclude a reading of the two as overtly parallel, particularly with the recurrence of specific masses sung. Sverrir argues that ‘this is a very common topos in the romances and cannot be counted among the peculiarities of Mírmann’s saga’, but while that may

apply to Continental and even some of the translated romances, this specific degree of religiosity preceding battle is almost unprecedented in the insular romances.<sup>34</sup> Mírmann is markedly Christian, and fulfils his role in the narrative as a triumphant Christian defeating pagans, emphasised by the doubling of the episode. In the next major battle, things have radically changed. Mírmann is now a polygamist, and when the formulaic words occur, ‘Um morguninn árla herklæddist hvorra tveggja herinn, og riðu til vígvallar með fylktu liði’ (p.66) [Early in the morning, both armies armoured, and they rode to the battlefield with arrayed hosts], Mírmann’s devotion is notably absent. Instead, it is his wife, disguised as a warrior, who makes the kind of prayer that Mírmann has previously made:

Almáttugur guð og faðir vors drottins Jesú Christi, frelsa mig nú, svo sem þú frelstir Súsönnu forðum af röngum dómi, í þessu einvígi, og á líttu mig nú, góði Jesú, með þinni miskunn, svo sem Maríu Magdalenu og Martam, er þú læknaðir hana af sínu krankdæmi. Leystu mig svo úr þessum vanda sem þú leystir Lazarum úr dauðans böndum, og hjálpa mér svo, að eg geta flutt þenna mann á rétta götu fyrir þína gæzku og fulltingi, að hans villa mætti dvína, svo hann fengi ævinlega með þér að vera í eilífum fögnaði (p.86)

[Almighty God and father of our lord Jesú Christ, free me now in this duel, just as you freed Súsanna in olden times from wrongful judgement, and look upon me now, good Jesú, with your mercy, just as upon María Magdalena and Marta, when you healed her from her illness. So release me from this trouble as you released Lazarus from the bonds of death, and so help me, that I can manage to pull this man onto the right path through your goodness and support, that his delusion might dwindle, so that he can get to be eternally with you in endless joy]

Cecilía now embodies the hagiographic, Bible-quoting role that Mírmann previously occupied, and Mírmann is on the wrong side of the conflict, now constructed as parallel to the pagans which he previously defeated: *villa* can also be read as “heresy”. Rather than a conversion narrative *per se*, *Mírmanns saga* is the story of a strong religious figure who sinfully breaks from the righteous path and must be defeated like a pagan.

Stereotypical pagans are not always merely enemies for the knights to cut through. Sometimes, the composers of these texts present contrasts of faith as a chance to present ideas about what makes a good Christian, and possibly even a good pagan. Perhaps the strongest indication of the attempt to

---

<sup>34</sup> Sverrir, ‘*Mírmanns saga*’, p.332.

frame positive characters religiously occurs in *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, which was considered in Chapter Three for its heavy use of Germanic legendary elements. It is in one of the heavily Scandinavian episodes, the wolf and honey episode derived from *Völsunga saga*, that the composer or redactor chooses to impose Christianity onto the narrative:

Kome mer þa j hug trva su, er bodinn var fyrer vtann hafith, ok þat, ath sa mundi mikil, er skapat hafdi himin ok jord ok alla skepno; stadfestiz mer þat j hug, ath ek skylda þann sid fylla, ef ek kemumz heil j brott [. . .] Suo hlifdi mer sa aatravnadr, er ek hafda fest mer j briosti, ath ylgrin lagdi huorki ath mer tennr ne klær, helldr enn være jarnn gloanda (p.20)

[That faith which is promoted overseas came into my mind then, and the idea that the One who had created the heaven and earth and all creatures must be great; it became fixed in my mind, that I should commit to that faith, if I came away whole . . . That belief, which I had secured in my breast, so protected me, that the wolf no more struck at me with either teeth or claws than as if against glowing iron]

The full conversion is withheld until the end of the narrative, but the effect of this simple framing is to claim a pre-Christian world and character as a righteous figure. Jón is similar to Mírmann, whose faith in the face of paganism marks him as near-saintly. In this minor twist to a Germanic hero, we can see just how important the navigation of the pagan-Christian boundary is to these texts, and how each narrative can claim its own definition of the line between faithful and false.

### **Devil in the Details: Good versus Evil**

The *riddarasögur* contain a range of pagans who are ultimately powerless in the face of righteous Christianity, but what of the figures who possess power beyond that of the heroes? Amongst the magic, marvels, and monsters of the romances, it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain which moments are religiously influenced or inflected. However, in a few texts, the use of magical and demonic forces evokes the spiritual struggles contained in religious material. The importance of stark contrasts recurs here, as Ásdís Egilsdóttir notes: ‘Hagiography is filled with the supernatural, but there is a clear

distinction between the miraculous, as in miracles, and the magical, which is caused by the evil doings.<sup>35</sup>

Writing on the *postola sögur*, Roughton comments:

The demons, like many of the other fantastic elements in these sagas, function primarily as tools for the propagation of Christian dogma, since their presence allows for the manifestation of miracles and attendant sermonizing, and thus can be seen as vital elements in a scheme in which evil is a necessary part of good<sup>36</sup>

These aspects impact the presentation of cosmological conflict in the *riddarasögur*, and the dual nature of the presentation is vital: presenting a demonic figure can simultaneously convey an impression of what is evil and also construct or support icons of positive power in response. However, while the dichotomy of miracle and magic may be fundamental to the saint's life, its presence is not always guaranteed in texts where heroes as well as villains resort to magical means. In some instances, the audiences must discern not simply between sorcery and divine influence, but between kinds of magic that are superficially identical but spiritually distinct. Furthermore, the precise implications of demonic interference sometimes draw on the metaphorical and symbolic in ways not expected of the romances, and it is only through the structural and replicative elements that the implications of the contrasts can be unveiled.

A text where the line between pagan and devilish power is crossed is the longer *Mágus saga*, which includes an exemplum of a foolish prince, Lais, who is tricked by a Jew. Unlike the presentation of Hlöðvir in *Mírmanns saga*, the text is strongly antisemitic, mainly through presenting Barus the Jew as an otherworldly and deathly figure. His introduction is straightforward and illustrative: 'Hann finnur einn mann fyrir sér. Hann hafði girzkan hatt á höfði. Hann kvaddi Lais með nafni' (p.322) [He notices a man in front of him. He had a Greek hood on his head. He greeted Lais by name]. Little attention is given to any physical or human traits, although the headgear may be a symbol of marked racial otherness, while Barus's ability to know Lais's name is a clear indication of unnatural knowledge; the

---

<sup>35</sup> Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 'The Fantastic Reality: Hagiography, Miracles, and Fantasy', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, pp.63-70.

<sup>36</sup> Roughton, 'Stylistics and Sources of the *Postola sögur*', p.849.

figure is marked as dangerous. The unsettling nature of the figure continues throughout the text, culminating in a necromantic ritual:

Nú fékk hann Lais pál og reku og bað hann að moka moldinni, og þar undir fann Lais mann mikinn nýgrafinn. Barus mælti: “Nú skaltu kryfja mann þenna og taka úr honum öll iðrin. Síðan skaltu stinga höfðinu upp undir bringubein hins dauða og vita, hvort sér nokkuð fleiri menn” (pp.365-366)

[Now he gave Lais a shovel and asked him to dig the earth, and, under it, Lais found a large man, newly buried. Barus said: “Now you must gut that man and take all the innards from him. Then you must stuff the dead man’s head up under the ribcage, and see whether more men can be seen at all.”]

Barus’s quest for knowledge places him squarely among the pre- or non-Christian tradition of ‘Deliberate attempts to see into the future’, as explored by McCreesh, and the grotesque elements of the ritual indicate that it is a wrongful act.<sup>37</sup> The presentation of the character is entirely negative, but unlike the other non-Christians we have examined, he has power over the “protagonist” of the episode, Lais. Unlike some of the generally virtuous romance heroes of other texts, or even the rest of *Mágus saga*, the prince here is a flawed figure: ‘Lais var grimmur og harður, og ekki má hann heima vera í ríki föður síns sakir óeirðar’ (p.320) [Lais was vicious and hard, and he could not be at home in his father’s realm on account of rebelliousness]. His folly is conveyed through a quick tripartite series of summers in which he repeatedly embarks on viking expeditions, loses his ships, and returns penniless. This little episode interrupts the overall narrative to construct a mode of moral examination: Lais’s flaws set him up to be victim of a figure essentially standing in for the devil.

However, the demonic figure of Barus is counterbalanced by a similar divine representative, the bishop Trajanus. The description of the bishop is as important in constructing Barus as scenes featuring the Jew: ‘Hann er ágætur klerkur og hinn mesti meistari á alla hluti, því að hann vissi fyrir af náttúrubragði sin marga óorðna hluti, og af honum verða allir meistarar, þeir sem í hans skóla nema’ (p.320) [He is a noble scholar and the greatest master in all things, because he knew in advance,

---

<sup>37</sup> McCreesh, ‘An Examination of the Prophecy Motif in Old Icelandic Literature’, p.364.

because of his natural skills, many future things, and all became masters from him, those who learn in his school]. His positive description indicates that he, rather than Lais, is the moral centre of this episode, but he also relates to Barus, as they share this concept of unnatural knowledge. However, the text clearly indicates that his prophetic ability is natural, and directly contributes to his prowess, so that, when Barus appears, his enigmatic knowledge and necromantic inclinations are more clearly wrongful to the audience, if not to Lais. The bishop and Barus are each aware of the other, the latter referring to Trajanus as ‘sá bannsetti hornaskálfur’ (p.366) [that accursed bastard] despite never meeting in the narrative. Their position as polar opposites is cemented, broadly representing good and evil, or God and the devil, over a foolish sinner. The bishop is given markedly miraculous elements, such as when he searches Lais’s ship for the magical item which he knows Barus has given him: upon encountering a locked chest, ‘Biskupr blessar yfir kistuna, ok gékk hún þegar upp’ (p.325) [the bishop blesses the chest, and it immediately opened up]. The employment of such miraculous actions is a commonplace in hagiography and even appears in *Mírmanns saga*, where the young knight is poisoned with a leprous drink by his mother, ‘En augu hans voru svo fögur sem áður höfðu verið, og fann hann, að það olli, er hann gerði mark hins helga kross yfir augum sér, áður hann drakk, og aldrei spilltust augu hans’ (p.46) [But his eyes were as beautiful as they had been before, and he realised that that was because he made the sign of the holy cross over his eyes, before he drank, and his eyes were never harmed]. Such motifs are a useful signpost that the character in question is strong in faith, that their devotion is the correct course of action, and that the thing they are opposing is wrongful. In *Mágus saga*, Trajanus is able to counter Barus’s magic, and outlines a plan to Lais that results in Barus dying during his own ritual. The bishop represents a counter to the devilish influence of Barus in an episode that can be comfortably read with some degree of metaphor as the struggle for a sinner to navigate between the sins of the world and the guiding influence of learning and the Church. What prompted the introduction of this episode to the saga is an intriguing puzzle that cannot be solved, and might not have a satisfactory answer in any case. However, we might speculate that in a story dominated by the magical trickery of Mágus, who evokes native legends as well as marvellous foreign figures, a redactor felt inclined to

introduce an episode which ultimately reinforced the moral superiority and power of the clergy in the face of dark magic.

The importance of bishops as the diametric opposite to devilish pagans may be in part indebted to the nature of Icelandic saints, who were themselves bishops. *Nikulás saga leikara* likewise associates bishops with the power to counter evil. In Chapter One, we saw the *blámaðr* who magically captures the maiden-king in an embedded narrative; like Barus, the figure is noteworthy for the effectiveness of their power, rising above simple portrayal of pagan opponents. The ill knight who fell victim to the *blámaðr* is an archetypal crusader: ‘hann barizt firer gudz christne og hanz hoffölk, og sigradi margann heýdýngia (pp.107-108) [he fought for the Christianity of God, along with his retinue, and defeated many heathens] and he ‘efldi j mǫrgum stǫdum gudz christni’ (p.110) [established God’s Christianity in many places]. In fact, as such a minor character, he is essentially nothing more than a crusader encapsulated, as it is revealed ‘hann hiet justýnus, enn þá hann var nýfæddur, var þá þüý heýted af faudur hanz ad hann skillde vera gudz riddare og frelsa christid fölk’ (p.111) [he was called Justínus, and when he was newly born, it was then promised by his father that he should be God’s knight and free Christian people]. His opponent, the monstrous *blámaðr*, consequently stands out as more than merely a pagan enemy through defeating this paradigm of Christian conquest. The magical and spiritual explanation of the knight’s sickness reinforces this metaphysical aspect:

þad munu þier heýrt hafa ad .x. filgiur filgia huerium manne, og mä hann öngrar missa. enn þessi vondi blämadur hefur stolid frá honum eirni filgiunn. þar med hefur hann suipt hann vitinu og allre sinnunne. og þad meýgi þier siä ad blämadurinn pýner filgiuna riddaranz (p.115)

[You must have heard that 10 spirits accompany each man, and he cannot lose any. But this damned *blámaðr* has stolen one spirit from him; alongside that, he has stolen the intellect and all sense from him. And you can see that the *blámaðr* tortures the knight’s spirit]

Unlike the other tricks and illusions in the story of *Nikulás*, this moment represents something beyond human. A divine remedy is therefore required, which *Nikulás* (in the guise of Þórir the merchant), subsequently provides:

þörer tók þá vř siöd sýnum boga eirn. hann var so lýtell sem barna leýka. þar filgdi ein ör ad þuý skape sem bogenn var. enn þesser griper voru suo, ad huorutueggia var fullstört þö ad gilldur madur skiti med. þä mællte þörer nu skulum vier kalla ä nafn gudz. og bidia þess ad hann veýte þeým riddara nockra hiälp og huggan. enn þessi skeýti er výgd af .v. Biskupum. enn nu vilium vier bidia þess gud, ad hann výse þessu skeýte firer briöst þeým aume manne er riddarann hefur suikid og þä vænu jungfrü (p.116)

[Þórir then took a bow from his pouch. It was as small as a child's toy. It was accompanied by an arrow in the same manner as the bow was, but these treasures were such, that both were fully sized if an accomplished man shot with them. Then Þórir said: "Now we shall call upon the name of God, and ask that he give that knight some help and comfort. And this projectile is consecrated by 5 bishops, and now we will pray to God that he might guide this projectile into the breast of that wicked man who has betrayed the knight and that handsome lady"]

This moment combines pure marvel, in the size-changing bow and arrow, with the hyperbolic element that makes five bishops more holy than one. God, devotion, and the clergy are positioned as the necessary solution to the diabolic power of the *blámaðr*. This action is heavily cast as miracle in a series of markers of devotion and invocation: 'Þórir signdi sig j nafne heýlagra þrenýnga' [Þórir signed himself in the name of the Holy Trinity]; 'hann giördi kross firer øruaroddim' [he made a cross over the arrow point]; he says 'nu skýt eg ör þessare j nafne faudur og sonar og heilags anda' [now I shoot this arrow in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit]; finally, 'Hann saung vers vř däuýdz psalltara ä medan ørinn var ä flugenne' (p.117) [He sang a verse from David's psalter while the arrow was in flight]. The sheer density of these miracle signifiers might lead us to question whether there is an element of parody here; regardless, it is emphatic in constructing a dichotomy between the worst forms of pagan magic and the miraculous, which stands above and beyond the tricks and spells otherwise performed in the text. However throwaway the reference, bishops have a significance as a clear symbolic stand-in for God's intervention.

These cosmic battles waged alongside regular romance narratives have thus far overtly delineated the good side, embodied in church and miracles, and the bad side, pagan and otherworldly. However, in *Dínus saga drambláta*, a text with two stark and symmetrical sides embodied in the haughty prince Dínus and the maiden-king Philotemia (see Chapter One, 'Strong Foil'), the contrasts of

religion and magic are more complicated and radical. The first substantial narrative framing of religion and its relationship to magic is when Dínus, humiliated by the princess, leaves behind a tablet which Philotemia and her maidens encounter:

geingr Philactemia þeirra fyrst upp lukandi hurdina ok þegar hun kemr jdyrrin sier hun hanganda a þeim pilar sem uar j gegn henne eitt fagurt tabulum þat uar pentad ok skrifat allt med gullstofum henne bregdr nockut undarliga uida þersa syn þuiat hun tekr skyndiliga brott þa skinandi coronu sem hun bar a sitt hofut fleygiandi henne langt j brott þersu nest fleygir hun af ser klêdum ok giorer sik alnokta ok suo huorr sem ein iungfruin þegar þêr lita þetta tabulum ok troda klêdin under fêtr ser nidr (p.38)

[Philotemia goes first of them, opening up the door. And as soon as she comes in the doorway, she sees a beautiful tablet hanging on that pillar which was opposite her, and entirely covered with golden letters. She reacted somewhat remarkably at this sight, because she quickly takes off that shining crown which she carried on her head, throwing it far away. After this, she flings off her clothes and makes herself completely naked, as does each lady as one, as soon as they see this tablet, and they trample the clothes down under their feet]

The sexual humiliation of Philotemia and her retinue and the voyeuristic element that the audience partakes in contribute to the punishment of female haughtiness already examined, but, for this chapter, it is relevant that this is a replicative episode. Immediately following this, the king learns of the events, and with his court comes to help: 'ok sia skiott huar þetta hit gulliga spialld uar upp heingt ok þegar j stad bregdr þeim sua uit sem meyiunum at þeir af klêða sik ok fleyia nidr aa murin ollum sinum plôggum ok alnoktir slaz þeir jleikin med meyiunum' (p.39) [and they quickly see where this golden plaque was hung up, and immediately, on the spot, they react just like the maidens, as they undress themselves and fling all their gear on the walls, and strike up the dance entirely naked with the maidens]. Dínus's accomplishment is highlighted through the ability of his spell to reach higher positions of status and power. Next, the clergy become involved:

ok verdr þat rad þeirra at skrydaz ok taka kross helgan ok uigt uatn med odrum helgum domum at fyrir þersu flygi j brôtt sa ohreinn andi sem adr hefit uerit j ragnadr Petta sama gera þeir taka skrin med krossum ok odrum helgum domum ok fara suo skryddir til herbergis kongs dottur (p.39)

[and it is their counsel to apparel themselves and take the holy cross and holy water, with other holy relics, that the profane spirit which before had been invoked might fly away. This same they do, taking blessing with crosses and other holy relics, and they go so apparelled to the king's daughter's dwelling]

The collection of religious imagery and the reference to demonic possession appear to suggest hagiographic influence, and the audience is likely to anticipate that this spiritual intervention is the solution. It is the third part of the sequence and figures such as these, and particularly holy objects, are associated with miracles. However, this expectation is then irreverently subverted:

Enn þo sem þeir lita tabulum slêr þui sama a þa sem hina er fyrri komu. Erkibiskupinn þrifur af ser sina gulliga mitru ok brótt fleygir hann bagal ok allan skruda ok allir þeir af klæða sik ok gera sik med ollu alnockta hlaupandi sua j leikin hafa þersir þui meira uit enn adrir sem þersir kom til umodir hroppa erkibiskupinn ok abotin med munkunum helldr gessiliga ok eingi furdadi annan ne undradi (p.39)

[And yet, when they see the tablet, it impacts them just the same as those others who came before. The archbishop throws the golden mitre from him, and flings the crozier from him and all raiment. And they all undress themselves and make themselves completely naked, so rushing into the dance. These ones engage even more than others, as these ones arrived with no tiredness; the archbishop and the abbots yell rather spiritedly, along with the monks, and no-one marvels or questions another]

The combined religious figures, and by extension their raiment and relics, are thoroughly mocked and even suggested to be more ridiculous than the previous dancers. Unlike *Mágus saga* and *Nikulás saga*, in which the bishops represent the undefeatable opposition to magic, here the entire clergy is disempowered and ineffective. It is a striking implication resulting from the act of someone who is nominally the protagonist. This incident in isolation would suggest a text committed to bawdy irreverence.

