

Abstract. This thesis analyses the function of the *þættir* in the construction of royal biographies in *Morkinskinna*, a thirteenth-century compendium of *konungasögur*. The narratological approach employed as the foundation of this study demonstrates the disruptive utility of the *þættir* within the wider narrative discourse, with these discordant narrative structures acting in concert with the introduction of unruly characters. This effect is termed as narrative insurrection and is persistent throughout the text, forming a key element in the representation of strife in Norwegian elite society from 1030-1157. The consequent instability of narrative history in *Morkinskinna* means that different kings' tactics for dealing with challenges to their authority come to be the primary method by which their legacies are assessed and their reigns are presented.

Chapter two provides a comprehensive literature review of previous scholarship relating to the form and function of the *þættir* and the structure of *Morkinskinna*. Chapter three rejects amplification and interlacing as methods for understanding *Morkinskinna*; instead a full investigation of the narrative discourse of the text leads to the production of narrative insurrection as a more suitable theoretical framework by which to understand *Morkinskinna*. Chapter four examines the narrative discourse of other *konungasögur* in relation to *Morkinskinna* and the ways in which royal biographies are structured within different texts in the genre. Chapter five provides historical context as to the organisation of the *hirð* to argue that the depiction of this elite institution is central to the narrative history of *Morkinskinna* and that the *hirð* is depicted with a degree of flexibility in the text for literary purposes. Chapter six considers the harmonious *hirðir* of kings who, despite being renowned for the benevolence, do not tolerate challenges to their authority and suppress unruly figures who seek to enter their *hirðir*. Chapter seven details the unruly *hirðir*, wherein more combative kings utilise the disruptive presence of marginal figures to the mutual benefit of both parties, demonstrating an alternate style of productive rule in the process.

Structuring Disruption: Narrative Insurrection in *Morkinskinna*

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
2020

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Acknowledgements

To acknowledge all the people who have contributed to the writing of this thesis is a task fraught with the same anxiety as compiling a bibliography: however comprehensive you aim to be, the fear remains that someone crucial has been omitted. As such, the following brief expressions of gratitude only single out a few amongst the larger communities of mentors, peers, and friends who have supported and encouraged me through the course of my doctoral research.

In the first place, my studies at the University of Oxford have been made possible through receiving the Paul Slack Scholarship from October 2016 to September 2019, comprised of Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding with an additional bursary generously provided by Linacre college. I am grateful to the AHRC and all at Linacre for their support, which was foundational to the production of this thesis. My deepest thanks go to my supervisor Heather O'Donoghue, whose mentorship has combined patience, wisdom, and good humour. Heather's enthusiasm and knowledge have been crucial not only to the development of my research but also to the pleasure I have taken in completing my DPhil. I am also grateful to the wider community of Old Norse scholars at Oxford: I am indebted to Carolyne Larrington, Siân Grønlie, and Gareth Lloyd Evans for their valuable advice on my drafts and all their feedback has helped to substantially refine my arguments. The friendship and camaraderie offered in my time at Oxford by so many medieval postgraduates have also proved invaluable, with especial thanks going to Tim Bourns, Brian McMahon, Annemari Ferreira, Amy Faulkner, Caroline Batten, James Parkhouse, Minjie Sue, Will Brockbank, and George Manning. My interest in Old Norse literature was fostered and cemented through the course of my undergraduate and master's degrees and I would like to thank those whose passion and encouragement have contributed to my own continued

enthusiasm for my field of study: David Ashurst, John McKinnell, Alex Wilson, Tom Spray, David Varley, and Nicola Lugosch.

In addition to many of those listed above, I want to express my gratitude to my friends, whose company has been so important to me through the course of my studies. First thanks go to the members of Crossgate, Anna Twomlow, Arthur Lewis, Charlotte Gurr, Claire Ogley, Enid Lau, Fleur Manning, Lucey Gorrill, and Tim Vivian-Shaw, who have offered constant friendship and unfailing support throughout my time at university. I would also like to thank all the members of Oxford University Water Polo club, particularly Ajay Kapur and Dom McLoughlin who suffered the most in living with me. Special mention must also go to Rose Lyddon, whose unwavering belief in both me and my work has been my inspiration in the completion of this thesis: I can only apologise to her that she now knows far more about *Morkinskinna* than she probably wishes. My final thanks go to my family, particularly my parents, for always being the mainstay upon which my determination to undertake academic research is founded.

1 Introduction

The writing of narrative history is necessarily the imposition of structure on past events. The ordering, emphasis, and embellishment of selected incidents provide limits and direction to the near-boundless account that could be provided of a specific period. This structuring, from the simple establishment of chronology to subtle nuances of characterisation, acts as a framework upon which the façade of narrative history rests. In the corpus of Old Norse *konungasögur*, in which the biographical details of a given king are relatively consistent, narratological features distinguish different sagas more markedly than the content that they contain. It is on this basis that the *konungasögur* are appreciated as a literary body, as varied perspectives on the past on the part of sophisticated authors and redactors.

The spans of history narrated in the *konungasögur* are often tumultuous and the texts are replete with warfare, regicide, political intrigue, succession crises, and the disputes of preeminent figures. This is certainly the case for *Morkinskinna*, a sequence of *konungasögur* that comprises an account of the events in the kingdom of Norway from 1030-1157 and is perhaps best known for the preponderance of *þættir* it contains. In this thesis, a reinterpretation of *Morkinskinna* and the interrelation of its constituent elements – saga, *þáttir*, and scene – is offered on narratological grounds. The resulting investigation posits that the ability of abrupt changes in narrative mode to reflect particulars of the content of the story is central to the form of *Morkinskinna* and the representation of a historical period typified by strife.

1.1 Overview of the Thesis

The first section of the thesis is narratological in its content, producing a theoretical framework by which the effect the *þættir* have upon the text of *Morkinskinna* can be better understood and demonstrating the manner in which the disruptive function of the *þættir*

renders *Morkinskinna* unique amongst the *konungasögur*. Chapter 2 provides a review of previous critical approaches to *Morkinskinna*, including the recent reappraisals of the text's complexity, which this dissertation further extends. The variety of ways in which the term *þáttir* has previously been understood and employed is also a central issue, and the chapter charts the movement from traditional models, in which the *þættir* are construed as a distinct prose genre, to the attempts within contemporary scholarship to understand these episodes in relation to the narratives that contain them.

The above propositions are extended in Chapter 3 to propose a model by which *Morkinskinna*'s structure, particularly the presence and function of *þættir*, can be better understood. Narrative amplification and interlacing are assessed as techniques that could account for the structure of the text, but their suitability is rejected. A close reading of *Brands þáttir orva* is employed to demonstrate that the repeated depictions of the struggles between kings and disruptive characters for narrative prominence are a key effect within *Morkinskinna*. Crucially, however, when figures suddenly intrude and challenge kings for social centrality, the narrative mode also changes abruptly; the discussion of this effect is derived from Gérard Genette's theoretical work on narrative discourse. The ways in which the inclusion of the *þættir* disrupts typical structures by which narrative history is conveyed are discussed in terms of voice, order, frequency, duration, and mood. Of particular note is the argument that a *þáttir* functions as a specialised form of expanded scene within *Morkinskinna*. This general effect produced by a *þáttir* is termed as *narrative insurrection*, through which the simultaneous and sudden introduction of a socially destabilising character and a discordant narrative structure are employed to enact and engender a moment of instability in Norwegian narrative history. Through narrative insurrection, the progress of royal biographies and the centrality of kings are repeatedly disrupted in a way which reflects the socio-political strife that is presented as typical of this period.

The originality and idiosyncrasy of the technique of narrative insurrection in the sagas can readily be seen by comparing *Morkinskinna* to other *konungasögur*, which is the purpose of Chapter 4. The structures of *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*, as texts which derive material from a version of *Morkinskinna*, are shown to represent Norwegian history as a single linear progress, which is less frequently disrupted. The effect produced in the narrative of *Morkinskinna* is also distinguished from that within the later literary project of *Flateyjarbók*, with which it has previously been grouped due to the inclusion of many *þættir* in both texts. *Morkinskinna*'s unusual structure is argued to be an experimental *cul de sac* in the development of Norse saga prose, which stands as a unique attempt to suggest historical instability in terms of literary effect, but the utility of narrative insurrection in relation to select episodes from throughout saga literature is also demonstrated.

The case made up to this point for thoroughgoing strife as the central theme of *Morkinskinna* is at odds with previous arguments for a binary division within the text between kings lauded for their benevolence and those condemned for their tyranny. The second section of this thesis seeks to challenge and complicate such an appraisal through an original reading of the text based upon the applicability of narrative insurrection to the reading of *Morkinskinna* as a whole, as my framework centres disruptive interactions between characters rather than the segregated depictions of preeminent individuals. The focus in *Morkinskinna* is not upon the morality of kings but the dynamics of their *hirðir*, the elite social institutions within which much of the text's action occurs. Chapter 5 demonstrates the intricacy of *Morkinskinna*'s redactor's attempts to depict the *hirðir* and the ways in which conformity and divergence from other thirteenth-century understandings of service within the *hirð* are employed with literary effect. This is achieved through comparison with the two major codifications of *hirð* practice *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá*. The presentation of the

hirð in *Morkinskinna* is demonstrated to be flexible and the form of the organisation is shaped by the quality of the interactions between kings and their followers.

From the principle of the centrality of the *hirð* stems a revision of the central dichotomy of *Morkinskinna*: I argue that kings are appraised for their different tactics for dealing with discord in the *hirðir* they preside over. In the harmonious *hirðir*, discussed in Chapter 6, the benevolence and wisdom of a king are mirrored in a *hirð* typified by the dutiful service of its members. Disruptions to this system, as threatened by the figures introduced in *þættir* narratives, must be defused. The attempts of Magnús inn góði, Óláfr kyrrr and Eysteinn Magnússon to suppress or control figures introduced in *þættir* are discussed, as is the increased use of narrative summary during their reigns to simulate the uninterrupted passage of history. These rulers, while admired, are not venerated uncritically but rather judged on their attempts to maintain social order in a disordered era. In particular, the negative consequences of these kings' actions for the marginal figures who interact with them are highlighted.

In the undisciplined *hirðir* discussed in Chapter 7, both kings and retainers utilise social chaos to demonstrate their attractive attributes, revelling in the opportunities for unparalleled strength, cunning, or fame that conflict allows. Haraldr harðráði, Magnús berfœtr and Sigurðr Jórsalafari are of primary interest to this discussion, although the redactor's fascination with periods of dual rule is also analysed as an important method by which *hirðir* are rendered unstable. The *þættir* present in these sections often demonstrate how a king's tolerance of the unruly independence of a marginal figure leads to profit for both characters. The concluding section of *Morkinskinna*, which deals with the Norwegian civil war era, is discussed in terms of the transformation of the narrative style in this brief account of the decline of the kingdom into full-scale conflict, and the different function of the *þættir* in this section is noted.

1.2 A Note on the Text of *Morkinskinna*

At this point, the manner in which the title *Morkinskinna* is made use of in this thesis requires clarification as this designation applies, simultaneously, to a manuscript, a text, and a textual tradition. Þormóður Torfason first used the name *Morkinskinna* in 1682 to refer to a manuscript that had been gifted to Frederick III of Denmark by Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson in 1662.¹ This manuscript is still held in Det kongelige bibliotek in Copenhagen where it is designated by the shelfmark Gamle kongelige samling 1009 fol. (hereafter GKS 1009 fol.). The manuscript is held to be Icelandic, but efforts to establish a more precise location for its transcription have not been fruitful.² The production of GKS 1009 fol. is dated to the latter quarter of the thirteenth century, perhaps 1275,³ and is written in two hands,⁴ both of which are considered somewhat orthographically archaic by the standards of the later thirteenth century.⁵ The manuscript is not illuminated and makes use of an extensive system of abbreviation, as is typical of medieval Icelandic codices.⁶ The manuscript as extant has thirty-seven leaves and has six lacunae, the most significant being the entirety of the final seventh quire and a six leaf lacuna that covers the end of Magnús góði's sole reign and a portion of Haraldr harðráði's adventures in Byzantium.⁷

¹ Brynjólfur was appointed as the Danish Royal Historian by Frederick III and collected a great number of manuscripts to be sent to the king, including the Codex Regius and *Flateyjarbók*; see Hans Bekker-Nielsen, 'Icelandic Manuscripts in Denmark and their Return to Iceland', *Libri*, 23.3 (1973), 169-80, at 169-70.

² Jonna Louis-Jensen is unable to suggest a specific region of Iceland in her study of the manuscript, see *Kongesagastudier: kompilationen Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, PhD thesis (Copenhagen, 1977), 63-4.

³ Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds, 'Formáli', in *Morkinskinna I*, Íslensk fornrit 23 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2011), xi.

⁴ Theodore Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, trans., *Morkinskinna, The Earliest Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030-1157)* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 5.

⁵ Finnur Jónsson, 'Indledning', in Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Morkinskinna*, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 53 (Copenhagen: J. Jørgensen and co., 1928-32), v.

⁶ Matthew Driscoll, 'Marking Up Abbreviations in Old Norse-Icelandic Manuscripts', in Andreotti Saibene and Maria Grazia, eds, *Medieval Texts – Contemporary Media: The Art and Science of Editing in the Digital Age* (Como: Ibis, 2009), 13-34.

⁷ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 5.

The issue of supplying text to fill these lacunae leads into the issue of *Morkinskinna* as a textual tradition. A stemma can be constructed of a number of closely corresponding accounts of Norwegian history from after the martyrdom of Óláfr helgi up to the death of Eystein Meyla.⁸ In modern editions, lacunae in *Morkinskinna* are filled from two later manuscripts – *Fríssbók*, a fourteenth-century *Heimskringla* variant which contains stanzas and *þættir* found in *Morkinskinna*, and a version of *Magnús saga góða ok Haralds harðráða* found in a fifteenth-century interpolation into *Flateyjarbók*.⁹ Both these texts are considered to be highly congruous with GKS 1009 fol. and the validity of inserting material from them to fill lacunae will not be challenged in this thesis. It is, however, important to note that neither uses GKS 1009 fol. as their exemplar but rather lost sister texts, *MorkY for *Fríssbók* and *m for the interpolation into *Flateyjarbók*; as such, the possibility of different redactorial principles being applied in the sections supplied from these texts cannot be discounted (see 3.5).¹⁰ Other notable later manuscripts which contain material that would classify them as part of the *Morkinskinna* textual tradition include *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, *Eirspennill*, *Jöfraskinna*, and *Gullinskinna*.¹¹

It has also been established that a version of *Morkinskinna* is employed as a central source for the accounts of the period 1030-1177 in both *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*.¹² As these texts are held to have been written in the 1220's, it follows that a version of

⁸ The lacuna that removed the conclusion of GKS 1009 fol. means that the extant manuscript terminates in 1157. It can be inferred, however, that the manuscript extended to 1177 – the terminal point for *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*. *Morkinskinna* may have been commissioned to cover the narrative history between the earlier *Óláfs saga helga* and *Sverris saga*: Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 72.

⁹ For the issue of interpolation into *Fríssbók* from *Morkinskinna*, see Bjarni Aðalbjarnason, 'Formáli', in Bjarni Aðalbjarnason, ed, *Heimskringla III*, Íslensk fornrit 28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1951), lxxxvii-lxxxviii; Louis-Jensen, *Kongesagastudier*, 19-21. Hereafter referred to as *Heimskringla III*.

¹⁰ For a hypothesised stemma of the interrelation of *konungasögur* that make use of material from the *Morkinskinna* tradition see Kari Ellen Gade, 'Morkinskinna (Mork)', Skaldic Project: Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?id=87&if=default&table=text&val=mss> (last accessed 24 January 2020).

¹¹ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 5-11; Louis-Jensen, *Kongesagastudier*, 7-13, 21-31.

¹² Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 11.

Morkinskinna, often designated *ÆMork or the Eldest *Morkinskinna*, predates their composition. Andersson and Gade theorise – based on the latest individuals mentioned within the genealogies of Tostig, Málmfríðr, and Saxa – that the internal evidence presented in the text of GKS 1009 fol. dates the writing of *ÆMork between 1217-1222.¹³ Substantial work has also been undertaken to establish the location and context in which the text was composed.¹⁴ Longstanding controversy, however, has surrounded the exact content that comprised *ÆMork. The *þættir* were, traditionally, considered interpolations into this original text that comprised a simpler sequence of shorter royal biographies (see 2.1). More recent scholarship has, however, challenged this assertion as constituting the imposition of modern aesthetic expectations regarding the construction of narrative history onto a medieval text; the Íslenzk fornrit edition of *Morkinskinna* emphatically concludes against previous arguments for largescale interpolation: *er eðlilegast að gera ráð fyrir að texti 1009 sé góður fulltrúi fyrir þá Morkinskinnu sem var til orðin nálægt 1220*.¹⁵ Chapter Two of the present thesis will document the variety of critical positions on the *þættir* and offer a fuller account of the shifting ways in which *Morkinskinna* has been appraised.

At this juncture, it is sufficient to say that the exact details of *Morkinskinna*'s provenance are probably irresolvable and that statements regarding the unity or disunity of the text ultimately constitute literary evaluations of the organisational principles of a complex

¹³ Ibid., 66-7.

¹⁴ Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörðr has been suggested as the monastic centre most probable to have produced the manuscript, see Eivind Kválen, *Den eldste norske kongesaga. Morkinskinna og Hryggjarstykki* (Oslo: Augustin, 1925), 46-53. Kválen's hypothesis has been built upon to associate *Morkinskinna* with Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson, a leading chieftain in Eyjafjörðr, see Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 67-72. This conjecture stems from what Andersson and Gade perceive to be a positive bias towards Ingí Haraldsson, an inclination informed by the fact that Þorvarðr served as a retainer of Ingí. It should be noted, however, that Ingí's presence within the extant narrative is slight and Andersson and Gade do much to stress the nobility of his presentation despite the negative presentation within *Morkinskinna* of all the kings complicit in perpetuating the Norwegian civil war in comparison to their forebears (see 7.4).

¹⁵ Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingí Guðjónsson, eds, 'Formáli', xxxiv. 'It is most reasonable to assume that the text of (GKS) 1009 fol. well represents that version of *Morkinskinna* that was produced c.1220.' Andersson and Gade also find no substantial evidence for the structure of *Morkinskinna* being the result of a process of interpolation and conclude that no concrete reason has been provided as to why the *þættir* could not have been present in *ÆMork; see Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 22-4.

work. This thesis provides useful nuance to the quandary of how to reconcile different elements of *Morkinskinna*'s narrative, by providing an unabashedly literary argument for the text as a sophisticated composition which exhibits consistent systems for the arrangement of material, while nevertheless aligning with the more traditional critical opinion in as much as the extant text will be argued to comprise a discordant and disrupted narrative history. This thesis centres the interrelation of the *þættir* with the surrounding text as crucial to the narrative discourse of *Morkinskinna*, an argument that is more coherent if the composition of the text is taken to have been a single creative process undertaken c.1220.

It is also important to stress, however, that the nature of the ensuing analysis does not necessitate that all the text of *Morkinskinna* was authored by a single individual. The literary quality of the text is produced by the artful selection, ordering, and editing of pre-existing material, whether oral or written, which was intermingled with what a modern reader would consider 'original' writing. Within this thesis, therefore, *Morkinskinna* will be described as having had a redactor rather than an author, although the use of this term casts no aspersion on the magnitude nor success of this figure's endeavour.¹⁶ Certainty in the compilation of *Morkinskinna* by a sole figure c.1220 is also not necessary for the narratological argument of this thesis to remain functional: a series of redactors sensitively expanding, complicating, and revising the material produced by their predecessors across several versions of the *Morkinskinna* narrative is another means by which complex artistry may have arisen. For the purposes of this thesis, the title *Morkinskinna* acts as a shorthand for the extant content of the late thirteenth-century GKS 1009 fol., with its lacunae filled from fourteenth and fifteenth-century textual variants, the sum of which is taken as a close approximate to a lost text

¹⁶ It is worth a small note here to point out that the redactor of *Morkinskinna* will be referred to by the gender-neutral singular pronouns 'they/them' throughout this thesis. This figure is anonymous and while the cultural context of thirteenth-century Iceland and the likelihood of the text's composition in the monastery at Munkaþverá both lend credence to the redactor being a man, it is unnecessary for the purposes of this thesis to speculate as to their gender.

written c.1220. When dealing with such imperfect conditions of textual preservation, questions of artistic intentionality are necessarily fraught – as such, this thesis will couch its analysis in terms of observable narratological effects rather than the creation of a portrait of the redactor in an attempt to divine their underlying motivation.

Section One: The Narratology of *Morkinskinna*

2 Literature Review

The term *þáttir* is of fundamental importance to the present study, with the usage and significance of the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* being a major constituent of the ensuing analysis. To embark on a discussion of the function of *þættir*, however, without first providing a detailed explanation of how this term will be used forthwith, is to fail to acknowledge the long history of critical evolution and persistent ambiguity that underpins a contemporary understanding of how to categorise a *þáttir*. This chapter will, therefore, begin with a summary of the evolution of critical thought concerning the *þættir*, from initial studies during the mid-19th century, through to current understandings of the term. Research concerning the role of the *þættir* within *Morkinskinna* will be prioritised, but relevant broader theoretical approaches will also be discussed. To offer such an extensive summary of previous work on this topic may appear excessive in the context of the ensuing study, which primarily responds to and extends the approaches employed by contemporary scholars engaging with the *þættir*. Nevertheless, a lengthier critical survey better demonstrates the variety of ways in which the term has been construed and contextualises the continuing diversity of approaches to the origins and functions of *þættir*, vindicating the necessity of the present thesis.

2.1 The *Þættir* as Independent Narratives

Nineteenth-century scholars studying Old Norse literature tended to conduct expansive surveys intended to address the entire corpus, so as one might expect in pioneering works, few studies from this period offer analyses dedicated specifically to what constitutes a *þáttir*. Yet even in monographs that make no mention of this specific term, the critical foundations were laid upon which later thought concerning the *þættir* were established. Amongst the earliest of these is Theodor Möbius' discussion of the Icelandic sagas, which includes a lengthy section devoted to *Víga-Glúms saga*.¹ Möbius conceives of the saga as a patchwork of pre-existing episodes, which are not consistently assimilated into the longer narrative form successfully: *man darf hieren wohl eine Spur von dem Zusammenfügen der einzelnen überlieferten Stücke finden, wobei Mangel an Aufmerksamkeit den Verfasser einzelne und unwesentliche Widersprüche übersehen liess*.² Within this formulation, scholars prized consistency and considered a saga as a dissonant episodic jumble when the author failed to harmonise their source material, causing inconsistencies to arise that disrupted the flow of the narrative and damaged its status as fine literature. Keyser makes a somewhat similar argument but goes further in making specific reference to *þættir* relating to Icelanders travelling to Norway within the *konungasögur*. He argues that the language and tone of these small-scale interruptions are unsuccessfully integrated into larger compendia, and, furthermore, that the *þættir* were introduced into the sagas by Icelandic scribes attempting to localise these narratives for an audience of their countrymen.³ No mention is made, however, of what constitutes a *þáttir* beyond the shared theme of an Icelandic journey to a foreign court.

¹ Theodor Möbius, *Über die ältere isländische Saga* (Leipzig: Giesecke and Devrient, 1852), 35-97.

² Ibid., 78. 'One may well find a remaining trace of the assembling of the individual fragments, whereby, through a lack of attention, the author has allowed himself to overlook isolated and insignificant contradictions.'

³ Rudolf Keyser, *Nordmændenes Videnskabelighed og Litteratur i Middelalderen*, Efterladte skrifter 1 (Oslo: B. E. Mallings Forlagsboghandel, 1847), 413.

The brief arguments within these two studies were expanded and qualified in Bååth's influential *Studier öfver kompositionen i några isländska ättsagor*, which 'gave the *pátrr* theory of saga origins its classic expression.'⁴ Bååth, through readings of four *Íslendingasögur*, concluded that the saga form was a product of the accretion of a number of shorter episodes which he classified as *þættir*; these sections were unified, to a greater or lesser extent, by the *röd tråd* (red thread) of fate, which Bååth considered as the central theme of saga literature.⁵ While the reductive idea of the *Íslendingasögur* as monothematic can be dismissed in a work of contemporary scholarship, several of Bååth's ideas regarding the *þættir* have proven to be considerably more enduring, and, on a foundational level, can be seen to inform some modern conceptual understandings of what constitutes a *pátrr*. The two most significant of these basic theoretical tenets are summarised by Bååth himself:

*Ursprungligen ha utan tvifvel de större isländska ättsagorna uppstått af þættir. Enligt sagorna sjalfva är en þátrr en kortare berättelse, som i form och sitt innehåll kan stå och ofta står för sig själf som ett helt.*⁶ The first concept within this formulation worth noting is that of the *pátrr* as the 'proto-saga' or 'shorter-saga', through which *pátrr* and saga are argued to be different points on the same evolutionary line, with both having a shared style and function and only being distinguished by the increasing sophistication of the longer saga form. The second point is that the *þættir*'s narrative integrity is sufficient to warrant consideration as stand-alone works in isolation from the material which surrounds them.⁷

⁴ Rodney Alan Maack, *Pátrr and Saga: Short and Long Saga Narrative in Medieval Iceland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 6. It may also be contended that Heinzel's argument for it being possible but aesthetically unappealing to disentangle each saga into its constituent *þættir* was a significant influence on Bååth's thinking, see Richard Heinzel, *Beschreibung der Islandischen Saga* (Wien: C. Gerold's sohn, 1880), 6.

⁵ Albert Ulrik Bååth, *Studier öfver kompositionen i några isländska ättsagor* (Lund: Berling Boktryckeri och Stilgjuteri, 1885), 160.

⁶ Ibid., 1-2. 'Originally, without a doubt, the great Icelandic family sagas have arisen from *þættir*. According to the sagas themselves, a *pátrr* is a shorter narrative, which in its form and content can and does often stand by itself as a whole.'

⁷ It should be noted that Bååth's so-called '*pátrr* theory' has been robustly challenged, with criticism being prevalent throughout the first half of the 20th century, particularly in relation to his exemplar *Ljósvetninga saga*. See Andreas Heusler, *Die Anfänge der isländischen Saga* (Berlin: Aus den Abhandlungen der Königl. Preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1914), 1-87; Björn Sigfússon, 'Um Ljósvetninga sögu', *Studia Islandica*, 3

An approach similar to that of Bååth can also be seen in the methodologies employed by early 20th century editors of the *þættir*. Þórleifur Jónsson produced *Fjörutíu Íslendinga-þættir*, one of the earliest edition of collected *þættir* in 1904, and the publication functioned as a *de facto* addendum to the larger project of producing editions of thirty-eight of the *Íslendingasögur* being overseen by Sigurður Kristjánsson.⁸ While the forty narratives compiled by Þórleifur are not accompanied by a justification as to why they, in particular, have been selected for inclusion, anthologising them into a single volume had the effect of establishing a corpus where one had not previously existed. The conception of the *þættir* as a genre within Norse prose literature largely stems from this impulse to consider these narratives as best read alongside similar episodes rather than in their original manuscript context.⁹ It is also crucial to note that even in the process of edition-making, the newly established genre has gained a thematic association: Icelanders are the unifying theme of the narratives, and, by extension, they came to be seen as the central characters of these tales and the figures that the *þættir* are ‘about’.

This stance exemplifies what came to be the approach to *þættir* favoured by the so-called ‘Icelandic School’ of Old Norse literary studies, as demonstrated by Finnur Jónsson’s decision to group the *þættir* by the region from which their central Icelandic characters originate, a trend reflected in later *Íslensk fornrit* editions.¹⁰ Finnur was also amongst a number of preeminent scholars of the early 20th century who sought to disassociate the *þættir*

(1937), 1-42; Hallvard Magerøy, *Sertekstproblemet i Ljósvetninga Saga*, Avhandlingar ut Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 2 (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1957). The tenets stated above, however, proved to have a critical longevity beyond that of the larger theory into which they were incorporated.

⁸ See Þórleifur Jónsson, ed., *Fjörutíu Íslendinga-þættir* (Reykjavík: Bókaverzlun Sigurðar Kristjánssonar, 1904). For a detailed account of the early editions of *þættir*, see Ármann Jakobsson, ‘The Life and Death of the Medieval Icelandic Short Story’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 112.3 (2013), 260-72.

⁹ This original corpus of forty *þættir* was extended to forty-two in 1935 by Guðni Jónsson, who divided one *þáttir* into two distinct narratives and included one additional tale in his edition, see Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Íslendinga þættir* (Reykjavík: Bókaverzlun Sigurðar Kristjánssonar, 1935). These two texts became the standard editions from which later work on the *þættir* was often conducted.

¹⁰ Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie* (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1894-1902), vol.2, 540-6.

from the texts in which they were preserved, and whose work did much to cement the *þættir*'s reputation as interpolations. With regard to *Morkinskinna*, he conceived, therefore, of an original, significantly shorter version of the text to which the *þættir*, themselves older compositions with independent textual histories, were added to create the agglomerate extant version.¹¹ This view is most fully expounded in Finnur's 1932 edition of *Morkinskinna*. In the introduction, he characterizes the manuscript as a strained amalgamation of a variety of sources: *Ved sammenføjningerne af de enkelte stykker er han ikke altid heldig og hang gør sig skyldig i gentagelser og forskellige ujævnbeder og han er ikke helt fri for modsigelser. Det er således klart, at han har haft række skrevne þættir og anden litteratur for sig.*¹² Furthermore, while he concedes that the *þættir* are *ejendommelige og morsomme* (curious and amusing), Finnur concludes that they fall outside the bounds of what he considers to be *Morkinskinna*'s primary purpose as a sequence of biographies of kings.¹³

Gustav Indrebø broadly concurs with Finnur's position on the *þættir* as interpolations but offers a more precise literary explanation as to why he feels the author of the 'original' *Morkinskinna*, a great artist in his opinion, would not have botched his work with thematically dissonant episodes. He argues for a discrepancy in characterisation between the heroic Haraldr harðráði of the king's royal biography, and what he views as the villainous role Haraldr takes on in the *þættir*.¹⁴ To rectify this, while preserving the artistic merit of the original *Morkinskinna*, Indrebø felt the *þættir* had to be later scribal insertions that could be removed to reveal the intentions of the text's author. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson further extends

¹¹ Ibid., 627.

¹² Finnur Jónsson, 'Indledning', xxvi. 'At the joints of the individual pieces, he (the *Morkinskinna* redactor) is not always successful and is guilty of repetitions and various irregularities and is not completely free from contradictions. It is thus clear that he has had an array of written *þættir* and other literature in front of him.'

¹³ Ibid., xl. For further analysis of Finnur's influential yet tendentious treatment of *Morkinskinna*, see Ármann Jakobsson, 'Den kluntede afskriver: Finnur Jónsson og *Morkinskinna*', *Opuscula*, 11 (2003), 289-306; and Magnús Fjalldal, 'Greatness and Limitations: The Scholarly Legacy of Finnur Jónsson', *Neophilologus*, 95.2 (2011), 329-39.

¹⁴ Gustav Indrebø, 'Harald Hardraade i *Morkinskinna*', in Johannes Brøndum-Nielsen, ed., *Festskrift til Finnur Jónsson 29. Maj. 1928* (Copenhagen: Levin and Munksgaard, 1928), 173-80, at 179.

the argument for a discrepancy between the manner in which *þættir* have been preserved and the manner in which they were intended to be read. He delineated sixteen *þættir* that he felt were independent narratives that might have existed prior to the compilation of *Morkinskinna* and which would have been unlikely to have been included in the original version of the text due to their irrelevance to its central substance.¹⁵ Bjarni departs from Finnur Jónsson's aesthetic critique of *Morkinskinna* to an extent, but, nevertheless, employs a method akin to that of the Russian Formalists by offering focused criticism of the internal mechanics of the text to reveal errors in composition, ranging from plot discrepancies to inelegant formulations.¹⁶

Finnur Jónsson, Indrebø and Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson all dealt with the *þættir* tangentially to their broader work on the *konungasögur*, and, indeed, came to the conclusion that the *þættir* were tangential to the texts upon which they were working. Despite a variety of dissimilarities between their views, their general theory, which one might term 'the *þáttir* as interpolation' has proved critically enduring. Ármann Jakobsson summarises the philosophy of Icelandic School scholars of the period as a conviction that the *þættir* are Icelandic and independent texts, which necessitates the dismissal of later compilations that contain the *þættir* as derivative.¹⁷ Ármann perhaps somewhat overstates the link between nationalistic sentiment amongst Icelandic scholars and their configuration of the *þættir*'s place within the wider literature. While a patriotic antiquarian desire to centre medieval Icelanders and their exploits is undeniable, this urge is also coupled with a genuine dissatisfaction on the part of late 19th and early 20th-century scholars, irrespective of

¹⁵ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Om de norske kongers sagaer* (Oslo: J. Dybwad, 1937), 154.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Life and Death of the Medieval Icelandic Short Story', 267.

nationality, with what was viewed as the aesthetic and structural limitations of the manuscripts in which the *þættir* are located.

This urge of Finnur Jónsson, Indrebø and Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson to excise the *þættir* from the texts in which they are preserved can perhaps be best attributed to the inherent aesthetic judgements present within their traditional palaeography and textual philology and the comparative brevity with which their literary analysis of the *þættir* and their surrounding context was conducted. Furthermore, despite the rigour with which these scholars edited and analysed saga material, their approaches combined social and textual structuralism in assuming Icelandic saga authors and redactors strove primarily for sober historical fidelity, and, by extension, that these medieval figures sought to produce a linear and systematic narrative history that mimicked modern editors' urge towards comprehensive compilation. This underlying predisposition proved hard to reconcile with the apparent intrusiveness of the *þættir* within the *konungasögur*, and can, to some extent, account for the comparative dismissiveness with which these episodes' positioning within larger texts was treated.

The demarcation of the *þættir* as autonomous literary creations was further extended by Wolfgang Lange who sought to instigate a reappraisal of this neglected branch of Norse prose, in an attempt to establish characteristics that could be used to define the *þættir* as a distinct genre.¹⁸ His 1957 article has been credited with heralding a substantial shift in the theoretical approach to how the *þættir* should be treated,¹⁹ and this is certainly demonstrated in Lange's significant broadening of the range of forms which might be considered *þættir*, as he proves willing to apply the term to prose forms ranging from digressional anecdotes to *kunstvollen kurzen Erzählung* (artful short stories).²⁰ Furthermore, in comparing the

¹⁸ Wolfgang Lange, 'Einige Bemerkungen zur altnordischen Novelle', *Altertum und Deutsche Literatur*, 88 (1957), 150-9.

¹⁹ Maack, *Þáttir and Saga*, 7.

²⁰ Wolfgang Lange, 'Einige Bemerkungen zur altnordischen Novelle', 158. By Lange's reckoning, this means there are over one hundred *þættir* in the Norse prose corpus.

relationship between saga and *þáttir* with that of novel and novella, Lange does much to present the shorter medieval prose form as worthy of consideration upon its literary merit. He does, nevertheless, still subscribe to the earlier notion that the *þættir*, when employed most artfully, become the construction material from which the larger sagas are synthesized, a point somewhat at odds with an attempt to consider shorter narratives on their distinct merits.²¹ Lange is also curt in his summation of the role of the *þættir* in the specific context of the *konungasögur*, referring to them as *kaum verarbeitete Stücke* (barely processed chunks).²²

2.2 Morphological and Semantic Approaches to the *Þættir*

Both Herbert Joseph and Anthony Faulkes continue in Lange's wake by contrasting the *þættir* with the sagas, and suggesting that *þættir* may have served as an important stage in the development of the saga form.²³ It was not until Joseph Harris published a pair of articles in 1972 and 1976, that the growing acceptance of the *þættir* as a consolidated genre was met with sustained analysis of their literary qualities. In these articles, Harris responds, in part, to Lars Lönnroth's lexicographical challenge to the use of the term *þáttir* as a denotation of genre, arguing that Lönnroth, while making a valid point about medieval usages of the term, cannot use this as evidence against the existence of broad literary types within Norse prose, nor as a case against the necessity and practicality of forming genre distinctions.²⁴ Harris does, however, go to some lengths to stress the problematic aspects of what he considers 'the genre problem'. This issue arises from the indistinctness of categorical groupings when

²¹ Ibid., 156.

²² Ibid., 156.

²³ See Herbert Joseph, 'The *Þáttir* and the Theory of Saga Origins', *Arkiv for nordisk filologi*, 87 (1972), 89-96; Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Two Icelandic Stories: Hreiðars þáttir and Orms þáttir*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series, vol. 4 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1967), 1-5.

²⁴ Joseph Harris, 'Genre and Narrative Structure in Some "Íslendinga Þættir"', *Scandinavian Studies*, 44.1 (1972), 1-27, at 21. For Lönnroth's broader critique of the usage of genre-related terms in relation to Norse prose, see 'The Concept of Genre in Saga Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, 47.4 (1975), 419-26.

dealing with vagary and variety in form in the extant corpus, and the gulf in the conception of genre between medieval author/scribe and the modern critic.²⁵

Harris' solution is to argue that the *þættir* can be vindicated as both credible literature on an individual level and a distinct prose genre as a collective on the grounds of 'common narrative structure', by producing a system of reiterated motifs and themes that best typify the shared traits of a range of *þættir* while providing room for an interplay of literary artistry.²⁶ Harris' approach is not only more detailed and incisive than previous scholarship but also innovative in its methodology and worth sustained consideration. Due to the difficulty of ascertaining exactly which texts can be classed as *þættir*, Harris does not apply his analysis to a complete corpus, but rather a specifically selected group of thirty-one *þættir* dealing with Icelanders abroad in the courts of Norwegian kings.²⁷ The basis of his approach to these texts is the formalist thought of Vladimir Propp, who divided Russian folktales along syntagmatic lines to create seven character types and thirty-one narrative functions which could be combined in a variety of ways to form any given tale.²⁸ Harris, however, acknowledges the rigidity of Propp's system and the substantial formal differences between fairy tale and *þáttir*: 'In the *Íslendinga Þættir* we are dealing not with folktales, a realm where scientific method is relatively at home and where the contribution of the individual teller to his tradition is probably relatively small, but with highly literary short stories where there is clearly a consciously artistic purpose, though it varies greatly from story to story.'²⁹ He tailors several of Propp's functions, therefore, into a looser structure that could be applied to all thirty one of

²⁵ Harris, 'Genre and Narrative Structure in Some "Íslendinga Þættir"', 22-6.

²⁶ Ibid., 27.

²⁷ Ibid., 2-3. It is of some note that twelve of these *þættir* are preserved within *Morkinskinna*, which also serves as their oldest extant attestation.

²⁸ See Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 25-66.

²⁹ Harris, 'Genre and Narrative Structure in Some "Íslendinga Þættir"', 9.

his examples: Introduction, Journey In, Alienation, Reconciliation, Journey Out, Conclusion.³⁰

Of these six stages, Alienation and Reconciliation are the most crucial, and the only functions that Harris believes to be present in all thirty-one of his examples. Harris conceives of these two motifs as the ‘outer form’ of the selected *þættir*, a narrative structure centred around an Icelander falling out of favour with their lord due to a slight or transgression, before regaining favour by the narrative’s conclusion, with the narrative description of the reconciliation process usually being more detailed than that of the alienation.³¹ This basic structure is complemented by the ‘inner form’ of the *þættir*, which Harris conceives of as a consistent set of themes throughout these texts or, more tentatively, an underlying ethos that unites them. Harris argues for ‘a limited range of generally humane and conciliatory themes’, noting the movement towards cheerful prosperity enjoyed by the *þáttir* hero in comparison to the more tragic trajectory that befalls heroic saga protagonists.³² Of the humanistic themes, which are said to predominate, friendship, gift-giving, generosity, hospitality, and wittiness are all highlighted as commonplace within the *þættir*.³³ While Harris does not go as far as to say that any Norse prose work that exhibits these themes or structures should be classified as a *þáttir*, he does suggest that with regard to his selected group, which contains many of the best-known short Norse prose episodes, this formulation unites his examples into an independent collection suitable for focused analysis.

Harris’ insightful analysis of themes within the *þættir* remains of vital importance in aiding any research conducted into these texts. Despite the innovativeness of this approach, elements of Harris’ theorising of the *þættir*’s narrative structure can be seen as refined

³⁰ Ibid., 7.

³¹ Ibid., 10-11.

³² Joseph Harris, ‘Theme and Genre in Some “Íslendinga Þættir”’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 48.1 (1976), 1-28, at 19, 23.

³³ Ibid., 15.

extensions of earlier arguments for the independence of the *þættir*. Harris rejects the importance of the diverse manuscript contexts from which these episodes were drawn, instead believing productive readings of these works are best achieved when they are excised, grouped, and thematically united, in the manner described above.³⁴ This view remains influential in current scholarship and, in the context of the present study of the literary role of the *þættir* in relation to the wider text of *Morkinskinna*, some of its tenets must be critiqued.

In the first place, the foundation of the argument upon Proppian morphology, albeit in a modified form, gives rise to a structure that cannot be universally applied to the interactions

between Icelanders and the kings they visit. Harris follows Propp in centring function VIII Villainy/VIIIa Lack and XIX Initial Misfortune or Lack Liquidated, which are reframed as the Alienation/Reconciliation dichotomy. Implicit to this schema, however, is the assumption that the simple folkloric binary of the Icelander as hero and the Norwegian king as antagonist is most productive when approaching the texts in question. Even an adherent to a similar brand of structuralism as Harris might argue that the *þættir* just as readily conform to the Proppian function pair XII The Hero is Tested, Interrogated, Attacked etc and XIII The Hero Reacts to the Actions of the Future Donor, which could be recast as a Challenge/Vindication structure that reflects the dialogic sparring so common to the *þættir*.³⁵

Regardless of which Proppian functions are selected, the reduction of the Icelander and king to stock characters diminishes the literary complexity implicit in the presentation of both roles. In the context of the *konungasögur*, which contain Harris' examples, kings are the central figures within the narrative and, with varying degrees of qualification, the heroes of their sagas. To assert that the kings fulfil a role that is purely auxiliary and malevolent can

³⁴ Ibid., 2-4. Harris' position on the *þættir* has broadly remained that they are most productively studied independently due to their various stylistic differences in comparison to their host texts. In more recent studies, however, Harris has partially conceded the necessity of considering some *þættir* within their wider manuscript context: see Joseph Harris and Thomas D. Hill, 'Gestr's "Prime Sign": Source and Signification in *Norna-Gests þáttir*', *Arkiv for nordisk filologi*, 104 (1989), 103-22.

³⁵ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 39-43.

only be supported if the *þættir* are wilfully considered outside of the context in which they are preserved. In contrast, this thesis will argue, at least in *Morkinskinna*'s case, that the balance of narrative centrality and agency between king and Icелander is finely balanced and sensitive to the wider characterisations of the figures involved. One can also take issue with Harris' application of the Alienation/Reconciliation model in several specific cases which do not seem to adhere to the structure as closely as he may contend. *Brands þáttir örva* is made use of as an exemplar, and yet the Alienation here must be taken as 'a given', as king and Icелander are yet to meet, with Harris attributing the inherent schism to Haraldr harðráði's jealousy regarding Brandr's reputation for generosity.³⁶ Yet an interpretation dependent on an implicit hostility between king and Icелander loses much of the sense of the central conceit of the *þáttir*: a genteel wisdom contest focused less on antagonism and appeasement and far more on the necessity for mutual respect and reciprocity between powerful men and the almost comic languidness with which Brandr overcomes the king's challenge (see 3.4). In this case, the rigidity of Harris' structural codification restricts the approaches by which the *þáttir* can be read, to the point of counter-intuitively rendering its central themes peripheral.

A similar effect can be observed in Harris' approach to scenes of 'parodied reconciliation', in which the expected narrative course is subverted or truncated in some manner.³⁷ With regard to *Halldórs þáttir Snorrasonar inn siðari*, Harris all but admits the incompatibility of the conclusion's overt lack of reconciliation with his proposed model, yet feels that the final scene, in which an enraged Halldórr threatens the king in his bed so that the latter will repay his debts, is ironic as 'a situation which might have brought about reconciliation in another story'.³⁸ The stark inversion of traditional interactions between kings and retainers in this scene is certainly worth noting, but to dismiss this encounter as parodic is

³⁶ Harris, 'Genre and Narrative Structure in Some "Íslendinga Þættir"', 11-2.

³⁷ Ibid., 18-9.

³⁸ Ibid., 18.

to ignore the lengths taken within the *þáttir* to demonstrate Halldórr's realisation of his incompatibility with *hirð* conventions and the Iclander's defence of his independence (see 3.1). The moment is not one of failed reconciliation as much as an aggressive declaration of autonomy that marks the cessation of loyal service: structurally the entire *þáttir* rises to this moment of permanent alienation and Harris' insistence on reshaping the episode to deal with themes of reconciliation, even only on a parodic level, lacks sensitivity to the idiosyncratic narrative structure this specific *þáttir* employs. Even amongst the self-selected group that Harris has chosen to analyse, too many exceptions and divergences from his proposed central structure exist for it to achieve the kind of holistic utility that he intended.³⁹

Heinrich Gimmmler's monograph on the *þættir* extends Harris' work and attempts to justify the genre as *eine durchaus eigenständige literarische Erscheinung*.⁴⁰ Here, however, the focus is specifically on the *þættir* within *Morkinskinna*. Gimmmler argues that a core consisting of dialogue is the genre-defining trait of the *þættir* and the feature which distinguishes them from the surrounding text. He retains the traditional conviction that the *þættir* are later interpolations into a more linear *Morkinskinna*, but his study explicates the difficulty in establishing exactly what constitutes a *þáttir* in a text replete with episodic digressions. Gimmmler's analysis centres around the production of two lists, the first of which is of the *þættir* proper: Gimmmler notes twelve instances in which short narratives can be categorically distinguished by their semi-independent textual status and Icelandic central characters.⁴¹ Also referenced, however, is a longer list of twenty eight *þættir- ähnliche*

³⁹ See Tommy Danielsson *Om den Isländska Släktsagans Uppbyggnad*, Skriftar utgivna af Literaturvetenskapliga institutionen vid Uppsala universitet 22 (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1986), 62-81. Danielsson argues for a large degree of individual variation between individual *þættir*, and forms three 'constellations' of king-subject relationships: alienation, conflict, and friendship. Danielsson's critique of Harris' work does not extend as far as an outright rejection of its structuralist foundation, however, and his conclusions can be seen as a focused extension of Harris' central argument.

⁴⁰ Heinrich Gimmmler, *Die Thættir der Morkinskinna: Ein Beitrag zur Überlieferungsproblematik und zur Typologie der altnordischen Kurzerzählung*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation (Frankfurt am Main, 1976), 140. 'An absolutely independent literary phenomenon'.

⁴¹ Ibid., 50-62. Gimmmler's twelve 'true' *þættir* are as follows: *Þorsteins þáttir Síðu-Hallssonar*,

(pseudo- *þættir*), which Gimmler argues as having the same thematic and structural qualities within *Morkinskinna* as the *þættir* do and were, therefore, probably also interpolated material inserted into the manuscript.⁴² Even if his general assertion that *þættir* prominently feature Icelanders is accepted, Gimmler's dichotomy remains somewhat arbitrary: there is no explanation, for instance, why *Arnórs þátr jarlaskálds* is not considered worthy of *þátr*-status proper, while *Brands þátr orva* is: both are brief, dialogue-driven tales about an Icelander's performance, whether skaldic or moral, for the benefit of monarchs. While it may not be the primary intention of his study, Gimmler, nevertheless, offers one of the first analyses of the *þættir* that considers the functions such episodes have in the context of their positioning in the text in which they are preserved.⁴³ These basic tenets have become vital to the field of 'compilation studies' that has developed out of the materialist philology of the 1980s, which has led to an increase in research in the last few decades of the *þættir in situ*, from which, in turn, the present study extends.⁴⁴

John Lindow relies on etymological evidence in charting the progression of the meaning of *þátr* from 'a strand in a rope', to 'part of a text' (be that as an episode or as an embedded complete narrative), to the extended sense pertaining to matters of genre that allowed independent short prose narratives to be referred to by the term.⁴⁵ This reconsideration of the term was undoubtedly important in challenging the increasingly uncritical manner in which 'þátr literature' was developing into a simple denotation of genre, in contrast to the rather more ambivalent manner in which the word is used within

Hreiðars þátr heimiska, Halldórs þátr Snorrasonar, Auðunar þátr vestfirzka, Brands þátr orva, Íslendinga þátr sögufróða, Þorvarðar þátr krákunefs, Sneglu-Halla þátr, Stúfs þátr blindi, Odds þátr Ófeigssonar, Ívars þátr Ingimundarsonar, and Gull Ásu-Þórðar þátr.

⁴² Ibid., 63-65.

⁴³ For a synthesis of Harris' and Gimmler's approaches that combines key features posited by both scholars, see Ásdis Egilsdóttir, 'Þættir: Einkenni og staða innan íslenskra miðaldabókmennta', Dissertation (Reykjavík, 1982).

⁴⁴ See Elizabeth Ashman Rowe and Joseph Harris, 'Short Prose Narrative (*þátr*)' in Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden: Blackwell Press, 2005), 462-78, at 466.

⁴⁵ John Lindow, 'Old Icelandic *þátr*: Early Usage and Semantic History', *Scripta Islandica*, 29 (1978), 3-44.

medieval literature. Carol Clover builds upon Lindow's scepticism regarding current usage to argue that 'the word originally meant, simply, 'part' (i.e. 'weavable part') and acquired its generic sense rather late in the development.'⁴⁶ In Clover's argument, the nature of the oral tradition meant that lengthy tales were broken down into easily communicable sections or *þættir*, which, while not possessing a narrative unity in their own right, were understood and enjoyed through 'the vast context of story', that is to say, the shifting nexus of performed tales beyond which the immanent version of any given extant saga hovered.⁴⁷ Only when the saga is codified and committed to writing does it resolve into a unified whole.

Clover's modification of the *þáttir* theory captures a distant and intuitive sense by which the term *þáttir* may have been understood by a medieval audience and is effective in accounting for the *Íslendingasögur*'s simultaneously episodic and organic structure. In prioritising the indistinct potential meaning the term *þáttir* may have held during the transition from an oral to literary culture of storytelling, however, Clover's model proves ineffective when considering extant instances where the *þættir* are placed in such obtrusive positions within manuscripts that it becomes unsatisfactory to excuse structural dissonance as the 'frayed edges' of storytelling. In cases such as *Morkinskinna*, it would be inadequate to consider the *þættir* as simply the least consolidated 'parts' of the narrative: their position, form and function suggest a compilation process in which the *þættir* are not the weakest bound fibres of the great rope of the compendia that contain them, but have a sophisticated relationship with the text which surrounds them (see 3.1, 4.5).

2.3 The Significance of the Textual Context of *Þættir*

Stefanie Würth offers one of the most significant arguments for the complex role of the *þættir* in their native context in her study *Elemente des Erzählens. Die þættir der*

⁴⁶ Carol Clover, 'The Long Prose Form', *Arkiv for nordisk filologi*, 101 (1986), 10-39, at 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

Flateyjarbók.⁴⁸ As its title suggests, Würth limits herself in this monograph to a study of the vast 14th -century manuscript *Flateyjarbók*, particularly those sections compiled by Jón Þórðarson, which are replete with a great number of episodic digressions, although she also stresses that whole sagas are used in this digressive manner within the manuscript.⁴⁹ This restriction of the number of *þættir* under consideration to those included by a single individual derives from one of the most radical elements of Würth's study: her rejection of previous considerations of the *þættir* as a unified genre and a consequent reappraisal of episodic digression as narrative structure, that is to say, a technique consciously employed by redactors within the larger scheme of compiling a manuscript.⁵⁰ This stands in opposition to the Icelandic School model of thinking of the *þáttir* as the excised short saga, and Würth makes a strong case for the necessity of reconsidering the *þættir* of *Flateyjarbók* in the manner in which they are deployed within the manuscript – as sections within the larger whole.⁵¹

Würth's argument is derived from detailed analysis of the structuring of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* and *Ólafs saga helga*, within which the compiler uses the rubric to denote fifty digressions as *þættir*: twenty-one in the former, nineteen in the latter, and ten forming a linking section between two sagas. The systematic codification of the sagas' internal structure is significant in suggesting that Jón Þórðarson rubricated his material using a consistent set of literary criteria: Würth is, therefore, able to argue that *þættir* are being deployed in a sophisticated manner in the section of the manuscript with which she is engaging. This, by extension, allows a strong case to be made for the redactor having an overarching artistic design behind intermeshing textual components, that is more complex than a simple desire

⁴⁸ Stefanie Würth, *Elemente des Erzählens. Die þættir der Flateyjarbók*, Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie 20 (Basel: Helbing and Lichtenhahn, 1991).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 30-35.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1-28.

⁵¹ Ibid., 35-38.

for the compendious accretion of loosely relevant narratives.⁵² Würth argues that the introduction of a *þáttr* signals the beginning of a new narrative arc that, while interrupting the continuity of the established saga and its central action, offers contextual embellishment that might be best thought of as ‘world-building’, before the digressive material is reintegrated into the central matter of the Norwegian kings whose exploits dominate the manuscript. This return to a linear chronology then allows for another *þáttr* to be initiated.⁵³ Würth finds explicit evidence for Jón Þórðarson adhering to a schema similar to that which she advocates through his use of an analogy employed in defence of the abundance of narratives that punctuate *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*, with the intrusive *þættir* excused as such:

Nú, þó at margar ræður ok frásagnir sé ritaðar í þessu máli, þær at eigi þykkja mjök til heyra sögu Ólafs Tryggvasonar, þá þarf þat eigi at undrast, því at svá sem rennandi vötn sem fljóta af ýmissum uppsprettum ok koma öll í einn stað niðr, til þeirrar sömu líkingar hafa þessar frásagnir af ýmisligu upphafi eitt endimark, at ryðja til atburða, sem Óláfr konungr Tryggvason verðr við staddr eðr menn hans.⁵⁴

‘Now, although many reports and tales may have been written in this account that do not particularly seem to concern the saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, it is not necessary to be alarmed, because just as running waters, which flow from various springs and all run down to one place, these tales from various sources have a single aim in the same way: to clear the way to the events in which King Óláfr Tryggvason or his men have participated.’

⁵² Rodney Alan Maack, Review of: Stefanie Würth, *Elemente des Erzählens. Die þættir der Flateyjarbók*, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 92.4 (1993), 601-3, at 603.

⁵³ Würth, *Elemente des Erzählens*, 52-4.

⁵⁴ Sigurðr Nordal, ed., *Flateyjarbók I* (Akraness: Flateyjarútgáfan, 1944), 420. Translations from Old Norse into English are my own. Where possible, a balance has been sought between idiomatic English and fidelity to the original Norse. Tense has sometimes been silently amended for consistency.

This metaphor of disparate rivers converging into a single sea is an apt one for understanding *Flateyjarbók* as a literary *mappa mundi* formed of interlocking narrative realms, and the presence of this explanation within the text does much to bolster Würth's argument for a consistent and premeditated structure within her studied sections, with the *þættir* being instrumental, rather than incidental, to the redactor's aims. In doing so Würth treats *Flateyjarbók* as a text capable of rewarding complex literary analysis on the macro-scale, and provides an interpretation of the term *þáttir* that harmonises with the word's original etymology as she envisions a compilation process akin to the conspicuous stray thread being rewoven into the rope proper.

Würth's approach is both convincing and innovative, but also demonstrates an awareness of its limitations: she does not aim, through her findings, to provide a general understanding of what a *þáttir* is, but rather a specific sense of how the term is deployed in the context of this manuscript. In fact, the present thesis derives from Würth's conviction that further study would be required into the idiosyncrasies of the relationships between individual texts and the *þættir* they contain to reach a more general understanding of the function of narrative episodes in Norse prose.⁵⁵ It is certainly the case that *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* are very different texts, with their disparity emblematic of the range of organisational principles visible within the *konungasögur* corpus and the substantial distance in time between the composition of the two texts: the former probably dating from the early 13th century, the latter from the late 14th century. But while Würth's argument for the sophistication of large compilations and the validity of defending the artistry of their construction will be adopted in this thesis, her schema for interpreting *Flateyjarbók* will be

⁵⁵ Würth, *Elemente des Erzählens*, 148.

demonstrated to not be transposable onto *Morkinskinna*, which is distinct in terms of narrative effect amongst the *konungasögur* (see 3.5, 4.1-4.5).

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe has conducted further research into the processes through which *Flateyjarbók* was compiled, and, in a study that ranges across the whole text, supports Würth's narrower conclusions, by arguing that the *þættir* are deployed in a specialised fashion in the narrative. Rowe offers a reading of the text in which its Icelandic compilers select and treat their material to offer an attractive set of politico-spiritual lessons for Óláfr Hákonarson, the young king of Norway and Denmark: an oblique and literary variant of the *specula principum* genre, with a vested interest in demonstrating the sagacity of practising generosity towards Icelanders.⁵⁶ Rowe notes Jón Þórðarson's use of the term *ævintýr*, the meanings of which can range across adventures, tales, and exempla, in relation to the *þættir*, but is also sensitive to his desire to justify the inclusion of seemingly extraneous narratives into his compilation, which accounts for the variety of sophisticated ways in which the *þættir* are selected, manipulated, rubricated, and inserted by the manuscripts editors: 'The *þættir* that Jón adds to the Óláfr-sagas thus occupy a position between the advice in *Konungs skuggsjá*, the *þættir* found in earlier kings' sagas and Christian exempla.'⁵⁷ Rowe also distinguishes the texts inserted into *Flateyjarbók* from those within *Morkinskinna* on the basis of the overt moral dimension of all the newly-introduced episodes in the later compendium, which often take the form of stories of pagan contact or salvation narratives, in comparison to the more secular concerns prioritised in the earlier *Morkinskinna*.⁵⁸

Of particular note within Rowe's monograph is the defence of the compilers as figures capable of being more structurally perceptive than an author, due to the principal concern of

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók: Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389*, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 15 (Gylling: Narayan Press, 2005), 54-61.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

an editor being the amalgamation and patterning of their material. Rowe extends this argument for the sophistication of medieval compilation to argue for the *þættir*, particularly those surrounding *Óláfs saga helga*, as being united by a nexus of interlinked themes: ‘the structural parallels and thematic development of the added *þættir* suggest that they were carefully chosen and perhaps reworked to convey their morals as emphatically as possible.’⁵⁹ Rowe’s sustained defence of a high level of editorial creativity in the organisation of episodes that, nevertheless, was coherent within the overarching aims of the production of a large compilation, will be adopted in the ensuing discussion of *Morkinskinna*.

Of further note in the discussion of compilation-focused criticism of *Flateyjarbók* is Siân Grønlie’s treatment on elements of the text, which makes some crucial emendations to the previous work of Würth and Rowe. Rather than arguing for the *þættir* being complementary to the central narrative’s themes and aims, Grønlie instead suggests that inserted episodes form a reflexive dialogue that allows the action and characterisation of the sagas they accompany to be interrogated and recast.⁶⁰ To exemplify this dynamic, Grønlie selects *Rögnvalds þáttir ok Rauðs* and its relationship to the saga within which it is found, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. In particular, the *þáttir* offers a response to the reputation for violent conversions associated with Óláfr, who frequently relies on gruesome methods of execution to deal with recalcitrant heathens within the wider tradition of his Christianisation of Norway. In *Rögnvalds þáttir*, however, the clash of pagan subject and Christian king ends in discussion rather than killing and the second half of the *þáttir* is essentially comic in its depiction of the combustion of a hapless wooden avatar of Þórr, which conforms to the sub-genre of idol parody ‘that emphasizes the absurdity rather than the dangers of paganism’.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., 89.

⁶⁰ Siân Grønlie, ‘Þáttir and Saga: The Long and the Short of Óláfr Tryggvason’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 9 (2013), 19-36, at 20.

⁶¹ Ibid., 24.

Grønlie acknowledges that, in isolation, the *þáttir* demonstrates the importance of confession to the conversion process, but also argues that the narrative has a more complex sense when considered in its context within *Flateyjarbók*, where it calls into question the ‘efficacy of physical strength and competition in bringing about conversion’, utilising the playfulness of its self-conscious fictionality as a challenge to the accepted themes of the central saga narrative to which it is attached.⁶² Grønlie conceives of this as an attempt to offer the sophisticated readers of the manuscript multiple interpretations of the received past, spanning genres and ethical frameworks to form a multi-faceted text constantly in conversation with itself (see 4.5).⁶³ Grønlie makes an important emendation to the studies of Würth and Rowe, by offering a reading of the *þættir*’s relationships to the sagas that contain them, which does not rely on a harmonising of style and ethos. The possibility that redactors made use of the *þættir* to offer dissonant commentary upon larger narratives, of which such episodes form a constituent part, will be explored with regard to *Morkinskinna* in this thesis, especially the concept that the accepted depiction of a monarch’s reign could be ‘revisited and recast’ (see 3.6). Würth’s proviso, that the manner in which such techniques are employed is dependent upon the text in question will also remain under consideration, as will the need, consequently, to reconfigure analyses of the effects and functions of *þættir* to best fit the structuring of *Morkinskinna*.

The integration of analyses of *þættir* into the wider critical discussion of *Morkinskinna* has also occurred, though arguably on a more limited scale than the body of scholarship devoted to *Flateyjarbók*. This is somewhat surprising considering the high concentration of *þættir* and other episodic material within *Morkinskinna*, itself a comparatively short compilation of *konungasögur*, both in terms of narrative length and the

⁶² Ibid., 30, 33.

⁶³ Ibid., 33.

span of the period covered. As Theodore Andersson notes, the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* are critical to the manner in which it has been received:

‘One of the most interesting features of *Morkinskinna* is that roughly 20-25 percent of the text consists of interlarded stories in which the most common pattern transports a notable Icelfander to the Norwegian court and pits him against the king in some trial of character or intelligence. This part of the text is, therefore, as much about Icelfanders as it is about Norwegian kings.’⁶⁴

Andersson does not undertake a more systematic investigation of the form of the *þættir* but briefly alludes to the function of Icelandic *þættir* characters within *Morkinskinna*: ‘They control not the events themselves but the discourse about the events, the tone of the story. That is no trivial function because the words are the story; without the words there would be no story.’⁶⁵ A comprehensive investigation of the relationship between the intrusion of characters in the *þættir* and sudden changes in narrative mode, only sketched by Andersson here, forms a central component of Chapter 3 of this thesis, which undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the narrative discourse of the *þættir* in relation to the wider text of *Morkinskinna*.