However, that episode is only the beginning of the careful positioning of religion in *Dínus saga*. The resolution of the tablet sequence introduces the figure of Anachorita, whose Latin name and residence in a hovel associates him with a religious recluse. He is an enigmatic and even monstrous figure: 'þar inni sa hann eitt kuikuendi eda manneskiu þat uar suart asyndar ok lodit sem saudr. Oll

manzuit hafdi þetta kuikuende' (p.40) [he saw a creature or human in there; it was black in appearance and woolly as a sheep. This creature had all the intellect of a human]. This introduction evokes the negative physical traits of demons, and treats Anachorita as more animal than human. However, he resolves the issue, and, for much of the narrative, represents the voice of reason on Philotemia's side. His position as an ultimately negative figure is revealed through the direct contrast between him and Dínus's subsequent helper, Heremita, whose name establishes a direct link and opposition to Anachorita, and whose appearance is also idiosyncratic:

kom einn madur, vndarliga buinn, hann var j einni lijnslippu jstur klæda, so sijdre ad hun nam jørd, j kringumm hann, þar vpp aff var ein hetta med sama mannlere, so sijdframm af høfdinu ad ei mätti siä hanz mannlereis asionu, þessi madur var stör vexte mieg, og suo sijndest þeim sem hann munde mieg resugur madur, eff hann heffde prijdeligann bunad (p.51)

[A man arrived, remarkably attired: he was in a linen gown over his clothes, so long that it came to the earth around him. Above that was a hood in the same fashion, so low from the head that his face could not be seen. This man was very large in stature, and it seemed to them that he must be a very splendid man, if he had been adorned nobly]

The description is far more human and positive than Anachorita's, and the religious element is obvious. Barnes suggests he is '[i]ntriguingly evocative—in name, linen surplice, and hood—of the order of the friars of St Augustine'.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of specifics, it is apparent that two concepts of religious isolation are being pitted against each other. The back and forth between Dínus and Philotemia is paralleled by the contest between Heremita and Anachorita, with the former's defeat of the latter concluding the conflict of the narrative even after the prince and princess have been united. The two characters' polar opposites are crystallised in this final reveal. Heremita is revealed to be a prince in disguise, although there is an element of the saintly or angelic in his entrance:

Persi madr var j pellz klêdum eigi var gull sparat uit þau hann hafdi eitt ziappel spent um sitt haar gjort af lauro ok fluur ok gull vida j sett har hans var sua fagrt ok skinanda sem logandi elldr ok huldi allar hans herdar sua listuliga faranda sem huerr madr mundi êskia hann bar ser j hendi

---

<sup>38</sup> Geraldine Barnes, 'Cognitive Dysfunction in *Dínus saga drambláta*', *Arthuriana* 22.1 (2012), pp.53-63.

einn gulligan sprota sem þat veri nockurskonar tignar mark j annari sinni hendi bar hann einn storan bölan sua vordin sem allr veri logandi ok med gleri samann steyptr (p.89)

[This man was in clothes of finery; gold was not spared on them. He had a circlet clasped around his hair, made of laurel and flowers and widely set with gold. His hair was as fine and shining as blazing fire, and it covered all his shoulders, flowing as elegantly as each man would wish. He carried a golden rod in his hand, as if it were some kind of mark of station; in the other hand he carried a large ball, so formed as if it were all afire and covered in glass]

The supreme elevation of Heremita is coupled by the literal demonisation of Anachorita, who is revealed to be trapped inside the orb as the prince explains: ‘Hans mynd mun her nu litaz j þersum gler knetti sua piniz hann nu af þeim sem hann hafdi sitt traust aa. enn þat uar pukin sialfr’ (p.89) [You can now see his likeness in this glass ball; he is now so tortured by the one whom he had his faith in, and that was the devil himself]. The entire narrative, the battle between two arrogant nobles, is recast as the front for a conflict between devilish evil and divine intervention, each masquerading as a form of religious hermit. Barnes sees the contrast between Heremita and Anachorita as relating to types of magic and forms of knowledge, with Anachorita’s ‘necromancy’ and Heremita’s ‘benign magic’.<sup>39</sup> The observation is valid, but somewhat overstated, as in many ways the magic on both sides is the same. It is true that Heremita is more heavily linked to illusion, so that, although both characters appear at one time as a dragon, the narrative comically undercuts Heremita’s draconic appearance by revealing it to be a trick he did with his clothing. Ultimately, however, the distinction between good and bad magic is somewhat blurry. Rather, this conflict seems to bring a cosmic element to the narrative in which true spirituality is revealed to reside in the clean and regal hermit rather than the hairy anchorite or even the bishops and their holy equipment. A reading of this text that draws on its metaphoric and symbolic potential completely changes the focus of the narrative.

Furthermore, the middle redaction of *Dínus saga* shows evidence that quite significant religious implications could be found in the earlier version. In this version, a few adjustments are made to the contrasting presentations of Heremita and Anachorita. The latter, in the edition we have, is now called

---

<sup>39</sup> Barnes, ‘Cognitive Dysfunction in *Dínus saga drambláta*’, p.58.

Avacterita, presumably due to minim confusion, although we cannot rule out deliberate obfuscation to remove the religious element. Additionally, Heremita's real appearance is toned down: 'þesse madur var vngur suo honum var varla grón sprotten, hann var j aullum skynande klædum med gulle pentudum og pictudum' (p.142) [this man was young, so that stubble had hardly grown on him. He was in entirely shining clothes, decorated and drawn with gold]. Although he is still noble, he is less saintly, and more of an archetypal prodigious lordling. The two characters' backstories are expanded and connected, so that Avacterita, real name Agapitus, is a schoolmate of the prince who was 'þegar j barnæsku kymenn og fólljtur suikull og flärädur' (p.143) [from earliest childhood sneaky and unpleasant, treacherous and wicked]; he set out to manipulate the Dínus and Philotemia conflict in order to win the kingdom and the princess, resulting in Jóhannes/Heremita seeking him out. The older redaction's vague presentation leaves space for symbolic readings, with the literal stories of Anachorita and Heremita mattering less than their demonic and sacred connotations, but here the characters are rationalised. Rather than incorporating the Dínus and Philotemia story into a broader opposition of universal good and evil, the plotline is merely revealed to be part of a larger story. The motivation for this change might not have been religious, but it is not the only adjustment that suggests that possibility. We explored Heremita's last trick to defeat King Maximilianus in Chapter One, a repeated sequence of appearing as a dragon, moving the king, and showing him visions which increasingly terrify him. The content of the visions in the older redaction is as follows:

eg þikiast siä eina äa ei allfiarre, miög störa, og ødrumeiginn vpp og offann allra handa þiöder, suma med coronu sem könga, enn suma riddara, störa sem hina stæstu risa, so mikinn fiölda ad einginn fær talid (p. 78)

[I think I can see a river, not far away, very large, and, up and over it on the other side, all manner of races, some with crowns like kings, and some knights, large as the largest giants – such a large multitude that no-one could make a count]

suo synist mer sem hinn ytste hlutr jardarinnar opnist, og þar vpp fare hiner suørtustu diøfflar haffande sier j høndumm edur klöm, kröka og konstra, og allz kins pijslar fære (p.79)

[it so appears to me that the furthest part of the earth opens, and the blackest devils travel up there, holding in their hands or claws crooks and magic, and all kinds of tools of torture]

so sijnest mier nu sem himininn opnist og þar offan stíjge eingla sueiter med logande suerdum,  
so mikill fiólde ad ej ma telia (p.80)

[it so seems to me now like the heavens have opened, and a retinue of angels climbs down  
with fiery swords, such a great multitude that it cannot be reckoned]

Heremita claims that the dead, including such figures as Theodosius and Ísungr, alongside the devils of hell and the angels of heaven, have all emerged to support Dínus. This episode draws to some degree on visions that appear in religious texts, such as in *Guðmundar saga biskups* or in certain *exempla* including 'Af dauða húsfreyju ok bónda' (see Chapter One, n.41).<sup>40</sup> Heremita's connection to cosmic forces, even if merely illusory, is reinforced. In contrast, the middle redaction continues a degree of rationalisation, focusing instead on the idea of dead heroes (much like *Mágus saga* in Chapter Three, 'Changing Faces'), with firstly those killed by weapons and illness, secondly those drowned in the sea, and thirdly a retinue of knights instead of angels. Although references to Biblical history are intertwined, such as the builders of Babel and the Pharaoh who opposed Moses, the spiritual conflict has been removed. In changing the narrative to make the battle between Heremita and Anachorita more human, the middle redaction only emphasises that the older version may have been a quite radical and symbolic text, willing to use a series of contrasts to present the composer's view of meaningful and meaningless Christian figures.

The text which benefits most from a metaphoric reading based on the structures and reflections in place is *Dámusta saga*, which has a clear religious heritage. Marianne Kalinke notes its connection to Marian material, the romance *Amadas et Ydoine*, and an *exemplum* called 'Af konu einum kviksettri'; she thoroughly and effectively explores the working of its bridal-quests, but the analysis is somewhat limited by an adherence to a purely literal reading of the text.<sup>41</sup> The literal plot is as follows: a knight kills the betrothed of a princess who then dies of grief; Mary appears to Dámusti

<sup>40</sup> For more on visions of the afterlife, see Jonas Wellendorf, 'Visions and the Fantastic', *The Fantastic in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, pp.1025-1033.

<sup>41</sup> Marianne Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp.123-135; for the *exemplum* in question, see 'Af konu einum kviksettri', *Íslendzk æventyri*, pp.254-246.

and reveals that a creature called Alheimr was responsible for Dámusti's actions and faked Gratiana's death; Dámusti defeats Alheimr and marries Gratiana. It is understandable that Kalinke concludes 'the Icелander's contribution to the narrative matter was the introduction of the Virgin Mary into the tale, so that the romance acquired legendary features about the intercessory power of Mary', but that is only part of the meaning.<sup>42</sup> Rather than reducing the narrative of this text to "knight falls victim to external monstrous foe", there is evidence that the narrative represents the individual and internal sin of a person and redemption through Mary. There are various levels to unpack, beginning with the initial bridal suit between Jón and Gratiana, which Kalinke considers 'misleading. The author sets up justifiable expectations in the reader that turn out to be unfounded'.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, these expectations are constructed, but this is not a failure. Jón and Gratiana are explicitly connected in ways seen throughout this study; Gratiana's conventional description is as follows:

Af hennar fegrð er það at seigia ok ijferlitumm, at henne samtijda var einginn frijdare nee jafnfrijd, þar epttir var allur hennar búningur, hegðan, ok lát 0ll, curteijse ok vijsd0mur, ad einginn monde kuenmann viliaedr ki0sa sig 0druvijs, enn sem Gud hafde hana skapad. Enn siá var en þ0 lutur, er hun bar af huors mann ási0nu, ad af hennar birtte er suo sagt, ad hun sigrade ad biarttleijk það gras, er lilia heiter

[There is to say of her beauty and appearance that, in her time, no-one was more handsome or as handsome. Everything about her attire, conduct, and behaviour, courtesy and wisdom, was following that, so that no-one could want a woman or choose themselves otherwise. But there was one such thing, which exceeded the countenance of every person, which is to speak of her brightness, that she conquered in brightness that plant which is called the lily]

When Jón is introduced and subsequently described by Dámusti, the language is clearly echoed and their connection highlighted:

hann er allfriidr madr sijnumm, suo ad ek hef alldre sied jafnn frijdann mann. Ok einn hlut hefur hann mest til, ad hár ok h0rund hefur hann suo biartt, ad ek sá alldre hanns maka, nema dotter ijdar, þar má einginn manna mun á gi0ra um birttu þeira. Þar eptter er allur hanns v0xtr til bols ok lima, ok munde huor sig ki0sa sem hann er (p.65)

<sup>42</sup> Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p.133.

<sup>43</sup> Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp.127-128.

[he is an incredibly handsome man in appearance, so that I have never seen a more handsome man. And he has one thing most of all, that he has such bright hair and flesh, that I never saw his like, except for your daughter. No distinction can be made between the brightness of them. All his stature, in body and limbs, is following that, and each would choose for themselves how he is.]

The two noble figures are directly aligned. Within the replicative frameworks considered in this study, the audience is unequivocally predisposed to expect the match, particularly as Dámusti's attractiveness is markedly less: 'Einginn var hann afburdarmadur ad frijtleijk, enn þó sæmilegr, ok liós á hárid, miukhærdr ok fór vel, liós ok riódr j andlite' (p.54) [He was no paradigm in handsomeness, but light and slender in hair – and it flowed well – light and red in face]. The parallels between Jón and Gratiana continue throughout their interactions: 'Þad var nijmæle, ad alldre hefdu þeir sied biarttare menn, enn þá mátte siá, þar er þau voru, Jón kongr ok Gratiana keijsare dotter, mátte þar ei misjafna fegurð med þeim' (pp.71-72) [It was said once more, that they had never seen brighter people than those who could be seen who were there, King Jón and Gratiana, emperor's daughter: the beauty between them could not be differentiated]. Even when they are both affronted, Jón by Gratiana's hesitation to accept his suit and Gratiana by Jón's subsequent accusation that she loves another, their indignation is connected: 'Enn vid þesse suðr brá Jóne konge suo, ad hann setti raudan sem blóð' (p.72) [And at this answer, King Jón so reacted, that he went red as blood]; 'Hafde hun þá tekid lita skiptte, ok var raud sem rósa; mátte þá ei misjafna med þeim Jóne konge' (p.73) [She had then taken a change in colour, and was a red as a rose; then her and King Jón could not be differentiated]. Everything in the narrative frames the couple as the perfect match, which makes Dámusti's actions, conspiring and killing Jón, markedly wrongful. At that stage in the narrative, there is no indication of any external force, merely the suggestion that Dámusti is jealous and possessive: 'hann fijrermunade huoriumm manne hennar ad nióta, utann sier einumm' (p.78) [he forbade each man to enjoy her, except himself alone]. Dámusti reaffirms this obsession in direct speech: 'ek ann aungum ad nióta hennar, nema mier einum' (p.80) [I allow no-one to enjoy her except myself alone]. At the stage that he realises his mistake and calls for forgiveness, the narrative has framed Dámusti as a sinner who disrupted the rightful way of things.

Consequently, we must re-examine the denouement, in which Alheimr reveals his responsibility for all Dámusti's woes and is defeated by Mary and Dámusti. The name 'Alheimr', meaning the world or the universe, is already an indication that there might be metaphor at play here. Evidence that Alheimr should not be treated over-literally can be found in the elusive descriptions of the character. In response to a range of questions from Dámusti about the monster's identity, Alheimr responds with vague and outright dismissive answers: 'Sá einn er hann, ad hann er vitrare enn þu, ok ei þarf ek spiria þig ad nafnne' (p.93) [He is only such a thing that is wiser than you, and I don't need to ask for your name]; 'Þad skipter þig aunguo, huor ek er, edr huadann ek er ad kominn, enn nafn mitt vil ek seigia þier: eg heite Alheimr' (p.93) [It does not concern you who I am or where I have come from, but I will tell you my name: I am called Alheimr]; 'Ek ræd þar mestu sem ek er, enn ei bigge ek þennann heim, þuiat fleijre eru heimar enn þesse einn, ok er mann folckid suo margt, ad þad má ei þennann heim biggia' (p.95) [I mostly rule where I am, but I do not reside in this world, because there are more worlds than this alone, and there is such a crowd of people that they cannot inhabit this world]; 'Madr er ek, ok sem madr skapadr' (p.95) [I am a man, and shaped like a man]. Dámusti attempts to identify him as a pagan only to be told that Alheimr knows of God, but does not have the nature to serve Him, and when Dámusti's questions persist even after Alheimr is defeated, Alheimr replies: 'Þui spir þu þessa jafnnann, er mier þikir mest fijrer ad seigia ok þig vardar ongo? Enn þu spir mig ecki ad forlógum sialfs þijns' (p.98) [Why are you always asking this, which bothers me to tell you and does not concern you at all? But you don't even ask me about your own fate]. Nothing in the presentation of Alheimr invites the audience to identify him as a specific creature, whether demon or troll or miscreant; viewing Alheimr as some kind of riddle, as Dámusti does, is likely missing the point. Dámusti later tells the king, 'Ei ætla ek, ad hann være fullkomid tróll, þui ei var hann suo jillegr, ad bide þad ótta; enn vóxtar hanns ok afl var ógrligt, ok ætla ek, at være blendingr; hann visse á óllu deijle, gódu ok jllu' (p.103) [I do not think that he was entirely a troll, because he was not so terrible, for that kind of terror; but his stature and power was horrible, and I think that he was a halfbreed; he knew all things, good and evil]; this answer is not necessarily correct, or, even if it is, the literal truth is just a facet of the character. As Grønlie aptly

notes: ‘From a hagiographic perspective, there is no contradiction in reading an evil spirit both as an external force of evil and as an internal flaw’.<sup>44</sup> To an audience willing to read this text in a way reminiscent of religious material, Dámusti is not simply the victim of some monster, but a man who gave into the temptations of the world and consequently sinned.

Furthermore, there are direct parallels between Dámusti and Alheimr. As Alheimr reveals his desire for Gratiana, he echoes Dámusti’s own words: ‘ek vil sækia keijsara dotter þui ek hefer ætlad mier hana, enn aungumm audrumm’ (p.93) [I will take the emperor’s daughter, because I have intended her for me and no others]. Furthermore, the confrontation between the two is framed as Dámusti versus a shadowy version of himself. Mary, visiting the regretful Dámusti, tells him to bring along his three prized possessions, which were described in detail earlier in the text:

Dámuste átte iii hlute, sem hann hafde mikla elsku á: það var hestr, er hann kallade Fulltrúa; mikils fiár var hann verdr, øruggr þóttist Dámuste umm sig, ef hann sat á bake þessumm heste; mikill var hann sem wlfalld, enn suo fagur sem Dualins leijka, sterkur sem leo, hann stód á stalle vetr ok sumar, át kornn enn drack mungát, skiótur var hann sem fugl, ok huer vitnna hlióp hann vppa, er fijrer honum vard, enn suo var hann ólmur sem einn solttinn vargur. Annar gripur var haukr hanns; hann var huijtr sem sniór, hann kallade hann Huijtserk; það var mikill fugl, ok kunne manns mál. Þridie gripur var hundr hanns, er hann kallade Albus; hann var mikill sem naut, tók hárid á jörd, enn toppur ad trijne, hardfeingr ok ólmur j bardögum; ei þótti Dámusta verra fijlgd ad honum enn xv mönnum (p.78)

[Dámusti had three things, which he had the greatest love for. That was a horse which he called Fulltrúa: it was of great value in wealth – Dámusti considered himself impregnable, if he sat on the back of this horse – it was large as a camel, but as beautiful as Dvalin’s plaything, strong as a lion. It stood in the stalls winter and summer, ate corn and drank beer; it was as quick as a bird, and it leapt upon everything which appeared before it, and it was as wild as a starving wolf. The second possession was his hawk. It was white as snow; he called it Hvítserkr. It was a large bird, understood human speech. The third possession was his dog, which he called Albus; it was large as cattle, its hair came to the ground, and a mane to the snout, violent and wild in battles. Dámusti thought its company was no worse for him than 15 men.]