Increasing attention to *Morkinskinna*’s unusual structure, such as that conducted by Andersson, has led to more specific research into *Morkinskinna*, particularly with regard to its structures and themes; in relation to the *þættir*, this analysis has been carried out most thoroughly by Ármann Jakobsson. Ármann has spent over seventeen years crafting a critical position in relation to the manuscript that refutes previous dismissals of the text’s formlessness; he instead contends that it is a work of sustained sophistication by a figure with

⁶⁴ Theodore Andersson, ‘The King of Iceland’, *Speculum*, 74.4 (1999), 923-34, at 926.

⁶⁵ Theodore Andersson, *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings (1130-1265): An Introduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 55.

a unique compilation methodology amongst *konungasögur* redactors.⁶⁶ Ármann has published a large array of articles and monographs, in a variety of languages, on a range of topics in relation to *Morkinskinna* and, as one might expect, his approach to the manuscript has evolved and expanded throughout this extensive period of publication. A central set of ideas are, nevertheless, observable, which will be summarised below in an attempt to encapsulate Ármann's nuanced approach to the text.

Ármann begins his analysis by arguing for the inclusion of the *þættir* as an integral part of the ingenuity of a single creative redactor who compiled *Morkinskinna* c.1220, an argument comparable with Würth, Rowe, and Grønlie's treatments of *Flateyjarbók*.⁶⁷ While Ármann admits that this conclusion is partly based upon supposition, he sees the opportunity, in the space afforded by a lack of critical consensus surrounding the text's transmission, to make the case for ingenious organisation of seemingly disparate elements of the text by a redactor whose structural aesthetics, while unconventional, are both apparent and consistent. In Ármann's approach, the central principle of *Morkinskinna*'s aesthetic is that of amplification, a compositional effect within which the *þættir* figure centrally. The redactor does not simply relate historical events or portray one-dimensional historical figures; rather the *þættir* are employed to embellish the depiction of period or ruler with contextualising narratives that offer a multi-faceted representation of Norwegian courts: each additional episode transforms a portrait of a king into a diptych, then a triptych, and so on to create a rich gallery of tales that comprehensively illustrate a motif.⁶⁸ In this manner, a web-like structure of interconnected narratives is built up within the text. Ármann compares *Morkinskinna* to 'a patchwork quilt. Such quilts are works of art in themselves but they

⁶⁶ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging: Morkinskinna and Icelandic Identity, c. 1220*, The Viking Collection 22 (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2014), 68-70.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 35-70.

⁶⁸ Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Amplified Saga: Structural Disunity in *Morkinskinna*', *Medium Aevum*, 70 (2001), 29-46, at 36-39.

consist of separable units... The text lacks organic unity and has no obvious singular narrative thread. On the other hand, no material can be regarded as extraneous'.⁶⁹ He then extends this point to argue that the redactor provides a key to his compilation method in *Hreiðars þáttir*, in which the eponymous foolish Icелander circles around King Magnús to best get a sense of the king's magnificence. Ármann equates Hreiðarr's progress around the king with that of *Morkinskinna*'s redactor around the period of history that is narrated with the role the *þættir* fulfil in offering unexpected or otherwise unavailable perspectives upon the kings under inspection.⁷⁰ The linear progress of historical chronology, to which *Morkinskinna* adheres, is accompanied, on a literary level, by a series of circular structures around each king that embellish their characterisations and those of their followers.

Ármann does not limit himself to a macro-structural analysis of the *þættir*, however, but also demonstrates ways in which the internal details of individual episodes contribute to the sophistication of the wider text. The centrality of dialogue to many of these episodes allows them to function as dramatized renditions of a moment in history, allowing the redactor not only to deliver accounts of the actions of kings but also to imagine the performances of rulers and retainers during these events and to fashion public personas and three-dimensional characterisations for central figures that exceed the simple chronicling of the past.⁷¹ Ármann further notes that the augmentation of the narrative with additional *þættir* provides information to the reader, who is privy to the whole encircling structure, that characters, who see only one perspective, are incapable of accessing, thus creating dramatic ironies within the text, which further enhance its sophistication.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 108.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 109-112.

⁷¹ Ibid., 120-28. See also Ármann Jakobsson, 'Textreferenzen in der *Morkinskinna*: Geschichten über Dichtung und Geschichten', *Skandinavistik*, 37 (2007), 118-30.

⁷² Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 128-32.

While Ármann often focuses on close readings of individual *þættir* and then extrapolates to suggest their application to *Morkinskinna* as a whole, his analyses are sufficiently comprehensive for his broader approach to the *þættir* as a collective to become apparent. Ármann sees the *þættir* as an essential element of the narrative structure of *Morkinskinna* – a unified text whose compositional elements are only meaningfully discussed in relation to one another. The fundamental tenet, that the *þættir* are inserted in their particular form and position in accordance with the artistic aims of a compiler, is of vital importance to the present thesis. Furthermore, Ármann’s methodology of intermingling the close inspection of a single *þáttir* with a broad survey of *Morkinskinna*’s structure is particularly well suited to dealing with a text concerned with matters as great as Scandinavian international relations and as trivial as interpersonal relationships between two Icelandic poets; a similar effort to suggest links between the minor and peripheral and the essential and overarching will also be employed in the thesis.

Most crucially, perhaps, Ármann has done a great deal to vindicate *Morkinskinna* as a text capable of supporting serious literary inquiry and which cannot be dismissed as a thoughtless assortment of loosely connected incidents. However, this urging to consider the artistry of the manuscript’s compilation, should not be seen as the concluding word on the techniques employed within the text, nor should Ármann’s model of encircling amplification be considered the only method by which the interplay between *Morkinskinna* and its *þættir* can be understood. No detailed challenge to Ármann’s conclusions will be offered at this juncture; this is due to Chapter 3 providing an original interpretation of the *þættir*’s roles within *Morkinskinna*. This reconsideration of the text will be supported through the qualification and amendment of some of Ármann’s above arguments, a process that constitutes a sustained engagement with his research while also offering a contrasting

interpretation of the text that seeks to expand the manner in which *Morkinskinna* is understood.

3 The Narrative Structure of *Morkinskinna*

To discuss *Morkinskinna* and its constituent *þættir* productively, it is necessary to construct a theoretical framework that reflects the unusual narrative structure of the text. This chapter will offer an approach that considers *Morkinskinna* outside of conventional expectations of linear storytelling in medieval narrative history but, nevertheless, as a text replete with structural ingenuity. In general terms, this chapter will aim to offer an original theoretical model by which the complex interrelation of seemingly discordant narrative material can be understood as central to the literary effect of the wider text. Heterogeneity of source and style renders *Morkinskinna* a *bricolage* and its redactor a highly capable *bricoleur*, who makes imaginative use of the ‘multiple and at the same time limited’ narrative materials they have at hand to serve their original ends.¹ *Morkinskinna* is an unusual example of a *bricolage* in not integrating its constituent elements but capitalising on their disintegration to innovatively construct Norse narrative history.² The fragmented quality of the text stands at the core of its poetics, and in this chapter, it will be argued that the

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans., Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1977), 7. The original critical definition of *bricolage* was formulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss as a term by which to characterise mythological thought as being composed of available pre-existing fragments that are freely adapted in the creation of a new unity; *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 17.

² Jacques Derrida considers all author figures as *bricoleurs* and suggests that Lévi-Strauss’ engineer, who in opposition to the *bricoleur* constructs only that which befits the material at hand, is himself a mythic figure; ‘Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, in *Writing and Difference*, trans., Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 278-94, at 288-9. Even within this revised framework, however, it is possible to discuss the different degrees to which the state of *bricolage* is observable in various texts: *Morkinskinna*’s utilisation of its composite construction is more pronounced than that of many other *konungasögur* compilations (see 4).

disruptive effect of the *þættir* upon the *konungasögur* that surround them reflects the fractious state of Norwegian history in the period the text dramatizes.

In keeping with the conclusions of scholarship by Würth, Grønlie and Ármann Jakobsson (see 2.3), it is worth stating at the outset of this chapter that my analysis of patterns in the function of *þættir* in *Morkinskinna* will not be overextended to the point that the *þættir* are grouped and homogenised into a distinct genre within the wider Norse corpus. The *þættir* are best understood *in situ*, positioned within the wider complex sense of the texts in which they are located. While Chapter 4 will draw comparisons and contrasts between the narrative structure of *Morkinskinna* and those of other *konungasögur*, the model that will be constructed below must have its applicability to other texts beyond *Morkinskinna* tested on an individual basis. It does not provide a general framework for understanding the presence of *þættir* in any and all narrative contexts.

3.1 The Narrative Integrity of *Morkinskinna*

This chapter develops Ármann Jakobsson's crucial contention that the *þættir* are part of the fundamental narrative structure of *Morkinskinna*, rather than a distinct prose form interpolated semi-randomly into the pre-existing *konungasögur* (see 2.3). Ármann's arguments are comprehensive and relevant, but an example will be offered here that demonstrates that the *þættir* function in sophisticated synthesis with one another and embellish the wider scope of the narrative. This demonstration of the sustained interrelation of various elements of the narrative justifies the consideration that *Morkinskinna* possesses intricate organisational principles. This is a necessary first step in facilitating a discussion – addressed later in this chapter – of the disruptive function of the *þættir* within the text as a matter of narrative effect, rather than being symptomatic of a botched compilation process.

Halldórs þáttir Snorrasonar narrates the degeneration of Halldórr Snorrason's relationship with Haraldr harðráði.³ Halldórr becomes disenchanted with service within the *hirð* throughout the *þáttir*, with his dissatisfaction forcing increasingly fraught confrontations with Haraldr over matters ranging from drinking etiquette, the debasement of his pay in silver, and the course the king's ship should chart.⁴ The *þáttir* climaxes with Halldórr threatening Haraldr with an axe after breaking into the king's bedchambers at night, before fleeing from Norway after extracting the promised payment from the king in the form of a gold ring. Halldórr remains in Iceland for the rest of his life, ignoring Haraldr's suspiciously genial entreaties for him to return, although he does send the ageing king some fox furs to warm his bed, which could be interpreted as apt compensation for previously disturbing the king in his chambers. The *þáttir*, which concludes shortly thereafter with Halldórr's death, would seem to form a nuclear entity within the narrative that can be delineated from the surrounding royal biography of Haraldr harðráði through Halldórr's central narrative presence. In this interpretation the *þáttir* is a digression, a diminutive saga about an Iclander inserted at best for its explicatory relevance in exemplifying Haraldr's cantankerous nature or, less charitably, as a narrative simply concerning Haraldr that was known to the redactor and, therefore, functions as part of an attempt to inflate the account of the king's reign through the inclusion of broadly relevant tales.

Yet while *Halldórs þáttir Snorrasonar* may be the section of the text in which Halldórr's characterisation is rendered in the greatest detail, the nature of the fraught dispute

³ It is of note that the word *þáttir* is not used in the headings of any of *Morkinskinna*'s episodes; as such, which portions of the text have previously been denoted as *þættir* is ultimately based on the rubrication of such narratives in later manuscripts, or the titles given to them in editions and critical studies, see Faulkes, *Two Icelandic Stories*, 1. Many of the episodes later designated as *þættir* are preserved in *Morkinskinna* in their earliest extant form, alongside stories that, while highly similar in function within the manuscript, have not been denoted as *þættir* or argued to have an independent existence outside *Morkinskinna*'s transmission history. The adoption of the titles of these narratives is a matter of convenience for a modern reader rather than a reflection of how these narratives are designated in *Morkinskinna*.

⁴ Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds, *Morkinskinna I*, Íslensk fornrit 23 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2011), 178-87. Hereafter referred to as *Morkinskinna I*.

between king and Icelander has repercussions in both preceding and succeeding scenes within *Morkinskinna*.⁵ During the besieging of a city at the Byzantine Emperor's request, Halldórr's participation and unabashed animosity towards his lord are specifically referred to when Haraldr commands Halldórr to carry a battle-standard after the Icelander has received a blow to the face: *Þat er sagn manna at þannug hefði orð farit með þeim Norðbrikt ok Halldóri Snorrasyni, þá er hann mælti at Halldórr skyldi bera merkit fyrir í borgina, at hann svaraði í fyrstu: 'Beri herr merki fyrir þér rögum!'*⁶ Later in Haraldr's reign, some time after the flight of Halldórr by the internal logic of the narrative, another *þáttr* recounts an unnamed young Icelandic storyteller entering the king's court. He swiftly gains popularity in the *hirð* for his lively tales but becomes morose when his cache of stories runs low, leaving only his account of Haraldr harðráði's youthful adventures abroad. The Icelander assumes he will not be able to tell this tale satisfactorily due to the risk of mis-recounting the exploits of the presiding king, which the young storyteller has not witnessed himself. Haraldr commands him to do so regardless and the Icelander offers an extensive version of the king's adventures that stretches over thirteen days during the feasting at Yule. The surprised king asks as to the source of such information, to which the Icelander responds: *'Þat var vanði minn út á landinu at ek fór hvert sumar til þings, ok namk hvert sumar af sǫgunni nǫkkvat at Halldóri Snorrasyni.'*⁷

While Halldórr is a central figure only in the *þáttr* concerning his disillusionment and flight, his impact on the text also offers a wider arc of character development. From acting as a loyal if irritable retainer, he moves through a period of increasing rebelliousness and aggression until a schism with his king becomes inevitable and, finally, Haraldr and Halldórr

⁵ Halldórr is not atypical within *Morkinskinna* in being afforded a supporting storyline that runs alongside the central biographies of kings: Einar þambarskelfir and Óttarr birtingr both have recurring and shifting roles that span the reigns of several monarchs.

⁶ *Morkinskinna I*, 105. 'There is a popular tale, that words were exchanged between Norðbrikt and Halldórr Snorrason, when Nordbrikt said that Halldórr should carry the banner forward into the town and he instantly replied, 'Have fiends carry the standard before you, coward!'

⁷ *Morkinskinna I*, 236. 'It was my habit out in Iceland that I went every summer to the assembly, and every summer I learned some of the story from Halldórr Snorrason.'

are granted a qualified proxy reconciliation in which Halldórr becomes a cultural custodian of Haraldr's legacy in Iceland through his faithful transmission of the king's exploits to the Icelandic populace, as emblematised by the account of the storyteller.⁸ Halldórr's tales of adventure with the king inspire an Icelander of the younger generation to enter the king's *hirð*, creating a renewable symbiotic relationship between kings and Icelanders (see 7.1.4), with Haraldr's wealth being exported back to Iceland but also with the exploits of the king being celebrated beyond his base of power. No matter how Haraldr's reputation fares in Norway, a separate commemorative narrative is now preserved in Iceland. The overall effect of Halldórr's characterisation within *Morkinskinna* is intricate and has significant implications for the depiction of Haraldr harðráði's reign and legacy, which suggests an editorial process that extends far beyond the simple chronological assimilation of source material or the haphazard agglomeration of relevant tales.

While few characters introduced in *þættir* have such sustained presences within *Morkinskinna* as Halldórr, even short *þættir* significantly influence the wider narratives in which they are placed. A consideration of the specific utility of any given *þáttir* in reshaping the narrative history of which it forms a constituent part is a productive method of reading *Morkinskinna* and a central principle of the present thesis. While it is the case that some *þættir* are better understood in their current position than others, the potential uncertainty surrounding the relevance of some episodes should not consign the text as a whole to a reputation of formlessness, any more than the presence of a few obscure metaphors should disqualify a modern novel from literary status. Rather, ambiguity should encourage the development of new interpretative frameworks, which better account for the presence of

⁸ Ármann Jakobsson discusses the meta-fictional role of this final episode, in that it demonstrates an Icelandic redactor, experienced concerning the Norwegian court, recounting a narrative of an Icelander telling a story about the Norwegian court, which the reader of *Morkinskinna* has had recounted to them earlier in the manuscript, see *A Sense of Belonging*, 295-7. The concept that the *Morkinskinna* redactor saw themselves as an extension of this storytelling tradition further demonstrates the sophistication of the interweaving of these scenes.

discordant narrative structures. In the context of this thesis, there will be an explicit focus on the function of *þættir* that have proved more resistant to critical interpretation, to demonstrate that a revised theoretical model can better explicate the function of such sequences within *Morkinskinna*.

An effective critical approach to the interrelation of the *þættir* and the wider text of *Morkinskinna*, as distinct from other uses of the term *þáttir* (see 2.2), is polysystem theory as formulated by Itamar Even-Zohar and which both Massimiliano Bampi and Siân Grønlie have applied productively in discussing genre in an Old Norse context.⁹ A polysystemic model stresses that multiple systems within a field of study, be they texts, analytic models, or genres, are not only diachronic but also better understood through their interrelatedness to each other.¹⁰ Systems and their constituent elements are exposed to a struggle for canonicity through which, over time, particular texts and classification systems are rendered central while others are marginalised.¹¹ The *þættir* form a sub-set of the wider corpus of Old Norse prose but the relationship of the smaller system to the larger is not static but rather in constant flux. The *þættir* could feasibly have operated as a distinct set of individual tales in an oral or literary tradition prior to the thirteenth century, just as they once again came to be disassembled by nineteenth and twentieth-century editors into individual literary works (see 2.1). In the specific context of the text of *Morkinskinna*, however, the episodes that have later come to be denoted as *þættir* operate as a composite element of the larger sagas within which they are situated and as features that have a substantial bearing on the structure of the wider text. This integration of saga and *þáttir* as represented in *Morkinskinna* may well have proved non-normative, by not aligning with literary trends in both a medieval and modern context.

⁹ Massimiliano Bampi, 'The Development of the *Fornaldarsögur* as a Genre: A Polysystemic Approach', in Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, eds, *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development* (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), 185-96, at 190; Siân Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), 32-6.

¹⁰ Itamar Even-Zohar, 'Polysystem Theory', *Poetics Today*, 11.1 (1990), 9-26, at 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

This should not result in the dismissal of observable literary techniques in the text, however, when the alternative is the prescriptive pan-temporal model of the *þættir* as a distinct genre. A practical benefit to reading the *þættir* in relation to *Morkinskinna* as a whole is that these sequences can be demonstrated to take on further significance when considered in terms of the function they fulfil, or the effect they engender, within the larger work which contains them. The following sections of this chapter evaluate the applicability of different models of the relationship between a *þáttir* and the surrounding text of the saga.

3.2 The Case against Amplification

Ármann Jakobsson, in his research on *Morkinskinna*'s structure, has sought to justify the *þættir*'s presence as part of a unique artistry that is incompatible with the Aristotelian ethos of narrative poetics that so strongly influenced Western critical sensibilities into the 20th century.¹² Yet to agree with Ármann that the text has an idiosyncratic structure need not extend to concordance on the manner in which that structure is manifested. An admission of narrative complexity, while fundamental to literary analysis of *Morkinskinna*, only provides the foundation from which literary criticism of the text can arise. Analysis may, from this initial point, diverge as to the proposed forms in which narrative structure is manifested.

Ármann argues that to remove the *þættir* would not reveal an underlying original text around which further material has been gathered: 'they do not augment the core of *Morkinskinna*: they *are* the core of the saga.'¹³ By the logic of this reading, the *þættir*, and the text's structure more generally, are understood to produce the effect of amplification, by which central themes are embellished by repeated reiterations in different narrative

¹² Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 77-92; 'The Amplified Saga', 37-8.

¹³ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 78.

contexts.¹⁴ Ármann conceives of each monarch as a central nucleus, encircled by the *þættir*, which allow the king to be viewed from a variety of angles and, therefore, augment an understanding of their characters while offering a variety of perspectives on the group who most often act as the kings' external viewers – the Icelanders who seek their company.¹⁵ As a series of concentric circles through which linear historical time is parsed, *Morkinskinna* achieves a narrative harmony through a form of orbital proximity between its various strands and episodes, all unified by the gravity of the stellar presence of the Norwegian kings (see 2.3).

As a response to prior critical dismissals of the text, Ármann's work is staunch in arguing for a holistic unity to the text's structure and seeks to vindicate its artistry through demonstrations of seamless integration of its various elements. A defence of the sophistication of *Morkinskinna* does not, however, demand an argument for complete consonance between different elements of the narrative. Under inspection, Ármann's vision of the *þættir* as encircling kings and amplifying their characterisations in a process he describes as 'regular augmentation', cannot fully account for the structure and style of *Morkinskinna*.¹⁶ In the first place, different kings do not have the same numbers of *þættir* associated with their reigns, nor are all the kings afforded narratives of similar lengths or complexities. Haraldr harðráði appears in a great many *þættir* and his royal biography is extensive and convoluted, encompassing elements of the fantastic in his youth, a range of depictions of the mature king's temperament within his reign, and even verging on tragedy in his hubristic demise during his invasion of England (see 7.1).

¹⁴ See Jane Baltzell, 'Rhetorical "Amplification" and "Abbreviation" and the Structure of Medieval Narrative', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 2 (1967), 32-9; Verne R. Kennedy, 'Amplification: A Central Theme in Late Medieval Rhetoric', *Central States Speech Journal*, 19.3 (1968), 214-8.

¹⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 109-12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 103

In contrast, Haraldr's son, Óláfr kyrri, is afforded a short saga which compares his achievements with those of his father, despite the prosperity of Óláfr's twenty-six-year reign. Only one *þáttr* features Óláfr, which is particularly jarring in relation to the saga in which it is embedded (see 6.2). Between these two extremes exist a variety of techniques for characterising the many kings presented in the narrative and structures by which their personalities and exploits can be best represented. There is little homogeneity in the presentations of the kings within *Morkinskinna* and while the second section of this thesis divides the depicted kings into two broad groups, each king will be given a distinct consideration as will the range of ways in which their sagas are constructed. A model which contends that monarchs' portrayals are amplified by the *þættir* associated with them, and which extends this to argue for the text as comprising circular systems – social, hierarchical, and structural – must also account for why some kings' circles are so thinly sketched in comparison to the detailed drafting of the reigns of their predecessors or successors.

Furthermore, the applicability of amplification as a general principle by which to understand *Morkinskinna*'s structure may also be challenged. Ármann conceives of the text as a single great project to embellish the synoptic account of the relevant period in *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum*.¹⁷ This may well be the case, and there is no need to challenge the fundamental contention that, with regard to the additions, 'no material can be regarded as extraneous – all the tales and other anecdotes are of equal importance'.¹⁸ The simple mechanical process of expanding upon source material does not, however, necessarily constitute the rhetorical effect of *auxesis/amplificatio*. As a classical rhetorical device, *amplificatio* is a process of consistent emotional magnification of the central tenets of an argument to increase not just the size, but also the perceived power and greatness of the

¹⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

matter being expounded upon.¹⁹ Amplification was viewed as having the power to violently stir emotions that might have been otherwise only mildly roused by a less embellished performance and, in a structural sense, functioned as a form of thematic hyperbole, by which the initially insignificant became conspicuous through pointed repetition.²⁰

As a well-known literary example of the process of amplification, the influence of Edmund Spenser's poetry upon the work of John Milton can briefly be considered.²¹ Milton's depictions of the pre- and post-lapsarian Garden of Eden in *Paradise Lost* have been considered as amplifications of descriptions of the Garden of Prosperina and the Garden of Adonis in *The Faerie Queene*.²² This is not a matter, however, of Milton simply devoting more verses to recounting the diversity of Eden's foliage. The 'mythic formulations' of Spenser's attractive landscapes are developed by Milton into a complex psychological and symbolic backdrop which his characters act upon and interact with, but which remains, at its core, an arresting description of a fantastic and verdant biome.²³ Milton's amplification is, therefore, a successful attempt to embellish a Spenserian nucleus with complementary and superior artistry that dramatically expands the remit of its source without contravening its central tenets.

A similar effect cannot, however, be observed throughout *Morkinskinna*. Individual moments of amplification can be suggested but these do not amount to an overarching effect within the text and do not form a significant challenge to the central critique of previous scholars, namely that *Morkinskinna* appears a disparate congeries of interrupted narratives

¹⁹ Lucia Calboli Montefusco, 'Stylistic and Argumentative Function of Rhetorical *Amplificatio*', *Hermes*, 132.1 (2004), 69-81.

²⁰ Alfons Weische, 'Rhetorik und Philosophie in der Antike: *Amplificatio* – *dilatatio* und die stoische Forderung der *brevitas*', in Helmut Schanze and Josef Kopperschmidt, eds, *Rhetorik und Philosophie* (Munich: W. Fink, 1989), 23-33.

²¹ See Michelle O'Callaghan, 'Spenser's Literary Influence', in Richard A. McCabe, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 664-83.

²² Linda Davis Kyle, 'Milton's Eden: Cyclical Amplification of Spenser's Gardens', *Studies in English Literature*, 55.1 (1978), 1-14.

²³ *Ibid.*, 13.

and intrusive shorter tales (see 2.1). While such comments were intended as dismissals of the text's literary merit, they gesture towards one of its central traits: *Morkinskinna* is a text typified by reconfigurations of elite society that often challenge, rather than amplify, established themes within the royal biography. Perhaps the best example is the independent interests promoted by characters introduced in *þættir*: these are not amplifications of the values of the presiding kings but rather disruptive to these rulers' pursual of their goals (see 3.4).

Nor can the disrupted status of the narrative structure of *Morkinskinna* be attributed solely to the presence of *þættir* within the text, as the effect is general and macro-structural throughout the text. The re-appearance of Haraldr harðráði in Norway, for instance, undermines the political stability of the reign of Magnús inn góði, just as the insertion of the lengthy retrospective account of Haraldr's youthful adventures severs the literary account of Magnús's exploits.²⁴ The inserted material concerning the nature of Haraldr's exploits in the east does not amplify *Magnús saga*, although it does enlarge it. Rather, as the kings' co-rule begins, a disruptive parallel between the actions and traits associated with both kings is produced, which stunts the progress of the account of both kings' reigns and demands the comparison of oppositional styles of kingship (see 7.1.2). For amplification to account for the structure of *Morkinskinna*, it would be necessary to suggest an inert thematic core to which further narrative material can be related: to employ Ármann's metaphor, Hreiðarr's encircling of Magnús góði offers different perspectives but does not change our view of the king's appearance. Many narrative structures within *Morkinskinna* do not have this neutral relationship with pre-established themes and characterisations but instead challenge or destabilise the progress of narrative history through a range of techniques described later in this chapter (see 3.4-3.6). The present thesis argues that no cluster of central themes can be

²⁴ *Morkinskinna* I, 82-4.

established within the text that is not disrupted by contrasting themes introduced elsewhere, particularly in the relation between the *þættir* and surrounding text. Expansion of the text comes at the expense of narrative dissonance and a model for understanding the structure of *Morkinskinna* must accommodate this quality.

3.3 The Case against Interlacing

It may seem reasonable to suggest that a suitable replacement for amplification, as a unifying technique employed throughout *Morkinskinna*, would instead be an interlaced structure. In such a model, a united story splits into distinct narratives that run parallel to one another, interrupting each other in turn as narrative focus shifts between characters and locales, before the accounts of disparate figures and events recoalesce at the text's conclusion. To accept interlace as a framework for *Morkinskinna* is to suggest that this sequence of *konungasögur* shares structural similarities with another genre of thirteenth-century literature: the Old French prose romances of which the prose *Lancelot* best demonstrates a sophisticated interlace effect.²⁵ In the case of this example, and sections such as the *Lancelot propre* and *Queste del Saint Graal* in particular, the adventures of several knights of the Round Table are simultaneously narrated as their movements diverge and converge, with the exploits of one knight being suspended to recount the escapades of his counterpart elsewhere. Critics have commented on the aesthetic unity of form and ideology in the narrative:

‘It seems clear that the writer chose to use the cadre of interlaced romance to symbolize what seemed for him to be the great collective adventure of humanity, the search for God. Summing up humanity in a few typical personality types, he interwove their biographies, presenting each separately, but for purposes of instructive

²⁵ See Frank Brandsma, *The Interlace Structure of the Third Part of the Prose Lancelot* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010). 24-112.

comparison each one is interrupted by another, and none is permitted to be lost from view for too long... The narrative web is woven of biographies, like threads of different colours, which form the central design, then disappear, reappear, and cross; the most brilliant of them come together at the end to form a last magnificent motif.²⁶

It is of note that the prose *Lancelot* was written c. 1215 and may, consequently, have been composed only five years prior to *Morkinskinna*'s potential date of compilation, c.1220. These dates are also nearly contemporary with the programme of translating and adapting European romances that developed in the court of Hákon Hákonarson from 1226 at the latest, when Brother Robert produced *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*.²⁷ It could be argued, therefore, that an exposure to, and indeed an appreciation of, romance may have preceded the more involved process of undertaking full adaptations and translations such as *Tristrams saga* by several years.²⁸ Such considerations inform another aspect of Ármann Jakobsson's argument, that *Morkinskinna*, as a text probably composed by an Icelander with intimate knowledge of the Norwegian *hirð*, was structurally influenced by trends in continental romance, examples of which were just entering the Scandinavian literary consciousness around this date.²⁹

If an argument for interlace being derived from wider developments in European literature is not accepted, *Morkinskinna* may exhibit the 'stranded' structure that Clover argues is a more general feature of the structuring of sagas and which, at its most complex,

²⁶ William Ryding, *Structure in Medieval Narrative* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 151-52.

²⁷ Marianne Kalinke, 'Scribe, Redactor, Author: The Emergence and Evolution of Icelandic Romance', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 8 (2012), 171-98.

²⁸ The manuscript transmission of the *riddarasögur* is particularly unclear as not only does uncertainty remain as to which specific French sources were being employed as models for adaptation, but the extant manuscripts preserving these texts are predominantly from the 14th century. Discussions of an early adoption of the literary styling of romance must, therefore, remain speculative, for a discussion of the ambiguity associated with establishing these texts' provenance, see Sverrir Tómasson, 'Hvenær var Tristrams sögu snúið?' *Gripla*, 2 (1977), 47-78. Carol Clover also contests the formative influence of romance on saga literature, instead arguing that while the two forms may have come into contact, similarities of structure arise from independent literary development; *The Medieval Saga* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 184-8.

²⁹ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 326-7.

weaves together various accounts of concurrent action.³⁰ To consider *Morkinskinna* as a text in which interlace is a central effect allows for a better understanding of its focus on periods in which multiple kings rule together. An interlace structure would allow for the juxtaposition of the actions of various monarchs, an effect that complements the argument made by several scholars that the *Morkinskinna* redactor is interested in morally comparing just, peaceable rulers with their harsher, more temperamental counterparts.³¹ Interlace would also decentre any given king within the narrative in favour of documenting the trajectory of the historical period in which all rulers participate, in a similar manner to various knights operating within different stages of a quest's progression in a romance. It is possible that interlace structure was employed in *Morkinskinna* as a narrative technique well suited to reflecting the political trends of the period 1025-1157. The increasing prevalence of rival kings, pretenders, and conflict between *hirðir* during this span would have contradicted any notion of royal biography as following a linear hereditary sequence and could, therefore, have justified an adaption in narrative structure to reflect the political factionalism of the era that demands the representation of multiple simultaneous narratives.

A framework for understanding *Morkinskinna* in which interlacing is suggested as a central structural effect fails, nevertheless, to encapsulate the diverse ways in which narrative 'strands' are arranged within the text. Most crucially, interlacing is achieved by the co-mingling of distinct stories with one another, with the pausing of the adventures of one figure allowing for a separate set of adventures to be recounted.³² This is not always the case in *Morkinskinna*, where the majority of the narrative is centred on the cast of a single elite

³⁰ Clover, *The Medieval Saga*, 61-108.