With the names Fulltrúa [Complete Faith], Hvítserkr [White Shirt], and Albus [*Latin* White], these are seemingly more than merely signs of aristocratic wealth; they appear to have some allegorical power

---

<sup>44</sup> Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, p.250.

as representatives of Dámusti's faith, purity, and ultimate penance. Mary suggesting he take them with him to face Alheimr can be comfortably read as Dámusti needing to be faithful and penitent in the face of sin. Alheimr consequently appears, with three parallel creatures:

það var svo mikid, ad honum þótti það langt taka vpp fjrrer kirkiugardinn, lodid var það, suoad hárid lá á jörd; það þóttist Dámuste vita, ad þetta var hundr, enn huorke sa hann augu nie trije. Þar eptir reid madr; hann var svo mikill, ad hærra bar hófud hanns enn kirkiuna, ei þóttist Dámuste skilia, huortt meira ferlijke var, hestr hans edr hann siálfur. Haukr sat á kniám honum, ok var furdu mikill. Þesse madr var med óllum riddara búninge (p.93)

[it was so large, that it seemed to him to rise up far over the churchyard; it was hairy, so that the hair reached to the earth. Dámusti thought he knew that this was a dog, but he saw neither eyes nor a snout. A man rode after it; he was so large, that his head reached higher than the church. Dámusti did not think he could tell which was more terrifying, his horse or the man himself. A hawk sat on his knees, and it was monstrously large. This man was entirely in knightly attire.]

Every animal, and the knight Dámusti himself, has a monstrous alternative. When, thanks to Dámusti's prayer, each animal defeats its equivalent and the knight incapacitates his opponent, the symbolic potential of the scene is strong. Dámusti the sinner has to figuratively face up to his faults and mistakes and overcome them through his devotion to Mary and his commitment to belief and reparation. The literal plot might tell one story, but the metanarrative, built on these replicated characters and reflective elements, is a cautionary tale against giving into the world and acting badly out of sexual jealousy. This message is in keeping with Marian literature of the time as a literary space where wrongdoers could find absolution.<sup>45</sup> The replicative structures of *Dámusti saga* unlock its potential as Marian allegory.

The *riddarasögur* may not employ demons in exactly the same way that hagiography might, in featuring them as enemies and prompts for good conduct and miracles, but several of these texts, or merely episodes within them, are built upon an opposition of divine good and demonic evil. The ways

---

<sup>45</sup> See for instance, Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, 'Motherhood as emotion and social practice: Mary and Anne as maternal models in medieval Iceland', *Denmark and Europe in the Middle Ages, c. 1000-1525: Essays in Honour of Professor Michael H. Gelting*, eds. Hundahl, Kjær and Lund (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp.43-58, and Clunies Ross, 'Love in a Cold Climate'.

in which these sides are constructed and the manner in which their interactions play vary as ever. Extreme and cosmic dichotomy remains a useful tool for *riddarasögur* composers and redactors to introduce or nuance Christianity in the texts, or even to create an entire allegory. There is always a question in romances, once religion is introduced, of just how much justification and praise can be given to knights, their values, and their actions.

### **Just Enough: Living and Ending Well**

Looking at the protagonists once more through a spiritual lens, there are problems and solutions that romance composers encounter in making their hero of the world mean something within a broader Christian existence. The narrative expectations and conventions of romance can prove challenging to intertwine with hagiographic elements. Firstly, due to the tendency for happy endings, martyrdom is rarely an option; the texts rarely give even the semblance of victory to pagan oppressors. The unusual instance of a hero's death, in *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands*, is more focused on the need for the younger Sigrgarðr to take his father's place than on the spiritual implications of a Christian's death. Secondly, as an alternative figure, the confessor saint nearly always discounts the possibility of romantic and sexual relationships, which are staples of the romance genre. Nor are there any particular instances of the "missionary saint": 'the holy man who leaves his Christian homeland and preaches the Gospel to pagans', as Haki Antonsson has explored in Scandinavian culture.<sup>46</sup> The result is that a majority of Icelandic romances make no attempt to integrate Christian sanctity with their secular heroes, but that does not prevent a range of tactics to elevate their protagonists towards grander prestige. These attempts can result in a clash between Christian ideals and extreme masculinity, as Phelpstead fruitfully explores with regard to the *konungasögur*. However, as Cormack affirms: 'Many of those recognized as saints by the church were extremely unlikely candidates for sanctity according to modern ideas. It must, however, be remembered that in the Middle Ages a violent career did not necessarily disqualify one

---

<sup>46</sup> Haki Antonsson, 'The Early Cult of Saints in Scandinavia and the Conversion: A Comparative Perspective', *Saints and Their Lives on the Periphery*, pp.17-34, here p.17.

from canonization'.<sup>47</sup> The advantage of these inherently fictional and ahistorical texts is they make no claim for canonisation, nor any posthumous miracles, nor cults of any description. However, it is clear that for some composers, and redactors, there was a desire to condone or excuse on religious grounds a variety of behavioural standards characteristic to romance. Narratives are often constructed and sometimes reconstructed in order to add a spiritual dimension to otherwise entirely worldly matters. There is a spectrum ranging from mild acceptance of questionable behaviour to figures who are at least "holy warriors" if not proto-saints. The audience is encouraged to take a religious lens to narratives that may superficially have minimal Christian elements.

One of the most powerful tools in constructing religious narratives is how the end of the story is framed. The type of ending given to a hero can shape the implications of the narrative: in the absence of martyrdom, the romances frequently introduce or reinforce Christian elements in the closing stages of the plot. As Cormack explains, "Making a good end" was important to both the heroic and Christian ethos, though for different reasons', and this dichotomy is evident across the corpus.<sup>48</sup> While texts such as *Blómstrvalla saga* and *Flóres saga konungs* are content to leave their heroes ruling realms and founding dynasties, other protagonists must leave their worldly belongings to die in piety. The archetypal example of this is the translated story of Flóres and Blankiflúr, summarised in the opening stages of *Sigurðar saga þögla* (see Chapter Two, 'Objects of Interest'). The religion of that romance couple is clearly a fundamental part of their reception in Iceland:

Enn nu var saa tijme kominn er kongrin og drottningin uillde skilia sik fra ollu volke veralldarinnar og þiona sierliga gudi eptir þui sem hun hafdi heitit þaa er þau hofdu uerit j sinne hardre þuingan og þravnging j Babilonn. Enn Blanchiflur atti kristna modur og fòdr er Felix kongr hafdi hertekid med odrum pilagrimum og þo hun fædde þessa mey med heidnum þiodum þaa hafdi hun þo kent henne kristiliga tru leyniliga. Ogh sem þau komu aptur ur Kaldealande ur hinne miklu Babilon tiedi Blankiflur sinum unnazta Flores margar Rocsemdir cristiligar truar og af hennar aeggiann for kongrinn Flores wt yfir hafit til Jorsala. og vard vijss sanninda wm aull

---

<sup>47</sup> Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings*; Margaret Cormack, 'Saints and Sinners: Reflections on Death in Some Icelandic Sagas', *Gripla* 8 (1993), pp.187-218, here p.199.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Cormack, 'Saints' Lives and Icelandic Literature in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', *Saints and Sagas: A Symposium*, pp.27-47, here p.40.

þau taknn er wor herra Iesus Christus giorde hier j heime og eptir þat for hann aptur ok tok heilaga tru (pp.101-102)<sup>49</sup>

[And now that time had come when the king and the queen wanted to separate themselves from all the trouble of the world and individually serve God (following what she had promised when they had been in their hard trials and trouble in *Babilonn*). And Blankiflúr had a Christian mother and father whom King Felix had captured with other pilgrims; and even though she birthed this maiden among heathen races, yet she had secretly taught her the Christian faith. And when they came back from *Kaldealand* from the great *Babilon*, Blankiflúr showed her lover Flóres many authorities of the Christian faith; and from her encouragement, the king Flóres went out across the sea to *Jórsala*, and became aware of the truth of all those miracles which our Lord Jesus Christ did here in the world. And after that he went back and took the holy faith.]

These elements of pilgrimage, service, and reparation emphasise that the two figures are ultimately, whatever the twists and turns of their plot, devotional. However, this backdrop functions as little more than providing the impetus for the plot, which subsequently relates little to Christianity. Neither Sigurðr nor Sedentiana mimic such devotional behaviour in their endings. The most that can be said is that the Christian faith bookends the major narrative, as the young Flóres, Sigurðr and Sedentiana's child, is destined to restore the equilibrium. Sedentiana announces:

hann skal Flores heita eptir nafne mijns fôdur og hann skal her leyniliga up fæda medur minne uitand og yduarre. enn eckj mun eg glosa ath sinne af fôdurætt hans. en þo mun hann cristina manna sid fanga um sijdir sem haft hefir minn fadir og modir þo at þat hafvi nu miog eyzt j þessu lande (p.228)

[he shall be called Flóres after the name of my father, and he shall grow up here secretly with my knowledge and yours. But I will not reveal for the moment his father's lineage. And yet, he will obtain the faith of Christian men eventually, which my father and mother have had, even though it has now greatly wasted away in this land]

The entire narrative of Sigurðr's adventures against vikings, knights, trolls, and the maiden-king is neatly placed within a blindspot in the Christian story, allowing its characters to act as needed for the plot

---

<sup>49</sup> See Geraldine Barnes, 'Some Observations on *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*', *Scandinavian Studies* 49.1 (1977), pp.48-66, and 'On the Ending of *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*', *Saga-Book* 22.1 (1986), pp.69-73.

without any particular spiritual implications. While Flóres and Blankiflúr's good and almost hagiographic end is central to their own story, here it is merely the backdrop to the story of someone else.

However, the good ending can be a means of strengthening the religious aspects of the plot. In *Dámusta saga*, the narrative of sin and repentance is strengthened by the final actions of the protagonists. Dámusti chooses to leave his aristocratic life 'enn taka i stadinn hárlæde ok kirttilhuijtann med kápu suarttre, ok hafa það berge, er ek hefer búid mier, enn það er einn steinn, þui ek á margt ad bæta, ok siá nockud fijrer sálunne' (p.106) [and take in its place hair clothing and a white robe with black cloak, and have such a dwelling which I have prepared for myself, and that is a cell, because I have much to amend, and to see to my soul]. Gratiana chooses to act similarly, confirming the text's commitment to religiosity rather than secular achievement. Yet the narrative contrasts the different penances of Gratiana and Dámusti in order to confirm its opinion of Gratiana's innocence and Dámusti's culpability:

Var Dámuste einsetu madr enn á life, er það stód ijfer, ok vijda kiemr hann vid saughur. Enn frá Gratiana er það ad seigia, ad hun var skammliff frá þui hun settist j stein sinn, þui Gud villde ei þiá hana j hardlijfe, er ei hafdi mikid ad bæta (p.107)

[Dámusti was a hermit yet in his life, as that continued, and he comes into stories widely. But of Gratiana there is to say that she was short-lived from when she settled in her cell, because God did not want to place her, who did not have much to amend, in hardship,]

Dámusti's need to make reparations for much is opposed to Gratiana's need to do little, as the latter is clearly a victim, while the former is a sinner. Consequently, the narrative concludes on a note of uncertainty: 'Dámuste vard gamall ok lifde leinge vid mǫrg meinlæti, enn Gud einn vijt, huoria umbun hann hefr tekid sinna meinlæta, enn lijklegt er, ad hann hafe góda umbun tekid' (p.108) [Dámusti became old and lived long with many troubles, and God alone knows what reward he has taken for his troubles, but it is likely that he has taken a good reward]. As Cormack explains: 'The use of such motifs did not necessarily signify sanctity; it could simply indicate that the individual concerned had died in an

appropriate frame of mind, and was therefore likely to be saved'.<sup>50</sup> Dámusti's salvation is certainly represented as likely, which is appropriate for an exemplary narrative suggesting devotion can redeem a person. Yet his unknown fate contrasts him to Gratiana, who it would seem is comfortably saved. The same can even be said of Jón, the murdered king, as he ends up sharing a grave with Gratiana, her father, and Dámusti under Mary's protection: Dámusti remains the dubious interloper whose redemption is a matter of faith and forgiveness, unlike the otherwise immaculate characters he interacts with. These final elements are not strictly necessary to the plot, but they form a further rhetorical element in conveying to the audience how characters should be viewed.

This sense that a religious ending can be equally constructed as reward or punishment is important to the way romance composers consider their story material. We saw some element of this in Chapter One in the handling of maiden-kings. In *Nikulás saga leikara*, the crusading knight and his wronged beloved, the nameless maiden-king, are not permitted to fulfil their love, but rather enter cloisters and serve God in thanks for their rescue. Given that Nikulás and Dorma do not enter such service at the end of their story, the implication is that the maiden-king has been somehow despoiled by the *blámaðr*. The "good ending" is in fact a sign of flawed behaviour, even though she is innocent. Similar can be seen in *Gibbons saga*, in which the maiden-king Florentia's religious acts appear to be made entirely in reparation for her wrongful treatment of Gibbon. First, she makes a grand display of religiosity: she 'lætr reisa eitt klavstr þar var ecki til sparat huarki gull ne silfr at þetta smidi mætti sem agiætaz verda vt af klaustrino var giorr ein holl forkunnar væn' (pp.78-79) [has a cloister raised; there was neither gold or silver spared, so that this construction might become its most splendid; a particularly fine hall was made from the cloister]. This construction serves as both the scene of her union to Gibbon, and, when he leaves for his "true" love Greca, it becomes Florentia's ultimate fate: 'geingr drotning jnn j þessa adr greinda hall trulofandi þat gudi at hun skilldi þar hreinlifi hallda ok vid enguan karllmann tala utan herra Alanum sin frænnda' (p.81) [the queen goes into this aforementioned hall, promising God that she should hold chastity there and talk to no man except Lord Alanus, her

---

<sup>50</sup> Cormack, 'Saints' Lives and Icelandic Literature in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', p.40.

kinsman]. The cloister is almost excessively related to Florentia's sin, and does not impact the other characters, to the extent that the young Eskopart, in attempting to coax Florentia into explaining his parentage, casually threatens to burn it down around her because of her stubbornness. In these texts, religious imagery suggests that only the wrongful characters need display their faith. However, this sentiment clearly bothered some readers, as the C-Version's ending decides to reintroduce the religious element. A distraught Greca explains:

þáá yckart einvigi var og eg saa vt af vigskaurdum til yckar fedganna. og þid baurdust áá kniaaunum og blodarnar runnu vr yckrum vndum. þáá trulofada eg þad gudi. at vmlidnum x aarum. skyllda eg hallda hreinlifi ef gud villdi þad gefa at huorgi fengi liftion af audrum aa þeim tima hefir og suo mart yfir mig fload j veralldar volki. og heimsins eptir læti at mier er máál yfir at bæta (p.114)

[when your duel was happening and I looked out from the ramparts to you two, father and son, and you fought on your knees and the blood flowed from your wounds, then I promised God that, with 10 years past, I should hold chastity if God wanted to grant it that neither received death from the other at that time. Also, so much of the world's trouble, and adherence to this existence, has flowed over me, that it is time for me to make amends for it]

The redactor recasts the story of Greca, and by extension Gibbon given that Greca is generally the sensible figure, as ultimately sinful. The full implication of that condemnation (whether it is against the couple's sexual relations, their treatment of Florentia, or something else) remains unspoken. The audience is not allowed to simply condone the behaviour they have witnessed in this text, but is forced to rethink and refocus on Christian morality. There is even some hint at the uneven reparations of *Dámusta saga*. Although both Greca and Gibbon enter cloisters, Gibbon has an extra element of pilgrimage: 'herra Gibbon hafi siglt j einum dromundi j Jorsala heim. og heim sogt grauf vors herra medr miklum heidri og sæmd' (p.114) [Lord Gibbon has sailed in a dromund into *Jorsalaheimr*, and sought out the grave of our Lord with great honour and respect]. In this redaction, Gibbon is ultimately the main wrongdoer and has the most to repay. Far from suggesting sanctity, the hagiographic elements of a good ending can be used as a weapon against the romance heroes and their behaviour.

Nevertheless, the same endings can suggest approval, even if the specifics can likewise depend on redactions of a single text, as is apparent with *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*. Both major versions focus on the dynamic of the central duo and their relationship, their similarities stressed early in both texts:

þeir uoru suo iafner sin j mille at huergi bar j milli. En þáá er þeir uoru sextan uetra gamler, þaa fanzt eingi fyrer nordan Gricklandz haf saa er þeim ueri iafn ad fridleika og jþrottum. Enn afl og vogst barv þier yfer adra menn. og med þessv giorast þeir fostbrædur. hier med unnuzt þeir svo mikit at huorgi þottizt þraaliga af ódrum sia mega. ok helldu þat leingi (p.5)

[They were so equal amongst themselves that nowhere was there a difference. And when they were sixteen winters old, then no-one north of the *Grikkland* sea could be found who was their equal in handsomeness and deeds. And they carried power and stature over other men, and with this, they become foster-brothers. Alongside that, they loved each other so much that each thought they could hardly look away from the other; and this continued for a long time]

Konungsson og jarlsson voru að flestu mjög líkir; þeir voru og jafngamlir; þeir lögðu félag og fóstbræðralag, og þótti ei aðrir þeim samlíkir. Hermann konungsson var fríður sýnum, sterkur að afli og ákafur í skaplyndi, djúpvitur og ör af peningum. Blíður og lítillátur var hann og vinsæll af öllum.

Jarlmann, fóstbróðir hans, var líkur honum um afl og íþróttir. Hann var djúpvitur og ráðagerðamaður mikill; hann var skjótráður og sköruglegur. (p.175)

[The king's son and the lord's son were very similar in most things; they were also the same age. They committed to fellowship and foster-brotherhood, and no others seemed like them. Hermann, the king's son, was handsome in appearance, strong in power and intense in temperament, wise and generous with money. He was pleasant and humble and beloved by all.

Jarlmann, his foster-brother, was like him in power and deeds. He was wise and a man of great counsel; he was quick-thinking and incisive.]

As is often the case with foster-brothers in this study, these emphatic similarities prepare the audience to read the individuals against each other, and judge their conduct. Kalinke suggests that *Jarlmanns saga* may even be a response to the negative foster-brother relationship in *Konráðs saga*.<sup>51</sup> As the narrative proceeds, Jarlmann emerges as the more honourable of the two: he secures Hermann a marriage match and turns down the princess himself, only for Hermann to declare his fear that Jarlmann

---

<sup>51</sup> Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p.169.

will seduce her. Jarlmann leaves, and Hermann falls to the trap of the *kuflungar* (see Chapter Three, ‘The Opposition’). After rescuing Ríkilát, Jarlmann eventually receives a wife, and, in the oldest manuscript, a religious good ending is given to all involved, as Jarlmann ‘var aasamt uid konu sina fimm uetur. sidan gaf hann hana j klaustur. enn geck sialfur j annat, ok kuezst þui heitid hafa j sinum naudum, ok enndu þau fagurliga sitt heit’ (p.65) [was together with his wife five winters; then he gave her into a cloister, and he went into another, and says he had promised it in his plight, and they finely fulfilled their promise]. The idea that religious service is the price for some form of success is recurrent, allowing the prestige of the most dangerous feat in a given text to be ultimately attributed to God rather than simply the hero. Otherwise, this conclusion is somewhat perfunctory, as Hermann and Ríkilát likewise enter cloisters. No distinction is made between the final end of these two foster-brothers, who ultimately, as the oldest text suggests, are more important as a pair than individuals. In contrast, the younger redaction tweaks the religious endings and increases the moral superiority of Jarlmann to show how he is a more godly figure than his equivalent. Jarlmann’s decision to leave his life is given more ceremony and pomp, marking its importance in a way the brief explanation in the older version did not:

En þá Jarlmann hafði á samt verið tíu vetur með sinni frú, gerði hann sæmilega veizlu og bauð til sín fóstbróður sínum og hans frú Ríkilát. En að þeirri veizlu gerði hann opinbert fyrir Hermann konungi og hans frú og öllum hans vinum, að hann vill ganga í stein. Segist hann heitið hafa, þá hann var út í Serklandi í mestum mannaunum, sína frú og sínar dætur í klaustur gefa, ef það væri hennar vilji; en hún jatar þessu (pp.233-234)

[And when Jarlmann had been together with his wife ten years, he hosted a noble feast and invited his foster-brother and his lady Ríkilát to him. And at that feast, he made it known before King Hermann and his lady and all his friends, that he wants to go into a cell. He says he had promised it, when he was out in Serkland in the greatest trials, to give his wife and his daughters in cloisters, if that was her will; and she agrees to this.]

The difference from the older version is generally little, as it merely expands on what was referenced there, but it transforms Jarlmann’s fate into a scene and part of the main narrative. His penance is not a mere epilogue. This significance is compounded by an adjustment to Hermann and Ríkilát’s ending: ‘þau fóru út í Jórsalaheim og enduðu þar ævi sína, og höfum vér ekki heyrt, hver þeirra ævilok urðu’

(pp.234-235) [they travelled out into *Jórsalaheimr* and there ended their lives, and we have not heard what kind of end their lives had]. There remains a clear devotional element in their pilgrimage, but the introduced uncertainty, as in *Dámusta saga*, does not necessarily mark the characters as unredeemed, but serves to emphasise that Jarlmann is the religious paradigm. The allocation of religious endings allows the younger text to take the implicit contrast between the jealous Hermann and the noble Jarlmann and give it a spiritual angle. Jarlmann's virtue is rooted in greater devotion, despite the general lack of religion throughout the text.

The implications of this minor change can be supported by a series of other differences between the two versions which suggest a stronger interest in comparing the morality of the foster-brothers. Jarlmann's proxy wooing of Ríkilát for Hermann involves a magic ring in both versions, but the younger redaction introduces an element where Jarlmann draws Ríkilát an image of Hermann to encourage her love, a motif that Paul Schach traces to *Tristrams saga*.<sup>52</sup> That connection is not impossible, but it may be a more direct reference to a sequence in *Þiðreks saga*. In that text, Herburt, sent by Þiðrekr on a similar proxy wooing, draws his lord's face on a wall, only for Hildir to choose Herburt, and the two run off together.<sup>53</sup> If this scene is being evoked, it encourages a knowing audience to expect Jarlmann to take Ríkilát's offer. However, he breaks with the connection and chooses instead to be loyal to Hermann, presenting his superiority relative to audience expectation. A series of minor changes to Hermann and Jarlmann's interactions further establish Jarlmann as an idealistic figure: rather than Hermann's general complaint in the earlier redaction that 'mer þiker ofmikit um kærleik þinn við Ríkelat' (p.35) [your affection with Ríkilát seems to me too much], the younger redaction makes more of Jarlmann's implied superiority, as Hermann says, 'uggir mig, að hún unni þér betur en mér' [I am afraid that she loves you better than me]. Another change comes in Jarlmann's attitude toward his foster-brother. Both versions include Hermann's admission that *því var misráðið* (p.40 and p.210) [that

---

<sup>52</sup> Paul Schach, 'Some Observations on the Influence of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* on Old Icelandic Literature', *Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, ed. Polomé (London: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp.81-129.

<sup>53</sup> See *Þiðreks Saga af Bern*, vol. 2, ed. Henrik Bertelsen (København: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1905-1911), pp.55-57.

was a mistake], and in both versions Jarlmann chides Hermann that ‘ecke mundi Ríkilát j burt horfin ef ek hefda hier uerit’ (p.40, and only a small change wording in the younger version, p.211) [Ríkilát would not have disappeared if I had been here]. However, the complexion of their confrontation is very different. In the younger version, Hermann explicitly asks for forgiveness, which is implicitly given as Jarlmann becomes practical: ‘Rís heldur upp, og gefum síðan góð ráð, ef við kunnum’ (p.211) [Rather, rise up, and let us supply good counsel, if we can]. This reconciliation is a departure from the older redaction, where Jarlmann is clearly reluctant, and makes no indication of clemency: “‘heldur mun ek þat giðra” seger Jarlmann “heldur enn þu suelltur þik j hel. giðre ek þat meir fyrer Rikelat enn þik”” (p.40) [“I will do that,” says Jarlmann, “rather than you starving yourself to death. I am acting more for Ríkilát than for you”]. These minor differences in characterisation have a large impact on the overall text. The younger version polarises the moral positions of the foster-brothers to a greater extent. We cannot guarantee that these changes were made directly to the older text rather than forming independently, but, regardless, the younger text contains a Jarlmann who represents the voice of reason, loyalty, and faith. He is therefore fitting for an end as a devoted hermit in a way his more bitter equivalent (both in the sense of Hermann and the older version of Jarlmann) is not. Appending a religious end to a tale allows composers and redactors an opportunity to confer divine approval or condemnation on certain elements of the fiction.

However, in some texts, this final judgement is not enough, as the narrative itself becomes overtly connected to God’s guiding hand. In *Rémundar saga*, Rémundr’s every movement through the narrative is directly linked to God, and therefore approved. Barnes notes: ‘Descriptions of religious ceremony mark key points in the development of the narrative’.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the main plot is triggered by one such event, a dream sequence in which Rémundr is “married” to a mysterious princess, whom he subsequently sets out to find. Such dreams of future lovers have been linked to “Oriental” traditions as well as the romance *Le petit Artus de Bretagne*, but, whatever its source, the dream in *Rémundar saga*

---

<sup>54</sup> Barnes, ‘*Rémundar saga keisarasonar*’, p.210.

is given strong overtones of Christianity.<sup>55</sup> Rémundr sees three impressive buildings, the first of which is 'musteri svo fagurt, að aldri sá hann slíkt fyrr. Það var þakið og með rauðu gulli byrst, og allir þess turnar voru gullegir að sjá' (p.170) [such a beautiful church, that he never saw such before. It was covered and decorated with red gold, and all its towers were golden to look at]. Three processions emerge, the first being 'kennimannaskari með fásénum sknúða, en í miðjum þessum skara gekk einn dýrlegur erkibiskup með fjórum lýðbiskupum' (p.171) [a host of clergymen in rare raiment, and in the middle of this host walked a splendid archbishop with four petty bishops]. The presence of this splendid clergy claims the dream as somewhat divine, even if inexplicable, and this continues in a carefully drawn performance of a Christian wedding:

Nú tekur hinn mektugi höfuðkonungur í hönd Rémundi, en erkibiskup í aðra, og leiddu hann með ágætri prócessíu í það dýrlega musteri, sem fyrr var frá sagt, og allt innar fyrir gráður háaltarsins. Þangað var og leidd hin ágæta jungfrú með þann glerhimin, er yfir henni var borinn; ok síðan lagði erkibiskupinn saman þeirra hendur. Þóttist hann það hér um skilja, að það skyldi vera púsunarmessa. Les erkibiskupinn nú slíkt yfir þeim, sem þar er til skipað. Síðan syngst messan all út til *pacem*, og tekur junkeri Rémundur *pacem* og gefur jungfrúnni. Og þá dregur hann sitt fingurgull upp á fingur jungfrúnnar, og hún tekur sitt fingurgull og lætur á hans fingur. (p.173)

[Now the mighty high king takes Rémundr's hand, and the archbishop the other, and they led him with a noble procession into that splendid church which was mentioned before and all the way in before the steps of the high altar. The noble lady was also led there with that glass roof which was carried over her, and subsequently the archbishop placed their hands together. He thought he could perceive that this must be a marriage ceremony. The archbishop now reads over what was arranged for it. Then the mass was sung all the way to *pacem*, and prince Rémundr takes *pacem* and gives it to the lady. And then he pulls his ring up onto the lady's finger, and she takes her ring and places it on his finger.]

The entire bridal quest, and therefore the romance itself, is given religious or even miraculous overtones. The sagas of holy bishops, for example *Þorláks saga*, contain dreams where the holy man foresees his future station; although it is unlikely *Rémundar saga* directly references that convention,

---

<sup>55</sup> See Margaret Schlauch, 'The "Rémundar saga keisarasonar" as an analogue of "Arthur of Little Britain"', *Scandinavian Studies and Notes* 10 (1929), pp.189-202, and Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p.145.

the use of this dream has both a functional and an ideological purpose.<sup>56</sup> The scene starts the plot, and also condones it. Similarly, this dream is important to a sense of narrative conclusion at the eventual wedding of Rémundr and Elína: ‘Er hér nú inn kominn draumurinn Rémundar, og þarf eigi oftár að skrifa, og gengur nu svo allt til, sem draumurinn segir áður, svo að hvergi ber af, og því þarf hann eigi, sem eg sagði áður, tíðar að skrifa’ (pp.328-329) [Now Rémundr’s dream has come about, and it does not need to be written again, and now it entirely proceeds as the dream says before, so that there was no difference, and therefore it does not need to be written, as I said before]. The reference to the dream suggests to the audience that this ending is ultimately right and even ordained; consequently, Rémundr’s actions throughout as romance hero and crusading knight are in a good cause. The blunt alignment of Rémundr’s plot with God’s will is particularly evident near the midpoint of the text, where the archbishop interrupts the love story to state: ‘En það er guðs vilji í himinríki, að þið skiljið að sinni, því að ykkart ráð stendur til mikils voða, sem þið sjálf undirstandið’ (p.262) [And that is God’s will in heaven, that you part for the moment, because your situation is in great danger, as you realise yourself]. The crusading battle is not merely introduced for the entertainment of the audience; the narrative justifies itself through direct association with divine will. At every stage of *Rémundar saga*, the composer condones their own plot choices, and consequently the behaviour of their characters, through placing religious ceremony and destiny at the heart of narrative motivation.

This use of religious framing to give approval to the novelties of romance is particularly evident in *Mírmanns saga*, where the culminating defeat of Mírmann by his wife disguised as a man is carefully justified by religion. While female appropriation of male roles is deemed wrongful by the narrative in *Sigrarðs saga frækna* (see Chapter One, ‘Suitable Women’), *Mírmanns saga* circumvents this assumption. Firstly, Cecilía is introduced as connected to God through her healing: ‘hún er hinn mesti lækni, og öngvir standast henni, og hún hefir guðs gjöf með sinni lækningu’ (p.50) [she is the greatest healer and no-one matches her, and she has God’s gift in her healing]. The healing role connects Cecilía

---

<sup>56</sup> For dreams in the sagas of bishops, see McCreesh, ‘Prophetic Dreams and Visions in the Sagas of the Early Icelandic Saints’, *Verbal Encounters*, pp.247-268.

to her namesake Saint Cecelia, as Sverrir notes, and has strong metaphoric resonance; Hallberg explains: ‘In accordance with the imagery of illness and health, a spiritual leader may be seen as *læknir*’.<sup>57</sup> Cecília’s primary characterisation is not as a warrior but as a healer. Her saintly identity frames the subsequent revelation of her warrior skills:

Hún hafði vanda sig við burtreið sem karlar. En þó vissu það fáir menn, því að hún lék í skógi í karlmanns klæðum að fárra manna vitorði. En því gerði hún svo, að guð, er alla hluti veit, fyrir vissi, að hún mundi þess þurfa, áður lyki (pp.50-51)

[She had accustomed herself to jousting like men. And yet few people knew that, because she sported in the forest in men’s clothing to the knowledge of few people. And she acted so because God, who knows all things, foresaw that she would need it before the end]

In a form of prolepsis, Cecília’s martial elements are introduced as serving a narrative and God-given purpose, thereby forestalling judgement. In the climactic battle, it is notable that God makes Mírmann falter, rather than Cecília winning a natural victory: ultimately, the gender assumptions about female roles are merely suspended, not subverted. Nevertheless, the contrast between Cecília and Mírmann is fundamental to the characterisation of both, and so this novelty and narrative necessity of woman masquerading as knight consequently receives religious approval. Cecília’s virtue is reinforced by her words to the captured Katrín, which establishes a divine contrast between the two women:

Hefir þú nú fengið nokkur laun þinna illgerða, og munt þó öðlast meiri og verri í helvíti, en við Mírmann munum bæði njótandi verða himnaríkis dýrðar og eilífrar sælu með guði og öllum hans útvöldum (p.90)

[You have now received some payment for your misdeeds, and yet they will increase, greater and worse, in hell, but Mírmann and I will both be enjoying the glory of heaven and everlasting fortune with God and all his elected]

The ultimate dichotomy, of heaven and hell, creates that cosmic opposition seen elsewhere, with Cecília elevated and Katrín demonised. Cecília’s participation in the role of knight and hero is thoroughly

---

<sup>57</sup> Sverrir, ‘*Mírmanns saga*’, p.329; Hallberg, ‘Imagery in Religious Old Norse Prose Literature’, p.140.

integrated into her role as pseudo-saint, and sets her apart from the other women in *Mírmanns saga*, who, despite their saintly names, act wrongfully.

The misogynistic lens which values women's spirituality through their sexuality, typically through the construction of a dichotomy we might label "Madonna-whore", of good and bad women, like Cecilía and Katrín, has its heritage in hagiography as Carlé notes:

for the women, however, the term 'social position' is not fully adequate, and must be replaced by 'socio-sexual position', since her position was not determined by the place she occupied within a hierarchical social system, but by the social framework which registered her state as a sexual being.<sup>58</sup>

A spiritually pure hero can be the means by which these judgements are made. In *Bærings saga*, the protagonist is used to judge a series of women; through rebutting female sin, he proves himself. Bæringr is frequently linked to divinity throughout the text as his achievements are intertwined with the work of Jesus: 'er beðe skipa lið ok Blamaana fellt raðvm ok hreysti Bærings ok fvltingi vars herra, lesv Kristi' (p.101) [both the host of ships and *blámenn* have been destroyed through the counsels and valour of Bæringr, and the support of our lord, Jesu Christ]. Motifs from the plot, such as Bæringr and his mother escaping in a basket, or Bæringr's shipwreck, could be drawn simply from romance, or equally have an element of Moses and Jonah, which audiences familiar with typology might observe.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Bæringr comes closest to channelling the saintly martyr when he is wrongfully thrown off a waterfall for supposedly seducing the emperor's daughter; his miraculous rescue uses language familiar from hagiographic texts:

Ræðiz eigi, goðir vinir! Þvi at gvð hevir gert iarteinir amer, synðgvm manne. Keisara dottir er vspellvð af mer, ok var mer fyrir onga sok iforsinn kastat. Ok iþvi kom engill gvðs ok bar mek or forsfallenv; ok þottumz ek sitia á vengium hans; ok flaug hann með mik, sva sem skip gengi vndir segli; ok kom ec þvi nest upp aþvrt land. Nv er þetta gvðs vili, at ver hittimz her heilir; ok eptir hans raði mvnv ver rekit fa vara harma (p.110)

---

<sup>58</sup> Carlé, 'Men and Women in the Saints' Sagas of Stock. 2, fol', p.344.

<sup>59</sup> See Exodus 2:1-10 and Jonah 1-16.

[Do not be afraid, good friends, because God has worked miracles on me, a sinful man. The emperor's daughter is unspoiled by me, and I was thrown into the waterfall for no reason. And, at that, an angel of God came and carried me from the waterfall, and I thought I sat on his wings. And he flew with me, just as a ship travels under sails, and after that I came up on dry land. Now this is God's will, that we meet here, healthy, and, following his counsel, we will manage to deal with our troubles]

Bæringr's near-saintliness is his main feature, and his narrative movements are therefore religiously inflected as he seeks revenge for his family and attempts to regain his rightful place. However, as Jonjo Roberts outlines: 'Bæringr's success, then, depends not solely on his military exploits, but on his ability to negotiate the moral challenges he is faced with as a result of his sexual magnetism'.<sup>60</sup> The revenge narrative is coupled with a repetitive exemplary tale of saintly chastity. In the text, a variety of women are contrasted against each other through their attraction to Bæringr. Various negative portrayals of sexual desire feature, typically linking the feelings to secrecy, pain, money, disregard for husbands, and audaciousness. Vilfríðr's love is cast as unpleasant illness: 'Sva tok hana fast astar eði við Bæring, at hon kvaldiz af beði nott ok dag' (p.97) [She began to love Bæringr so firmly, that she was pained by it both night and day]. Similarly, the emperor's daughter 'feck mikinn harm af fegvrð hans; ok bar hvern þann angr leyniliga ser i briosti' (p.106) [got great pain from his beauty, and she carried that distress secretly in her breast]. The passion of the wife of a margrave killed by Bæringr leads to bribery:

vnni hon honvm meirra, en henni var hægt af, ok harmaði hon þá litt frá fall bonða sins, ok sendir Bæringi orð, at hann fai hennar eptir landz lavgum, ok lofar miogg kvrtæisi sinna, avð mikinn, gyl ok gimsteina, eignir ok oðol. (p.104)

[she loved him more than was comfortable for her, and she then mourned her husband's death little, and sends word to Bæringr that he could take her in accordance with the laws of the land, and greatly praises her courtesy, great wealth, gold and gemstones, possessions and land]

Bæringr's presence provokes negative experiences and expressions of desire. When Bæringr stays with a woman and her daughter, they each ask to sleep with him; Bæringr evades this by substituting his

---

<sup>60</sup> Jonjo Roberts, 'Religious Visions and Christian Rule in Old Icelandic Romance', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, pp.826-835, here p.828.

servants for himself in the respective beds. This series of functionally identical women representing unabashed sexuality serves the purpose of highlighting the virtue of Bæringr's true match Vindemia. She is not associated with any descriptions of extreme desire, but rather marks her superiority to the trope by acknowledging it: 'Hans hraustleikr ok riddara skapr ok hit fannhvita horvnd kennir margri kono langan harm at bera' (p.101) [His valour and knightlihood and the pure white flesh has the ability to make many a woman carry pain for a long time]. Although Bæringr does prove his virtue by rejecting all advances and waiting for a lawful marriage to Vindemia, it is really Vindemia whose character is framed by Bæringr. Faced with the ideal of Bæringr, she shows restraint and consequently receives the approval of the narrative.