³¹ See Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, 'Historical Invasions / Historiographical Inventions: Snorri Sturluson and the Battle of Stamford Bridge', *Medievalia: A Journal of Medieval Studies*, 17 (1994), 1-28, at 3-4; William Ian Miller, *Audun and the Polar Bear: Luck, Law, and Largesse in a Medieval Tale of Risky Business*, *Medieval Law and its Practice*, vol.1 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 63; Alison Finlay, 'History and Fiction in the Kings' Sagas: The Case of Haraldr Harðráði', *Saga-Book*, 39 (2015), 77-102, at 85.

³² Ryding, *Structure in Medieval Narrative*, 145; Clover, *The Medieval Saga*, 73-5.

Norwegian society whose members all interact with one another within a localised and temporally consistent context. Furthermore, in exceptional cases such as the lengthy account of Haraldr harðráði's youthful experiences in Byzantium, where an extended separate narrative is interwoven into the surrounding text, the redactor displays a degree of organisational self-consciousness that is not present at the start of a *páttr*, for instance. When the text returns to the chronological point from which it departed with Magnús inn góði meeting his uncle Haraldr, an aside is included to clarify that a digression has concluded: *Nú er þar til sögu at taka er fyrr var frá horfit, er þeir finnask í Danmörk, Magnús konungr ok Haraldr fjoður-bróðir hans.*³³ It is of note that even lengthy *þættir* do not warrant such an editorial clarification: the need for such an aside here suggests that the interlaced relationship between narrative elements at the point of Haraldr's introduction is atypical in the text and this example can be delineated from the effect caused by the presence of other scenic material that introduces new characters.

In other instances where one might expect interlacing to occur within *Morkinskinna*, such as when two or more kings rule simultaneously, the narrative does not neatly alternate in offering episodes dealing with each ruler in turn, but often features several monarchs as significant characters meaningfully involved in the events being recounted. To return to the joint rule of Eysteinn, Sigurðr and Óláfr, in the sequence denoted as *Þinga saga*, all three sons of Magnús berfœttr maintain prominent narrative positions as their legal dispute unfolds.³⁴ Indeed, in the span in which these kings reign together, the text intermingles episodes concerned with the endeavours of one king with frequent accounts of sustained interaction between the three half-brothers. If interlace can be understood as the divergence

³³ *Morkinskinna I*, 120. 'Now the story is taken up from at the point it was left off, when King Magnús and his uncle Haraldr met in Denmark'. For further discussion of formulae that give notice of narrative transitions in the *konungasögur*, see Clover, *The Medieval Saga*, 171-2.

³⁴ Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds, *Morkinskinna II*, Íslenzk fornrit 24 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2011), 114-131. Hereafter referred to as *Morkinskinna II*.

and convergence of distinct narrative paths and distinct groups of individuals, the effect in *Morkinskinna* is more akin to the thickening and thinning of a single road, so that, at various points, the text can offer wider and more focused presentations of a single, if multivalent, Norwegian society.³⁵ More generally, the pragmatic considerations of writing an account of a 128-year period preclude the employment of symmetrical interlace, in which an initial cast of central characters disperses, only to be ultimately reunited. As one might expect from a sequence of *konungasögur*, kings and retainers die and are succeeded in turn, with a great many narrative strands being severed long before *Morkinskinna*'s truncated ending. This is nowhere more obvious than in the *þættir*, which, if viewed as narrative threads, are discrepantly short and distinct from the longer threads of royal biography with which they are supposedly interwoven. The *þættir* break up *Morkinskinna* as clipped bursts of narrative rather than being woven into the text and, consequently have a plosive position and effect within the wider narrative. Notions of stranding, while partially functional with regard to *Morkinskinna*, cannot be adopted wholesale, and further narratological investigation is required to account for the narrative structure of this text.

3.4 Brands *þáttir orva* and the Struggle for Narrative Centrality

The *þættir*'s disruptive effect upon larger royal biographies is linked to the effect these narratives have upon the prominence of kings within the text, through the introduction of characters who challenge rulers' centrality. The figures with whom kings interact in *þættir*, the majority of whom are of low social status or are from a peripheral location in relation to the Norwegian elite, have equal, if not superior, narrative presence in their respective *þættir*. These characters benefit from attractive characterisations that often amount to meaningful agency in their dealing with kings. The *þættir* depict the period and figures in question

³⁵ Cf. the narrative technique of discontinuous retrieval more prevalent within the *Íslendingasögur*; Clover, *The Medieval Saga*, 111-2.

dramatically, with a sensitivity to the framing and interpersonal dynamics of the exchange, and this parity of prominence between monarch and Icelander is carefully staged, as in *Brands þáttir ǫrva*, a summary of which follows:³⁶

Brandr ǫrvi (the generous), a wealthy and well-liked Icelander, comes to Norway during the summer, in the reign of Haraldr harðráði. Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, a skald attached to the king's *hirð* had told the king regularly about the positive qualities of Brandr, most notably his munificence, going as far as to say that no other man was better suited to being king of Iceland. Haraldr decides, therefore, to make a test of the newcomer's generosity, and instructs Þjóðólfr to go to Brandr and ask him for his cloak. Brandr silently drops his cloak while continuing with his work. Þjóðólfr reports this to the king, who comments on the arrogance of Brandr's silence, before sending the skald back to request Brandr's ornate axe. Þjóðólfr protests but ultimately agrees and makes the request of his fellow Icelander. Brandr, again silently, gives up the valuable weapon. Haraldr is mildly impressed by this display of generosity but decides to put Brandr to the test a final time, coercing the unwilling Þjóðólfr into asking for the tunic Brandr is wearing. Brandr silently removes his tunic and offers it up, but not before ripping off and retaining one of the sleeves. When Haraldr sees this, he interprets this as the Icelander implying that the king only has one arm, as he takes without giving in return. Acknowledging the wisdom of this critique, Haraldr honours Brandr and bestows lavish gifts upon him.³⁷

The depiction of a parity of prominence between monarch and Icelander, the latter a newcomer to the *hirð*, gains much of its effectiveness from its finely wrought presentation of

³⁶ For the use of the *þáttir* as dramatic structure within *Morkinskinna*, see Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 113-20.

³⁷ *Morkinskinna I*, 230-32.

two diametrically opposed kingly figures. At this point in the text, Haraldr is established in his monarchic authority as the sole ruler of Norway and a familiar narrative presence, while the newcomer Brandr is a symbolic ruler only by dint of his countryman's effusive praise: *Ok svá hafði hann mælt, Þjóðólfr, at honum þætti eigi sýnt at annarr maðr væri betr til konungs fallinn í Íslandi fyrir sakir orleika hans ok stórmennsku.*³⁸ Brandr cuts a regal figure, not only through his costly clothing and weapon, but also in his quiet aloofness from the space into which he has intruded, as he sits displaying and counting his wealth in the domain of an infamously irritable king.³⁹ The tone in this case remains playful, although much of the social anxiety, and risk of displeasing either figure, is borne by Þjóðólfr, who must act as an intermediary between the two aloof men.⁴⁰ The back-and-forth movements of the hapless skald allow for Haraldr and Brandr to remain static and civilised, with the *þáttr* playing out like a sequence of diplomatic overtures in miniature, where neither monarch need move from their realms, or engage in personal conflict, to continue civil negotiations.

Brands þáttr also offers an immediate departure from the material which precedes it within *Morkinskinna*: a sequence recounting Haraldr's humiliation of a rich landowner named Ulfr, from whom the king seizes vast amounts of wealth while threatening to cast him into slavery.⁴¹ A thematic similarity exists in as much as both sequences focus on the acquisitiveness of Haraldr and his rivalry with figures who hold power detached from the nexus of the king's *hirð*. In both cases, individuals are introduced who play roles that exceed the reality of their social station: Ulfr as a descendant of slaves masquerading as a nobleman and Brandr as an Icelander behaving like a king. The great difference between the two

³⁸ *Morkinskinna I*, 231. 'And Þjóðólfr had said, therefore, that it did not seem likely to him that another man was better suited to be king in Iceland due to his generosity and munificence.'

³⁹ Brandr's ornate axe may align his regal self-presentation with a specific king: Óláfr helgi, typically symbolised by his axe, Hel. The strength of such an allusion in the context of this *þáttr* is only latent but the effectivity of Brandr's posturing is heightened in emulating the revered king with the attendant implication that Haraldr, in contrast, fails to successfully mimic his saintly predecessor.

⁴⁰ Miller, *Audun and the Polar Bear*, 83.

⁴¹ *Morkinskinna I*, 226-30.

sequences is in the power given to the figure interacting with King Haraldr. Haraldr's treatment of Ulfr is violent and vindictive, stripping a proud magnate of his agency (see 7.1.3), with Ulfr being cast as the passive recipient of the king's verbose tirade and not being afforded actions or speech through which to defend himself. Haraldr's agency is unchallenged in this scene as his opponent is instrumentalised to demonstrate the king's eloquence and ardour. *Brands þáttr*, on the other hand, is genteel, even playful, taking the form of a kind of wisdom contest in which both members participate productively.⁴² Brandr may be silent like Ulfr, but his taciturnity is instrumental to his protest against Haraldr, rather than enforced by the king's wrath; Brandr's actions are placed at the centre of the episode and his person is treated with respect.

The *þáttr* is usually read as a wise Icelander gently prompting Haraldr into the realisation that his acquisitiveness is unkingly, with the implication being that a monarch's munificence is vital to a cohesive *hirð* and a productive relationship between king and retainer.⁴³ This is certainly a central theme of the episode, but less is made of Brandr's failure to conform to the expectations of a loyal member of the *hirð* (see 5.1): his ostentatious performance and maintenance of distance from Haraldr is in stark contrast to the more common trope of the impoverished Icelander who seeks personal intimacy and physical proximity with a Norwegian ruler. The conventional social hierarchy is disrupted, with Brandr and Haraldr facing off as rival figures of regal authority. Both men, however, are somewhat lacking in their lordly role: Haraldr avariciously asks a perceived inferior for gifts,

⁴² The aggrandising and stimulating nature of Norse wisdom contests for their participants should not be overlooked, despite the mortal stakes often involved. Participation in such a contest implies a pre-existing reputation for superlative wisdom and stresses how the knowledge available to the opposing parties is evenly balanced. For comprehensive discussions of Norse wisdom contests, see Anders Hultgård, 'The Wisdom Contest in *Vafþrúðnismál*', in Wilhelm Heizmann, Klaus Bödl and Heinrich Beck, eds, *Analecta Septentrionalia: Beiträge zur nordgermanischen Kultur und Literaturgeschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 531–9; Brittany Schorn, *Speaker and Authority in Old Norse Wisdom Poetry* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 86–115.

⁴³ Andersson, *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings*, 52; Ármann Jakobsson, *Íslendingaþættir: Saga hugmyndar*, *Studia Islandica* 63 (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2014), 103–4.

but Brandr is resolutely silent throughout the entire *páttr*, with Haraldr having to apply his wisdom to the situation to offer an interpretation of Brandr's actions, which otherwise risk being construed as haughty arrogance.⁴⁴ Whether a greedy but wise lord is worse than a mute and generous one is not, perhaps, the episode's point, but the shortcomings of both men temporarily place them in a form of social symbiosis, with Haraldr relying on Brandr's generosity to fulfil his acquisitive requests and Brandr upon Haraldr's wisdom to vindicate his actions. Perhaps an Icelandic audience would have viewed Brandr's actions as justified irrespective of Haraldr's reaction, but within the etiquette conventions of the Norwegian *hirð* such behaviour is both mysterious and disruptive, as is King Haraldr demanding rather than apportioning gifts.

It is fitting that this situation, in which the *hirð*'s stability is threatened by this cycle of unjust gift-demand countered by gift-offer with abandon, both Haraldr and Brandr participate in the restoration of a more conventional relationship between king and retainer:

Brandr bregðr þá sýslunni ok steypir af sér kyrtlinum ok mælti ekki. Hann sprettir af erminni annarri ok kastar braut síðan kyrtlinum, en hefir eptir ermina aðra. Þjóðólfr tekr hann upp ok ferr á fund konungs ok sýnir honum kyrtlinn. Konungur leit á ok mælti síðan: 'Þessi maðr er bæði vitr ok stórlýndr. Auðsét er mér hví hann hefir

⁴⁴ An ambivalence towards silence's social role exists in the Norse gnomic tradition that adds credence to the interpretation that Brandr's quietness is not a straightforward heroic trait, which allows him to 'instruct King Haraldr on courtly etiquette without uttering a word'; Andersson, *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings*, 65. In *Hávamál*, the utility of silence is the subject of a number of verses; early in the poem silence is stressed as advisable if one wishes to not reveal one's shortcomings, but later verses stress the necessity of eloquence for productive participation within society, with the taciturn individual instead being cast as foolish; see Carolyne Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnostic Theme and style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 21-29, 37, 48-9. See in particular *Hávamál*, stanza 57, in Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds, *Eddukvæði I: Goðukvæði* (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2014), 333: 'Brandr af brandi / brenn, unz brunninn er, / funi kveikisk af funa; / maðr af manni / verðr at máli kuðr, / en til dælskr af dul.' (A brand burns from a brand, until it has burned, flame kindles itself from flame; a person becomes known to another person through speech but becomes foolish when aloof.) The use of the lighting of a brand, Brandr's namesake, as a metaphor for the importance of communication is intriguing, although there is no direct evidence for any such gnomic inspiration behind the *páttr*'s composition. The notion of *Brands páttr* making literary allusions to other texts, however, has previously been argued by Hermann Pálsson, who notes motifs that may have been drawn from the *biskupasögur*: 'Brands páttr örva', *Gripla*, 7 (1990), 117-30, at 124-7.

erminni af sprett: Honum þykkir sem ek eiga eina hǫndina ok þá þó at þiggja ávallt en veita aldriða. Ok fari nú eptir honum.⁴⁵

Then Brandr broke off from the task and threw off his tunic and said nothing. He tore off one of the sleeves and afterwards threw down the tunic but held back the sleeve. Þjóðólfr picked up the tunic and went to find the king and showed him it. The king inspected it and said afterwards: ‘This man is both wise and generous. It is obvious to me, why he has torn off a sleeve. It seems to him as if I have only one hand and it always accepts gifts but never gives them. Go after him now.’

Brandr corrects his generosity, in recognition of the thankless nature of unmitigated giving, with the removal of his tunic’s sleeve qualifying its status as a precious object with newfound symbolic value. It still falls to Haraldr, however, to divine and proclaim the exact meaning of the gesture and his aphoristic formulation acknowledging his greed ensures that he and Brandr both conclude their interaction with a reputation for wise conduct. It might be said that just as Brandr’s actions drive the *þáttr*’s narrative progress, Haraldr’s words divine its narrative ethos – a form of narratological symbiosis in line with the two men’s complementary roles within the story. The *þáttr*’s conclusion heralds the reestablishment of social norms: Brandr is reintegrated into the *hirð*, retaking his position as Haraldr’s inferior by his gracious acceptance of gifts and the king defuses a rival figure’s threat to his authority.

The nature of this ‘generosity test’ forces both men outside of their conventional roles through a reconfiguration of the standard hierarchy of reciprocity. The two men occupy the centre of both the *þáttr* and the *hirð* as principal characters and preeminent men. This is best attested by Þjóðólfr’s split sympathies between his king and his countryman, with his indecision performed in his scurrying back and forth to facilitate their interaction. The

⁴⁵ *Morkinskinna* I, 232.

dramatic quality of *Brands þáttr* is generated by this tension between equally formidable characters being invested, simultaneously, with a central narrative position. The effect is strictly temporary, however, as Haraldr continues to feature prominently in a narrative centred upon his biography, but for Brandr the *þáttr* constitutes his only appearance within *Morkinskinna*. Brandr is by no means atypical in this regard, as the *þættir* consistently feature non-elite individuals, newly introduced or otherwise previously socially marginal, who rise suddenly within the text to situations of prominence that parallel and threaten the centrality of the presiding monarchs, before exiting the narrative, or being reduced to a far more peripheral position. Such movements from figures who, albeit briefly, achieve the status of protagonists alongside the kings they ostensibly serve, is incompatible with an understanding of *Morkinskinna* as a text comprising a consistent structure of amplification or interlacing. A given *þáttr* punctuates and pierces the surrounding prose in charting and celebrating the moment of intrusive prominence of an otherwise marginal figure.

3.5. The Narrative Discourse of *Morkinskinna*

As amplification and interlacing do not satisfactorily account for the sudden centrality and swift disappearance of disruptive characters occasioned in the *þættir*, it is necessary to construct an original narrative framework tailored to suit *Morkinskinna*. To do so, the constituent elements of the narrative will be delineated, and their semiotic effects and interactions considered. From this narratological foundation, it will be demonstrated that the ways in which *þættir* interrelate with the prose that surrounds them depart from preconceptions of the typical saga-structure. The aim of this section is not to produce a neat axiom that dismisses or harmonises the conflicts of structure, theme and style so apparent in *Morkinskinna*, but rather to stress the centrality of this very conflict to *Morkinskinna*'s composition and to rehabilitate discord as vital to the text's artistry. At the centre of this

undertaking is the development of a theoretical model by which a *þáttir* can be understood to engage with the surrounding material of the *konungasögur* in narrative terms.

Further clarity on the complexities of *Morkinskinna*'s narrative structure can be provided through the application of Gérard Genette's work on narrative theory. In his seminal work, *Narrative Discourse*, Genette seeks to apply a narratological framework to a text specifically selected for its size, convolution, and resistance to ready categorisation: Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Genette distinguishes five areas of narrative syntax as the primary concepts underpinning his analysis: Order, Frequency, Duration, Voice, and Mood.⁴⁶ Each concept is worth considering in relation to *Morkinskinna*, as together they clarify the manner in which the *þættir* are both integrated and distinguished within the text, although the order in which these categories are approached in this thesis will differ from Genette's work and will instead be presented in increasing relevance to the text under consideration.⁴⁷

3.5.1 Voice

Of Genette's subsections of narrative, the issue of voice is the most readily resolved in relation to *Morkinskinna*. The question of voice concerns the relationship, in terms of distance of removal, between the narrator and the matter which is being narrated. Genette initially distinguishes voice according to narrative level: when the narrator operates from within the story-world of the text, the narrative is intradiegetic; when the narrator is distinct from the tale they narrate, it is extradiegetic.⁴⁸ Genette further distinguishes the heterodiegetic narrative, in which the narrator does not feature as a character, from the homodiegetic, where the author is

⁴⁶ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay of Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 31-2.

⁴⁷ Wallace Martin has suggested the integral role of temporality, causality, and human interest in typifying a given narrative and, by extension, that shifts in these three factors produce a shift in narrative style; see, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 87. The introduction of a *þáttir* occasions a significant departure from pre-established norms in all three cases.

⁴⁸ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 231-8.

active within the plot.⁴⁹ When these two axes are combined and related to *Morkinskinna*, the text can be said to be traditional in its voice as, like Homer, it follows the ‘extra-diegetic-heterodiegetic – paradigm: ... a narrator in the first degree who tells a story he is absent from.’⁵⁰ The issue of ‘who speaks’ the narrative may seem to be rendered somewhat unclear by ambiguities surrounding the identity and number of individuals involved in *Morkinskinna*’s compilation, though this uncertainty is no more of a problem than the contention surrounding the figure of Homer. Nevertheless, the historicity of a specific authorial figure is not the matter at hand for either Genette or the present study: rather the focus is on the consistency of observable effects within the text and, as such, the voices of narrator and redactor need not be conflated. In *Morkinskinna*, the narrative voice recounts royal biographies from the 11th and 12th century – as it itself is a product of the 13th century, it is fitting and obvious that the voice is separate from the narrative it relates.

What is perhaps more surprising is the rigidity with which the narrator refrains from making use of a second level of narration within the story-world itself: that is to say, the lack of sequences in which characters within the story takes over the telling of the tale themselves and become the narrative authorities controlling what we as readers are informed of. This does not occur even in instances where such an effect might reasonably be expected. The introduction of Haraldr harðráði into the narrative is rendered dramatically, with the king appearing in disguise after a long absence abroad before revealing himself to his nephew Magnús góði in a scene replete with both royal power dynamics and familial intimacy. The text is explicit that people present were eager to hear of the king’s adventures: *ok var mǫrgum mikill forkviðr á at vita ok heyra þau tíðendi er Haraldr kynni at segja*.⁵¹ Rather than continuing the dramatic sequence and having Haraldr narrate his exploits to the audience both inside and

⁴⁹ Ibid., 245-53.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 248.

⁵¹ *Morkinskinna* I, 82. ‘And there was a great amount of curiosity to know and hear those tales that Haraldr could recount.’

outside the text, the narrator instead interjects to state the suitability of recounting Haraldr's exploits at this point, before narrating them as an analeptic digression from the account of Magnús's rule.⁵² *Morkinskinna*'s narrator occasionally displays a self-consciousness about the source of some of the information that is included within the text (see 7.2), but the general consistency of the third-person narration is not only typical of the saga style but also situates the authority to divulge the events of royal biography in the hands of the narrator alone. The narrator, consequently, need not reveal the complex transmission paths by which episodes have been sourced in the compilation of the text. This stability of voice establishes a parity in the quality of accounts of Norwegian internal politics, kings' foreign adventures, and the *þættir* themselves, which creates a levelling sensation of thoroughgoing narrative objectivity and reliability: all is reported in the same detached voice.

3.5.2. Order

To discuss narrative order in relation to a 13th-century sequence of *konungasögur* might seem superfluous: narrative discourse of the synoptic chronicle style, which forms the foundation of medieval narrative history, is subject to a substantial amount of manipulation within the sagas, but the chronological ordering of material remains fundamental.⁵³ Within *Morkinskinna*, however, markers of the exact historical date at which events occur are rare, most commonly taking the form of noting the feast day on which momentous events, such as the death of Magnús góði or the initiation of Haraldr's campaign in England, occurred.⁵⁴ A sequential logic of linear time is, nevertheless, adhered to in the text, which is sufficient to integrate it into Genette's formulation of narrative order, which is stated as follows:

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For an examination of the malleability of the chronicle style, see Thomas H. Croft, 'Degrees of Veracity in the *Morte d'Arthur*: Elements of Malory's Chronicle Style', *Journal of International Arthurian Society*, 1.1 (2013), 120-39.

⁵⁴ *Morkinskinna I*, 174-8, 299-301.

To study the temporal order of a narrative is to compare the order in which events or temporal sections are arranged in the narrative discourse with the order of succession these same events or temporal segments have in the story, to the extent that story order is explicitly indicated by the narrative itself or inferable from one or another indirect clue.⁵⁵

In his discussion of narrative order, Genette primarily considers analeptic and proleptic movements, and the intertangled narration of a complex chronology they produce. *Morkinskinna* does not deviate from successive chronology regularly, although analeptic moments are present in instances in which a character's introduction require more contextualisation than their simple appearance *in medias res* can provide – most notably in the recounting of Haraldr harðráði's extensive adventures prior to returning to Norway.⁵⁶

The order of *Morkinskinna* is less contrived than a work of high modernism and it cannot be argued that the text has a particularly obfuscated internal chronology. This is not to say that a temporal trajectory is not established to underpin its episodic structure with the presentation of the progress of narrated events suggesting a particular ideological approach to Norwegian history. While the absence of the text's ending makes such an analysis somewhat speculative, in its extant form *Morkinskinna* follows a degenerative course. The text is atypical amongst kings' sagas as the narrative begins during the Danish occupation of Norway under the unpopular rule of Sveinn Knútsson, thereby offering no account of the preceding Christianization period enacted in the reigns of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, with the latter's reign, in particular, often depicted as the climax of Norwegian political, social, and spiritual history. The sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson

⁵⁵ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 35.

⁵⁶ Later scholarship on narrative order has argued that very few narratives of substantial length are capable of adhering to true chronological order, see William Nelles and Linda William, 'Narrative Order in the First-Person Novel', *Poetics Today*, 39.1 (2018), 131-58. Minor discrepancies in order do not, however, disqualify comment on broader textual patterns.

form the central sections of many of the *konungasögur* compilations: *Heimskringla*, *Fagrskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* all reserve their most extensive and embellished narrative sequences for the life and eventual defeats and deaths of these two most preeminent kings.⁵⁷ Óláfr helgi's mixing of martial prowess and martyrdom at Stiklastaðir, in particular, was a defining moment of Norwegian history and the instigation of the *Morkinskinna* narrative immediately following this momentous event is significant. It is unlikely that *Morkinskinna*'s redactor chose to omit the death of Óláfr helgi purely for literary effect, rather than seeking to produce a text that covered a historical range not comprehensively narrated in previous sagas. The initiation of the narrative in the aftermath of Stiklastaðir, an event cast as both a national defeat and a spiritual triumph, must, however, have had some bearing on how the construction of a narrative history of this sort was considered in relation to wider Norwegian history.

It might be tempting, consequently, to consider *Morkinskinna* in a similar vein to the likes of the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid*, as works that presuppose familiarity with the heroic climax and cataclysm of the *Iliad*, but nevertheless are structured so as to culminate in independent periods of social resurgence and harmony, be that through familial reunion in the case of the former or the prefiguring of the Roman Empire in the resettlement of the Trojan refugees in the case of the latter. In *Morkinskinna*, however, the comparable moment of the reestablishment of a peaceful social order occurs early in the text when a rebellion reinstates Magnús goði, restoring a Norwegian king to sole rule of the country. This political restoration is echoed on a personal level following Sigvatr Þórðarson's composition of the admonishing

⁵⁷ See Sverre Bagge, 'The Making of a Missionary King: The Medieval Accounts of Olaf Tryggvason and the Conversion of Norway', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 105.4 (2006), 473-513; 'Warrior, King, and Saint: The Medieval Histories about St. Óláfr Haraldsson', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 109.3 (2010), 281-321.

Bersögglisvísur, which rectifies Magnús's fledgeling despotic behaviour and leads him into a mode of kingship that better reflects the example of his saintly father (see 6.1.1).

This reestablishment of tranquillity in Norwegian narrative history is, however, early and brief. The re-intrusion of Haraldr harðráði and the subsequent period of co-rule herald an increase in political fractiousness and instability within Norway, as rival modes of kingship come into conflict. Andersson has noted that the Icelandic redactor vilifies kings who engage in expansionist military expeditions and lauds those who focus on establishing the prosperity of Norway, a perspective he claims is concordant with anxieties surrounding the threat of the loss of Icelandic independence during the first half of the thirteenth century.⁵⁸ As such, the kings often form pairs whose personalities are contrasted: Magnús góði and Haraldr harðráði; Eysteinn Magnússon and Sigurðr jórsalafari; and, less distinctly due to their lack of co-rule, Óláfr kyrri and Magnús berfœttr. A case by case inspection of the kings in question, however, does not yield the expected shifts in moral approbation based on a given monarch's foreign and domestic policy (see 5 and 6). Despite variation in how kings are characterised, the span of all rulers' reigns are subsumed to the more general ordering of material within the text – the repeated presentation of escalating conflict and strife in elite Norwegian society that prefigures the socially degenerative Civil War period in which an increasing number of rivals, kings, and pretenders are engaged in bloody conflict for temporary control of a part of an increasingly factional country. This degeneracy may be thought of as central to the *aevum* of *Morkinskinna* – to briefly borrow Kermode's term for the logic by which fiction is rendered as a unified sequence rather than merely unrelated events.⁵⁹ In this manner, *Morkinskinna* as a compilation of sagas is unified into a single text.

⁵⁸ Theodore Andersson, *The Partisan Muse in the Early Icelandic Sagas (1200-1250)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 119-34.

⁵⁹ Frank Kermode, *A Sense of Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 70-75. Kermode makes use of a Thomist rationale for the form of angels, which could neither be irreducibly simple and omnipresent as this would make them indistinguishable from God nor be in possession of materiality

This observation of an overarching degenerative order is given additional credence by also being overtly referenced within the text itself, where the progressive weakening of monarchic authority recurs intermittently as a motif. The physical diminution of kings is perhaps the most striking means by which this effect is achieved, as demonstrated during the reign of Óláfr kyrri:

Var mark gørt um þessa þrjá langfeðga, Harald konung, Ólaf konung ok Magnús konung berfœtt, á Máriukirkju norðr í Kaupangi, þeiri er Haraldr konungr lét gera. Var klappaðr kross á steinveggnum við dyrnar þar er Haraldr konungi var hægt at kyssa á, ok annarr Óláfr konungi, þriðri Magnúsi konungi, ok var sá neðarst mjök miklu, ok allra jafn langt í milli.⁶⁰

‘Marks were made at the height of these three kinsmen, King Harald, King Óláfr, and King Magnús berfœttr on the Church of Mary in the north in Kaupangr, which King Haraldr ordered to be built. A cross was hewn into the stone-wall near the door, at a height it was easy for King Haraldr to kiss, another for King Óláfr, and a third for King Magnús, and the last one was by far the furthest down the wall and all the crosses had an equal distance between them.’

While the text is quick to state that Magnús still retains noble qualities, the implication of an incremental decrease in strength and potency is unavoidable: later kings literally prove incapable of measuring up to their predecessors. This loss of stature, if read as a suggestion of a royal line decreasing in nobility, meshes well with how the order of succession is depicted in the text at large, where the long sequences and effusive praise

as would be the case for a human. A third order of existence was created, therefore, that of *aevum*, through which an eternal, immaterial being could act within the temporal world of potentiality. Kermode sees this as an apt metaphor for ‘the time-order of novels’: that imperative force which controls the succession of events and ensures their consecutive procession.

⁶⁰ *Morkinskinna II*, 10.

afforded in description of both Magnús goði and Haraldr harðráði, despite their many differences in temperament, trail off to the far briefer and often ambivalent passages dealing with the cruel practices of Haraldr gilli and Sigurðr slembir. This shift puts the text on a clear degenerative course from a romanticised reclamation of Norwegian independence, to the sordid and complex issues of multi-generational elite infighting. Spans of peace and prosperity, such as the reign of Óláfr kyrri, are also narrated with atypical brevity that minimises their impact on the more general trend of increasing destabilisation (See 6.2). This general decline in the quality of kings is also reminiscent of the prophecy made regarding the form the reign of Sigurðr jórsalafari will take: *Þat mælti spekingr einn í Miklagarði at svá myndi fara virðing Sigurðar konungs sem it óarga dýr er vaxit, geyst í bógunum ok aptr minna: lét at svá myndi fara hans konungdómr at þá myndi mest um þykkja vert en síðarr minna.*⁶¹ Sigurðr's reign tapers off in this manner due to the degradation of his mental health in his later years (see 7.3), but a similar effect is visible in *Morkinskinna* in total, where the accounts of kings' reigns become briefer, bloodier, and more bathetic as the text progresses.