However, Bæringr's sexual purity almost unsettles the narrative, as he so closely evokes saints that his position as romance hero is in jeopardy. When Bæringr's virtue relative to the sinful women is summarised, the language of saintly virginity is used: 'þær gatv eigi gæt sinn fyrir astar æði, en Bæringr hellt sik vel fra losta semi, ok osæmdi þær eigi at helldr, ok hellt hreinlifi, en let eigi mvnvð rikia' (p.121) [They did not manage to protect themselves from the madness of love, but Bæringr held himself from pleasure, and did not disgrace them at all, and held chastity, and did not let passion rule]. Indeed, Bæringr throughout shows so little interest in sexual or romantic activity that the prospect of the conventional *riddarasaga* conclusion – marriage – is initially undermined. Partway through this sequence of attempted seductresses, Bæringr contemplates their desire and his own disinterest, wishing his handsomeness might decrease:

Þvi at hver sv kona, er hann leitt, gat sinn eigi gætt fyrir astar æði. ok hann fek vptt mikitt vankvæði at því. Þviat æigi fylgði friðleik hans ergi ne hælenni; en hað beid eigi i skappi hans; ok ei vilði hann i manðrapvm standa nema fyrir fvlla navðusynn. Mikla astvndann hafði hann til gvðs ibænvm ok qlmvsvgerðum (p.105)

[Because each woman who saw him could not protect herself from the madness of love, and he received great trouble from that, because neither lust nor pride accompanied his handsomeness, and there was no wickedness in his temperament. And he would not be involved in killing men unless in complete necessity. He had great love for God in prayers and almsgiving.]

Bæringr's religiosity is given complete dominance over any romantic inclinations, evoking a confessor saint or virgin martyr. As Hume suggests: 'Although romance heroes can certainly be religious, it would be surprising and quite uncharacteristic if their behaviour throughout were more monkish than heroic'.<sup>61</sup> Bæringr's characterisation is surprisingly close to this situation. This crux requires the narrative to provide some form of spiritual justification for why Bæringr should not commit to saintliness, but rather should follow the expectations of the genre and marry Vindemia. Unusually for a romance, and more like a saint's life, a direct angelic visitation is employed, but here the angel's words are used to support romance tropes:

Gvð hefir gefitt þer mikinn friðleik; ok vil hann eigi, at þv leynir gíof hans ne fegvrd þinni. En at fegrd þinni mvn þer verðan meinleiti; því at dottir Lvcíj Rvmveria konvngs, er heitir Lvcinia, man miok freista þinn, ok margar adrar; þviat þær vili þinvm vilia na. En engri þeirra þarftu at trva, nema Vindemie; hon er in kvrtæizta mær; hana skaltu þer til aiginkvnnv taka, en ei aðrar, þær er villaz fyrir fridleik þinvm ok villi mvnvð drygia, en avnga einvrð halda (p.105)

[God has given you great attractiveness, and He does not want for you to hide his gift, nor your beauty. But you will get distress from your beauty, because the daughter of Lucius, the *Rómverja*-king, who is called Lucinia, will greatly test you, as will many others, because they want to get your desire. But you do not need to trust any of them except Vindemia: she is the most courteous maiden. You shall take her as your wife, and no others, those who stray before your handsomeness and want to engage in lust, and hold no loyalty]

By casting Bæringr's attractiveness as a gift from God, the narrative justifies the romantic attachment to come in a similar way to *Rémundar saga*, framing the wooing as fulfilment of God's design. *Bærings saga* is a fascinating example of how hagiography and romance collide, and how composers use narrative structuring and reflective elements to allow their characters to be both sacred and secular, even sexual. Throughout these texts, religious symbols, associations, actions, messages, and destinies are used to impart spiritual judgements and justifications to their narratives. Both the characters within a text and, on a metatextual level, the entertaining and novel features of romance are given their own approval or disapproval.

---

<sup>61</sup> Hume, 'Structure and Perspective', p.96.

## The Cheek, and Turning It: Farce and Forgiveness

The potential irreverence of the romances' treatment of religion is worth exploring. Texts sometimes treat religion as no more than a tool for the narrative's own ends, or even a joke. However, within such moments of disregard, there might nonetheless lurk a nuanced, but ultimately pious, view of the Christian world. Many of these romances ultimately demonstrate respect and high esteem for some form of spirituality, even if that comes at the expense of certain figures of organised religion. However, the importance of hagiography within the Icelandic literary environment had the potential to produce some degree of backlash, something Grønlie has compellingly argued for with regard to *Egils saga*: 'The saga has an 'oppositional' relationship to the saint's life: it makes use of hagiographic models in such a way as to transform their meaning and to challenge their monopoly on redemptive language and saving power'.<sup>62</sup> Although the *riddarasögur* do not necessarily engage with the genre of hagiography in quite such a dialogue, they nonetheless frequently appropriate, transform, and often outright mock religious material. *Dínus saga*, with its naked priests dancing, is a prime example, and there are various such irreverent episodes throughout the course of the text. For instance, the magical apple which Dínus uses to enchant Philotemia and her maidens is received by her in a moment of faux devotion:

veit eg ad hlunninde þetta er komid vr Paradijs, og er þetta fullkomid vissu merke huorsu Gude lijkade vel huorse þesse kóngs son heffur hier vtlejikkinn vered, og dáaradur, enn firer sðkumm þess ad þetta er so lijted ad þad mä ei partierast allra vor åå mille, þä føllum åå knie allar, og bidium af hiarta himna Gud ad birta oss þetta enn framar (pp.46-47)

[I know that this piece has come from Paradise, and this is an utter symbol of how God really liked how this king's son has been duped and humiliated here. But on account of this being so little that it cannot be shared between all of us, then let us all fall to our knees, and pray from the heart to heavenly God to reveal more of this to us]

As the audience is party to Dínus's tricks, the maidens are undermined by their religious response to what is merely magical food dropped into the hall through a gap in the wall. Whether or not audiences linked the apple and Philotemia's folly to Eve, this episode appropriates religious language at the

---

<sup>62</sup> Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, p.91.

expense of the character, rather than the religion itself. Something similar can be said of King Maximilianus's horrified reaction to his visions of the dead, demons, and angels: those ghostly figures are later revealed to be mundane aspects of the nightly surroundings such as 'skogar ok storar eikr' [forests and large trees], 'suôrt sky med hafinu' [black clouds over the sea], and 'stiôrnurnar' (pp.90-91) [the stars]. The gullible king is the object of mockery, rather than the spiritual vision itself. Yet, as we have seen throughout the study, a range of responses are possible within the corpus of *riddarasögur*, and the intertwining of religious motifs. Their place within the narrative structures can reveal a variety of stances on how respectfully religion must be treated within the realm of romance.

A common trope is the appropriation of monastic garments for some incongruous purpose. In *Nikulás saga leikara*, for example, a similar episode to the kidnapping in *Jarlmann ok Hermanns* occurs: mysterious guests appear claiming to be builders and build a wonderful hall, only to disappear with the princess. Where the role of kidnappers fell to the Odinic *kuflungar* in *Jarlmanns saga* (see Chapter Three, 'The Opposition'), the two villainous knights Birgir and Romanus in *Nikulás saga* disguise themselves as monks. It is unclear whether this indicates that monks were deemed trustworthy figures, and therefore a cunning disguise, or instead represents a satirical comment on the treachery of monks. This episode is a small part of the text, but it is interesting to see the motif elsewhere. In *Victors saga ok Blávus*, Blávus's successful plan to kidnap the maiden-king, after Victor's repeated failures (see Chapter One, 'Event Management'), involves the two characters parodying saintly figures:

[They] hófdu þá fengit munka klædi ok sogduzt wera brædur at vigslu ok kuomu ser j mwnclijfi þat sem hardla nær war hofutborginni. saa aboti er þar war var j mikilli vinaatu vid Fulgida drottningu suo at þat var laust ok bundit allra hennar rada sem hann uilldi at wæri. kærer wrdu brædur þesser skiott abota. þat war hinum meira brodr til lista gefit at hueriar sotter suller edur womein sem woro þa batnadi þegar sem aa tok ok yfer saung (p.41)

[They had then obtained monks' clothing and said they were brothers by consecration, and brought themselves into that monastery which was very near to the citadel. That abbot which was there was in great affection with Queen Fulgida, so that all her matters were resolved and set as he wanted it to. These brothers quickly became dear to the abbot. It was a skill given to the greater brother that all illnesses, troubles, or concerns which were about improved as soon as he touched them and sung over them]

The imitation of miraculous healing, given no actual explanation in the plot, serves merely as the front for getting a private audience with the maiden-king. A repeated sequence sees Fulgida ask for help from the brother only to be rejected, a strange inversion of the conventions of saintly miracles; a sexual element is even introduced as the brother ‘seger þat ecki klaustramonnum heyra at starfa at kuinum einkanliga þar sem komit var aa millum fotanna’ (pp.41-42) [says it does not befit men of the cloister to work upon women, especially where it concerns between the legs]. This saintly role of a godly healer is swiftly dropped, and Blávus spirits Fulgida away before disguising himself as her instead. There is a playfulness to Blávus’s subversion of roles, moving from his transformation into a holy figure to his appropriation of a female persona. The religious element is reduced to nothing more than a disguise and a trick.

The exacerbation of this treatment of the monk figure occurs in *Gibbons saga*. In this text, monks are frequently portrayed as violent figures with no holy qualities. Kolr, a prince-in-disguise figure, appears for much of the narrative as ‘einn mvnkr sva mikil ok svartr sem einn fiandi’ (p.13) [a monk, as large and black as a devil]. Later, Gibbon is supported by a peculiar army: ‘allir bera þeir mvnka klæði firi vopnn mvnkar þeir erv likare dioflinum ok ohreinvn ondvm at vexti ok afli en mennzkum monnvm’ (p.68) [they all carry monks’ clothing over their weapons. Those monks are more like devils and unclean spirits in stature and power than human men]. No explanation is given for the choice of appearance, but it appears to represent a hyperbolic distortion of the monastic figure. The text either conveys a negative judgement of monks, thus uncovered by these characters, or it offers these figures as “anti-monks”, a complete inversion of their positive role. In both cases, the idea of monks is treated without respect. This grotesque demonisation of the monk reaches its pinnacle when it features in Gibbon’s rape of Florentia after he has sneaked in disguised as a monk and immobilised her: ‘Sǫ lætr munkrin sem hann eigi fodrs sins at hefna a fruinar meydummi eigi var klavstra regla vel halldin a þessarri natt’ (p.75) [The monk so acts as if he has to avenge his father upon the lady’s virginity. The rules of the cloister were not well held on this night]. It is impossible to ignore the ugly humour of this moment, which seemingly delights in transforming the monk from a figure of quiet chastity and devotion to a

violent agent of sexual revenge. The joke continues into the morning, when the dwarf assistant serves Gibbon wine: ‘herra prior herra prior segir hann dreck heidarligt vin. ok fait ydr nytt blod þuiat þier erut ecki uanir slikum nattleikum helldr hardlifi ok vtferdum a nottum’ (p.76) [“lord prior, lord prior,” he says, “drink some wholesome wine and get yourself some new blood, because you are not accustomed to such nightly sports, but rather hardship and journeys in the nights”]. Again, it is tempting to suspect some broader satire of the monk figure. In any case, the violent punishment of Florentia involves not merely her sexual violation, but violation by a figure intended to be completely non-sexual; far from the respect given by some texts to religious figures, these texts undermine the supposed status and virtue of monasticism to the extent of monstrosity.

The pairing of the sexual and the religious clearly held an appeal for some composers. In both *Sigurðar saga turnara* and *Jóns saga leikara*, replicative sequences juxtapose some element of religious behaviour with pursuit of sexual fulfilment, reminiscent almost of *fabliaux*. In *Sigurðar saga*, the first subversion of spirituality features the moment when Sigurðr breaks into the chamber of the unnamed king’s daughter:

vppi yfer sænginne stendr einn rodu kross stor klæddr med pell. Epter þetta kastar Asmundur klædum og stigur vpp j sængina og leggur fruarinar arm vmm sin hals. spennandi hennar lijkam at sier med afmorligum atuikum. Vidr þetta allt saman vaknar kongs dotter og bregdur sinum augum j sundr. huxar hun þetta allt saman mune vera sionhuerfingar og so sem hun þeinker j sinn huersu at er ætlar hun vpp at standa enn þess er eingin kostur þvi at Asmundr spener hana so fast ad sier. hun signer sig þaa og mællti (p.212)

[up over the bed stands a large crucifix, clothed in fabric. After this, Ásmundr removes his clothes and climbs up into the bed and places the lady’s arm around his neck, clasping her body to him with amorous activity. At all this together, the king’s daughter awakens and opens her eyes. She thinks all this together must be illusions, and just as she ponders for the moment how that is, she intends to stand up, but that is not an option, because Ásmundr clasps her so firmly to him. She then makes a cross over herself and spoke]

As in *Gibbons saga*, the text intertwines religiosity with rape in an uncomfortable fashion, presumably for the purposes of humour. There is even some suggestion that the episode parodies other aspects of hagiography, such as dream vision or visitation, and the empty use of crossing one’s self, elsewhere a

powerful tool against evil and here achieving nothing. The crucifix, noticeably 'klæddr' [clothed] while Sigurðr unclothes, serves little purpose other than to be juxtaposed with extramarital sex. This clash continues in the repeated attempts for Sigurðr to hide in his lover's bedchamber (as examined in Chapter Two, 'A Combative Approach'). On the first night, the king's daughter points out a hollow pillar for him to use and on the next night, he is shown a hiding place under the bed. On the final night, the king's daughter responds to the situation thus: 'Nu skal meir treysta wp aa gudligan krapt enn ockra til giord. og skalltu nu skiotliga stiga wp vr sænginne aa þann stall er frame er fyrer krossinum og skalltu retta fra þier henndr og fætur og standa jafn hatt rodunne' (p.227) [Now we must trust more in Godly power than our actions, and now you must quickly climb up from the bed onto that post which is in front of the cross, and you must stretch your arms and legs from you and stand as tall as the crucifix]. The invocation of God in this moment suggests a divine condonement of their illicit behaviour. Furthermore, Sigurðr essentially mimes the crucifixion. The potentially parodic nature of *Sigurðar saga turnara* is supported by this sequence: nothing is treated with any degree of reverence. Every aspect of this narrative relates to gratifying Sigurðr's desires.

*Jóns saga leikara* is less extreme in its bawdy attitude, but it likewise uses a repetitive sequence in which religious overtones are juxtaposed with secret sexual behaviour. When Jón and the king's daughter consummate their relationship, the latter is forced to hide, as one of two bald boys bursts into the room and announces:

huj eru þier gödj Riddare suö van tekner ad þier liggid oc gangid ei til kirkiu enn kongur og oll hanz hijrd Bijdur ydar þuiad prestur er skriddur og Bwinn ad dirka heilaga Gud þiönustu standid nu vpp j Gudz nafnj oc hindrid eigi þujad þad Bijriar ydur ad giora (pp.11-12)

[why are you, good knight, so weak that you lie and do not go to church, when the king and all his court are waiting for you, because the priest is garbed and ready to hold service to holy God. Now stand up, in God's name, and do not delay, because it suits you to act so]

Jón's religious duties are contrasted against his actual behaviour. This contrast is more weighted than in *Sigurðar saga*, because Jón previously embodied a Christian knight. He sets out on his adventure

because ‘alltt það Gudz lán Sem ec hefj odlast eidest og ad önguö verd ef eg skal æ vera a mijnz födur gardj oc öngra æfinn tijra leita mier j verolldjnnj’ (p.3) [all that gift of God which I have accrued will decay and come to nothing if I must always be in my father’s court and seek no adventure for myself in the world]. The knightly quest is explicitly connected with divine intentions. When Jón is faced by a serpent, he charges ‘vnder merki heilagx kröss’ [under the mark of the Holy Cross] and ‘fjrrer heilagx anda var hinn vngi madur heill og oskaddur ad öllum lijkama’ (p.5) [because of the Holy Spirit, the young man was healthy and unscathed in all body]. Until this point, Jón had channelled pseudo-saintly attributes, verging on the miraculous, making this clash between devotion and sexual desire more notable and potentially more amusing. The fact that, unlike Sigurðr, Jón is a flawed but sincere character adds a playfulness to the scene. Jón has sworn to always be honest, and so is saved by the king’s daughter, who grasps his leg in terror, allowing him to equivocally reply:

Gud j himj rijkj sagdj hann þackj konginum þessa sijna kurtteise sem allar adrar sem margar eru ad telia sem hann hefur vid mig Giortt og nu einkannlega þetta er hann Bijdur sialfur mijn med sinnj hird j helgre kirkiu Blessada messu ad heirja villdi eg giarnan sem lijfid ad lifa þangad föra ef eg mættj Enn eg er gödj vin seiger hann hardlega halldinn vmm vinstre handlegginn og vmm vinstre sijduna ad huorgj mä eg mig hræra (p.12)

[“May God in heaven,” he said, “thank the king for this courtesy of his, like all others which he has directed towards me, which are many to count, and now especially this, that he himself waits for me with his court in the holy church to hear blessed mass. I would eagerly like to go there, like living my life, if I could, but I am, good friend,” he says, “severely oppressed in my left leg, and across the left side, that I can move myself nowhere]

The pun on *haldinn* as literally held, but more figuratively pained or troubled, constructs Jón as clever within the confines of Christian honesty, and echoes similar multivalent oaths in the Tristan tradition.<sup>63</sup>

To emphasise the awkward comedy of Jón’s situation, the encounter immediately repeats, with the second bald boy entering. He ‘seiger oll sömu örd sem hinn fjrrer’ (p.12) [says all the same words as the

---

<sup>63</sup> For the equivocal oaths, see Richard N. Illingworth, ‘The Episode of the Ambiguous Oath in Beroul’s *Tristan*’, *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 106 (1990), pp.22-42 and Jane Gilbert, ‘Gender, Oaths and Ambiguity in *Sir Tristrem* and *Béroul’s Roman de Tristan*’, *The Spirit of Medieval Popular Romance*, eds. Putter and Gilbert (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp.237-257.

previous one] and the king's daughter's fright continues and she grasps even more of Jón. The climax of this encounter is the king entering, chiding Jón for his failure to meet the religious expectations of his status, only to then bemoan Jón's illness. Recognising her father, the king's daughter grasps more of Jón, who claims the illness has spread to his entire body. The scene ends with a messenger distracting the king with news of the attacking wolf, although one final joke is made about this sequence when Jón emerges, suddenly healthy, and the king responds with parodic piety:

sätt er a heimj þessum þuj hann er miog huerfur þuijad fijrer litlu er eg gieck hiedann varstu gödj riddarj seiger hann all þunglega halldinn Enn nu er suo vörddid sem himna gud hafj Löf fijrer ad þu rett heill ordinn (p.15)

[“it is true of this world that it is very changeable, because a little time ago when I went away from here, you were, good knight,” he says, “very heavily oppressed. But now it has so happened as the heavenly God may have praise for, with you brought to good health”]

Jón's reputation as holy knight comically collides with the reality of his sexual escapades, but it is Jón's sincerity and his minor flaws which stop this sequence becoming completely irreverent. While religious service is missed and mocked a little, ultimately it is the characters who are at the heart of the parody, and not the religious material itself.

*Jóns saga leikara*, indeed, seems to have a rather nuanced approach to Christian virtue, through the theme of forgiveness. Repeatedly in the narrative, punishment or violence is expected by characters or the audience, only for clemency to be granted. Jón himself asks for forgiveness from the king when the truth emerges, with language that suggests the king is the victim: ‘Gud signe ydur herra sagdi hann fijrer so mikils þölinn mædj sem þier framm latid vid mig overdugan.’ (pp.17-18) [“May God bless you, lord,” he said, “for as much patience as you extend towards my arrogant self”]. He also asks for forgiveness on behalf of the king's wife, who it transpires had an affair resulting in the two bald boys that appear at the court. Previously, the king had been parading her lover's head before her in a motif with some potential resonance with Biblical history, but certainly cast as penance, ‘dæmandi drotningunne þä skript ad huorn dag sijnz lijfs skal hun þad sia med sijnum augum oc ydrast suö sijnz

glæps' (p.17) [assigning that penance to the queen, that each day of her life, she shall see it with her eyes and so regret her folly].<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Jón saves the wolf, the cursed prince (see Chapter Three, 'The Opposition'); this theme of forgiveness provides some answer for the strange inclusion of that story element. This romance promotes the idea of not judging and not punishing without the full picture. Jón's hagiographic elements are not in conflict with his flaws *per se*: rather they combine to suggest a figure who is not perfect, and not saintly, but not despicable either.

This message of acceptance recurs throughout the corpus. In *Drauma-Jóns saga*, Jón encapsulates the theme:

hafið vors herra þolinmæði fyrir augum yður ok líkizt honum í því að hefna yðar eigi, þótt þér megið, heldur líknið að hans dæmi og ljáið þeim til umbótar líf, er dauða eru verðir, því að svo megið þér mest vinna, að yfir skapraunir setjið þér miskunn og þolinmæði (p.166)

[Have our lord's patience before your eyes, and imitate him in it, by not avenging yourself, even though you can. Rather imitate his example and grant life in reward to those who are worthy of death, because you can achieve the most, when you place mercy and patience over your inclination]

It is remarkable that some romances seem committed to promoting non-violence and forgiveness in a corpus also featuring some brutal punishments which are there framed as righteous. In *Konráðs saga*, after Roðbert impregnates his foster-brother's sister, Konráðr makes a religious plea to his father:

Það muntu heyrt hafa segja fróða menn frá guðlegum málum, að hann vilji eigi dauða syndugs manns, heldur lifi hann og bæti fyrir sína misverka. Sýn þú nú þína mildi og líkna manni þessum, er í þetta óhapp hefir ratað, og hygg af því, sem mælt er, að, 'upp skal jarli gefa eina sök'. Og ef oftar hendir hann slíkt, þá mun hann eigi að mér fá undanmæli (p.278)

[You must have heard learned men say it from Godly sayings, that He does not want the death of a sinful man, but rather that he may live and repay his misdeeds. Now show your generosity and pity this man, who has encountered this misfortune, and think away from it, as it is said that 'a lord must be forgiven one charge'. But if he causes such again, then he will receive no excuse from me]

---

<sup>64</sup> For example, Salome and John the Baptist in Mark 6:21-28 and Matthew 14:6-12.

The irony of this speech is that, when Roðbert again misbehaves, this time directly betraying Konráðr (see Chapter Two, ‘Gaming the System’), Konráðr does not in fact fulfil his promise. He again chooses to forgive, sending Roðbert merely into exile; Roðbert subsequently exits the narrative unscathed. For *Konráðs saga* at least, retribution is not the ultimate message. This stance was clearly controversial, as *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, which appears to have been written as a response to *Konráðs saga*, reuses Roðbert as a villain – a rare occurrence of insular romance characters crossing texts.<sup>65</sup> In *Þjalar-Jóns saga*, the character is given the punishment the composer clearly believed he deserved:

“Það er maklegt, að Rodbert fai þann dauddaga, er hann valdi þeim Hryngi og Eylyfi, fyrir það þeir tóku mig ecki af lífi.” Lietu þeir þa giðra tuo ellda, og setia Rodbert þar á milli bundin, og lauk þar hanz lijfdógum; saugdu margir honum þann dauda maklegan fyrir syn suik, og er það mál manna, ei hafi þuiljukur suikari vered, sem Rodbert (p.42)

[“It is fitting that Roðbert receives that execution, which he selected for Hringr and Eilífr, because they did not deprive me of life.” They had two fires made then, and they place Roðbert bound there in the middle, and there his life ended. Many said that death was fitting for him because of his treachery, and such is the speech of men: there has not been such a traitor as Roðbert]

The sequence is constructed rhetorically to convince the audience this is appropriate, repeatedly suggesting it is *maklegr* [fitting]. The disembodied public is given a voice to suggest a near-objective truth and the punishment echoes a prior brutal act of his in a form of poetic justice. Konráðr even makes an appearance in the text, now emperor, where he explicitly condones the execution of Roðbert as necessary, some of the clearest intertextual commentary in the *riddarasögur*. Clearly forgiveness was not a universal priority in these texts, but it is clear that some composers were willing to use whatever means, even including poking fun at the strict rules of Christianity, in order to convey the importance of divine and not human judgement.

To conclude, it is worth returning to the beginning of this study, with *Clari saga* and its possible heritage in *exempla*, as it unites much that we have discussed in this section. Serena, the haughty

---

<sup>65</sup> See Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp.179-180 for more on *Þjalar-Jóns saga* and *Konráðs saga*.

princess, is taught a lesson about her secular behaviour through both sexual violence and the appropriation of religious imagery. Her “husband”, whom she must serve in penance, is not only monstrous (‘einn dólg eigi lítinn og heldur ósýnilegan; hann var svartur sem hrafn; nef hans var langt og bjúgt; að öllu var hann afskaplegur.’ (pp.43-44) [a little and rather unattractive monster; he was as black as a raven. His nose was long and crooked; he was unpleasant in everything]), but, as Battista suggests, possesses ‘characteristic demonic traits’.<sup>66</sup> The scene of her punishment by Clarus is at church doors, where she begs for alms, in a rare instance within this text of direct invocation of God by the characters: “‘Haf fyrir guðs ást,” segir hún, “en sakir þess, að eg kenni hér engan mann og ekki torg veit eg hér, þá bið eg fyrir guðs sakir, að þu verndir penningum fyrir mig og fáir mér kostinn.”’ (p.54) [“For the love of God,” she says, “and on account of the fact that I know no-one here and I know of no market here, I ask you for God’s sake, that you supply money for me and give me provisions.”]. Furthermore, she is repeatedly pitied by a passing man, who is physically unremarkable (‘í það form sem einn bóndi’ (p.54) [in the form of a householder]), but is implicitly the counterpart to her demonic husband, as both are seemingly Master Perus in disguise; there is a Christ-like element to this humble helper. Serena’s penance is thoroughly steeped in religious imagery, and it is difficult to draw the line between appropriation and appropriate. In one respect, the spiritual penance is merely a tool for presenting Clarus with his desire. However, the ultimate theme of forgiveness which is central to *Clari saga*, albeit in heavily misogynistic terms, makes the Christian aspect somewhat fitting. A text that presents itself as an *exemplum* collected by Jón Halldórsson is the perfect place for this Christian ideology, regardless of its sincerity.

The relationship between the Icelandic romances and religion is complicated: the sheer variety of responses, and the methods by which those stances are conveyed, is remarkable. In some places, the texts verge on allegory, while in others they resemble parody. Religious aspects are used to both condemn and condone, while the Church is both supported and undermined. The influence of hagiography is blended with the assorted other literary heritages of the genre in ways that are often

---

<sup>66</sup> Battista, ‘*Blámenn, djöflar, and Other Representations of Evil in Old Norse Literature*’, p.116.

difficult or impossible to untangle and separate, but clearly spirituality is a vital element. The composition, transmission, and readjustment of some these texts via replicative structures are shaped around goals that have higher (or sometimes baser) concerns than we might expect from romance.

## Conclusion: Moving Forward with the Insular Romances

The concerns of Icelandic insular romances are wide-ranging. The socio-political gender relationships of maiden-kings and suitors are debated within a small subgenre of *riddarasögur*, with sometimes polarised ideologies; texts respond to each other and broader assumptions through the adjustment of female and male behaviour. More broadly across the presentation of knightly and courtly figures, the conduct and qualities of heroes are examined, in a constant “one-upping” of previous achievements; any encounter of two figures can become a site of comparison and characterisation. Where included, the mysterious world of the Scandinavian past is evaluated in relation to its romance alternative; sometimes the old traditions are honoured, and sometimes they are dismissed or even feared. Meanwhile, some narratives seek to imbue their marvellous adventures with spiritual implications for protagonists and antagonists alike; forgiveness and respect can be conveyed, or these lofty ideas can be subverted into irreverence. While certain texts choose from these subjects selectively and sparsely, in other places a whole range of material interacts. Although these conceptual groupings can be fruitfully explored, it must be remembered that they are not truly isolated; they often work together in complicated and symbiotic ways. To construct a viking, you often have to construct a knight with which to compare him. Likewise, the means of framing exemplary behaviour might relate to the spiritual worldviews of the text. A wrongful suitor might be marked as such through signs gathered from romance or legendary material. References to the Classical world are often intertwined with connections to Biblical history. There will always be further ways of connecting these individual points in useful ways. The literary environment of Iceland, with its proliferative prose literature, contained networks of information and significance, the full depths of which we may not be able to grasp. This study has offered a starting point to assist in gaining basic understanding of these texts.

As this study has demonstrated, the usefulness of considering the *riddarasögur* in isolation is limited. Almost every aspect of these texts can be placed into dialogue with other genres of Icelandic literature with which we are familiar. The *exempla* may have directly supplied some romances with

their style; more generally, the drive towards modelling behaviour is recurrent throughout our texts. The translated romances may have started a world apart from Iceland, but their relationship to the insular romances is complicated; it is clear that the familiar figures of chivalry, whether Arthur, Charlemagne, Hector, or Floris and Blanchefleur, were useful for medieval audiences as benchmarks and paradigms. The so-called legendary world, problematic as that is, was clearly undergoing a series of readjustments and re-evaluations, and these romances are constantly establishing how appropriate those old, familiar figures were. And religious literature, while at first seemingly the antithesis of secular romance, in fact suffuses a great many features of these texts. There is potential for these genres, all proliferative in themselves to some degree, to be re-evaluated within the same frameworks of replication, reflection, and narrative networks and patterns. This approach would be particularly helpful in the *fornaldarsögur*, whose identity as distinct from the *riddarasögur* may continue to be rightfully challenged and rethought. Even the *Íslendingasögur* might benefit from a reconsideration on these stylistic grounds. Throughout this study, some recurrent features have emerged which might originate or at least co-exist in the family sagas. Foster-brothers are repeatedly used as a means of comparing characters and the worldviews they represent. Many texts display significant intergenerational networks, with characters sharing names and narrative functions with ancestors. Additionally, feud and family duty frequently motivate and structure plot. Even with a lesser degree of overt fictionality, the classical sagas will likely prove to exhibit many similar conceptual patterns. Beyond the medieval, the vast store of post-Reformation romances, which circulate with the texts I have considered, deserve further analysis. I suspect these methods of replication and reflection will recur well beyond the corpus I have considered. Likewise, the *rímur* should be included in this discussion, as the introduction of verse, a more traditional vessel for lexical and structural patterns, will develop this topic further. There is a wealth of possibility for the continuation of these thoughts, with relevance for any field of late medieval Icelandic literature.

In addition to broader implications, each text makes a powerful statement for itself. The romances are frequently responding to assumptions and stereotypes and making potent claims for

their position within ideological conflicts. They represent a wide variety of lengths, styles, content, and ethos, and their individuality should not be forgotten. While their place within broader debates deserves greater attention, so too do individual texts deserve future studies. This thesis is a tool by which more detailed analysis of each romance might occur, uniting these narrative and semiotic principles with numerous other features. Literary analysis of the *riddarasögur* has long been wanting, and these ideas must be added to other interpretative approaches such as historical context, textual scholarship, and theoretical models. Likewise, with more attention to the lexical patterns that run through the *riddarasögur*, we may be ready for a new process of editing these texts, one which can use this evidence of careful construction to help in our own process of reconstruction. Many of these texts deserve to reach new eyes, both in specialist academic work and broader ranks of students, for whom the use of patterns and the engagement with a range of issues such as gender, social roles, and history may provide useful stimuli. The ease of translating these texts, once tricky orthography is navigated, and the genuinely entertaining quality of many episodes, should encourage us to make these texts available in English for readers of any academic level. With continued critical assistance, these romances will prove fruitful sources of analysis.

The terms replication and reflection, and broader talk of network and patterns, are not intended as fixed concepts or absolute terminology, but as useful frameworks. Much like the constant adjustment of the generic terms applied to the *riddarasögur*, whether “native”, “original”, “indigenous”, or “insular”, we will doubtless continue to nuance the language we use in relation to these texts (particularly for effective translation of these concepts outside of English). The main aim is to bring these aspects of the genre to the attention of scholars, and to allow future work to adapt the frameworks as necessary. The core of this thesis has been demonstrating that countless associative connections run through these texts, encouraged by the language and narrative structuring of the romances. The terminology used matters less than the overall observation that there is a world of subtext to be uncovered in texts previously dismissed as superficial. These networks are both useful tools for analysis and starting points for more questions. We might ponder whether these sophisticated

networks imply a learned audience, or instead wonder if they suggest sophisticated cognitive processes among a broader audience. We might lean toward a more heavily didactic motivation for these texts, or decide that entertainment incorporated morals for dramatic effect. There is still an assortment of interpretations available; I have aimed to set up the debate, not conclude it. However, the analysis in this thesis, while only a means to an end, is still one step closer to answering the tricky questions which plague this intriguing genre and the literary environment that produced it.

## Bibliography

### Primary – Insular Romance

- 'Adonias saga', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances* III, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963, pp.67-230.
- An Edition and Study of "Nikulás saga leikara"*, ed. Keren H. Wick, University of Leeds, PhD thesis, 1996.
- 'Ála flekks saga', *Drei Lygisögur*, ed. Ake Lagerholm, Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1927, pp.84-120.
- 'Ála flekks saga', *Riddarasögur* V, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954, pp.123-160.
- Blómstrvallasaga*, ed. Theodor Möbius, Lipsiæ: sumptibus G. Engelmanni, 1855.
- Bragða-Mágus saga með tilheyrandi þáttum*, ed. Gunnlaugur Þórðarson, Kaupmannahöfn: Páll Sveinsson, 1858.
- 'Bærings saga', *Fornsögur suðurlanda*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld, Lund: F. Berlings boktryckeri, 1884, pp.85-123.
- 'Clari saga', *Riddarasögur* V, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954, pp.1-61.
- Clári saga*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld, Halle a. S.: M. Niemeyer, 1907.
- 'Dámusta saga', *Þjalar Jóns saga: Dámusta saga*, ed. Louisa Fredrika Tan-Haverhost, Leiden: H.D. Tjeenk Willink, 1939, pp.49-108.
- Dínus saga drambláta*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, Reykjavík: Háskóli Íslands, 1960.
- 'Drauma-Jóns saga', *Riddarasögur* VI, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954, pp.147-170.
- 'Drauma-Jóns saga', ed. Hugo Gering, *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 26, 1984, pp.289-390.
- 'Ectors saga', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances* I, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962, pp.79-186.
- 'Flóres saga konungs og sona hans', *Riddarasögur* V, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954, pp.63-121.
- 'Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans', *Drei Lygisögur*, ed. Ake Lagerholm, Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1927, pp.121-177.
- 'Fragment af en ellers ukendt "Grega saga"', ed. Agnete Loth, *Opuscula* 1, 1960, pp.201-206.
- Gibbons saga*, ed. Raymond Page, Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1960.
- 'Hrings saga ok Tryggva', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances* V, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965, pp.233-238.
- 'Jarlmanns saga og Hermanns', *Riddarasögur* III, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954, pp.171-235.
- 'Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances* III, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963, pp.1-66.
- Jóns Saga Leikara*, ed. Martin Soderbach, University of Chicago, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, 1949.
- Kirialax saga*, ed. Kristian Kålund, Copenhagen: S. L. Møllers bogtrykkeri, 1917.
- 'Konráðs saga', *Riddarasögur* III, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949, pp.269-344.
- 'Mágus saga jarls', *Fornsögur suðurlanda*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld, Lund: F. Berlings boktryckeri, 1884, pp.1-42.
- 'Mágus saga jarls (hin meiri)', *Riddarasögur* II, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949, pp.135-429.

- 'Mírmanns saga', *Riddarasögur* III, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949, pp.1-94.
- 'Mírmanns saga', *Riddarasögur. Parcevals saga. Valvers þátrr. Ívents saga. Mírmans saga*, ed. Eugen Kölbing, Strassburg: K. J. Trübner, 1872, pp.137-213.
- 'Nitida saga', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances V*, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965, pp.1-37.
- 'Nítíða saga: A Normalised Icelandic Text and Translation', ed. Sheryl McDonald, *Leeds Studies in English* 40, 2009, pp.119-45.
- 'Rémundar saga keisarasonar', *Riddarasögur V*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1951, pp.161-339.
- 'Sagann af Samsone Fagra', *Nordiska kända dater: I en sagoflock samlade om forna kongar och hjältar*, ed. Erik Julius Björner, Stockholm: J. L. Horn, 1737.
- 'Samsons saga fagra', *Riddarasögur* III, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949, pp.345-401.
- 'Saulus saga ok Nikanors', *Late Medieval Romances II*, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963, pp.1-91.
- 'Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction', eds. Alaric Hall, Steven D. P. Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies* 21, 2012-2013, pp.80-155.
- 'Sigrgarðs saga frækna', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances V*, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965, pp.39-107.
- 'Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances V*, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965, pp.109-194.
- 'Sigurðar saga fóts', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances III*, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963, pp.231-250.
- 'Sigurðar saga turnara', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances V*, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965, pp.195-232.
- 'Sigurðar saga þögla', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances II*, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963, pp.95-259.
- Sigurðar saga þögla: The Shorter Redaction*, ed. Matthew Driscoll, Reykjavík: Stofnum Árna Magnússonar, 1992.
- 'Valdimars saga', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances I*, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962, pp.51-78.
- 'Victors saga ok Blávus', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances I*, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962, pp.1-50.
- Viktors saga ok Blávus*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, Reykjavík: Handritastofnum Íslands, 1964.
- 'Vilhjálm's saga Sjóðs', *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances IV*, ed. Agnete Loth, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1964, pp.1-136.