The initiation of a *þáttr* introduces a figure who operates on a timeline isolated from the established *aevum*, both in terms of the chronology of Norwegian succession and in relation to kings' concerns about their deteriorating political authority. The *þættir* stand distinct from the surrounding downward trajectory and instead demonstrate a different relationship with both the passage of time in the narrative and the text's construction of historical order. This can be attributed to any given *þáttr* constituting a distinct narrative reignition as is often demonstrated by the formulaic introduction, naming, and genealogy of a new character at the outset of the episode. These elements are truncated in comparison to the contextualisation of characters in the *Íslendingasögur* and may be as unostentatious as the

⁶¹ *Morkinskinna II*, 99. 'A prophet in Miklagarðr said that King Sigurðr's reputation would grow like a lion, ferocious to the shoulder but less impressive after that. The prophet said it was the case that his kingly authority appeared greatest in quality at this time and would be of lesser value later.'

introduction an anonymous Icelanders travelling from his home country: *Svá barsk at eitthvert sumar at einn íslenzkr maðr, ungr ok fráligr, kom til konungs ok bað hann ásjá.*⁶²

The presence of these ‘micro-beginnings’ signals the sudden narrative importance of a figure who has a specific short-term social aspiration within the *hirð*, be that entry into, profit within, or exit from the organisation.⁶³ As the *þættir* predominantly end with the achieving of this goal through the accrual of fortune or esteem for their central characters, irrespective of the effect the episode has on the presiding king, the *þættir* can be seen to stand in isolation, or even opposition, to the larger temporal order of deteriorating political stability in which they are situated.

The swift introductions and exits afforded to the figures introduced within *þættir* also suggest the comparative unimportance of contextualising these characters beyond their limited period of prominence in elite Norwegian society, with the vast majority of the *þættir* having a quasi-atemporal relationship with the surrounding royal biography.⁶⁴ That is to say, beyond the clear limits of necessarily falling between a certain king’s succession and their deposition if that ruler is to feature as a presiding figure, many *þættir* have few links to a particular point in a king’s reign and little historical connection to the events that surround them. Notable exceptions do occur, however, particularly in the case of *Auðunar þáttir*, where Auðun’s journey with the bear must occur prior to 1064, to account for the open hostilities between Haraldr and Sveinn.⁶⁵ The *þættir*, while rarely placed in a manner that is overtly

⁶² *Morkinskinna* I, 235. ‘It happened one summer, that a young and swift Icelandic man visited the king and asked him for help.’

⁶³ Cf. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 46

⁶⁴ Clover considers this failure of temporal synchronization between narrative elements a disqualifying factor from *Morkinskinna* being considered to employ the classical saga style: *The Medieval Saga*, 173. For further discussion of ways in which instances of atemporality can be placed within a temporal scheme, see Megan Marie Eckerle, ‘Speculation and Time in Late Medieval Visionary Discourse’, unpublished PhD thesis (Yale University, 2016), 185-96.

⁶⁵ Ármann Jakobsson has analysed *Auðunar þáttir* as being instrumental to the reconciliation of Haraldr hardráði and Sveinn Ástríðarson and brokering the peace between Norway and Denmark: *A Sense of Belonging*, 96-100. This is a secondary effect, however, and relies on inference drawn from the subsequent improvement in the relationship between the two monarchs (see 7.1.4).

anachronistic, must often be assumed to occur around, between, or during larger historical events: the general requirements that the relevant king is mature and in Norway within the *þátttr*'s span are the only necessities to justify its position. This is not to say that their position is unconsidered, however, but rather that the passage of a *þátttr*'s narrative is detached from the wider temporal order – the overarching scheme of accelerating ignobility and callousness is briefly paused, as the secondary narrative order of the *þættir* supplants it.

3.5.3 Frequency

Genette considers frequency the least well studied of the elements of narrative discourse he investigates, and he defines the term as the number of times something can be understood to have happened, or the number of times said event is recounted as having happened within the narrative.⁶⁶ In the works of Proust, such an issue is a central concern: events are revisited and reconstrued as the Narrator matures and ages, with revelations of revised meaning arising at great narrative distances from one another within the text as part of 'the Proustian apprenticeship to the truth'.⁶⁷ Events in *Morkinskinna* appear to occur only once, as might be expected in a text generally adhering to the tenets of narrative history: the sequential synopsis of events and the established linear chronology it produces would be shattered by the recursive re-narration of previously covered events.

Such a reading of narrative frequency as only being concerned with how many times a specific instance of action is narrated is, however, disingenuously literal. Consider Genette's understanding of the ways in which an event can be understood to repeat:

An event is not only capable of happening; it can also happen again, or be repeated: the sun rises every day. Of course, strictly speaking the identity of these multiple

⁶⁶ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 112-13.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 58. One may consider one of the better-known examples of this within *À la recherche du temps perdu*; in *La Fugitive* it is revealed to the Narrator that the now-deceased Albertine was engaged in affairs with women at Balbec, amongst the friendship group that the narrator both idealized and fetishized in *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*: see Marcel Proust, *The Captive and the Fugitive*, trans. Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol.5 (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 704-12.

occurrences is debatable: ‘the sun’ that ‘rises’ every morning is not exactly the same from one day to another — any more than the ‘8:25 p.m. Geneva-to-Paris’ train, dear to Ferdinand de Saussure, is made up each evening of the same cars hooked to the same locomotive. The ‘repetition’ is in fact a mental construction, which eliminates from each occurrence everything belonging to it that is peculiar to itself, in order to preserve only what it shares with all the others of the same class, which is an abstraction: ‘the sun,’ ‘the morning,’ ‘to rise.’ This is well known, and I recall it only to specify once and for all that what we will name here ‘identical events’ or ‘recurrence of the same event’ is a series of several similar events considered only in terms of their resemblance.⁶⁸

On a more subtle level, the issue of frequency is also one of narrative patterning, as it concerns how congruent sequences are positioned in relation to one another within the text. The largest scale example is the relationship between the juvenile adventures of Haraldr harðráði and Sigurðr jórsalafari, which, despite their substantial differences in detail, offer similar accounts of martial kings vindicating their authority alongside the Byzantine Emperor and extracting wealth and prestige from richer nations to bolster their reputation on their return to Norway (see 7.1 and 7.3). More broadly, Magnús góði, Sigurðr slembir, and Haraldr gilli similarly move from the geographically distant locations that they occupy when young to their eventual accession to the Norwegian throne (see 6.1 and 7.4).

The extent to which the narrative frequency of such a motif can be meaningfully considered in relation to *Morkinskinna* is further complicated, however, when the Icelanders who are frequently central characters within the *þættir* are considered. They also often take a similar trajectory to Haraldr and Sigurðr, in travelling to a locus of foreign wealth and power,

⁶⁸ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 112.

prospering within it, before returning, wealthy and respected to Iceland.⁶⁹ The pan-continental progress of kings is mirrored in miniature by the pan-Scandinavian movements of those who enter their *hirðir*. Like Norwegian kings who mature abroad, Icelanders also reach the peak of their prominence and power upon their arrival in Norway.⁷⁰ A position at the centre of the Norwegian elite is the terminal point of all prominent characters in *Morkinskinna*, irrespective of their diverse origins, and the accounts of these figures' exploits, be they royal or peripheral, are given their most extensive and embellished treatment in the limited confines of the *hirð* as a social space (see 5.2). Accounts of such movements from the periphery to the centre can, therefore, be said to occur at a high frequency within *Morkinskinna*.

While the above theme is but one example of integrated thematic repetition occurring on a variety of scales within *Morkinskinna*, one may also think of frequency in terms of the repeated presence of a set of narrative structures. If the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna* are accepted as being united in their effect of raising an otherwise inconsequential figure to disruptive prominence (see 3.4), then it is possible to note the frequency at which such structures occur and the comparative proximity of one such episode to similar examples. When such analysis is undertaken, it is apparent that certain spans of the text contain high-density clusters of *þættir*, occasionally running on consecutively from one another. The densest of such instances is the dual reign of Magnús góði and Haraldr harðráði, which despite only lasting 1046-47, is punctuated by four substantial *þættir*, concerning Þorkell dyðrill, Þorsteinn Siðu-Hallsson, Arnórr jarlaskald, and Hreiðarr heimski.⁷¹ The density of the *þættir* at this point renders this section of *Morkinskinna* akin to Genette's notion of an iterative narrative, where the passage

⁶⁹ It may be argued that as an Icelandic text, this motif within *Morkinskinna* is reflective of the 13th-century context of Icelandic interaction with the courts of Hákon Hákonarson and Jarl Skúli; these sequences are all, consequently, variations of the central theme of the ways in which an Icelander could profit abroad and the resources they could utilise to increase their reputation. For an account of this process grounded in economic theory see Kevin Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia*, Toronto Old Norse and Icelandic Studies (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2008).

⁷⁰ Margaret Clunies Ross, 'From Iceland to Norway: Essential Rites of Passage for an Early Icelandic Skald', *Alvissmal*, 9 (1999), 55-72.

⁷¹ *Morkinskinna I*, 120-94.

of time is subsumed to cycles of repeated, recognisable episodes; iterative narrative is, consequently, imbued with a sense of recurrence, even torpor.⁷² The typical form of *Morkinskinna*, which the text shares with chronicles of narrative history, is that of distinct momentous events being narrated only once. This linear chronology is destabilised by the dense congregation of *þættir*, which in sufficient numbers have the effect of radically slowing the passage of narrative history.

To consider the distinction between the linear narrative and the iterative narrative from another perspective, J. T. Fraser, in his attempts to create a theoretical hierarchy of the ways in which time is reflected within narrative, produced a number of critical terms useful to understanding the distinct chronologies of the *þættir*. To employ Fraser's framework, the established sequential narration of royal lives could be classified as biotemporal, in presenting accounts of kings moving from accession (or earlier) to death – the expected unidirectional passage of both royal life and royal biography.⁷³ The *þættir* as a collective can, conversely, be better understood in relation to Fraser's analysis of Samuel Beckett's theatrical use of time, which he describes as prototemporal; an extended and recursive present that fails to develop into a linear temporal order.⁷⁴ Fraser sees this prototemporal effect as a consequence of the essential futility of purposeful action within plays like *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, which is replaced by static figures whose 'conversation goes in overlapping cyclicity'.⁷⁵

It would be inaccurate to claim that any given *þáttir* has the same level of lethargic cyclicity as absurdist theatre, as figures within the *þættir* can achieve productive goals and

⁷² Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 226.

⁷³ Fraser's theorising of time is elaborately interdisciplinary, meticulously structured, and develops over the course of a number of books. For the most fully-formed versions of his model, see Julius Thomas Fraser, *Time, Conflict and Human Values* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); *Time and Time Again* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁷⁴ J. T. Fraser, *Of Time, Passion, and Knowledge* (New York: George Braziller, 1975), 418-19.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 418.

the conversations between rulers and newcomers, while prolonged, are not truly indefinite. If taken as a collective, however, and considered as the single dominant structural effect deployed by the redactor of *Morkinskinna*, the *þættir* do form ‘a sequence of short mental presents in a circling conversation that flit and stop in fits and starts.’⁷⁶ The repeated effect of figures gaining sudden prominence within a *hirð*, engaging in extended, historically-inconsequential dialogues at the very centre of the Norwegian socio-political hierarchy, before receding into obscurity, has something of the absurd about it in decentring the more momentous deeds of kings and frustrating the redactor’s ostensible aim of narrating a span of the history of the kingdom of Norway. The deployment of *þættir* in high concentration within *Morkinskinna* instead creates pockets in the text within which presiding kings and narrative become repeatedly mired in the micro-detail of an interaction with a single individual, which, in turn, extends the significance of interpersonal moments within the text as a whole.

3.5.4 Duration

Of the subsections of narrative discourse outlined by Genette, it is duration that is the most visible effect employed in *Morkinskinna* and the element of narrative composition in which the redactor demonstrates the most flexibility and ingenuity. The concept of duration is that of the relationship between the amount of time, mimetically, in which an action would be expected to occur and the quantity of narrative space afforded to its description. Genette distinguishes four terms by which the scale of narrative duration can be demarcated: descriptive pause, scene, summary, and ellipsis.⁷⁷ Descriptive pause and ellipsis both appear in *Morkinskinna*: in the case of the former, the angry silence and flush of Magnús góði on seeing the spot at which his father, Óláfr helgi, was slain is a prime example.⁷⁸ In the case of

⁷⁶ Paul A. Harris, ‘Thinking on Different Levels of Narrative Time: J.T. Fraser’s Eotemporal Hierarchical Theory and Samuel Beckett’s Prototemporal Cosmos’, *Kronoscope*, 13.2 (2013), 203-16, at 212.

⁷⁷ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 94.

⁷⁸ *Morkinskinna I*, 30.

ellipsis, *Morkinskinna* is punctuated with phrases such as *eptir þetta einn dag*, which suggest the passage of unnarrated time between episodes.⁷⁹

Such instances are, however, necessarily limited: a text cannot be composed entirely of narrative caesurae and lacunae and still command a plot. The two middle positions of scene and summary are, therefore, the most prevalent within *Morkinskinna* and the primary terms by which narrative duration will be discussed in this section. Genette also sees the alternation between scene and summary as the ‘fundamental rhythm’ of any text and the arrangement of these two durations as the essential building blocks from which novelistic narrative is formed.⁸⁰ Genette’s argument follows that Proust’s manipulation of time is at odds with this traditional model, which Genette categorises as follows:

‘the contrast of tempo between detailed scene and summary almost always reflected a contrast of content between dramatic and nondramatic, the strong periods of the action coinciding with the most intense moments of the narrative while the weak periods were summed up with large strokes and as if from a great distance... the alternation of nondramatic summaries, functioning as waiting room and liaison, with dramatic scenes whose role in the action is decisive.’⁸¹

For the sake of further clarity, it is possible to think of scene as a mode of narrative that is contrived to better mimic the pace at which a reader would themselves expect to experience an event. In the case of the medieval narrative, this simulation is achieved predominantly through the inclusion of dialogue, gesture, and *punctum* (the presence of extraneous or inexplicable material the presence of which simulates verisimilitude).⁸² Summary is a more

⁷⁹ *Morkinskinna II*, 98. ‘One day, after that,’.

⁸⁰ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 97.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 109. It is of note that Genette, a modernist critic, only considers Proust’s narrative discourse in relation to the preceding tradition of the European canonical novel rather than its medieval precursors. Nonetheless, the relevance of such an approach to the narrative prose of the saga form is readily apparent.

⁸² Joaquín Martínez Pizarro, *A Rhetoric of the Scene: Dramatic Narrative in the Early Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 63-65, 109-115. For the original discussion of *punctum* in the context of the visual medium, see Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Cape, 1982), 73-95.

broadly applicable term for any narrative form that is self-consciously synoptic in excising detail seen as non-relevant to create terser, non-evocative accounts that can be more swiftly digested by a reader.⁸³

In relation to Norse literature, Carol Clover has stressed the centrality of scene to the saga style. To Clover, scene is the single ‘large narrative element’ that is consistent across the various forms of saga literature, and the primary method by which the corpus displays its literary quality.⁸⁴ In this reading, scene is denoted through a persistent structure: a tripartite scheme of preface, dramatic encounter, and conclusion.⁸⁵ Clover, like Genette, stresses the importance of the central dramatic section and the components that render it scenic:

‘...the drama may consist of direct or indirect discourse or, commonly, a combination of the two (sometimes effected by anacoluthon). In the dramatic encounter the narrator provides exactly, no more and no less, the ingredients for stage drama: mainly dialogue, interspersed with *hann svaraði*, *hann segir svá*, etc., together with concise and concrete stage directions of necessary accompanying movements and gestures. Summary and general statements (about time, situation, etc.) are relegated to the preface or conclusion; the center section stands alone as drama.’⁸⁶

While admitting there is considerable flexibility in the ways in which scenes are deployed throughout various sagas, Clover suggests that the symmetrical progress of a dramatic interaction is the template from which all saga authors draw their depictions of moments of high action.⁸⁷

To consider the *þættir* as scenes within *Morkinskinna* requires no adaptation of Clover’s model: a great many of the examples within *Morkinskinna* follow this basic formula.

⁸³ See Phyllis Bentley, ‘Use of Summary’, in Philip Stevick, ed., *The Theory of the Novel* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 47-52.

⁸⁴ Carol Clover, ‘Scene in Saga Composition’, *Arkiv for nordisk filologi*, 89 (1974), 57-83, at 58-59.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 59-61.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

Take, for instance, the structure of the sequence concerning Sigurðr jórsalafari and Áslákr hani:

- Preface: A single non-dramatic sentence establishing Sigurðr's location, company, and mood: *Svá bar at eitt sinn at Sigurðr konungr sat með mörgum mönnum gófgum í stirðum hug.*⁸⁸
- Dramatic encounter: In a mixture of direct and indirect speech, Sigurðr demands meat, despite it being a Friday, with his *hirð* being too afraid to contradict him, except for the low-status Áslákr. An extended dialogue ensues between the two men, with the sequence's centre being Áslákr's eloquent appeal to Sigurðr's piety and etiquette so that the king will mend his ways. The king's temporary silence is interpreted as anger and Áslákr is urged to flee, but he refuses, and the king's subsequent dialogue reveals his approval of his retainer's intercession, which he rewards with three farms. The sequence is rendered particularly dramatic by both Áslákr's interjection and Sigurðr's menace being entirely verbal – the episode progresses with dialogic rather than physical momentum.
- Conclusion: Like the preface, a single non-dramatic sentence, signalling not only the episode's conclusion, but also, atypically, the narrator's satisfaction with Sigurðr's eventual behaviour: *Lauk svá málinu at konungr sneri svá til sem bezt gegndi.*⁸⁹

The *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* are all rendered dramatic by their high percentage of dialogue, and all feature the framing boundaries of Preface and Conclusion in some form, often rendered as tersely as in the case above. To consider the *þættir* as scenes within *Morkinskinna* in this manner is useful in that it integrates them into the wider compositional project as essential narratological components of the larger text. Both *þáttir* and scene utilise dialogue

⁸⁸ *Morkinskinna II*, 144. 'One time, it came to pass that King Sigurðr sat in an unstable frame of mind alongside many noble men.'

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 145. 'The issue was settled that the king altered his behaviour for the better.'

and interpersonal positioning to embellish key moments of narrative with all the impact of drama.

While a helpful point of departure, to consider a *þáttr* to *only* function as a scene in *Morkinskinna* produces several difficulties. In the first place, it raises the question of the manner in which the surrounding prose of the kings' sagas should be understood: Clover's focus on scene is not accompanied by an extensive consideration of how summary operates. By denoting non-scenic passages, loosely, as 'interstitial narrative', Clover uses terminology that implies this synoptic prose primarily functions as brief bridges between the more crucial scenes, despite noting the significant variance in the form and length of this supplementary material.⁹⁰ This position derives, in part, from Clover's adoption of Heusler's distinction between *dünner Bericht* (sparse report) and *geschaute Auftritte* (observed performance) as typical of the saga style.⁹¹ In this thesis, discussing the presence of scene as a matter of narrative duration is intended to address this issue: scene and summary/synopsis are on a durational spectrum from faster to slower narration.

A further specific problem that arises if the *þættir* are designated as scenes within *Morkinskinna* is in their difference of function from other instances in the text that have obvious scenic qualities. Examples such as the lot-drawing trick played upon the Greek general Gyrgir by Haraldr harðráði to ensure his men could pitch their tents first or the dramatic rendering of Magnús berfœttr's death, which is punctuated by the king's exhortations to his men, clearly conform to Clover's concept of scene.⁹² Yet these examples prove complementary to surrounding summary in a manner which the *þættir* do not: instances

⁹⁰ Clover, 'Scene in Saga Composition', 64.

⁹¹ Andreas Heusler, *Die Altgermanische Dichtung* (Budapest: Darmst, 1957), 225-27.

⁹² *Morkinskinna I*, 91-2; *Morkinskinna II*, 63-70.

such as these, which have a less extrusive presence within the broader narrative, are, in fact, closer to the protracted examples Clover herself offers.⁹³

Take, for example, the passage concerning one of Haraldr harðráði's military engagements against King Sveinn of Denmark in which a harmony between scene and summary is achieved.⁹⁴ The passage begins with a summary of the size and location of the parties involved in the engagement and the manner in which the conflict goes awry for the Norwegians, in terms largely as prosaic as *Hann hafði þrjú hundruð langskipa, ok urpu Danir þá inni Norðmenn*.⁹⁵ Despite the potential for high drama in full-scale military conflict between rival kings, this material is unembellished, offering little information beyond the nature and position of the forces involved. A section of indirect speech is present in this passage, which includes a jibe at the incompetence of the Danes, but it serves to contextualise the king's selection of his theatre of combat rather than initiating a dialogue.

Upon Haraldr and his army being driven to a rocky island, however, a scene is constructed, which is centred upon the company's search for water, a comparatively brief event in comparison to the marshalling of Norway's military levy and its subsequent rout. This small matter is afforded a narrative duration, however, that is roughly equivalent to that of the summary of the entire preceding conflict. The focus on the wise commands of the king and the movements of the snake he uses to seek out fresh water prolong the episode and help to imbue it with the necessary detail of character, position and action to render the account scenic. Yet the scene does not dwarf or disrupt the preceding summary by introducing discordant characters or themes and maintains relevance to the material which surrounds it by highlighting an unusual moment in an otherwise typical military encounter. The landing at

⁹³ While Clover also acknowledges that the deployment and quality of scene can vary substantially between sagas, her given examples are all notably brief and linear in comparison to the *þættir*, which may include a number of distinct 'scenic sequences' in their own right.

⁹⁴ *Morkinskinna I*, 240.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 'He had three hundred longships and the Danes then surrounded the Norwegians.'

the island seamlessly progresses from the harrying of the Norwegian fleet, and the discovery of water demonstrates King Haraldr's ingenuity in a moment where it might otherwise appear that he has been outmanoeuvred. This scene even concludes with a rare justification of its relevance and the rationale for its preservation, with the redactor's need to explain a clever and practical trick excusing the duration of the narrative: *Ok varð af þessi ráðspeki konungs vatnit fundit, ok því at minnum haft eptir at ráðit þótti vitrligt ok hugkvæmligt.*⁹⁶

Such concern for a harmonious balance between the duration of scene and summary is not present in the relationship between *þættir* and surrounding synoptic material. The *þættir* expand the components of the typical scene to the point of dissonant narrative length, a feature accentuated by the particular elongation of the narrative duration of seemingly inconsequential events to a point disproportionate with their significance. This expansion is achieved in these sequences through the provision of the rich detail of personal interaction, with the inclusion of extensive dialogue being the primary tool.⁹⁷ Take, for example, the length of this sequence of dialogue in *Hreiðars þáttr*, which constitutes the preamble to Hreiðarr's inspection of Magnús inn góði:

Konungr svaraði honum hlæjandi ok mælti: 'Ef þú átt við mik ærendi þá mæl þú skjótt slíkt er þú vill. Aðrir eigu enn nauðsyn at tala við mik síðan.' Hreiðarr svarar: 'Mitt ærendi þykki mér skyldast. Ek vilda sjá þik, konungr. 'Þykki þér nú vel þá,' segir konungr, 'er þú sér mik?' 'Vel víst,' svarar Hreiðarr, 'en eigi þykkjumk ek enn til gørla sjá þik. 'Hvernug skulu vit nú þá?' spyrr konungr, 'vildir þú at ek stæða upp?'

⁹⁶ Ibid. 'The water came to be found due to the king's wisdom and, therefore, that has afterwards been remembered as the plan seemed wise and ingenious.'

⁹⁷ Depictions of psychological interiority, with their ability to evince recursive chains of digressive remembrance, as notably employed by the likes of Proust and Woolf, are arguably the most effective means of prolonging the duration of the narrative, as associative thought can be recounted near indefinitely without the need to progress narrative time substantially; see Tamar Katz, *Impressionist Subjects: Gender, Interiority, and Modernist Fiction in England* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). As the saga style makes infrequent use of interiority, however, prolonged dialogue, by which the narrative pace is slowed to the speed of conversation, constitutes the most radical deceleration possible in this case.

Hreiðarr svarar: ‘Þat vilda ek,’ segir hann. Konungr mælti er hann var upp staðinn: ‘Nú muntu þykkjask gørla sjá mik mega.’ ‘Eigi enn til gørla,’ svarar Hreiðarr, ‘ok er nú þó nær hófi.’ ‘Viltu þá,’ spyr konungr, ‘at ek leggja af mér skikkjuna?’ ‘Þat vilda ek víst,’ svarar Hreiðarr. Konungr mælti: ‘Vit skulum þar þó nokkut innask til áðr um þat málit. Þér eruð hugkvæmir margir, Íslendingar, ok veit ek eigi nema þú virðir þetta til ginningar. Nú vil ek þat undan skilja.’ Hreiðarr svarar, ‘Engi er til þess fœrr, konungr, at ginna þik eða ljúga at þér.’ Konungr leggur nú af sér skikkjuna ok mælti: ‘Hyggðu nú at mér svá vandliga sem þik tíðir.’⁹⁸

The king, laughing, answered him and said: ‘If you have business with me then say quickly whatever you want, as other people need to speak with me afterwards.’

Hreiðarr answers ‘My business seems the most urgent to me. I wanted to see you, king.’ ‘Does it seem good to you’ says the king, ‘when you look at me?’ ‘Good, to be sure,’ answers Hreiðarr, ‘but I still don’t think I can see you too clearly.’ ‘How shall we proceed now then?’ asks the king; ‘Do you want me to stand up?’ Hreiðarr answers, ‘I would like that,’ he says. The king said, when he was standing up: ‘Now you will think you can see me clearly’ ‘Still not clearly enough,’ answers Hreiðarr, ‘but it is a bit better.’ ‘Then do you want me,’ asks the king, ‘to take off my cloak?’ ‘I definitely want that,’ answers Hreiðarr. The king said: We should, nevertheless, discuss this beforehand. You Icelanders are very devious and for all I know you consider this a mockery. I want this issue settled in advance.’ Hreiðarr answers, ‘No one is able to deceive or lie to you, king.’ The king took off his cloak and said, ‘Now look at me as carefully as you want.’

⁹⁸ *Morkinskinna I*, 155-6.

The passage, while being approximately equivalent in length to the combined summary and scene of Haraldr's campaign against the Danes, is not even a full scene, but rather a dialogic extract from a far lengthier episode detailing the exact sequence of movements, gestures and articulations that comprises Hreiðarr's first meeting with King Magnús. It has been selected here for its particular political inconsequence: the dialogue merely represents the negotiations that precede an Icelander's appraisal of a king. The whole encounter between Hreiðarr and Magnús is itself one of the smaller scenic units that constitute the full structure of *Hreiðars þáttir*, each connected by the slim amount of synoptic material that provides transitions within the narrative sequence.⁹⁹ If the account of Hreiðarr's exploits only functioned to contextualise Magnús reign as a narrative concerning the king's authority (see 6.1.2), material such as the above quotation would seem a prime candidate for excision. The total length of *Hreiðars þáttir* in relation to the extent of sequences elsewhere in *Morkinskinna* cannot be overstated: the account of this Icelander's comic exploits abroad here exceeds the space devoted to significant events such as royal voyages, the suppression of rebellion, or even the account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge, a climactic moment in the narrative.

To borrow a phrase from Proust, by way of Genette, it is possible to distinguish between a typical scene within *Morkinskinna* on the one hand, and on the other, a *þáttir*, which can be considered as a 'supernourished' scene within the text.¹⁰⁰ Moments of revelatory social initiation for Proust's Narrator, such as the Villeparisis matinee or Guermantes dinner, are 'almost always inflated, indeed encumbered with digressions of all kinds, retrospections, anticipations, iterative and descriptive parentheses, didactic

⁹⁹ It is important to note that not all *þættir* feature smaller sub-scenes within them, as some briefer examples do not depict the range of locations or varieties of interaction that the lengthiest *þættir* include. Even the grandest examples (*Hreiðars þáttir*, *Auðunar þáttir*, *Halldórs þáttir Snorrasonar*, etc.), which sustain multiple episodes within them, are overwhelmingly scenic and do not feature prolonged passages of summary as is typical elsewhere in *Morkinskinna*.

¹⁰⁰ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 111.

interventions by the narrator, etc., all intended to collect in a syllepsis around the gathering.¹⁰¹ So too the *þættir*, albeit it through the prodigal inclusion of devices consistent with the saga style, radically expand the narrative duration of the interactions of kings and marginal figures to an extent disproportionate with the duration afforded to more conventionally momentous events elsewhere in *Morkinskinna*. The presence of extensive dialogue, frequent updates as to characters' description and position during dialogue, and the dramatisation of action within *þættir* narratives not only inflates the apparent importance of events narrated in this manner but also diminishes the impact of historically significant events covered only in summary form.¹⁰² The narrative history of *Morkinskinna* is not shaped so as to be analogous with a historical timeline on which significant events are writ bold and the inconsequential is excluded. Scenes of everyday intimacy in elite communities come to dominate the account of the period and are presented as the most prolonged and vivid issue with which Norwegian kings are confronted. The *þættir* are not, therefore, a palimpsest for more curtailed scenes in terms of their narrative effect within the text. The process of 'supernourishment' is rather a stylistic excess that stalls the progress of royal biography in favour of hyper-extending moments of idiosyncratic, interpersonal drama, marginalising the narration of national statecraft in the process.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Narrative syllepsis is used somewhat loosely by Genette across his different categories – in this case, it may simply be better to use Sabine Lang's definition of the term as 'a procedure of simultaneisation of what is not simultaneous'; 'Prolegómenos para una teoría de la narración paradójica', trans., Liviu Lutas, in Nina Grabe, Sabine Lang, and Klaus Meyer-Minneman, eds, *La narración paradójica: 'Normas narrativas' y el principio de la 'transgresión'* (Madrid: Iberoamericano, 2006), 21-47, at 33.

¹⁰² This assertion is well supported in the reader-reception branch of cognitive psychology where substantial research has been conducted on the negative effects that variation in narrative duration has on the recollection of previous narrative material. Broadly, if narrative events signpost themselves as taking longer than the events which preceded them or as being distinct from the previous chronology, readers disproportionately segment the narrative at this point, making previous action less mentally accessible or memorable at later points within the discourse; see Tali Ditman, Phillip J. Holcomb, and Gina R. Kuperberg, 'Time Travel Through Language: Temporal Shifts Rapidly Decrease Information Accessibility During Reading', *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 15.5 (2008), 750–6; Heather Bailey, Christopher Kurby, Jesse Sargent, and Jeffrey Zacks, 'Attentional Focus Affects how Events are Segmented and Updated in Narrative Reading', *Memory and Cognition*, 45.6 (2017), 940-55; Raymond B. Becker, Todd R. Ferretti, and Carol J. Madden-Lombardi, 'Grammatical Aspect, Lexical Aspect, and Event Duration Constrain the Availability of Events in Narratives', *Cognition*, 129 (2013), 212-20. The interruption of synoptic royal biography by a *þáttir* can, therefore, constitute an act of forgetting in relation to kings' previous actions within the text.

3.5.5 Mood

Mood is the term employed by Genette to discuss the ‘regulation of narrative information’.¹⁰³

As Genette holds that storytelling can only contrive to achieve partial mimesis, mood is the factor that dictates the quality and amount of detail provided within a narrative, with Genette subdividing this category further into distance and perspective.¹⁰⁴ Narrative distance pertains to what extent the reader is made aware they are being told something by the narrator-figure rather than seeming to experience actions in the story unmoderated. Despite recounting events that occurred up to two hundred years prior to its compilation, which the narrator cannot claim to have observed, narrative distance within the text is low. This is largely due to the prevalence of reported speech throughout *Morkinskinna*, which gives the audience the sensation of bearing immediate witness to action. The narrator regularly effaces their presence to invest characters with a personal voice that is constructed to appear to recount verbatim the conversation under consideration. This, in turn, lowers the incongruity of the 13th-century Icelandic narrator’s temporal and spatial distance from recounted events.¹⁰⁵

This artificial construction of ‘bearing witness’ functions parallel to the comparable process of the insertion of skaldic poetry, which has been argued, in relation to *konungasögur*, as having both a corroborative and embellishing effect on the prosimetrum it creates. The inclusion of verse validates the account through the stanzas’ status as both reliable witnesses to, and alternative formal renditions of, the events under consideration.¹⁰⁶ In *Morkinskinna*, skaldic verse of this sort is almost exclusively used in conjunction with

¹⁰³ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 162.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 162-3.