### Primary – Other Texts and Collections

- Austfirðinga sögur*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1950.
- Biskupa sögur*, ed. Jón Sigurðsson, Kaupmannahöfn: S.L. Møller, 1858-1878.
- Drei Lygisögur*, ed. Ake Lagerholm, Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1927.
- Egils saga*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003.
- Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954-1959.

- Fornaldarsögur norðrlanda*, ed. Valdimar Ásmundarson, Reykjavík: S. Kristjánsson, 1886-1891.
- Fornsögur suðrlanda*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld, Lund: F. Berlings boktryckeri, 1884.
- Heilagra Manna sögur*, ed. C. R. Unger, Christiana: Trykt hos B.M. Bentzen, 1877.
- Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1941-1951.
- Íslendzk Æventyri*, ed. Hugo Gering, Halle a. S: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1882.
- Karlamagnus saga ok kappá hans*, ed. C. R. Unger, Christiania: Trykt hos H. J. Jensen, 1860.
- Mariu saga*, ed. C. R. Unger, Christiana: Trykt hos B.M. Bentzen, 1871.
- Norse Romance I and II*, ed. Marianne Kalinke, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999.
- Partalopa saga*, ed. Lise Præstgaard Andersen, Copenhagen: C. A. Reistlz Forlag, 1983.
- Postola sögur*, ed. C. R. Unger, Christiana: Trykt hos B.M. Bentzen, 1874.
- Riddarasögur I-VI*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949-1954.
- Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, ed. and trans. Karsten Friis-Jensen, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015.
- Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, second edition, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005.
- The Story of Jonatas in Iceland*, ed. Peter A. Jorgensen, Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1997.
- Pidriks Saga af Bern*, ed. Henrik Bertelsen, København: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1905-1911.

## Secondary Reading

- Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, 'On Supernatural Motifs in the *Fornaldarsögur*', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.33-41.
- Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, 'The Werewolf in Medieval Icelandic Literature', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 106.3, 2007, pp.277-303.
- Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, 'The Origin and Development of the *Fornaldarsögur* as Illustrated by *Völsunga saga*', *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012, pp.33-58.
- Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, 'Some Heroic Motifs in Icelandic Art', *Scripta Islandica* 68, 2017, pp.11-49.
- Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, 'Motherhood as emotion and social practice: Mary and Anne as maternal models in medieval Iceland', *Denmark and Europe in the Middle Ages, c. 1000-1525: Essays in Honour of Professor Michael H. Gelting*, eds. Kerstin Hundahl, Lars Kjær and Niels Lund, Farnham: Ashgate, 2014, pp.43-58.
- Aguirre, Manuel, 'Narrative Structure in The Saga of the Volsungs', *Saga-Book* 26, 2002, pp.5-37.
- Allen, Graham, *Intertextuality*, London: Routledge, 2000.
- Amory, Frederic, 'Things Greek and the *Riddarasögur*', *Speculum* 59.3, 1984, pp.509-523.
- Ashman Rowe, Elizabeth, 'Generic Hybrids: Norwegian "Family" Sagas and Icelandic "Mythic-heroic" sagas', *Scandinavian Studies* 65.4, 1993, pp.539-554.
- Ashman Rowe, Elizabeth, '*Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*, *Helga þáttur Þórissonar*, and the Conversion *þættir*', *Scandinavian Studies* 76.4, 2004, pp.459-474.
- Ashman Rowe, Elizabeth, '*Fornaldarsögur* and Heroic Legends of the Edda', *Revisiting the Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Heroic Legend*, eds. Acker and Larrington, New York: Routledge, 2013, pp.202-218.
- Ármann Jakobsson, '*Le Roi Chevalier*: The Royal Ideology and Genre of *Hrólfs saga kraka*', *Scandinavian Studies* 71.2, 1999, pp.139-166.

- Ármann Jakobsson, 'Identifying the Ogre: The Legendary Saga Giants', *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. Agneta Ney, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009, pp.181-200.
- Ármann Jakobsson, 'Enter the Dragon. Legendary Saga Courage and the Birth of the Hero', *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur*, eds. Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2010, pp.33-52.
- Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Earliest Legendary Saga Manuscripts', *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012, pp.21-32.
- Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 'The Fantastic Reality: Hagiography, Miracles, and Fantasy', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.63-70.
- Bampi, Massimiliano, 'The Development of the *Fornaldarsögur* as a Genre: a Polysystemic Approach', *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012, pp.185-199.
- Barnes, Geraldine, 'The *Riddarasögur* and Mediaeval Literature', *Medieval Scandinavia* 8, 1975, pp.140-158.
- Barnes, Geraldine, 'The *Riddarasögur*: A Medieval Exercise in Translation' *Saga-Book* 19, 1977, pp.403-441.
- Barnes, Geraldine, 'Some Observations on *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*', *Scandinavian Studies* 49.1, 1977, pp.48-66.
- Barnes, Geraldine, 'On the Ending of *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*' *Saga-Book* 22.1, 1986, pp.69-73.
- Barnes, Geraldine, 'Arthurian Chivalry in Old Norse', *Arthurian Literature* VII, ed. Richard Barber, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987, pp.50-102.
- Barnes, Geraldine, 'Some Current Issues in *Riddarasögur* Research', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 104, 1989, pp.73-88.
- Barnes, Geraldine, 'The Lion-Knight Legend in Old Norse Romance', *Die Romane von dem Ritter mit dem Löwen*, ed. Xenja von Ertzdorff, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994, pp.383-399.
- Barnes, Geraldine, 'Romance in Iceland', *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.266-286.
- Barnes, Geraldine, '"Discourse of Counsel" and the "Translated" *Riddarasögur*', *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, eds. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, Turnhout: Brepols, 2007, pp.375-97.
- Barnes, Geraldine, 'The Tristan Legend', *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*, ed. Marianne Kalinke, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp.61-76.
- Barnes, Geraldine, 'Cognitive Dysfunction in *Dínus saga drambláta*', *Arthuriana* 22.1, 2012, pp.53-63.
- Barnes, Geraldine, '*Rémundar saga keisarasonar*: Romance, Epic, and the Legend of Prester John', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 111.2, 2012, pp.208-223.
- Barnes, Geraldine, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, Odense: University of Southern Denmark Press, 2014.
- Barraclough, Eleanor Rosamund, 'Following the Trollish Baton Sinister: Ludic Design in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4, 2008, pp.15-43.
- Barraclough, Eleanor Rosamund, 'Sailing the Saga Seas: Narrative, Cultural, and Geographical Perspectives in the North Atlantic Voyages of the *Íslendingasögur*', *Journal of the North Atlantic* 7, 2012, pp.1-12.
- Barraclough, Eleanor Rosamund, 'From Eiríkr the Red to Trolls in the Wilderness: The Development of Supernatural Greenland in the Old Norse Sagas', *Imagining the Supernatural North*, eds.

- Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough, Danielle Marie Cudmore, and Stefan Donecker, S. Edmonton: Polynya Press, 2016, pp.77-94.
- Battista, Simonetta 'The Compiler and Contemporary Literary Culture in Old Norse Hagiography', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1, 2005, pp.1-13.
- Battista, Simonetta, 'Blámenn, djöflar, and Other Representations of Evil in Old Norse Literature', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.113-122.
- Benson, Adolph B., 'Scandinavian Saints and Legends: A Resumé', *Germanic Review* 31, 1956, pp.9-22.
- Bibire, Paul, 'From *Riddarasaga* to *Lygisaga*: The Norse Response to Romance', *Les Sagas de Chevaliers (Riddarasögur)*, ed. Régis Boyer, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985, pp.55-74.
- Bornholdt, Claudia, 'The Old Norse-Icelandic Transmissions of Chrétien de Troyes's Romances: *Ívens Saga*, *Erex Saga*, *Parcevals saga* with *Valvens þáttur*', *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*, ed. Marianne Kalinke, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp.98-122.
- Bornholdt, Claudia, "'Everyone thought it very strange how the man had been shaped": The Hero and his Physical Traits in the *Riddarasögur*', *Arthuriana* 22.1, 2012, pp.18-38.
- Boyer, Régis, 'The Influence of Pope Gregory's Dialogues on Old Icelandic Literature', *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference*, eds. Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson, Desmond Slay, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1973, pp.1-27.
- Boyer, Régis, 'An Attempt to Define the Typology of Medieval Hagiography', *Hagiography and Medieval Literature: A Symposium*, eds. Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Peter Foote, Jørgen Højgaard Jørgensen, and Nyberg, Odense: Odense University Press, 1981, pp.27-36.
- Carlé, Birte, 'Some Observations Regarding Narrative Patterns in the Medieval Sagas of Holy Maids', *Les Sagas des Chevaliers (Riddarasögur)*, ed. Régis Boyer, Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1985, pp.393-404.
- Carlé, Birte, 'Men and Women in the Saints' Sagas of Stock. 2, fol', *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, eds. John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, Odense: Odense University Press, 1986, pp.317-346.
- Chesnutt, Michael, 'The Content and Meaning of *Gjafa-Refs saga*', *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. Agneta Ney, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009, pp.93-106.
- Ciklamini, Marlene, 'The Old Icelandic Duel', *Scandinavian Studies* 35.3, 1963, pp.15-194.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret, 'Stylistic and Generic Identifiers of the Old Norse Skaldic Ekphrasis', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3, 2007, pp.159-184.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret, 'Love in a Cold Climate - with the Virgin Mary', *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland*, eds. Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008, pp.303-317.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret, '*Fornaldarsögur* as Fantastic Ethnographies', *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. Agneta Ney, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009, pp.317-330.
- Cook, Robert, '*Kirialax saga*: A Bookish Romance', *Les Sagas des Chevaliers (Riddarasögur)*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985, pp.303-326.
- Cormack, Margaret, 'Saints and Sinners: Reflections on Death in Some Icelandic Sagas', *Gripla* 8, 1993, pp.187-218.
- Cormack, Margaret, *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*, Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1994.

- Cormack, Margaret, 'Saints' Lives and Icelandic Literature in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', *Saints and Sagas: A Symposium*, eds. Hans Bekker-Nielsen and Birte Carlé, Odense: Odense University Press, 1994, pp.27-47.
- Cormack, Margaret, 'Sagas of Saints', *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.302-325.
- Cormack, Margaret, 'Christian Biography', *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, pp.27-42.
- Cormack, Margaret, 'The Economics of Devotion: Vows and Indulgences in Medieval Iceland', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5, 2009, pp.41-63.
- Crane, Susan, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Cronan, Dennis, 'The Thematic Unity of the Younger *Gautreks saga*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 106.1, 2007, pp.81-123.
- Damico, Helen, 'Sörlapátttr and the Hama episode in *Beowulf*', *Scandinavian Studies* 55.3, 1983, pp.222-235.
- Divjak, Alenka, *Studies in the Traditions of Kirialax saga*, Ljubljana: Institut Nove revije, zavod za humanistiko, 2009.
- Driscoll, Mathew James, *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland*, Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1997.
- Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, 'Celtic Elements in Icelandic Tradition', *Béaloideas* 25, 1957, pp.3-24.
- Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Viktors Saga ok Blávus: Sources and Characteristics', *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, Reykjavík: Handritastofnum Íslands, 1964, pp.cix-ccix.
- Eriksen, Stefka Georgieva, 'Popular Culture and Royal Propaganda in Norway and Iceland in the 13th Century', *Collegium Medievale* 20, 2007, pp.99-135.
- Eriksen, Stefka Georgieva, 'Mode of Reception and Function of Medieval Texts: A Comparative Study of *Elye de Saint-Gilles* and *Elis saga ok Rósamundu*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112.1, 2013, pp.1-25.
- Ferrari, Fulvio, 'Possible Worlds of Sagas: The Intermingling of Different Fictional Universes in the Development of the *Fornaldarsögur*', *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012, pp.271-289.
- Fjalldal, Magnús, 'Beowulf and the Old Norse Two-Troll Analogues', *Neophilologus* 97.3, 2013, pp.541-553.
- Foote, Peter, 'Saints' Lives and Sagas', *Saints and Sagas: A Symposium*, eds. Bekker-Nielsen and Carlé, Odense: Odense University Press, 1994, pp.73-88.
- Garmonsway, George Norman, *Beowulf and Its Analogues*, London: Dent, 1980.
- Gilbert, Jane, 'Gender, Oaths and Ambiguity in *Sir Tristrem* and Bérout's *Roman de Tristan*', *The Spirit of Medieval Popular Romance*, eds. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000, pp.237-257.
- Glauser, Jürg, *Isländische Märchensagas: Studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island*, Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhalm, 1983.
- Glauser, Jürg, 'Romances, *Rímur*, Chapbooks. Problems of Popular Literature in Late Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavia', *Parergon* 8.2, 1990, pp.37-52.
- Gottskálk Jensson, 'Were the Earliest *fornaldarsögur* Written in Latin?', *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. Agneta Ney, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009, pp.79-91.

- Greenberg, David F., *The Construction of Homosexuality*, London: University of Chicago Press, 2008, pp.244-245.
- Grønlie, Siân, 'Miracles, Magic and Missionaries: The Supernatural in the Conversion *þættir*', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.294-303.
- Grønlie, Siân, *The Saint and the Saga Hero: Hagiography and Early Icelandic Literature*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017.
- Gropper, Stefanie, '*Breta sögur* and *Merlínuspá*', *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*, ed. Marianne Kalinke, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp.48-60.
- Gvozdetskaya, Natalya Yu, 'Sanctity of a Christian King in *Heimskringla* in Narratological Perspective', *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages: Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference Bonn/Germany, 28th July-2nd August 2005*, eds. Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer, Bonn: Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn, 2003, pp.207-210.
- Haki Antonsson, 'The Early Cult of Saints in Scandinavia and the Conversion: A Comparative Perspective', *Saints and Their Lives on the Periphery: Veneration of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe*, eds. Haki Antonsson and Ildar H. Garipzanov, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010, pp.17-34.
- Hallberg, Peter, 'Is there a "Tristram-Group" of the *Riddarasögur*?', *Scandinavian Studies* 47.1, 1975, pp.1-17.
- Hallberg, Peter, 'Some Aspects of the *Fornaldarsögur* as a Corpus', *Fourth International Saga Conference, München, July 30th — August 4th, 1986*, München: Institut für nordischen Philologie der Universität München, 1979, pp.1-41.
- Hallberg, Peter, 'A Group of Icelandic "Riddarasögur" from the Middle of the Fourteenth Century', *Les Sagas de Chevaliers (Riddarasögur)*, ed. Régis Boyer Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985, pp.7-53.
- Hallberg, Peter, 'Imagery in Religious Old Norse Prose Literature: An Outline', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 102, 1987, pp.120-170.
- Hamer, Andrew, '*Mágus saga* — *Riddarasaga* or *Fornaldarsaga*?', *Fourth International Saga Conference, München, July 30th — August 4th, 1986*, München: Institut für nordischen Philologie der Universität München, 1979, pp.1-19.
- Hamer, Andrew, 'Translation and Adaptation in *Amícus ok Amilíus saga*', *Leeds Studies in English* 16, 1985, pp.246-258.
- Hansen, Anna, 'Crossing the Borders of Fantastic Space: The Relationship between the Fantastic and the Non-Fantastic in *Valdimars saga*', *Parergon* 26.1, 2009, pp.57-74.
- Harris, Joseph, 'Gestr's "Prime Sign": source and signification in *Norna-Gests þáttur*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 104, 1989, pp.103-122.
- Harris, Richard L, 'The Lion-Knight Legend in Iceland and the Valþjófsstaðir Door', *Viator* 1, 1970, pp.125-145.
- Heinemann, Fredrik J., 'Retrospectivity in *Völsunga saga*: The Brynhildr-story', *Leeds Studies in English* 35, 2004, pp.23-42.
- Helgi Þorláksson, 'The Fantastic Fourteenth Century', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.365-371.

- Hermann Pálsson, 'Towards a Definition of *Fornaldarsögur*', *Fourth International Saga Conference, München, July 30th — August 4th, 1986*, München: Institut für nordischen Philologie der Universität München, 1979, pp.2-18.
- Hermann Pálsson, 'The Transition from Paganism to Christianity in Early Icelandic Literature', *The Sixth International Saga Conference 28/7-2/8 1985*, eds. Jonna Louis-Jensen, Christopher Sanders, and Peter Springborg, Copenhagen: Det Arnamagnænske Institut, 1985, pp.483-498.
- Hermann, Pernille, 'The Icelandic Sagas and the Real: Realism in *Þorláks saga*', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.372-380.
- Hieatt, Constance B., 'The Redactor as Critic: An Analysis of the B-version of *Karlamagnús saga*', *Scandinavian Studies* 53.3, 1981, pp.302-319.
- Hughes, Shaun F. D. 'The Literary Antecedents of *Áns saga bogsveigis*', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 9, 1976, pp.196-235.
- Hughes, Shaun F. D., '*Klári saga* as an Indigenous Romance', *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, eds. Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008, pp.135-164.
- Hughes, Shaun F. D., "'Where Are All the Eddic Champions Gone?' The Disappearance and Recovery of the Eddic Heroes in Late Medieval Icelandic Literature, 1400-1800', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 9, 2013, pp.37-67.
- Hughes, Shaun F. D., 'The Old Norse *Exempla* as Arbiters of Gender Roles in Medieval Iceland', *New Norse Studies*, ed. Jeffrey Turco, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015, pp.255-300.
- Hugus, Frank, '*Blómstrvallasaga* and *Þiðriks saga af Bern*', *Scandinavian Studies* 46.2, 1973, pp.151-168.
- Hume, Kathryn, 'Structure and Perspective: Romance and Hagiographic Features in the Amicus and Amelius Story', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 69, 1970, pp.89-107.
- Illingworth, Richard N., 'The Episode of the Ambiguous Oath in Beroul's *Tristan*', *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 106, 1990, pp.22-42.
- Jochens, Jenny M., *Women in Old Norse Society*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Jochens, Jenny, *Old Norse Images of Women*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.
- Johanterwage, Vera, 'The Use of Magic Spells and Objects in the Icelandic *Riddarasögur: Rémundar saga keisarasonar* and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.446-453.
- Jorgensen, Peter A., 'The Icelandic Translations from Middle English', *Studies for Einar Haugen*, The Hague: Mouton, 1972, pp.305-320.
- Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, 'Ideology and Identity in Late Medieval Northwest Iceland. A Study of AM 152 fol.', *Gripla* 25, 2014, pp.87-128.
- Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Historical Writing and the Political Situation in Iceland 1100-1400', *Negotiating Pasts in the Nordic Countries: Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Memory*, eds. Anne Eriksen and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2009, pp.59-78.
- Jónas Kristjánsson, 'Sagas and Saints' Lives', *Cultura Classica e Cultura Germanica Settentrionale*, eds. Janni, Poli, and Santini, Macerata: Herder, 1985, pp.125-143.
- Jørgensen, Jørgen Højgaard, 'Hagiography and the Icelandic Bishop Sagas', *Peritia* 1, 1982, pp.1-16.
- Kalinke, Jane Aza, 'The Structure of the *Erex Saga*', *Scandinavian Studies* 42.3, 1970, pp.343-355.