¹⁰⁵ This effect of the deployment of reported speech to ‘level differential identities’, in this case between narrator and subject, has also been noted in an oral-rhetorical context; see Kathleen Glenister Roberts, ‘Liminality, Authority, and Value: Reported Speech in Epideictic Rhetoric’, *Communication Theory*, 14.3 (2004), 264-84, at 266.

¹⁰⁶ For the concept of the skaldic verse as ‘footnote’ to historical account, see Heather O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 29-39.

extended sections of summary and should be distinguished from the rarer usage where verses are employed as a means to render dialogue dramatically (see 6.1.1).¹⁰⁷ The function of skaldic verse as a form of citation offers an alternative, non-scenic punctuation to synopsis by augmenting the terse prose with laudatory material that approbates a king's noble traits and martial prowess, often without the qualification and ambivalence as to royal qualities typical of the prose of *Morkinskinna*. To an extent, the effusiveness of verse with regard to kings' characters and deeds can be seen to qualify the less emotive position on monarchs' attributes evinced within the prose and stress the preeminent quality of all figures under consideration.¹⁰⁸ The presence of such verses, while primarily corroborative, has the further effect of enmeshing the narrator's account with those of the skalds who acted as members of kings' *hirðir* and, therefore, suggesting that the most effective manner by which to understand a ruler is through the accounts of his most intimate companions, a conviction of apparent importance to *Morkinskinna*'s redactor (see 3.1).

The narrative voice in *Morkinskinna* is detached, largely fulfilling the simple function of the conveyance of the story (see 3.5.1), although more overt moments of involvement on the part of the narrator are occasionally observable, such as in cases where the text's organisation or credibility are defended, or in the cases of later kings where violent cruelty is condemned.¹⁰⁹ While low narrative distance is consistent throughout the text it is worth noting that the extensive dialogue employed in the *þættir* renders the presence of the narrator particularly suppressed. The pacing and structure of extended conversation is the closest approximation of mimesis in the text and the redactor's frequent deployment of lengthy exchanges constitutes one of the key methods of constructing history within *Morkinskinna*:

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 39-45.

¹⁰⁸ This is not to say that skaldic poetry cannot imply latent critique nor support complex depictions of its subject but rather that its superficial stylistic exuberance forms an effective comparison to the comparatively subdued prose.

¹⁰⁹ *Morkinskinna II*, 208-10.

that of comprehensive re-enactment. Just as the inclusion of skaldic verse provides the authenticating voice of a figure who bore witness to a king's deeds, the extended dialogue of the *þættir* recreates fully rendered moments in the daily function of a *hirð*, which, instead of offering the redactor's reflection on a historical period, immerse readers in a dramatic reconstruction of a particular event. This is linked to the notion of 'supernourishment' (see 3.5.4), where the narrative impact of summary, which inevitably offers a reminder of narrative selectiveness, is further diminished through the repeated expansion of immersive moments of interpersonal intimacy, predominantly within the *þættir*. This has the effect of placing the audience in a position akin to an anonymous *hirðmaðr* as a first-hand listener to a conversation between a ruler and his followers rather than as a detached observer of events concerning the entire kingdom.

Such a statement may seem rather trite, in as much as the engrossing effect of simulating the unmediated reception of dialogue is inherent in all direct speech. The effect is employed with specific nuance in *Morkinskinna*, however, through its interplay with the other aspect of Mood that Genette discusses – that of perspective. Central to Genette's understanding of narrative perspective is the concept of focalization, most commonly described as the point-of-view adopted by the narrator, but more precisely understood as the extent of the knowledge the narrator is willing or able to provide: 'between the information of the hero and the omniscience of the novelist is the information of the narrator, who disposes of it according to his own lights and holds it back only when he sees a precise reason for doing so.'¹¹⁰ Genette distinguishes three subcategories by which to understand the term: zero focalization, in which the narrator has practical omniscience, being able to recount all physical and mental attributes of his characters without limit; internal focalization, in which the narrator's knowledge is equivalent to that of a particular focal character, allowing interior

¹¹⁰ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 206.

knowledge of that individual alone; or external focalization, where the narrator does not share information held by characters instead offering a detached external perspective on their actions.¹¹¹

Morkinskinna, as is typical of the saga style, does not regularly depict characters' interiority,¹¹² therefore, under Genette's tripartite system *Morkinskinna* must exhibit external focalization throughout the entire text, as the narrative has a filmic quality in capturing the actions of characters from a detached perspective. Such a generalisation is somewhat dissatisfying, however, in failing to account for distinctions between the narrative mood of synopsis and that of the *þættir*. Below are two passages drawn from the reign of Sigurðr jórsalafari, the first recounting the death of Óláfr Magnússon in the form of pure summary, the second being the opening section of the *þáttr* concerning King Sigurðr's interactions with Óttarr birtingr. A comparison of the two illustrates the variation in focalization well:

Á þrettánda ári ríkis þeira bræðra tók sótt Óláfr konungr Magnússon ok andaðisk, ok er hann grafinn at Kristskirkju norðr í Kaupangi, ok var hann allvinsæll maðr. Móðir Óláfs konungs var Sigríðr, dóttir Saxa ór Vík, systir Kára Austráttis [er] kallaðr var Kári konungsbróðir, ríkr maðr ok vinsæll. Önnur dóttir Saxa í Vík var Þóra. Hon gat son þann er Sigurðr [hét ok] síðan kallaðisk sonr Magnúss ok kallaðr var Sigurðr slembidjárn. Kári konungsbróðir átti Borghildi, dóttur Dags [Eilífssonar]. Var þeira sonr Sigurðr Austrátt, lendr maðr, faðir Jóans er átti Sigríði, systur Inga konungs Bárðarsonar. Eptir andlát [Óláfs konungs] skipta þeir bræðr landi með sér í helminga, Sigurðr konungr ok Eysteinn konungr. Hafði Sigurðr konungr inn eystra hlut lands en

¹¹¹ Ibid., 194-8.

¹¹² On a point of clarity regarding the relative scarcity of depictions of interiority in the saga style, it is worth stressing that this does not mean that emotion is not represented, nor that character complexity is lacking, but rather that assumptions as to a character's mental state must be drawn from that which can be externally observed, rather than through direct access to their feelings. See Kirsten Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics: Emotion and the Human Face in the Sagas and *þættir* of Icelanders', *Traditio*, 69 (2014), 125-45. Other characters' observations of a figure's mood, therefore, do not qualify as representations of the mental interior.

Eysteinn konungr [inn nørðra] hlut, ok sat hann optast í Niðarósi. Brátt gerðusk nokkurar greinir milli konunga í landinu.¹¹³

During the thirteenth year of the brothers' rule, King Óláfr Magnússon fell ill and died and he is buried at Christ Church to the north in Kaupangr and he was a deeply beloved man. King Óláfr's mother was Sigríðr, the daughter of Saxi of Vík, the sister of Kári of Austrátt, who was called Kári konungsbróðir, a powerful and popular man. Another daughter of Saxi of Vík was Þóra. She gave birth to a son who is called Sigurðr and who later called himself a son of Magnús and was nicknamed Sigurðr slembidjákn. Kári konungsbróðir married Borghildr, Dagr Eilífsson's daughter. Their son was Sigurðr Austrátt, a landed man, the father of Jóan who married Sigríðr, the sister of King Ingi Bárðarson. After the death of King Óláfr, the brothers, King Sigurðr and King Eysteinn, divided the land in half between them. King Sigurðr had the country's eastern part and King Eysteinn the northern part, and he sat most often in Niðaróss. Swiftly, there arose some quarrelling between the kings in the country.

Þat er sagt at hvítsunnudag sat Sigurðr konungr í hásæti sínu með vinum sínum ok miklu fjölmenni, ok þá sá menn at konungr var með miklu vanmegni ok þungu bragði. Váru þá margir hræddir um hversu af myndi reiða. Konungr leit yfir lýðinn ok arðgaði augunum ok sá umhverfis sik um pallana. Þá mælti konungr ok tók bókina þá ina dýru er hann hafði haft í land ok ǫll var gullstǫfum ritin, ok eigi hafði meiri gersimi komit í land í einni bók. Dróttningin sat hjá honum.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *Morkinskinna II*, 113-4.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 138-9.

It is told that on Whitsunday, King Sigurðr sat in the high-seat accompanied by his friends and a great crowd and at that point people saw that the king was deeply troubled and had a solemn expression. Then many people were afraid how that would turn out. The king looked over the company and rolled his eyes and looked around himself at the benches. Then the king spoke and took hold of a precious book that he had brought back to Norway and which was written completely in golden letters. A greater treasure had never come into the land in the form of a single book. The queen sat near Sigurðr.

These two examples, so different in style and tone, would both qualify as external focalization in Genette's model despite their substantial difference in narrative function. Issues such as this have led to focalization, despite its popularity as a concept amongst literary theorists, being the most heavily critiqued aspect of Genette's *Narrative Discourse*. In her influential amendment to the various modes of narrative perception, Mieke Bal extends her discussion of perspective to consider the concept of space, the depiction of which forms a specialised subsection of focalization.¹¹⁵ In *Morkinskinna*, a text in which a single character can operate across individual, institutional and national levels, the issue of spatial representation or how close the focal point is to the narrated event is of vital importance. In the case of the death of Óláfr Magnússon, the first of the two quotations above, the narrative ranges widely and swiftly across locations and generations, expanding outwards from a precise point of initiation, Óláfr's grave at Kaupangr, to cover a range of distant locations and the cast of interrelated individuals associated with them. The ability to view scattered individuals from different generations with near simultaneity in this manner can be seen to fall under Manfred Jahn's concept of 'weak focalization' in which objects are observed from

¹¹⁵ Mieke Bal, *Narratology*, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 124.

a nonspecific spatial and temporal position.¹¹⁶ More precisely, the point of focalization is national, depicting the division of Norway between the brother-kings from a satellite perspective that simulates for the reader a macropolitical moment comparable to the visual effect of the inking of borders on a map. This point of view is impersonal, not only in not being associated with a given individual but, more importantly, in it not being cogent for any individual to observe both kings' domains at this narrative distance with this degree of parallelism.

In the second example, from the *þáttir* concerning Sigurðr's interactions with Óttarr birtingr, the spatial aspect has collapsed to the limits of a single hall. This is typical of the *þættir*, whose narrative focus is often static and limited in scale: *Brands þáttir* takes place within two rooms, and King Eysteinn comforts Ívarr in what appears to be a private corner (see 3.4, 6.3).¹¹⁷ In this case, the focus remains closely upon King Sigurðr, as a figure distinct from the generic crowd that is celebrating the feast day around him, and the narrative dwells upon his movements and expressions of dejection and frustration. The value of the book is also lingered upon in relation to its status as a unique treasure.¹¹⁸ Ármann Jakobsson comments upon restrictions of narrative vision, such as this, as part of an 'alienation effect', by which the reader is forced to share an unfamiliarity with regard to the Norwegian *hirð* with the newly-arrived Icelanders present in many *þættir* and with an Icelandic saga audience uncertain as to the particulars of this distant and exotic zone.¹¹⁹ It is certainly the case that kings are often rendered mysterious through both their disguises and their splendour, and this occasions a tightening of perspective, but Icelanders and peripheral figures more generally, are also represented vividly and enigmatically within the narrative field of vision. The figures

¹¹⁶ Manfred Jahn, 'The Mechanics of Focalization: Extending the Narratological Toolbox', *GAAT*, 21 (1999), 85-110.

¹¹⁷ *Morkinskinna II*, 102-5.0

¹¹⁸ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 158-9.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 124-6.

of the king and the newcomer are idiosyncratic landmarks around which a *þáttr* is orientated, but the reader does not look through these characters' eyes, nor through a narrator strongly aligned with either of their positions: both individuals are depicted as exceptional and ambiguous in their characterisations.

An alternative explanation for the presence of these sudden restrictions in the field of narrative view is that they offer a reconfiguration of perspective that, for the span of the *þáttr*, shifts focalization to conform to a perspective appropriate to the ideology of a *hirð* member.¹²⁰ This effect, which can be termed as social focalization, allows for a perspective on the scene similar to that of an attendant character whose values are typical of the milieu depicted, but who, nevertheless, does not appear as an actualized character within the narrative. The use of *Þat er sagt* (It is told) to begin the above passage further accentuates the sensation of anonymous observation from a perspective distinct from that of the narrator. In this manner, a reader is implicitly informed of the limits and stakes of the episode and any details of particular interest, without ceding the duty of narration to a specific character and thus demanding a depiction of their interior mental state. In the *þáttr* concerning Óttarr and Sigurðr, the hall is distinguished as the spatial bound, while the tight narrative focus on the temperament of the monarch and surrounding tokens of wealth implies a value system appropriate to service within the *hirð*: one concerned with loyal service to one's lord and the consequent possibility of valuable reward. This is not the perspective of Óttarr himself, however, who is delineated from the institution that surrounds him through his ambivalent description, which itself suggests a certain social expectation to *hirð* membership that Óttarr partly contravenes: *svartr á hárlit, lítill ok vaskligr ok kurteiss, dækkliðaðr ok þó vel um*

¹²⁰ For further discussion of the significance of ideology to focalization, see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 83-84. In Rimmon-Kenan's view, the ideological facet is inherent to all focalization, with the narrator-focalizer holding the dominant ideological position. For the narrator to shift their perspective to a position more closely aligned with that of an imagined figure within the storyworld, therefore, evinces an ideological reorientation within the text where such a figure's perspective is elevated in authority and narrative centrality.

sik.¹²¹ Both Sigurðr, with his antisocial distemper, and Óttarr, of low stock and uncertain character, are rendered as agents of dramatic strife in this *páttr* (see 7.3), through the narrative's social focalization, which provides a normative view that falls between the two men: that of a faceless *hirðmaðr* well-versed in the supposed conventions of such a space and sensitive to their destabilisation (see 4).

In sections of summary, the focal point operates at a distance that, while still centred upon the king, is detached from any one localised position and can, therefore, consider the ruler in relation to Norway as a whole, allowing the narrative focus to flit across an abstract landscape with the king as the sole actor, whose agency impacts the whole country. Within the *pættir*, conversely, the quality of immersive re-enactment, as engendered by extended dialogue, is compounded through the sudden reconfiguration of the narrator's focal position to harmonise with the elite social perspective of the *hirð* as the institution that hosts the scene. Both the figure of the king and the uninitiated newcomer stand distinct from the *hirð*. The consistent focus on their superlative actions, or disruptive interactions, defines them both in relation to a normative perspective in relation to *hirð* customs, centring around the whims of kings, precious objects, feasting, elite etiquette, and homosocial camaraderie, all of which form the backdrop to the action of the *pættir*. The events narrated in the *pættir* disrupt such normative values and the ability of such episodes to threaten the stability of Norwegian elite society is central to their function.

3.6. Narrative insurrection in *Morkinskinna*

Having distinguished the radical effect the presence of a *páttr* has upon presentations of characters within the *hirð* and the quality of the narrative discourse of *Morkinskinna*, the chapter will conclude with the formulation of an original theoretical model through which to

¹²¹ *Morkinskinna II*, 139. 'Dark haired, small and valiant and courteous, with a dark complexion but still fine looking.'

approach this phenomenon within the text. If the structuralist approach of Joseph Harris (see 2.2) is modified to consider the *þættir* as elements of a larger text that all exhibit similarities of construction, a broad definition of the term tailored for *Morkinskinna* can be supplied: *a þáttir is a stylistically demarcated narrative structure, which temporarily centres a socially marginal and disruptive figure alongside the presiding king within the Norwegian hirð*. Such a denotation has some utility in the analysis of the *þættir* within the context of this thesis, in providing a general rationale for the selection of certain episodes for discussion as *þættir* rather than simple scenes and in preserving a sense of the term compatible with previous scholarship.

To supply a concise definition of the term *þáttir* on the basis of content alone, however, risks reproducing the issues that have hampered previous scholarship: marginal cases that only partially fulfil the criteria demanded by a given definition can be suggested that diminish its utility. It is more productive to understand the events that typify the *þættir* – the recursive struggles for prominence between kings and peripheral figures – as in concordance with the effects the *þættir* themselves occasion within the narrative discourse, as the spatio-temporal depiction of history is reconfigured at their boundaries. Just as the unruly prominence afforded to marginal *þættir* protagonists disrupts the preestablished authority of kings, the presence of the *þættir*, as sequences that radically alter the narrative mode, stands in opposition to the equilibrium of scene and synopsis typical of narrative history.¹²² Thus, the disruption of society and discourse are synthesised; the *þættir* narrate the variety of ways in which marginal figures seek to destabilise the hegemonic centrality of kings within elite

¹²² Ármann Jakobsson, in discussing the lack of narrative unity in *Morkinskinna*, makes use of an analogy with *nykrat*, the juxtaposition of unlike kenning within a skaldic verse, to suggest that the text's failure to conform to Aristotelian poetics was an element of its artistry; 'The Amplified Saga', 37. Ármann argues for *nykrat* as a metaphor that applies to his broader argument for the different elements of *Morkinskinna* all having equal relevance and consequently adhering to a principle of amplification in forming a 'narrative web'. This is not the argument made in this thesis but the term may have its use extended and modified here to discuss the incongruous boundaries in the narrative discourse between *þættir* and synoptic material.

society and, as structures within the wider text, similarly destabilise Norwegian royal biography, stiling the progress of chronological narrative history through dramatic shifts in narrative duration, detail and perspective. This effect on the text of these two combined factors can be called narrative insurrection and it is through the use of this term that the relationship between the *þættir* and *Morkinskinna* shall be understood.

The effect of narrative insurrection upon the structure and content of a text can be further clarified by way of a well-known example from *The Canterbury Tales*, specifically the function of the ‘The Miller’s Prologue.’ Following the conclusion of ‘The Knight’s Tale’, the Host invites the Monk to speak next in accordance with the social hierarchy that has been established as providing the rationale for the sequencing of the tales. The Miller interjects at this point, however, in an unruly fashion:

The Millere, that for dronken was al pale,
 So that unnethe upon his hors he sat,
 He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,
 Ne abyde no man for his curteisie,
 But in Pilates voys he gan to crie,
 And swoor, ‘By armes, and by blood and bones,
 I kan a noble tale for the nones,
 With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale.’¹²³

The Miller’s interruption is that of a disruptive character whose crudity and breaches of etiquette are in opposition to the refined values embodied by the knight. Similarly, ‘The Miller’s Tale’ reconfigures the courtly love triangle at the centre of ‘The Knight’s Tale’ in bawdy style, transforming the romance into the cuckoldry typical of a *fabliau*.¹²⁴ Both the

¹²³ Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘The Miller’s Prologue’, in F. N. Robinson, ed., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 47.

¹²⁴ Dawn Simmons Walts, ‘Tricks of Time in the *Miller’s Tale*’, *The Chaucer Review*, 43.4 (2009), 400-13, at 408.

unruly Miller and the ribald tale he recounts disrupt expected orders, both within the depicted social group and the narrative discourse. In *The Canterbury Tales*, the use of narrative insurrection reflects a fluidity of social station that disrupts the supposed hegemony of authority and narrative form associated with the Knight. The Miller's oaths in his prologue demand that he be heard and are accompanied by the Narrator's apology for the subsequent form and content of the verse in 'The Miller's Tale',¹²⁵ synthesising the forthright speech act of a cantankerous character with the narrator's simulation of losing control of the narrative in allowing 'The Miller's Tale' to occupy such a position within *The Canterbury Tales*. The *þættir* have a similar effect upon *Morkinskinna*, except no apology is made for their presence on the part of the narrator and their inclusion is persistent rather than being limited to a device to transition between other tales. The effect of narrative insurrection on the text of *Morkinskinna* is, consequently, of another magnitude of disruption.

If narrative insurrection is to be accepted as a central organisational principle within *Morkinskinna*, the objective of using this model in the structuring of narrative history must also be considered. In many cases the *þættir* feature Icelanders, and issues of the representation of Icelandic identity have figured large in previous summations of *Morkinskinna*'s modus operandi. Andersson and Gade consider *Morkinskinna* to be written by a northern Iclander (see 1.2), perhaps himself once in service in a foreign court, and whose centring of the capability of Icelanders for 'fidelity and contentiousness' while in Norway suggests a profound interest in the relationship between the two countries and the necessity of safeguarding Icelandic independence while ensuring personal profit for Icelanders abroad.¹²⁶ Ármann Jakobsson also considers it probable that the authorial figure was an Iclander, due to the specificity of the details of the Icelandic experience in Norway,

¹²⁵ Michael P. Kuczynski, "'Don't Blame Me': The Metaethics of a Chaucerian Apology", *The Chaucer Review*, 37.4 (2003), 315-28.

¹²⁶ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 77-81.

and the extensive consideration of Icelandic experience in the *þættir*. Ármann argues that the Icelander takes on a variety of guises while abroad, which can range from refined courtiers to hapless fools.¹²⁷ While making clear that not all Icelanders are fortunate abroad, Ármann concludes that the text centres on ‘an Icelander who makes the Norwegian court his own society and the Norwegian king his leader.’¹²⁸

This thesis does not seek to challenge such arguments for the prominence of Icelanders in *Morkinskinna*; narrative insurrection is an accurate model when applied to the process by which Icelanders are prominently and jarringly ‘written in’ to Norwegian narrative history. Issues arise, however, if the primary instigator of the disruptive narrative structure of *Morkinskinna* is argued to be national identity. By the terms formulated within this chapter, not all the episodes that qualify as *þættir* feature protagonists who are Icelandic, with socially marginal Norwegians disrupting elite life in a significant minority of episodes. Furthermore, as action is confined to the limits of the socio-economic institution of the Norwegian *hirð*, an equally reasonable suggestion might be that narrative insurrection enables the depiction of the struggle between lord and retainer. These readings only constitute individual facets of a larger project that accounts for the presence of narrative insurrection within *Morkinskinna*: an overarching attempt to represent strife and instability as essential constituents of Norwegian narrative history.

The centrality of strife is achieved through the intermixed representations of order and disorder on individual, institutional and literary levels. Kings wield unchallenged authority over Norway one moment and are outwitted by a poor farmer the next. A *hirð* is a rigorously hierarchical organisation exactly until a greenhorn newcomer circumvents its structures to achieve immediate intimacy with a king (see 4.2). Brief summaries of matters of international

¹²⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 287-92.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 341.

diplomacy are dwarfed by the supernourished scene of Sneglu-Halli's gruel-eating contest (see 7.1.4). The ungovernable quality of history, both as a sequence of past events and as the subject of sagas, is represented in *Morkinskinna* through the bursting of the inconsequential and uncouth into the grandiose and refined, voiding established social norms and stylistic expectations. Within this context, the employment of narrative insurrection emphasises that the presiding king must engage in multiple struggles with a host of disruptive challengers. Kings retain narrative centrality until their deaths or depositions, but their status as saga protagonists is repeatedly demonstrated to be both assailable and partisan. These challenges can arise from other kings and powerful magnates, but the effect of the *þættir* on the text is to have the most dramatic disruptions be enacted by the impoverished, the eccentric, and the renegade, which exacerbates this strife beyond a narrative of the elite jockeying for power and constitutes a broader challenge to royal centrality in Norway. Such stakes are in keeping with the serious social degeneration into civil war that underpins the narrative history of *Morkinskinna* (see 3.5.2) and the tumult of which is represented in miniature by the *þættir*.

To understand *Morkinskinna* as replete with interpersonal conflicts that serve, in combination, to corrode kingly authority, is not to consider it a text that is hopeless in tone, or one that presents this period as irredeemably anarchic: the theme is the slide of Norway into instability, with only its brief final section depicting violent instability proper (see 7.4). Kings who feature in *þættir* have different methods of approaching the unruly figures who challenge them, many of which prove productive, and the nature of their response informs the reputation they receive within the text. In the second section of the present thesis, the different methods by which kings negotiate a range of threats to their authority, as crucially informed by the model of narrative insurrection, will be investigated. In doing so, a highly original reading of *Morkinskinna* will be produced.

4 The Idiosyncrasy and Relevance of *Morkinskinna*

In the previous chapter, the model of narrative insurrection was offered as a compositional effect crucial to the structure of *Morkinskinna*. Other *konungasögur*, however, differ substantially in terms of structure despite the corpus frequently overlapping with regard to the events being narrated. This chapter will discuss a selection of *konungasögur* and the various ways in which their narrative content is ordered, depicted, and dramatised, in comparison to the model argued for *Morkinskinna*. This is not with the aim of centring *Morkinskinna* as the structural exemplar of the *konungasögur* as a genre but to demonstrate the particular idiosyncrasy of *Morkinskinna*'s narrative discourse being typified by the presence of *þættir* and, by extension, narrative insurrection. Numerous incongruous episodes or sequences within other *konungasögur* will be shown, simultaneously, to benefit from having the framework of narrative insurrection applied to them, which destabilises the primacy of kings within narratives ostensibly centred upon royal characters. In doing so, both the necessity of appreciating the unique centrality of strife to the composition of *Morkinskinna* and the utility of applying this thesis' analytic model to specific passages elsewhere in Norse narrative history will be demonstrated.

Compendia of *konungasögur* that present a span of Norwegian royal succession rather than texts that focus on the exploits of one king will be favoured in this chapter due to the readier comparison with *Morkinskinna*; for similar reasons, subsequent analysis will often afford particular mention to narratives of the period 1030-1157 within wider compendia, to provide a pointed comparison with the presentation of contemporaneous events and characters to those depicted in *Morkinskinna*. The chapter does not, however, aim to extend the debate surrounding the provenances of various *konungasögur* manuscripts or their relationship to *Morkinskinna*, a problem the complexity of which has often been remarked

upon.¹ In noting narratological parallels between texts whose methodologies of composition were influenced by differences in location, remit, and ideology on the parts of their compilers, the aim is not to construct a stemma through an analysis of literary style. The purpose of this chapter is instead to summarise the variety of ways in which royal biography is rendered in Norse prose and, in doing so, to demonstrate the unique effect produced within *Morkinskinna*. The chapter will conclude with a broader consideration of the utility of narrative insurrection as a model for understanding sections of narrative throughout saga literature.

4.1 *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*

Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum or, as it is more concisely referred to, *Ágrip*, is preserved in a single fragmentary manuscript, AM325 II 4to, probably from the first quarter of the thirteenth century, with the text itself held to date from c.1190.² The title, derived from Finnur Magnússon's 1835 edition of the text, denotes its concise nature, but this traditional view of the text as a strict synoptic has been challenged due to the evident variability in narrative duration of different kings' lives.³ *Ágrip* provides, for instance, an early example of the embellishment of the reigns of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr helgi that becomes typical of later compilations. *Ágrip*'s brevity, coupled with its moralising tone and frequent use of atypical syntactic formulations,⁴ has often relegated it to being considered as a bridging text between

¹ Jón Helgason, ed., *Morkinskinna: MS No.1009 fol. in the Old Royal Collection of the Royal Library, Copenhagen*, Corpus Codicum Islandicorum Medii Aevi 6 (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1934), 12.

² For a comprehensive argument for the dating of the manuscript to this period on palaeographic grounds, see Hreinn Benediktsson, *Early Icelandic Script as Illustrated Vernacular Texts from the Twelfth to the Thirteenth Centuries* (Reykjavík: Manuscript Institute of Iceland, 1965), xxi. Sigurðr Nordal provides the most compelling argument for the text's composition c.1190 due to its use of elements of *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, which was produced prior to 1188 and the use of *Ágrip* itself as a source for passages from the Old Norse revision of Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, probable to date from c.1200; see Sigurðr Nordal, *Om Olaf den Helliges saga: En kritisk undersøgelse* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1914), 8-9, 37-9.

³ Ármann Jakobsson, 'Inventing a Saga Form: The Development of the Kings' Sagas', *Germanic Philology*, 4 (2012), 1-22, at 11.

⁴ Matthew James Driscoll, *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 10, 2nd ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2008), xvii-xx.

Latin synoptics and the sagas, rather than as a member, albeit truncated, of the *konungasögur* proper.⁵

In addition to their shared subject matter and use of the Norse vernacular, there are sound narratological reasons for considering *Ágrip* alongside the *konungasögur*, although features of the text's narrative discourse are much compressed due to its brevity. *Ágrip* constructs narrative history around the same three primary types of narrative content as other *konungasögur* texts that narrate multiple reigns. The first is the issue of succession: the events by which one king comes to succeed another, be they death, co-rule, or conflict. The details of a king's accession and their deposition or deaths are, consequently, prominent and both are linked through the detailed afforded to climactic battle scenes, which often acquire a narrative tradition semi-distinct from the royal biographies of the kings involved.⁶ The second is supplying commentary on kings' characters, to produce an implied, if not overt comparison, between monarchs, although this need not extend to the point of moral approbation or condemnation. The third, which most distinguishes the saga-form from the synoptic history, is the inclusion of developed literary scenes to embellish momentous, relevant, or entertaining events *during* a monarch's reign. The weighting of these three components varies considerably between texts: in the case of *Morkinskinna*, for instance, there is a notable preponderance of scenic material.

Ágrip maintains a narrow focus on the figures of kings; it provides little detail regarding their followers except in cases where retainers' actions are instrumental or exemplary in serving their lord, such as the deaths of Björn digri and Þorsteinn knarrasmiðr

⁵ See, for example, Andersson, *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings*, 28-30.

⁶ Jakub Morawiec and Przemysław Urbańczyk, 'Building the Legend of the Battle of Svoldr', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 37.3 (2012), 279-295.

defending St. Óláfr.⁷ The text is consistent in focusing on events of dynastic significance and displays a sensitivity to the relative length that events within the narrative can be afforded in a brief text. In relation to their respective accounts of the reign of Haraldr harðráði, the contrast between the narratives of *Ágrip* and *Morkinskinna* is jarring: in the former only three episodes of the king's life are narrated in comparison to the dense clustering of *þættir* in the account of Haraldr's reign in the latter. In *Ágrip*, the first episode concerns Haraldr's return to Norway, while the last recounts his death at Stamford Bridge, creating the narrative frame that links his reign to those that proceed and succeed it. The central episode focuses upon Haraldr's conflict with Finn and King Sveinn, which is a significant military engagement and exemplifies the king's martial prowess, but the text also includes an account of the trick by which Haraldr locates water on a barren island by following a snake (see 3.5.4).⁸ While seemingly of lesser historical consequence than the surrounding material, the episode fulfils a purpose similar to that of the comparable narrative material in *Morkinskinna* – to demonstrate Haraldr's cunning as crucial to his effective kingship. Even in this condensed text, it is possible to single out episodes where seemingly extraneous material is included to better characterise the king in question, a practice that partly informs the inclusion of the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna*.

The above episode is still centred upon a king, however, and in the majority of cases, *Ágrip* does not seek to challenge the primacy of the institution of kingship, nor to represent figures who might disrupt or qualify a ruler's centrality or agency. Such an approach is to be expected in a text that functions as an epitome of a broad span of Norwegian history. The consistency of monarchic centrality is achieved through more than the terse style, however,

⁷ *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum* in, Bjarni Einarsson, ed, *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum, Fagrskinna – Noregs Konunga Tal*, Íslenzk Fornrit 29 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka Fornritfelag, 1985), 3-54, at 30. Hereafter referred to as *Ágrip*.

⁸ *Ágrip*, 38.

with scenes more often demonstrating kings' superiority over their retainers and their ability to act without support. This is well demonstrated in one of the more embellished scenes in *Ágrip*, in which Hákon góði slays Eyvindr skreyja, a champion of Haraldr gráfeldr, who is described as follows: *Hann var kappi mikill, meiri en aðrir menn ok bitu varla járn.*⁹

Beforehand, however, Hákon refuses the aid of Þórálfr sterki, a nineteen-year-old Iclander, rumoured to be equal in strength to the king. Hákon and Þórálfr's dialogue is one of the few instances in *Ágrip* of a king conferring with a member of his *hirð* and the king's statement of his resolution to represent himself in combat is emblematic of the narrative's narrow focus upon royal action: *mik vill hann hitta; skal hann ok því mik finna.*¹⁰ It is possible to extend such a reading further to note that this scene, which features a king being offered aid from a youthful companion in defeating a giant and seemingly indestructible champion but refusing, subverts the biblical model of David's encounter with Goliath.¹¹ In a sophisticated piece of hermeneutics, Hákon is presented, in opposition to Saul, as not requiring the help of his retainer to defeat a terrifying foe.¹² Such a presentation of the king as the sole active figure on the battlefield conforms to the wider tendency in *Ágrip* for the narrative to be focused solely on royal action with challenges to a king's narrative centrality arising predominantly from conflict with rival monarchs. The institution of kingship consequently remains secure as the catalyst of the progress of Norwegian history.

⁹ Ibid., 9. 'He was a great champion, larger than other people and hardly cut by iron.'

¹⁰ Ibid., 10. 'He wishes to meet me; therefore he will find me'.

¹¹ For the considerable tradition of employing Davidic literature in similar quasi-legendary contexts, see Stanley Jerome Isser, *The Sword of Goliath: David in Heroic Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

¹² It is fascinating to note further similarities between Saul's presentation in 1 Samuel and Hákon góði's depiction in *Ágrip*: both are righteous kings, initially adhering to the commands of God, but later erring in their behaviour, either through seizing cattle as plunder from the Amalekites in Saul's case or conceding to partake in heathen sacrifices in the case of Hákon. Both can be seen as noble failures as kings, who despite their many positive qualities only serve to prefigure later rulers who exceed them as king's more beloved by God: King David and St Óláfr. Both men also die shortly after being wounded by arrows in battle, although Saul commits suicide unlike Hákon who dies repenting his unworthy heathen conduct and begging forgiveness from God. It is tempting to view *Ágrip*'s depiction of Hákon inn góði as being partially modelled on Saul, albeit with a degree of sympathy to a Christian figure surrounded by hostile pagans, which justifies the relative positivity of the presentation of Hákon's battle with Eyvindr skreyja and the king's humility in death.

In the accounts of pre-Christian kings, whose behaviour the text's compiler often condemns, marginal figures do achieve an otherwise atypical narrative prominence. These examples also constitute some of the most dramatic scenes of *Ágrip*: several are sufficiently disruptive in terms of their length and content to be considered as narrative insurrections. The depiction of the ignominious downfall of Hákon jarl when opposed by Halldórr of Skerðingssteðja is one such example.¹³ Rather than choosing to fight, Hákon dismisses all his men and flees with his thrall Karkr, drowning his horse and casting off his sword and cloak to hide in a cave, subsequently named Jarlshellir. Here Karkr has two prophetic dreams in which he is visited by *maðr svart ok illiligr* who informs him that the jarl's son Erlendr is dead in the first case, and that there is no escape from their grisly fate in the second.¹⁴ Afterwards, both men hide in the pigsty of Þóra, the king's mistress, until Hákon orders Karkr to cut his throat to avoid torture upon hearing that a search party intends to burn the farm. The author moralises Hákon's fate through the memorable formulation: *ok lauk svá saurlífsmaðr í saurgu húsi sínum dögum, ok svá ríki*.¹⁵ Karkr presents the jarl's head to Hákon's enemies, expecting a reward, but is hanged.

The narrative focuses on the cooperation of a jarl and a thrall with the clear purpose of debasing the former through his close association with the latter; the expanded account of Hákon's death in *Heimskringla* gives Þóra dialogue and includes a description of Óláfr Tryggvason's slaying of Erlendr and the subsequent search for Hákon – the structure of the *Ágrip* episode is more restrained in maintaining its primary focus on the interactions of two men of vastly different social standings.¹⁶ Hákon's discarding of his steed, clothing, and

¹³ *Ágrip*, 16-8.

¹⁴ Ibid., 17. 'A dark and evil-looking man'.

¹⁵ Ibid., 18. 'And so a man who had a squalid life ended his days and his authority in a squalid house.'

¹⁶ For treatments of Hákon's deaths in other *konungasögur*, see Sverrir Tómasson, 'Dauði Hákonar jarls', *Gripplá*, 15 (2004), 186-93; Andrew Hamer, "'Death in a Pig Sty": Snorri's version of the Death of Hákon jarl Sigurðarson', in Richard North and Tette Hofstra, eds, *Latin culture and Medieval Germanic Europe*:

weapon, all conventional tokens of status, denigrate him, as do his repeated acts of cowardice in hiding from his pursuers. Karkr is, simultaneously, elevated to a level of narrative prominence comparable to that of his lord through his uncanny insight into their doom: a specific irony may be suggested here in Hákon, previously celebrated for his peerless cunning, having to rely on his slave for information. The scene is composed of indirect speech that unites dream and reality and which elongates Hákon's flight and death beyond the length of the account of the rest of his reign.

The structure of the scene also produces a compression of the narrative space to claustrophobic effect, which parallels Hákon's diminishing sphere of influence, from his previous *ríki miklu* (great authority) over Norway, to cohabitation of confined spaces, a cave and later a pigsty, where he is reliant on his thrall even for the ignoble action of helping him take his own life. The narrative enacts a sequential reduction of Hákon's authority and agency which extends into his afterlife, where Karkr, briefly the sole focal character, conveys his lord's head to his enemies in hope of a reward, only to be hanged instead. Hákon's instrumentalisation is absolute as he is reduced to an object in a slave's possession and a target of public anger: *ok kastaði hverr maðr steini at*.¹⁷ The author creates an effective caesura between the immoral heathen practice of Hákon and the Christianising efforts of Óláfr Tryggvason through this interlude in which royal biography, albeit momentarily, is disrupted by a focus on the movements and actions of Karkr, who, as a slave to a dead king, occupies a place at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The narrative lingering on Hákon's severed head and the abuse it suffers, therefore, reflects the severance of the established pagan succession.

Proceedings of the First Germania Latina Conference held at the University of Groningen, 26 May 1989 (Groningen: E. Forsten, 1992), 55-69.

¹⁷ *Ágrip*, 17. 'Every man threw stones at it.'

The other scene in *Ágrip* whose inclusion is best understood if it is considered as destabilising the account of the reign of the monarch in which it is inserted concerns Haraldr hárfagri's lust for the Finnish princess Snjófríðr and his subsequent prolonged and ruinous mourning following her death. The episode is preceded by a comment on Haraldr's success in increasing Norway's stability and peacefulness, followed by a catalogue of his twenty sons.¹⁸ The list concludes with the pre-emptive introduction of Snjófríðr as the mother of the sorcerer Rognvaldr reykill. The signalling of her intimacy with Haraldr prior to the scene in which she plays a central role could be attributed to the author working from a variety of sources and failing to integrate them successfully. There is, however, a certain narrative utility to discussing Rognvaldr in relation to his many half-brothers, as this removes the need to mention the only active element of Haraldr and Snjófríðr's relationship – their progeny – from the ensuing scene, which draws its force from the static and destructive interrelationship of the two lovers. This accentuates the sense of inversion the scene itself engenders: Haraldr decamps from his hall to a modest *gammi* (Finnish hut), wherein his established promiscuity is replaced with a monomaniac devotion to Snjófríðr, an attraction seemingly magical and genuine in parts, and his effective rule is reduced to impotent doting.¹⁹

Snjófríðr, or rather her corpse, becomes emblematic of the paralytic malaise in this period of Haraldr's rule, as Peter Dendle says: 'For someone who does not speak directly or indirectly, and who performs no activities in *Ágrip* other than to pour mead and die, Snjófríðr exerts a tremendous negative influence on the king and the people as a whole.'²⁰ *Ágrip*'s author

¹⁸ Ibid., 4-5. Haraldr's promiscuity is probably not only seen as a negative attribute of his heathenism but a contributor to ensuing Norwegian instability due to the resultant surplus of successors and their competing claims to the royal title. It is tempting, therefore, to suggest that *Ágrip*'s clerical author, writing during the civil war era, considers Haraldr's superfluity of sons as the 'original sin' of the royal dynasty that rationalizes later elite infighting.

¹⁹ Ibid., 5-6.

²⁰ Peter Dendle, 'Direct Discourse and Gender in the *Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sögum*', *Neophilologus*, 81.3 (1997), 403-8, at 407.

places Snjófríðr at the centre of a ripple effect of bereavement that encompasses all of Norway and depicts Haraldr as a figure in need of mourning by association: *Syrgði hann hana dauða, en landslýðr allr syrgði hann villtan*.²¹ It is worth noting the narrative centrality of a royal corpse here, as in the case of Hákon jarl's head, as a method of demonstrating an intermission in effective monarchy. The king's bewitched vigil is resolved by the intervention of Þorleifr spaki, who persuades the king to move the corpse, at which point Snjófríðr's evil nature is revealed in the sudden putrefaction of her remains: *blánaði þó áðr allr líkaminn, ok ullu ór ormar ok eðlur, froskar ok þøddur, ok allskyns illyrmi*.²² The dissolution of the disruptive character into vermin as the scene's conclusion can be read as a negative variant of the typical pattern observable in the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna*, by which the disruptive presence of a newly-prominent figure is defused at the conclusion of the scene, allowing the king to return to normative royal action.

Heather O'Donoghue has noted the arresting prominence of the Snjófríðr sequence, terming it 'a compelling piece of narrative', adding that 'Snorri includes it in much the same form in *Heimskringla*, but in *Ágrip* this episode is longer than the whole of the rest of the account of Haraldr's reign.'²³ O'Donoghue suggests that this discrepancy arises from the episode existing in a distinct oral tradition, accounting for its substantial detail in comparison to the surrounding synoptic material but the presence of which, in narrative terms, counters previous consideration of *Ágrip* as consistently synoptic in form.²⁴ Such an understanding of the text can be extended, considering the size and dramatic quality of this episode and that of Hákon's death, to suggest a principle of composition in *Ágrip* by which the characters of

²¹ *Ágrip*, 6. 'He mourned her death, but all the people of the country mourned him for being beguiled.

²² Ibid. 'Soon, however, the entire body turned black and out poured worms and vipers, frogs and toads and all kinds of vile worms.'

²³ O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 24.

²⁴ Ibid., 28. For a further argument that this episode's length is due to it being a distinct piece of Trøndelag oral tradition see Alison Finlay, *Fagrskinna: A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway: A Translation with Introduction and Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 7-8.

kings are often presented through a sketched general biography coupled with a dramatic scene in which their behaviour is expounded upon so as to typify their royal character. It is pointed, however, that in the cases of Haraldr and Hákon, the associated scenes do not demonstrate their action as rulers as much as their abstention from kingly duty and their dependence on the destabilising presences of socially marginal figures with whom they interact. The logic of the inclusion of episodes with such a disruptive effect in the cases of these kings is evident: their reputations for just or wise rule are qualified by their paganism. The chronicling of these kings' generally effective leadership is derailed by dramatic demonstrations of the failure of their royal power as their zone of authority collapses to the point that it centres upon their relationship with an individual whose temporary power within Norwegian elite society, which uncannily exceeds that of the presiding king, is delegitimising to the ruler in question. This is not the finely balanced equity of agency achieved between kings and retainers in the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* (see 3.4) and nor could it be said that such moments of disruption typify *Ágrip*'s structure, but it is important to recognise that even in an earlier and truncated narrative history, narrative insurrection is employed evocatively at moments of historical instability, in this case engendered by the fallibility of pagan rulers, to demonstrate the resultant strife.

The particular brevity of *Ágrip* necessitates that much of the narrative history it contains takes the form of synopsis. Scenes are present within the text, however, and several of the most extended examples deal with the disruptive presence of uncanny figures who contribute to kings straying from just rule. The prominence afforded to these condemned characters and the resultant unsettling effect on the authority and succession of Norwegian kings can, therefore, be considered, a moralistic analogue to the narrative insurrections caused by the *þættir* within *Morkinskinna*.

4.2 *Fagrskinna*

Fagrskinna was the name given in the seventeenth century by Þormóður Torfason to a manuscript containing a sequence of royal biographies in the University Library of Copenhagen to distinguish it from *Morkinskinna*, its more dilapidated counterpart.²⁵ The text is thought to be a product of the 1220s, with Gustav Indrebø's suggested composition date of 1225 retaining broad acceptance.²⁶ *Fagrskinna* narrates a longer period than *Morkinskinna*, from the reign of Hálfðan svarti to the death of Eysteinn meylla and has markedly different organisational principles. This difference of form comes despite *Fagrskinna* drawing upon *Morkinskinna*'s account of the period 1030-1157, although this is by no means the text's only written source; **Hryggjarstykki*, *Ágrip*, Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, the Oldest Saga of Saint Olaf, **Hlaðajarla saga*, and *Jómsvíkinga saga* have all been suggested as texts which the *Fagrskinna* compiler drew upon to a greater or lesser degree.²⁷ Indrebø concluded that very little material was derived from oral tradition:²⁸ *Fagrskinna*'s compilation is usually viewed as the amalgamation and abridging of disparate pre-existing sources.²⁹

The methodology behind this compilation process is not, however, a neutral urge to produce a comprehensive account of a broad span of Norwegian history: *Fagrskinna* is held to be the *konungasögur* compilation, certainly amongst those composed in the 13th century,

²⁵ This *Fagrskinna* manuscript, probably written in Norway in the early fourteenth century, was destroyed by fire in 1728, although three late 17th-century copies remain. This stemma is usually referred to as A to distinguish it from the defective B stemma which is derived from a mid-thirteenth century version of the text, of which only a single leaf of the original is preserved, although three copies exist. B was probably a product of the Trondheim region and contains several substantial lacunae resulting in the dependence on A for editions of the text; see Alfred Jakobsen, 'Litt om forelegget til *Fagrskinnas* A-resensjon', in Hallvard Magerøy and Kjell Venås, eds, *Mål og namn: Studiar i nordisk mål og namnegransking. Heidersskrift til Olav T. Beito* (Oslo: Universitetforlaget, 1971), 154–72; Jan Ragnar Hagland, 'Fagrskinna B og Arnmødlingtal', in Alfred Jakobsen and Jan Ragnar Hagland, eds, *Fagrskinna-Studier*, Skrifter 3 (Trondheim: Tapir, 1980), 131-59, at 132, 153.

²⁶ Gustav Indrebø, *Fagrskinna*, Avhandlinger fra Universitetets historiske Seminar 4 (Oslo, Grøndahl, 1917), 272-3.

²⁷ Andersson, *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings*, 66

²⁸ Indrebø, *Fagrskinna*, 11-103.

²⁹ Andersson, *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings*, 66-8; Finlay, *Fagrskinna*, 2-17.

most tailored to the sensibilities of the Norwegian partisan.³⁰ Such a suggestion of partiality is derived from an unusually uncritical positivity towards Norwegian kings; to employ Bjarni Einarson's assertion: *En Fsk. ein gerir sér greinilega far um að breiða yfir ávirðingar konunganna*.³¹ This is achieved through a project of valorisation that expands accounts of military success while downplaying or avoiding the more ignominious details of a monarch's actions. The promiscuity and tyranny of Hákon jarl, for instance, is mentioned only in passing after the expansive account of his defeat of the Jómsvíkingar, and even then, is rationalised as resulting from his unchallenged authority over the country.³² His shameful death in a pigsty is skirted over delicately compared with the dramatic accounts preserved in *Ágrip* and *Heimskringla*, with *Fagrskinna* simply stating: *Þá var hann staddr í Gaulardali á bæ þeim, er Rimul heitir, ok var þar drepinn af skósveini sínum, er hét Skopti karkr*.³³

Theodore Andersson makes reference to this positivity towards Norwegian kings to argue for the text's composition being influenced by increasing tensions between Norwegians and Icelanders in the early 1220s, as 'a literary initiative that was Norwegian and royalist in outlook and tacitly anti-Icelandic.'³⁴ Andersson claims that *Fagrskinna* has a reflexive relationship to *Morkinskinna*, the source from which it borrows most heavily, serving as a Norwegian reaction to, and correction of, the strong Icelandic sympathies of its predecessor.³⁵ In the section of *Fagrskinna* which draws upon *Morkinskinna*, the most substantial evidence

³⁰ Indrebø's claim that the text is the product of the Trøndelag region of Norway has not been seriously challenged, *Fagrskinna*, 278-82. The debate as to whether the author was Icelandic or Norwegian is less conclusive; see Alfred Jakobsen, 'Om Fagrskinna-forfatteren', *Arkiv for nordisk filologi*, 85 (1970), 88-124. Alison Finlay rightly argues that the question is largely moot as *Fagrskinna* reflects significant interaction between the two cultures and is part of a wider project of compiling royal biography ongoing at the time; *Fagrskinna*, 16.

³¹ *Ágrip*, cxxii, 'But *Fagrskinna* alone clearly attempts to cover up the faults of kings.'

³² *Fagrskinna*, in Bjarni Einarsson, ed, *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum, Fagrskinna – Noregs Konunga Tal*, Íslenzk Fornrit 29 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska Fornritfölag, 1985), 139. Hereafter referred to as *Fagrskinna*.

³³ *Ibid.*, 139. 'Then he was staying in Gaulardal at that farm called Rimul and was killed there by his servant, who was called Skopti Karkr.'

³⁴ Andersson, *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings*, 72.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

in support of Andersson's argument is the absence of the *þættir*, for which alternative material is rarely substituted, which is a major contributor to the reduced length of the *Fagrskinna* account of this period.³⁶ In concordance with Andersson, the removal of these Icelandic figures appears partly a prioritisation of Norwegian affairs and partly distaste for anecdotal material.³⁷ It would be a mistake, however, to consider this excision of *þættir* as an effort purely to repress the Icelandic presence in Norwegian history or as employed solely for the sake of conciseness, particularly as this thesis has demonstrated the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* do not only feature Icelanders (see 3.6). By way of example, take the pair of small scenes in *Morkinskinna* that recount the tensions between Einarr þambarskelfir and Kálfr Árnason at the start of the reign of Magnús góði; neither is present in *Fagrskinna* despite their brevity and the fact they feature two preeminent Norwegians.³⁸ The *Fagrskinna* compiler may have felt that the presence of a depiction of infighting between two of Magnús's most powerful supporters would implicitly undermine Magnús's authority. Moments in which the narrative perspective is not centred closely upon the king are rare in *Fagrskinna* and the exclusion of scenes such as those concerning Einarr and Kálfr's squabbling can be attributed to the redactor considering them as digressions in the context of a narrative more tightly focused upon the actions of kings, rather than their followers.

An argument for the judicious removal of material not immediately related to the personal actions of kings cannot, however, account for the absence in *Fagrskinna* of a number of episodes from *Morkinskinna* that feature only Norwegians and in which kings

³⁶ For the full list of episodes omitted from *Morkinskinna* in *Fagrskinna*, see Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 497-503.

³⁷ The possibility remains, of course, that the *Fagrskinna* compiler drew upon an earlier version of the *Morkinskinna* account which did not include the *þættir* or other excluded episodes, however, modern scholarship, while by no means conclusive, tends towards *Morkinskinna* existing by 1220 in a form similar to the extant late 13th-century copy (see 1.2). Alison Finlay is more conservative about exactly what form *Morkinskinna* took when the *Fagrskinna* compiler consulted it but agrees that a process of condensing digressive sources into a concise account is in keeping with the observable structural principles of *Fagrskinna*. See Finlay, *Fagrskinna*, 11-13.

³⁸ *Morkinskinna I*, 28.

figure prominently. By way of example, the three episodes in *Morkinskinna* relating to the increasing distemper of Sigurðr jorsalafari and featuring the efforts of Óttarr birtingr, Áslákr hani and the bishop Magni to placate Sigurðr and correct his behaviour are all omitted.³⁹ This omission is probably related to an unwillingness to portray Sigurðr's unstable behaviour later in life, although it is worth noting that the first two examples end positively with the tempering or correction of the king's behaviour (see 7.3). Another absent episode concerns the incident in which Haraldr harðráði insults Þórir, Magnús goði's brother, in a verse, only for Magnús to craft a retort mocking Sigurðr sýr, Haraldr's father.⁴⁰ The scene demonstrates Magnús's capability in skaldic verse, conventionally Haraldr's area of expertise, as a means of mocking his co-ruler. The episode is contextualised, however, within a wider dispute between the kings as to the amount of taxes they are entitled to levy in which Haraldr triumphs in the legal matter due to the favourable testimony of the kings' host Áslákr.⁴¹ In *Morkinskinna* the episode as a whole is balanced to avoid the humiliation of either king and rather shows their respective wit as they compete for power and wealth.

It is an oversimplification to suggest that *Fagrskinna* removes such passages because they depict kings negatively – rather their absence can be better understood as a by-product of a more comprehensive editorial project. The unifying feature of the majority of the episodes present in *Morkinskinna* which are not included or reduced in length in *Fagrskinna* is that they depict internal conflict between members of the Norwegian *hirð*.⁴² This would include all the material defined as *þættir* within *Morkinskinna* by the terms established in this

³⁹ *Morkinskinna II*, 139-40, 145, 150-1.

⁴⁰ *Morkinskinna I*, 138-9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 137-9.

⁴² Due to the exclusion of episodes of Haraldr harðráði's foreign adventures which depict his enmity to the Empress Zoe, it may be possible to broaden this redaction process to a more general unwillingness to present conflict within any elite space. In the case of the Byzantine episodes, however, it is important to consider that the presence of supernatural elements within this sequence may also have been grounds for its removal, see Finlay, *Fagrskinna*, 10.

thesis (see 3.6). If the removal of troubling accounts of elite disputes is the principle by which the *Fagrskinna* compiler revises the material that they derive from *Morkinskinna*, then this provides compelling evidence for a medieval sensitivity, albeit a reflexive one, to the tenets of narrative insurrection through a negative response to the effect in a later text. In short, if *Fagrskinna* is accepted as drawing upon a version of *Morkinskinna* in which the *þættir* were present and the *þættir* are understood as centring a more diverse range of figures rather than just Icelanders, then the systematic exclusion of all such material in *Fagrskinna* demonstrates an appreciation of these episodes as a group and an understanding of their shared disruptive function.⁴³

The absence of depictions of internal conflict in Norway within *Fagrskinna* can be linked to the text's particular status amongst the *konungasögur* compendia as a collection of *orrustusögur* (battle sagas) due to the extensiveness of combat sequences, which constitute the most detailed and dramatic sections of the narrative. *Fagrskinna* is jingoistic in its concern with the defence of Norwegian sovereignty from numerous powerful enemies; the *hirðir* are, consequently, presented as martial organisations operating in support of their respective kings in the face of external hostility. Whereas *Morkinskinna* represents internal strife as typical of the Norwegian elite and the primary socio-political challenge that kings must overcome, *Fagrskinna* depicts the realm as threatened by external forces, emphasising Norwegian martial hegemony and instances of triumph over foreign aggressors.⁴⁴ If Indrebø's dating of *Fagrskinna* to c.1225 is accepted, contemporary Norwegian historical events suitably contextualise such an approach. The conflict with Sigurðr ribbungr, one of the

⁴³ It should be stressed that this does not, in and of itself, provide evidence for the *Morkinskinna* redactor organising said material with this effect in mind but rather demonstrates an ability to understand such material as similarly disruptive to narrative history on the part of the thirteenth-century *Fagrskinna* compiler.

⁴⁴ In instances of momentous conflict in which the rebellion of Norwegians against their king is an important element, the Norwegian presence is often valorised while their Swedish and Danish allies are rendered cruel, dull and ineffective: the most pointed example is the Battle of Svöldr, in which Eiríkr jarl is actively commended by his enemy Óláfr Tryggvason, while the Swedish and Danish forces are largely ineffectual and easily defeated: *Fagrskinna*, 153-9.

final challengers to Hákon Hákonarson's claim to the Norwegian throne, had, by 1225, morphed into an invasion of the Swedish *landskap* Värmland, due to its inhabitants' support for the pretender Sigurðr.⁴⁵ Disagreement continues as to whether the production of *Fagrskinna* is more likely to be associated with Hákon or Skúli jarl.⁴⁶ Either ruler may have been invested in emphasising Norwegian unity against foreign threats, rather than internal conflict, in the mid-to-late 1220s, as Haraldr's marriage to Skúli's daughter Margrete is also dated to 1225. The concerted effort in *Fagrskinna* towards diminishing instances of Norwegian internal conflict may be informed, therefore, by efforts towards reconciliation between Hákon and Skúli contemporary with the text's composition.

Battle scenes, despite their dramatic rendering, do not disrupt the structure of *Fagrskinna* in a manner analogous to the effect the *þættir* have within *Morkinskinna*. This is due to the presentation of large-scale combat as an extension of a given king's prowess as a leader and warrior: the king's position at the centre of royal biography is strengthened by conducting war, irrespective of the success of a campaign or battle.⁴⁷ Depictions of combat do not resist the conventions of narrative history in the same way as the *þættir*, which expand accounts of mundane interpersonal interaction; the battle scene operates as a suitable climax to a king's reign while also often marking the succession point between monarchs (see 4.1). It is important to note the distinction between presentations of the violent tumult of warfare on one hand and of the social instability occasioned by the disruption of social hierarchies on the other. The Augustinian philosophy of warfare was influential throughout the medieval period, which held war as an inevitability deriving from the interactions of political kingdoms, with

⁴⁵ Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1996), 129-30

⁴⁶ Andersson, *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings*, 71-3.

⁴⁷ For a similar argument for the representation of warfare primarily through the exploits of a 'hero-class' in late 12th-century historical chronicle, see Marian J. Ailes, 'Heroes of War: Ambroise's Heroes of the Third Crusade', in Corinne Saunders, Françoise Le Saux and Neil Thomas, eds, *Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare* (D.S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2004), 29-48.

cycles of combat being inherent to the natural order of a Fallen world.⁴⁸ In narrative history, war is destructive but does not contravene formal conventions due to its central position in the momentous events around which royal biographies were structured.

Fagrskinna has radically different organisational principles to *Morkinskinna*, not least in the differing degrees to which narrative focus remains trained on the figure of the king between the two texts (see 3.5.5). Exceptional sequences are present within *Fagrskinna*, however, in which the otherwise consistent centring of monarchic actions and the deference of retainers are reconfigured to allow counter-normative views a prominent if fleeting presence within the *hirð*. Following the death of Hákon góði and the succession of Haraldr gráfeldr, the text displays a sensitivity to the contrasting merits of the two kings and dramatises the resistance of Hákon's loyal retainers, now integrated into Haraldr's *hirð*, to their crueller new lord.⁴⁹ This disagreement between kings' followers is given both disruptive and dramatic force, beyond that achievable through an initial synoptic reference to unrest within the *hirð*, through a depiction of the behaviour of Eyvindr skáldaspillir. Eyvindr is presented as unshakeable in his loyalty to Hákon, much to the displeasure of Haraldr and his loyal retainer Glúmr Geirason with whom Eyvindr is placed in opposition.⁵⁰ Glúmr and Eyvindr conduct a form of proxy *mannjafnaðr* as their verses debate the comparative honour of Hákon and Haraldr.⁵¹ Haraldr is incensed by Eyvindr's profession of loyalty to another ruler and implicitly threatens loyalists to Hákon with death in the following pronouncement: "*Enn elski þér meirr Hákon konung, fari þér enn með <hónum> ok verið*

⁴⁸ Augustine, *The City of God: Books VIII-XVI*, trans Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan, The Fathers of the Church vol. 14 (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952), Book XV, ch. 4, 419-20.

⁴⁹ *Fagrskinna*, 95.

⁵⁰ Hákon was probably Eyvindr's great-uncle, suggesting that the skald's loyalty to his deceased lord and apathy towards serving Haraldr are potentially implicitly informed by the pressure to seek vengeance as a surviving family member. For further biographical information concerning Eyvindr, see Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 447-9; Edith Marold, 'Eyvindr Finnsson skáldaspillir', in Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf, eds, *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopaedia* (Garland: New York, 1993), 175-6.

⁵¹ See Karen Swenson, *Performing Definitions: Two Genres of Insults in Old Norse Literature*, Studies in Scandinavian Literature 3 (Columbia: Camden House, 1991), 53-8.

hans menn”.⁵² Eyvindr’s friends intervene on his behalf and urge Eyvindr to atone for his actions by composing verses in praise of Haraldr. After Eyvindr recites a laudatory verse for Haraldr, the king and Glúmr comment on the meagre value of the poetry and Eyvindr’s apparent disloyalty, with their dialogue in response to his verses having parallels with Haraldr harðráði’s comments on the quality of Arnórr jarlaskáld’s skaldic verse in *Morkinskinna* (see 6.1.2). The scene concludes with Eyvindr leading an exodus of men still loyal to Hákon from Haraldr’s *hirð*.

The narrator’s admission of the presence of strife in Haraldr’s *hirð* is synchronous with Eyvindr’s sudden increase in narrative prominence. The skald becomes a central character when he is at his most precarious and disgruntled; in this manner, the episode’s function is analogous to the *þættir* within *Morkinskinna* as a disruptive narrative structure that operates as a vehicle for a non-royal character to challenge royal hegemony. The episode concerning Eyvindr can be distinguished in gaining its primary force as a sophisticated prosimetrum, without recourse to the extended dialogue more typical of *þættir* in *Morkinskinna*.⁵³ The function of Eyvindr’s presence within *Fagrskinna* has been corroborative up to this point, with skaldic verse attributed to him attesting to the munificence and prowess of Hákon without depicting Eyvindr himself as a character actively involved in the narrative.⁵⁴ During Haraldr’s reign, conversely, Eyvindr’s verses are utilised as catalysts of and responses to the king’s anger: rather than previously, where inserted verse implicitly corroborated the royal biography of Hákon góði. Haraldr gráfeldr’s attempts to exert his authority as an aggressive military leader over Norway, as in his defeat of Hákon

⁵² *Fagrskinna*, 97. ‘If you still love King Hákon more, you should still accompany him and be his men instead.’

⁵³ Many of the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* are themselves prosimetric, with those concerning Stúfr inn blindi and Sneglu-Halli being the most notable examples. The characterisation of the marginal figure solely through their use of verse would be atypical within *Morkinskinna*, however, where verse tends to supplement surrounding dialogue.