- Kalinke, Marianne E., 'Honor: The Motivating Principle of the *Erex Saga*,' *Scandinavian Studies* 45.2, 1973, pp.135-143.
- Kalinke, Marianne E., '*Erex saga* and *Ívens saga*: Medieval Approaches to Translation', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 92, 1977, pp.125-144.
- Kalinke, Marianne E., 'Stalking the Elusive Translator: A Prototype of *Guíamars ljóð*', *Scandinavian Studies* 52, 1980, pp.142-162.
- Kalinke, Marianne E., *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest: the Matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1981.
- Kalinke, Marianne E., 'The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance', *Modern Language Review* 78, 1983, pp.850-861.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. and P.M. Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Kalinke, Marianne E., '*Riddarasögur*, *Fornaldarsögur*, and the Problem of Genre', *Les Sagas de Chevaliers: Riddarasögur*, ed. Boyer, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985, pp.77-91.
- Kalinke, Marianne, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, London: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Kalinke, Marianne, *The Book of Reykjaholar: The Last of the Great Medieval Legendaries*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
- Kalinke, Marianne E., 'The Cowherd and the Saint: The Grateful Lion in Icelandic Folklore and Legend', *Scandinavian Studies* 66, 1994, pp.1-22.
- Kalinke, Marianne, 'Norse Romance (*Riddarasögur*)', *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, eds. Carol Clover and John Lindow, London: University of Toronto Press, 2005, pp.316-363.
- Kalinke, Marianne, 'The Genesis of Fiction in the North', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.464-478.
- Kalinke, Marianne, 'Table Decorum and the Quest for a Bride in *Clári saga*', *At the Table: Metaphorical and Material Cultures of Food in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Timothy J. Tomasik and Juliann M. Vitullo, Turnhout: Brepols, 2007, pp.51-72.
- Kalinke Marianne, 'The Introduction of the Arthurian Legend in Scandinavia', *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*, ed. Marianne Kalinke, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp.5-21.
- Kalinke, Marianne, 'Sources, Translation, Redaction, Manuscript Transmission', *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*, ed. Marianne Kalinke, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp.22-47.
- Kalinke, Marianne, 'Arthurian Echoes in Indigenous Icelandic Sagas', *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*, ed. Marianne Kalinke, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp.145-167.
- Kalinke, Marianne, '*Ectors saga*: an Arthurian Pastiche in Classical Guise', *Arthuriana* 22.1, 2012, pp.64-90.
- Kalinke, Marianne, 'Textual Instability, Generic Hybridity, and the Development of some *Fornaldarsögur*', *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012, pp.201-227.
- Kalinke, Marianne, 'Scribe, Redactor, Author: The Emergence and Evolution of Icelandic Romance', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 8, 2012, pp.171-198.
- Kaplan, Merrill, 'The Past as Guest. Mortal Men, Kings' Men, and Four *Gestir* in Flateyjarbók', *Gripla* 15, 2004, pp.91-120.

- Kratz, Henry, 'The Vocabulary of Paganism in the *Heilagra manna sǫgur*', *The Sixth International Saga Conference 28/7-2/8 1985*, eds. Jonna Louis-Jensen, Christopher Sanders, and Peter Springborg, Copenhagen: Det arnamagnænske Institut, 1985, pp.629-644.
- Kristeva, Julia, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Lambertus, Hendrik, 'Mirrors of the Self: Deconstructing Bipolarity in the Late Icelandic Romances', *Á austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia: Preprint papers of the 14<sup>th</sup> International Saga Conference*, eds. Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist, Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009, pp.551-559.
- Lacy, Norris J., 'Writing in the Margins: Norse Arthurian Sagas as Palimpsests', *Arthuriana* 22.1, 2012, pp.5-17.
- Larrington, Carolyne, 'A Viking in Shining Armour? Vikings and Chivalry in the *Fornaldarsögur*', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4, 2008, pp.269-288.
- Larrington, Carolyne, 'Queens and Bodies: the Norwegian Translated *Lais* and Hákon IV's Kinswomen', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108.4, 2009, pp.506-527.
- Larrington, Carolyne, 'The Translated *Lais*', *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*, ed. Marianne Kalinke, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, pp.77-97.
- Larrington, Carolyne, 'Völsunga Saga, Ragnars Saga and Romance in Old Norse: Revisiting Relationships', *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012, pp.251-270.
- Lassen, Annette, 'Orignes Gentum and the Learned Origin of Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda', *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012, pp.33-58.
- Leach, Henry Goddard, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921.
- Leach, Henry Goddard, 'Is *Gibbonssaga* a Reflection of *Partonopeus*?', *Medieval Studies in Memory of Gertrude Schoepperle Loomis*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1927, pp.113-133.
- Leach, Henry Goddard, 'The *Lais Breton* in Norway', *Studies in Language and Literature in Honour of Margaret Schlauch*, Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1966, pp.203-212.
- Leneghan, Francis, 'The Poetic Purpose of the Offa-Digression in *Beowulf*', *Review of English Studies* 60, 2009, pp.538-560.
- Leslie, Helen F., 'Border Crossings. Landscape and the Other World in the *Fornaldarsögur*', *Scripta Islandica* 60, 2010, pp.119-135.
- Leslie, Helen F., 'The Matter of Hrafnista', *Quaestio Insularis* 11, 2011, pp.169-208.
- Lindow, John, 'Norse Mythology and the Lives of Saints', *Scandinavian Studies* 73, 2001, pp.437-456.
- Lönnroth, Lars, 'Dreams in the sagas', *Scandinavian Studies* 74.4, 2002, pp.455-464.
- Marti, Suzanne, 'Translation or Adaptation? *Parcevals saga* as a Result of Cultural Transformation', *Arthuriana* 22.1, 2012, pp.39-52.
- Marti, Suzanne, '*Tristrams saga* Revisited', *Maal og Minne* 1, 2013, pp.39-68.
- Mazo, Jeffrey Alan, 'Sacred Knowledge, Kingship, and Christianity: Myth and Cultural Change in Medieval Scandinavia', *The Sixth International Saga Conference 28/7-2/8 1985*, eds. Jonna Louis-Jensen, Christopher Sanders, and Peter Springborg, Copenhagen: Det Arnsmagnænske Institut, 1985, pp.751-762.
- McCreech, Bernadine, 'Structural Patterns in the *Eyrbyggja saga* and Other Sagas of the Conversion', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11, 1978-1979, pp.271-280.

- McCreech, Bernadine, 'Contrasting Christian and Pagan Motifs in Certain Family Sagas', *The Sixth International Saga Conference 28/7-2/8 1985*, eds. Jonna Louis-Jensen, Christopher Sanders, and Peter Springborg, Copenhagen: Det Arnamagnænske Institut, 1985, pp.763-774.
- McCreech, Bernadine, 'An Examination of the Prophecy Motif in Old Icelandic Literature', *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages: Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference Bonn/Germany, 28th July-2nd August 2005*, eds. Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer, Bonn: Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn, 2003, pp.355-365.
- McCreech, Bernadine, 'Prophetic Dreams and Visions in the Sagas of the Early Icelandic Saints', *Verbal Encounters: Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Studies for Roberta Frank*, eds. Antonina Harbus and Russell Gilbert Poole, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005, pp.247-268.
- McDonald, Sheryl, 'Pagan Past and Christian Future in *Norna-Gests þáttr* and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*', *Bulletin of International Medieval Research* 15-16, 2011, pp.164-178.
- McDonald Werronen, Sheryl, *Popular Romance in Iceland: The Women, Worldviews, and Manuscript witnesses of Nítíðasaga*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016.
- McKinnell, John, 'The Fantasy Giantess: Brana in *Hálfðanar saga Brǫnufóstra*', *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. Agneta Ney, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009, pp.201-222.
- McTurk, Rory W., 'The Extant Icelandic Manifestations of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*', *Gripla* 1, 1975, pp.43-75.
- Middel, Kim P., '*Alexanders saga*: Classical Ethics in Iceland's Alexander Epic', *Viator* 45.1, 2014, pp.121-148.
- Milroy, James, 'The Story of Ætternisstapi in *Gautreks Saga*', *Saga-Book* 17, 1968, pp.206-223.
- Mitchell, Stephen A., *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*, London: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Mitchell, Stephen A., 'The Supernatural and the *Fornaldarsögur*: The Case of *Ketils saga hængs*', *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. Agneta Ney, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009, pp.281-298.
- Moore, Bruce, 'The Thryth-Offa Digression in *Beowulf*', *Neophilologus* 64.1, 1980, pp.127-133.
- Mortensen, Lars Boje, 'Writing and Speaking of St Olaf: National and Social Integration', *Saints and Their Lives on the Periphery: Veneration of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe*, eds. Haki Antonsson and Ildar H. Garipzanov, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010, pp.207-218.
- Mundal, Else, 'The Heroine in the *Fornaldarsögur*', *Fourth International Saga Conference, München, July 30th — August 4th, 1987*, München: Institut für nordischen Philologie der Universität München, 1979, pp.1-16.
- Mundt, Marina, 'Observations on the Influence of *Þiðriks saga* on Icelandic Saga Writing', *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference*, eds. Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson, and Desmond Slay, London: University College, 1973, pp.335-359.
- Nordal, Guðrún, 'Poetic Voice in the *Fornaldarsögur*', *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012, pp.139-151.
- O'Connor, Ralph, "'Stepmother Sagas". An Irish Analogue for *Hjálmþers saga ok Ölvérs*', *Scandinavian Studies* 72.1, 2000, pp.1-48.
- O'Connor, Ralph, 'Truth and Lies in the *Fornaldarsögur*: The Prologue to *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*', *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. Agneta Ney, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009, pp.361-378.

- O'Connor, Ralph, 'Astronomy and Dream Visions in Late Medieval Iceland: *Stjörnu-Odda draumr* and the Emergence of Norse Legendary Fiction', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 111.4, 2012, pp.474-512.
- O'Connor, Ralph, 'Monsters of the Tribe: The Berserk Fury, Shapeshifting and Social Dysfunction in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, *Egils saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*', *Kings and Warriors in Early North-West Europe*, eds. Jan Erik Rekdal and Charles Doherty, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2016, pp.180-236.
- Orchard, Andy, 'Hot Lust in a Cold Climate: Comparison and Contrast in the Old Norse Version of the Life of Mary of Egypt', *The Legend of Mary of Egypt in Medieval Insular Hagiography*, eds. Erich Poppe and Bianca Ross, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996, pp.175-204.
- Orning, Hans Jacob, 'The Magical Reality of the Late Middle Ages: Exploring the World of the *Fornaldarsögur*', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 35.1, 2010, pp.3-20.
- Orning, Hans Jacob, 'The Reception and Adaptation of Courtly Culture in Old Norse Society: Changing Conceptions of Hierarchy and Networks in Two Versions of *Tristrams saga*', *Friendship and Social Networks in Scandinavia, c. 1000-1800*, ed. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Thomas Smaberg, Turnhout: Brepols, 2013, pp.115-151.
- Phelpstead, Carl, 'The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfs saga kraka*', *Scandinavian Studies* 75.1, 2003, pp.1-24.
- Phelpstead, Carl, *Holy Vikings: Saints' Lives in the Old Icelandic Kings' Sagas*, Temple: Arizona, Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007.
- Phelpstead, Carl, 'Adventure-Time in *Yngvars saga víðförla*', *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. Agneta Ney, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009, pp.331-346.
- Power, Rosemary, 'Christian Influence in the *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*', *The Sixth International Saga Conference 28/7-2/8 1985*, eds. Jonna Louis-Jensen, Christopher Sanders, and Peter Springborg, Copenhagen: Det arnamagnænske Institut, 1985, pp.843-858.
- Pulsiano, Phillip (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, London: Garland, 1993.
- Quinn, Judy, 'The End of a Fantasy: *Sǫrla þáttr* and the Rewriting of the Revivification Myth', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.808-816.
- Quinn, Judy, 'The Realisation of Mythological Design: The Early Generations of the Völsung Dynasty', *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. Agneta Ney, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009, pp.123-142.
- Raudvere, Catharina, 'Myth, Genealogy, and Narration: Some Motifs in *Völsunga saga* from the Perspective of the History of Religions', *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, eds. Pernille Hermann, Jen Peter Schjødt, and Rasmus Tranum Kristense, Turnhout: Brepols, 2007, pp.119-131.
- Righter-Gould, Ruth, 'The *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*: A Structural Analysis', *Scandinavian Studies* 52.4, 1980, pp.423-441.
- Roberts, Jonjo, 'Religious Visions and Christian Rule in Old Icelandic Romance', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.826-835.
- Roughton, Philip, 'Stylistics and Sources of the *Postola sögur* in AM 645 4to and AM 652/639 4to', *Gripla* 16 (2005), pp.7-50.
- Sanders, Christopher, '*Sturlaug's saga starfsama*: Humour and Textual Archaeology', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.876-885.

- Sanders, Christopher, 'Beyers saga in the Context of Old Norse Historical Prose', *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition*, eds. Jennifer Fellows, and Ivana Djordjević, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008, pp.51-66.
- Schach, Paul, 'The Saga of Tristram ok Ísodd: Summary or Satire?', *Modern Language Quarterly* 21, 1960, pp.336-352.
- Schach, Paul, 'Some Observations on the Influence of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* on Old Icelandic Literature', *Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, ed. Edgar C. Polomé, London: University of Texas Press, 1969, pp.81-129.
- Schach, Paul, 'Antipagan Sentiment in the Sagas of Icelanders', *Gripla* 1, 1975, pp.105-134.
- Schach, Paul, 'Tristrams Saga ok Ýsoddar as Burlesque', *Scandinavian Studies* 59.1, 1987, pp.86-100.
- Schjødt, Jens Peter, 'The Notion of Berserkir and the Relation between Óðinn and Animal Warriors', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.886-892.
- Schlauch, Margaret, 'The "Rémundar saga keisarasonar" as an Analogue of "Arthur of Little Britain"', *Scandinavian Studies and Notes* 10, 1929, pp.189-202.
- Schlauch, Margaret, 'Widsith, Vithforull, and Some Other Analogues', *PMLA* 46, 1931, pp.969-987.
- Schlauch, Margaret, *Romance in Iceland*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934.
- Schlauch, Margaret, 'The *Dámusta saga* and French Romance', *Modern Philology* 35, 1937, pp.1-13.
- Schlauch, Margaret, 'Arthurian Material in some Late Icelandic Sagas', *Bulletin Bibliographique de la Société Internationale Arthurienne* 17, 1965, pp.87-91.
- Shippey, Tom, 'Hrólf's saga kraka and the Legend of Lejre', *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur*, eds. Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2010, pp.17-32.
- Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, 'Translating emotion: vocalisation and embodiment in *Yvain and Ívens saga*', *Emotions in Medieval Arthurian Literature: Body, Mind, Voice*, eds. Frank Brandsma, Carolyne Larrington, and Corinne J. Saunders, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015, pp.161-180
- Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017.
- Simek, Rudolf, 'Lancelot in Iceland', *Les Sagas des Chevaliers (Riddarasögur)*, ed. Régis Boyer, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985, pp.205-215.
- Slay, Desmond, 'Ívens saga, Mírmanns saga and Ormr Snorrason's Book', *The Sixth International Saga Conference 28/7-2/8 1985*, Copenhagen: Det arnamagnænske Institut, 1985, pp.953-966.
- Spurkland, Terje, 'Lygisögur, skröqsögur and stjúpmaðrasögur', *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012, pp.173-184.
- Strand, Birgit, 'Women in *Gesta Danorum*. I. Saxo's Description of Women Compared with Snorre's. II. Thyre Danebod in *Gesta Danorum*', *Saxo Grammaticus: A Medieval Author between Norse and Latin Culture*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1981, pp.135-167.
- Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'Prose of Christian Instruction', *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Rory McTurk (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).
- Sverrir Jakobsson, 'Saracen Sensibilities: Muslims and Otherness in Medieval Saga Literature', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 115.2, 2016, pp.213-238.
- Sverrir Tómasson, 'The Fræðisaga of Adonias', *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, eds. John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, Odense: Odense University Press, 1986, pp.378-393.

- Sverrir Tómasson, 'The Hagiography of Snorri Sturluson Especially in the Great Saga of St Olaf', *Saints and Sagas: A Symposium*, eds. Hans Bekker-Nielsen and Birte Carlé Odense: Odense University Press, 1994, pp.49-71.
- Sverrir Tómasson, 'Mírmanns saga: The First Old Norse Icelandic Hagiographical Romance?', *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland*, Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008, pp.319-334.
- Tanner, Robert, 'The Style of the *Dinus saga dramláta*', *Scandinavian Studies* 52.1, 1980, pp.53-62.
- Thomas, M. F., 'The Briar and the Vine: Tristan Goes North', *Arthurian Literature* 3, 1983, pp.53-90.
- Torfi H. Tulinius, 'The Matter of the North: Fiction and Uncertain Identities in Thirteenth-Century Iceland', *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.242-265.
- Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, trans. Randi C. Eldevik, Odense: Odense University Press, 2002.
- Turville-Petre, Gabriel, *Origins of Icelandic Literature*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.
- van Dijk, Conrad, 'Amused by Death? Humour in *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar*', *Saga-Book* 32, 2008, pp.69-84.
- van Nahl, Astrid, *Originale Riddarasögur als Teils Altnordischer Sagaliteratur*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981.
- van Wezel, Lars, 'Myths to Play with: *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.1034-1043.
- van Zanten, Arwen, 'Going Berserk: In Old Norse, Old Irish and Anglo-Saxon Literature', *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 63, 2007, pp.43-64.
- Wanner, Kevin, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.
- Weber, Gerd Wolfgang, 'The Decadence of Feudal Myth: Towards a Theory of *Riddarasaga* and Romance', *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, eds. John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, Odense: Odense University Press, 1986, pp.415-454.
- Weiss, Judith, *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000.
- Wellendorf, Jonas, 'Visions and the Fantastic', *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham: The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, pp.1025-1033.
- Wellendorf, Jonas, 'The Attraction of the Earliest Old Norse Vernacular Hagiography', *Saints and Their Lives on the Periphery: Veneration of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe*, eds. Haki Antonsson and Ildar H. Garipzanov, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010, pp.241-258.
- Wolf, Kirsten, 'Pride and Politics in Late Twelfth-Century Iceland: The Sanctity of Bishop Þorlákur Þórhallsson', *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Thomas Andrew DuBois, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008, pp.241-270.
- Zitzelsberger, Otto J., 'The Berserkir in the *Fornaldarsögur*', *Fourth International Saga Conference, München, July 30th — August 4th, 1986*, München: Institut für nordischen Philologie der Universität München, 1979, pp.1-13.