⁵⁴ E.g. *Fagrskinna*, 84, 85, 87-8, 90-1.

góði, are disrupted by the critical intrusion of the skald and his verses which forces the king to exercise his power in the more limited social domain of controlling his *hirð*.⁵⁵

It is also worth considering the process by which such a disruptive prosimetrum is created in a text in which the disruption of royal authority is comparatively rare. Russell Poole suggests that the prose context of the verses ‘probably depends in part on separate oral traditions and in part on *ex post facto* inferences from the stanzas themselves.’⁵⁶ Certainly, Eyvindr’s transition from effusive praise of Hákon to a mixture of laudatory, apathetic, and critical verses concerning Haraldr gráfeldr is sufficiently stark to necessitate a rationalisation on the part of the *Fagrskinna* compiler who accordingly shaped a narrative of a deteriorating relationship between king and skald. It is possible to further suggest that the final verse of the episode concerning Eyvindr’s protest was selected as the transitional point between benevolent and despotic periods of Norwegian history:

Einn dróttin hefk áttan,
 jöfurr dýrr, an þik fyrra
 – bellir, bragningr, elli –
 biðkat mér ins þriðja;
 trúr vask tyggja dýrum,
 tveim skjöldum lékk aldri;
 fyllik flokk þinn, stillir;
 fellr á hendr mér elli.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ O’Donoghue has argued for the selectivity of verse usage in *Fagrskinna*, with particular reference to the preference for verses that adhere to the accepted historical tradition concerning Óláfr helgi; see *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 52-4.

⁵⁶ Russell Poole, ‘(Introduction to) Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson, Lausavísur’, in Diana Whaley, ed., *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 213. See also Sverre Bagge, ‘A Hero Between Paganism and Christianity: Hákon the Good in Memory and History’ in Karin Hoff and Heiko Uecker, eds, *Poetik und Gedächtnis: Festschrift für Heiko Uecker zum 65. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt and Main: P. Lang, 2004), 185-210, at 197.

⁵⁷ *Fagrskinna*, 98.

I have had a single lord before you, dear ruler. Prince, I don't beg for a third lord for me – my old age is on display. I was loyal to the dear leader: I never played with two shields. I fill up your host, ruler; old age falls upon my hands.

While the scene ends at this point and the narrative reverts to synopsis, Eyvindr retains the disruptive capacity established within the episode despite no longer being focalized in the prose: his ensuing verses return to their corroborative function but now reinforce the negative qualities of Haraldr's reign, such as famine or the king's miserliness.⁵⁸ Poole's suggestion of the prose context arising from a synthesis of oral and verse traditions is speculative but it can reasonably be suggested that the skaldic record of Eyvindr's shifting loyalties provided an apt frame by which the compiler could demonstrate a moment of concentrated political instability occasioned by the transition from just to tyrannical rule. Andersson has described the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* as 'protest literature', which is a fitting term in relation to this isolated example in which the skald noisily expostulates with regard to his changing circumstances.⁵⁹ Eyvindr's dissident performance in the *hirð* is the interpersonal analogue for the more general social disasters of famine and warfare that it precedes. Eyvindr and his failure to produce purely laudatory verse stand as the epicentre from which the broader negative consequences of Haraldr's actions radiates; in this instance, as in *Morkinskinna*, the destabilising prominence given to a figure engaged in a personal dispute with a king and his established supporters is a predicate for the expression of more general social instability (see 7.1.4).

In terms of narrative structure, *Fagrskinna* stands in opposition to *Morkinskinna* by maintaining a consistent focus on kings as the unchallenged protagonists of Norwegian narrative history, particularly as leading figures in battle. This relationship between the two

⁵⁸ Ibid., 98-103.

⁵⁹ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 63-4.

texts stems, in part, from the probably excision of the *þættir* from *Fagrskinna* to reduce the narrative presence of internal discord in the Norwegian *hirðir*. This effect is not universal, however, as the example of Eyvindr skáldaspillir demonstrates that on occasion the rise to prominence of a rebellious character is complemented by shifts in the narrative mode in *Fagrskinna*.

4.3 *Heimskringla*

Heimskringla is an Icelandic compendium of *konungasögur* probably completed by 1230, with Snorri Sturluson being the most credible suggestion as to the text's author.⁶⁰ There is a comparative abundance of manuscript attestations of *Heimskringla*, with substantial variation between the *Kringla* and *Jöfraskinna* groups, as demonstrated in Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson's provisional stemma, with the *Kringla* group being considered closer in content to the original text.⁶¹ The narrative begins with *Ynglinga saga*, a founding myth of Scandinavia and the Swedish and Norwegian royal lines, and runs to 1177AD, part way through the reign of Magnús Erlingsson. The convention of printed editions is to divide the text into three

⁶⁰ These two suggestions concerning *Heimskringla*'s date and author are linked: *Íslendinga saga* records that in 1230, Sturla Sighvatsson stayed with Snorri and wished to have copies made of *sögubæk* his uncle had compiled: Örnólfur Thorsson, ed., *Sturlunga saga* (Reykjavík: Svart á Hvítu, 1988), vol. 1, 329. If the term is taken to mean 'books of history' then it has been suggested that the work being copied was *Heimskringla*, see Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes, 'Introduction', in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. and trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2016), vol.1, viii; Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1991), 13. Evidence for linguistic similarities between *The Prose Edda*, *Egils saga* and *Heimskringla* seems to suggest a shared authorship but cannot be conclusive, as Snorri's composition of any of these texts in their extant form is by no means certain: Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda*, 26-9. Snorri's reputation as well versed in the history of Norwegian kings, coupled with the compatibility of his known biography with suitable conditions for the production of such a text, are also important factors in assessing the likelihood of his authorship of *Heimskringla*: see Theodore Andersson, 'The Politics of Snorri Sturluson', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 93.1 (1994), 55-78. Agreement on the question of Snorri's sole authorship is by no means universal, however; see Patricia Boulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway: Medieval Sagas and Legal Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 6-21. The general consensus that Snorri had an involved editorial role in the creation of *Heimskringla* is not challenged in this thesis, though Whaley's incisive provisos about the nature of medieval authorship remain relevant: *Heimskringla: An Introduction*, 17-9.

⁶¹ *Heimskringla III*, xciv. Elements of this stemma, particularly in relation to the *Jöfraskinna* group are significantly revised and expanded by Louis-Jensen; see, *Kongesagastudier*, 36-59. The preference for the *Kringla* manuscript as the foundation for most editions is founded on it containing fewer interpolations, particularly those 'of the highly fabulous kind', from *Morkinskinna* than those of the *Jöfraskinna* group, Whaley, 1991, 45-6.

volumes: the first running until the ascension of Óláfr Haraldsson, the second comprising the extensive account of the saintly Óláfr's reign, and the third running from the reinstatement of Manús inn góði to the text's conclusion. It is this third section that narrates approximately the same period of Norwegian history as *Morkinskinna*.

Due to the preeminent position of *Heimskringla* as the traditional canonical centre of the *konungasögur* corpus, the techniques by which narrative history is structured within this text have had a disproportionate effect on the manner in which Norse royal biography has been understood.⁶² This includes the traditionally lacklustre appraisal of *Morkinskinna*'s literary merits, despite it forming a major source for the later sections of *Heimskringla* (see 1.2).⁶³ The denigration of the poetics of *Morkinskinna* due to the presence of the *þættir* and their unruly cast, in part derives from the narrower focus on the characterization of a select group of rulers and regional leaders in *Heimskringla*. As in *Fagrskinna*, the kings depicted in *Heimskringla* operate at the centre of the narratives of their reigns and predominantly interact and struggle with a cast of other monarchs or powerful figures such as jarls, *hersar* or *lendir menn*.⁶⁴ *Heimskringla*, however, has a greater frequency of sequences than either *Morkinskinna* or *Fagrskinna* that can be considered genuine digressions: episodes that do not feature the king who has been established as the focal character of a given saga.

⁶² See, for example, Whaley's assertion of *Heimskringla*'s centrality to the development of the saga style: *Heimskringla: An Introduction*, 83-4.

⁶³ Sigurður Norðal's demonstration of the ways in which Snorri Sturluson improves on the structuring of dialogue in comparison to his sources, neatly demonstrates this tendency to establish *Heimskringla* as the aesthetic standard by which other narrative history is assessed. Amongst his examples are edits made to the *mannjafnaðr* between Sigurður and Eysteinn, probably derived from *Morkinskinna*; Sigurður Norðal, *Snorri Sturluson* (Reykjavík: Thor. B. Þorláksson, 1920), 228-32.

⁶⁴ The argument that *Heimskringla* is typified by the struggle between the presiding king and the Norwegian gentry was first raised by Halvdan Koht in his Marxist interpretation of Norwegian history; *Inhogg og utsyn í norsk historie* (Kristiania: H. Aschehoug, 1921), 76-123. This somewhat anachronistic application of class struggle to the medieval period is critiqued and modified by Sverre Bagge, who instead argues for interpersonal conflicts with a variety of magnates which constitutes a more nebulous struggle for power within a broader Norwegian elite: *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 64-75. Andersson discusses the predilection in *Heimskringla* for interweaving the biographies of a number of preeminent men; *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings*, 87.

This digressive tendency is most common in *Óláfs saga helga*, which, in terms both of the length of this section of narrative and its spiritual significance, forms the centrepiece of *Heimskringla*.⁶⁵ These ‘digressions’ are often rendered relevant by recounting the exploits of a member of Óláfr’s *hirð* who is acting on the king’s behalf in a diplomatic matter or, alternatively, in demonstrating the concurrent actions of Óláfr’s rivals. This allows for the depiction of intense political factionalism in a Norway presented as well-populated with powerful men and their followers, who are all bound together by complex social relationships.⁶⁶ Instances in the text in which a character interacts with Óláfr in a manner that impacts the king’s narrative centrality in a scene in which he is present, however, are far rarer: the king is more usually either dominant or absent. Even in cases where characters are fierce opponents, Snorri favours narrative interlace as his primary method of developing the antagonistic relationship (see 3.3). This is the case in the representation of the enmity between Óláfr helgi and Þórir hundr, a preeminent *lendr maðr* from Hálogaland, the account of which punctuates the latter half of Óláfr’s reign.⁶⁷ Þórir and Óláfr do not meet in person until the Battle of Stiklastaðir itself, in which their interaction is decidedly violent and physical rather than based in dialogue, with Þórir striking the king one of his death-blows.⁶⁸ Before this, both men operate with authority, unmatched intelligence, and frank ferocity in the discrete episodes in which they are the central characters.

⁶⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, ‘Royal Biography’, in Rory McTurk, ed., *Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 388–402, at 397. Digressions do occur on occasion in the first section of *Heimskringla* but are considerably rarer, in part due to the comparative brevity of the royal biographies in this section and, to an extent, due to the more overtly folkloric structuring of the legendary past; see Marlene Ciklamini, ‘The Folktale in *Heimskringla* (*Hálfðanar saga svarta — Hákonar saga góða*)’, *Folklore*, 90.2 (1979), 204–16.

⁶⁶ Lars Lönnroth, ‘Ideology and Structure in *Heimskringla*’, *Parergon*, 15 (1976), 16–29, at 29.

⁶⁷ For a schema of the interlaced effect within the narrative see Susan Elizabeth Blackall, ‘A Stylistic Study of the Sagas of Sturla Þórðarson and their Relationship to Some Other Thirteenth-Century Icelandic Historical and Literary Sagas’, DPhil Thesis (Oxford, 1981), 193.

⁶⁸ Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., *Heimskringla II*, Íslenzk fornrit 27 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1945), 384. Hereafter referred to as *Heimskringla II*.

Within the wider interlaced account of Þórir and Óláfr's enmity, a potential comparison with the effect achieved in the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* comes in the scene depicting the interaction between Þórir Ölvisson, the nephew of Þórir hundr, and Óláfr helgi. The younger Þórir is a promising, wealthy, and attractive man who invites the king and his retainers to an excellent feast.⁶⁹ The king is not initially suspicious but, through the insights of his seemingly-prescient follower Dagr, is alerted to the possibility that Þórir has betrayed him to King Knútr in return for a large arm ring, which Þórir keeps concealed. Óláfr then undertakes a physical appraisal of his host as a contrivance to feel Þórir's arm. Þórir excuses the hard lump on his arm as a boil but the king insists on examining it under the pretext of his medical skill: *Hefir þú eigi spurt þat, at ek em læknir?*⁷⁰ Þórir is forced to reveal the ring and admits that he received it from Knútr. The enraged Óláfr has Þórir executed despite the pleas of Þórir's relatives in the king's *hirð*.

The episode appears to have many characteristics in common with a *þáttir* in *Morkinskinna*: a newly-introduced character comes into social contact with the king and strife is engendered within the restricted elite space of the feasting hall. Þórir is initially established as a figure worthy of admiration despite his values being in opposition to those of the presiding king. While his sudden introduction and narrative prominence initially have a destabilising effect on Óláfr's narrative centrality, unlike in a *þáttir* this is not sustained throughout the course of the narrative. Þórir's reported speech is slight, particularly in comparison to that afforded to the king's loyal supporter Dagr, and he is instead depicted as a passive presence, incapable of resisting the physical inspection he receives from the king; worse, he is revealed to possess a diseased body, with the golden arm ring received for his

⁶⁹ Ibid., 300-2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 301. 'Have you not heard that I am a healer?'

treachery being the metaphorical boil that mars his otherwise attractive form and character.⁷¹ Þórir's establishing characterisation suggests potent activity, but this expectation is subverted as his betrayal of Óláfr proves to be passive, taking the form of a piece of jewellery begrudgingly revealed. As such, Þórir's presence does not constitute a foil to the king's behaviour but rather further develops pre-established themes: the loyalty and foresight of Dagr and the opposition of Þórir hundr and his relatives to Óláfr's authority.

It is crucial, when considering narratological effect, not to discuss episodes in isolation at the expense of the wider patterning that informs their position and structure. While the episode concerning Þórir Ölvisson may resemble a *þáttr eo ipso*, its function in *Heimskringla* is distinct from the effect of narrative insurrection produced by the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna*. This difference can be best attributed to the construction of *Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla* as a sophisticated and comprehensive conversion narrative. Snorri is capable of synthesising the large-scale conversion of Norway with the small-scale conversions of individuals to demonstrate the holistic process of the revelation of both Christianity and Óláfr's saintly character.⁷² Regardless of scale, the structure of narratives of conversion begins in a place of hostility and resistance to the exhortation to moral reformation but ends in a realisation of the power and truth of both the Christian message and its holy bearer. Such a formulation is probably a rationalisation on Snorri's part, as he seeks to reconcile accounts of Norwegian opposition to St Óláfr, or reports of the king's extreme cruelty, with his eventual canonisation. These admissions of the nobility of Óláfr's enemies or the ruthlessness of his practices also reveal the range of discordant episodes present in Óláfr's royal biography

⁷¹ Compare this domineering inspection scene with the one conducted by Magnús góði in *Hreiðars þáttr* in which Hreiðarr is an active and enthusiastic participant and respondent rather than the passive subject of an analysis (see 6.1.2).

⁷² Christopher Abram, 'Modelling Religious Experience in Old Norse Conversion Narrative: The Case of Óláfr Tryggvason and Hallfreðr vandræðaskald', *Speculum*, 90.1 (2015), 114-57, at 114-5.

and the impossibility of converting them into a positive hagiographic narrative – a more complex structure is required to justify Óláfr's beatification.⁷³

This tension in the presentation of Óláfr is demonstrated well by the sequence concerning Þórir Ólvisson. On the one hand, Óláfr displays a disturbing lack of clemency in executing his popular host; on the other, Óláfr's wisdom and the loyalty he commands allow him to remove this charismatic and well-connected threat to his overlordship. One could go further still and argue the scene constitutes an ironised miracle, by which Óláfr's laying on of hands on the boil/ring cures himself, his *hirð*, and Norway of the pernicious infection of a treasonous figure. The progress of this episode, from the presentation of staunch initial opposition to the king, through violent struggle, to the recension of objections to Óláfr's holy authority, is replicated on a larger scale in the narrative arc in which it is contained, concerning the king's antagonistic relationship with Þórir hundr. This long sequence of episodes begins as feud-cycle between two powerful but morally-dubious Norwegian rulers, emblematic of regional power struggles, but as the narrative builds toward the Battle of Stiklastaðir and Óláfr's martyrdom, Þórir hundr comes to be depicted as a Norwegian Judas-type, betraying and murdering his rightful lord for personal gain, before being consumed with intense contrition upon realising both the dead king's sanctity and the abhorrent nature of his previous actions.⁷⁴ On the scale of the kingdom of Norway as a whole, this process is

⁷³ Sian Grønlie, 'Conversion Narrative and Christian Identity: "How Christianity Came to Iceland"', *Medium Ævum*, 86.1 (2017), 123-46. In this article, Grønlie discusses how in Ari's canonical account of the smooth and peaceful Christianisation of Iceland, discordant, localised or even individualistic conversion narratives prior to the year 1000 are neglected due to their focus on conflict and upheaval. In relation to *Heimskringla*, Grønlie's approach can be adapted to argue for the simultaneous presence of a central process of conversion that, nevertheless, contains constituent episodes that complicate and destabilise the wider schema.

⁷⁴ The interlaced sequence culminates in Þórir hundr realising Óláfr's sanctity upon the latter's blood healing Þórir's wounds as he cleans the corpse, with Þórir going on to testify to the king's holiness as Óláfr cult develops postmortem; *Heimskringla II*, 396-7. Þórir hundr's status as a Judas figure is particularly apt in the context of the ambivalent manner in which Judas Iscariot is dealt with in theology due to the tension between his status as the arch-betrayer and his integral role in human salvation in ensuring Christ's resurrection, see Almut-Barbara Renger, 'The Ambiguity of Judas: On the Mythicity of a New Testament Figure', *Literature and Theology*, 27.1 (2013), 1-17. Þórir is similarly a complex character, in parts noble and deceptive, whose role in rebelling against and killing Óláfr are juxtaposed against his pivotal role in authenticating the king's sainthood.

reflected in the trajectory of the Christianisation process, where an analogous movement is enacted on the part of all Norwegians, from recalcitrant opposition to the king and his religious mission to the enthusiastic championing of both Óláfr's son Magnús as rightful king and of the Christian identity of Norwegians. The patterning of *Óláfs saga helga* is, therefore, consistent across the micro-, medio-, and macro-structural levels in presenting narrative history as passing through three distinct stages: a starting point in which Óláfr Haraldsson competes for narrative and political centrality with other strikingly rendered characters; a conversion process by which initial positions of opposition to the king are abandoned or discredited through conflict; and a culmination to the scene, sequence, or saga in which the revelation of St. Óláfr's preeminent sanctity resolves, or at least suppresses, previous instances of inter-elite strife.⁷⁵ In the context of the central section of *Heimskringla*, the occasional presence of *þættir* within the wider interlace structure allows for temporary demonstrations of entrenched social discord and the resultant ability to depict Óláfr's failures and cruelties whilst, nevertheless, positioning such strife within a program that moves inexorably towards Óláfr's saintly status.⁷⁶

This particular way of ordering the narrative material in *Óláfs saga helga* remains consistent when applied to another episode in *Heimskringla* that can readily be designated as a *þáttir* due to the disruptive function of the character it introduces. Þórarinn Nefjólfsen is

⁷⁵ This point correlates with Carl Phelpstead's argument for competing discourses and characterizations surrounding Óláfr as a method utilised by Snorri to reflect the complexity of depicting a figure as a viking, king and saint: *Holy Vikings: Saints Lives in the Old Icelandic Kings' Sagas* (Arizona: ACMRS, 2007), 156-8.

⁷⁶ Theodore Andersson similarly notes a tension between the summation of Óláfr's sanctity and substantial reservations surrounding his mode of kingship in *Heimskringla*. Andersson's solution is to suggest that this dichotomy arises from an attempt to mediate between the more extreme ideological positions he feels are adopted in the two preceding kings' saga compendia: an Icelandic scepticism of monarchy in *Morkinskinna* and a pro-Norwegian celebration of Óláfr's sanctity in *Fagrskinna*; see *The Partisan Muse*, 119-41; *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings*, 98. Andersson argues that *Heimskringla* is more secular in outlook and minimises hagiographic elements although this position seems rather dependent on his assertion that 'the last days of King Óláfr need not detain us', *Ibid.*, 99. Unwillingness to deal with the miraculous elements of Óláfr's martyrdom aside, the above discussion demonstrates that admissions of Óláfr's tyrannical predilections need not be viewed as at odds with his path to sanctity in a narrative pattern that elides from political history presented through multiple perspectives to universally approbated hagiography across the course of saint's life.

introduced in a fashion that situates him as amongst the most socially marginal figures to feature within the *konungasögur*: he is an Icelander of inconsequential social standing, overconfident in his dealings with more powerful men, and characterised by extreme ugliness: *Þórarinn var manna ljótastr*,⁷⁷ which critics argued to extend to the point of deformity.⁷⁸ Þórarinn's only somewhat positive trait is his extreme loquaciousness, which seems tailored to his large amounts of dialogue within the text. The first sequences that feature Þórarinn align well with the model of narrative insurrection (see 3.6). Þórarinn engages in a witty wager with Óláfr, who claims no foot is uglier than the one of Þórarinn's that he is currently observing. Þórarinn counters by revealing his other foot, which, in missing a toe, he claims to be yet more hideous. The king wins the exchange by arguing that Þórarinn's second foot, in only having four *ferligar* (monstrous) toes, is less hideous than the first foot with five.⁷⁹ To draw upon Kristeva, Þórarinn's horrifying limbs engender an extreme dissonant response as abject objects that serve as a reminder that the *hirð*, as a wealthy elite body, is a rarefied construct, in relation to Icelandic poverty.⁸⁰ After the king's victory in the encounter, Óláfr tasks Þórarinn with transporting his enemy, the blind king Hrærekr, into exile, resolving the social disruption caused by the presence of the two troublesome figures, both high and low-status, within his *hirð*.⁸¹

Þórarinn next appears in a scene in which he plays a mediatory role when the king is demanding Asbjörn Sigurðarson's execution following the slaying of the king's *ármaðr* Þórir

⁷⁷ *Heimskringla II*, 125. 'Þórarinn was the most hideous of men'.

⁷⁸ Hendrikje Hartung, 'Von Þórólfr Höllenhaut ist das zu sagen, dass er in schlechtem Rufe stand: Zur Wahrnehmung deformierter Körper in der altnordischen Sagaliteratur', in Gabriela Antunes, Björn Reich and Carmen Stange, eds (*Deformierte Körper 2: Die Wahrnehmung und das Andere im Mittelalter* (S.L.: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2014), 241-60, at 251.

⁷⁹ *Heimskringla II*, 126. Hartung, 'Von Þórólfr Höllenhaut', 252.

⁸⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

⁸¹ For more on the function of Þórarinn attempted voyage to Greenland discussed within the wider literary context; see Jonathan Grove, 'The Place of Greenland in Medieval Icelandic Saga Narrative', *Journal of the North Atlantic*, 2. Sp2 (2009), 30-51.

selr.⁸² Þórarinn's ugliness and outsider status are not mentioned here and his assimilation into the conventions of etiquette within the *hirð* are demonstrated through the variety of schemes that Þórarinn employs to delay Asbjörn's killing. These involve manipulating the king's piety, through bribing a priest to ring the announcement of a feast day early, so that the king is too occupied by religious observance to enact the execution.⁸³ Þórarinn does, nevertheless, achieve narrative parity with Óláfr in this episode, with the previously prominent Asbjörn becoming instrumental to this second contest of wits between Óláfr and Þórarinn, albeit one with more serious stakes. The re-insertion of Þórarinn at this point in the text is a departure from the previous and ensuing narrative focus on the actions of Asbjörn and his relatives and the motivation for Þórarinn's dogged determination to follow Skjálgr's request to delay Asbjörn's execution is not expanded on.⁸⁴ The episode does, however, depict Þórarinn's conversion into a more genteel form of retainer: although his actions remain disruptive in thwarting his king's wishes, he is now positioned as an expert in ecclesiastical convention and a skilled diplomat rather than functioning as a grotesque body, as in the previous scene.

In his final appearance in *Heimskringla*, Þórarinn is tasked by King Óláfr with travelling to Iceland to secure the island of Grímsey for his lord and, more tacitly, to canvass Icelandic support for accepting Óláfr as their ruler.⁸⁵ The mission has mixed results, with the Icelanders refusing direct over-lordship or to gift the king the island following a pivotal speech by Einarr Eyjólfsson, although they do promise firm friendship and send hostages to Óláfr's *hirð* as a demonstration of their loyalty. The political ramifications of this scene are

⁸² *Heimskringla II*, 201-3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁸⁴ Andersson suggests that the presence of Þórarinn in this narrative sequence provides a rationale for the entire sequence's transmission and preservation within Iceland; *The Partisan Muse*, 104. This hypothesis of direct transmission to justify Þórarinn's narrative centrality is attractive but not provable with the intervening two centuries and the assimilation into a literary form probably having a more significant impact on the extant episode's form and function.

⁸⁵ *Heimskringla II*, 215-7.

striking,⁸⁶ but more crucial to the matter of Þórarinn's shifting characterisation is his role here as the diligent and enthusiastic promoter of his king's interests in Iceland. Previous tokens of his marginal status (his extreme ugliness, social obscurity, and presumptuous disobedience) are not depicted here, as Þórarinn is recast in the normative position of proxy for his king in opposition to the sceptical Icelandic population. It is now Þórarinn, the previously disruptive presence, who has become the figure representative of Norwegian hegemonic authority, whose ideology the yet-more-peripheral Icelanders resist. This shift across the course of his characterization is symbolically depicted in the differences between the two voyages Þórarinn takes to Iceland. During the first, in his reluctant escort of Hrœrekr, Þórarinn is threatened by storms that mirror the strife between the wishes of king and retainer; in the second, his journey is noted for its extreme swiftness that complements his new desire to serve his lord.⁸⁷ Rather than arguing that Snorri has proved unable to reconcile the range of characterisations of Þórarinn available within these three scenes, it is possible to view this sequence of episodes as the social conversion or, more whimsically, the gentrification of an Icelandic as his initial troublemaking transitions to faithful service. While all three episodes, whether considered as three separate *þættir* or a single *þáttr* interspersed with other narrative strands, depict disruptive events, when considered together they do not constitute an enduring challenge to Óláfr's royal and spiritual hegemony but rather function as a demonstration of the king's ability to triumph over adversity, irrespective of its scale, and convert troublemakers into loyal ambassadors.

The *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* are, conversely, self-justified as disruptive structures in their own right. The characters introduced in *þættir* are rarely instrumentalised to serve the political purposes of kings and instead weaponise their fractious presences to their own ends.

⁸⁶ Andersson, *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings*, 92-3.

⁸⁷ *Heimsrkingla II*, 215.

The conclusions of the *þættir* regularly demonstrate the balanced utility of the interaction for both kings and marginal figures, with the latter advancing their interests unabashed and prospering more often than they are punished. In the instances in *Morkinskinna* in which disruptive figures do not assimilate into *hirðir* at the conclusions of their respective *þættir*, they form an enduring counter-position to that occupied by the presiding king. This is in opposition to the effect achieved within *Óláfs saga helga*, where initial disruption is demonstrated to be folly as an unjust resistance to the king's holy authority.

In the sagas conventionally designated as the third section of *Heimskringla*, which narrate broadly the same period as *Morkinskinna*, the *þættir* are conspicuous in their absence.⁸⁸ Ármann Jakobsson has written on the stylistic difference between these kings' sagas compilations:

Heimskringla adheres rather better to neoclassical principles than *Morkinskinna*.

Snorri did not perceive amplification as his main task, that much is evident in his use of *Morkinskinna*. If the third part of *Heimskringla*, where *Morkinskinna* is a chief source, is compared to *Morkinskinna*, it is evident that the author of *Heimskringla* has discarded much of *Morkinskinna* but added only a little.⁸⁹

This contention holds true for the material in *Heimskringla* relating to Magnús góði, which is far briefer than in *Morkinskinna*, with the king receiving a less developed characterisation due to the considerable shortening of the account of the tumultuous year of co-rule between Magnús and his uncle Haraldr, one of the areas in *Morkinskinna* in which *þættir* are most densely clustered. Ármann's general observation can be supplemented through the application of the argument made in the previous discussion of *Fagrskinna* (see 3.2): depictions of unresolved interpersonal conflict within the *hirð*, whether engendered by

⁸⁸ Hans Kuhn, 'Narrative Structure and Historicity in Heimskringla', *Parergon*, 15 (1976), 30-42, at 37.

⁸⁹ Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Amplified Saga', 57.

an Icelandic or other marginal individual, appear incompatible with the structuring of this section of the text. This is in part a question of brevity, to preserve the centrality of the more extensive *Óláfs saga helga*, but the absence of episodes that reveal the limits of a king's authority has a significant effect on the form of the text.

In *Morkinskinna*, *Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar* offers an extended dramatisation of the disintegrating relationship of Haraldr harðráði and the eponymous Icelandic (see 3.1). In contrast to the 'conversion structures' that punctuate *Óláfs saga helga*, *Halldórs þáttr* can be thought of as the inverse – a 'disenchantment narrative' in which loyal service is replaced by increasing dissatisfaction and the eventual divergence of monarch and retainer. The *þáttr* is not, however, present in *Heimskringla*. Halldórr is, instead, referenced in a summation of his character inserted into a general synopsis of Haraldr's particular friendship with Icelanders, the text of which, with the exception of the mentions of Hálldorr, is itself derived from *Morkinskinna*. Úlfr Óspaksson is cast in positive terms as a loyal Icelandic to whom Halldórr is placed in contrast as a figure whose service was displeasing to the king:

Halldórr var manna mestr ok sterkastr ok inn fríðasti. Þat vitni bar Haraldr konungr honum, at hann hafi verit þeira manna með honum, er sízt brygði við váveifliga hluti. Hvárt er þat var mannháski eða fagnaðartíðendi eða hvat sem at hendi kom í háska, þá var hann eigi glaðari ok eigi óglaðari, eigi svaf hann meira né minna eða drakk eða neytti matar, en svá sem vanði hans var til. Halldórr var maðr fámæltr ok stirðorðr, bermæltr ok stríðlundaðr ok ómjúkr, en þat kom illa þá við konung, er hann hafði gnóga aðra með sér gøfga menn ok þjónostufulla. Dvalðisk Halldórr litla hríð með konungi. Fór hann til Íslands, gerði þar bú í Hjarðarholti, bjó þar til elli ok varð gamall.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ *Heimskringla III*, 119-20.

Halldórr was the largest and strongest of men and the most handsome. King Haraldr had this opinion of him, that of all the men who had been with him, he was the one who reacted the least to sudden things. Whether it was mortal danger or wonderful news, or whatever peril befell him, he was neither happy nor unhappy, he did not sleep nor drink nor eat food any more or less than the amount that was his habit.

Halldórr was a taciturn and stiffly-spoken man, plain-speaking and obstinate and harsh, and that came across badly to the king, when he had plenty of other men with him, who were honourable and eager to serve. Halldórr stayed with the king only a little while. He went back to Iceland, established a farm in Hjarðarholt and lived there until he became elderly.

This passage, while not detailed enough to demonstrate conclusively Snorri's knowledge of *Halldórs þáttr* as it appears in *Morkinskinna*, offers a compatible characterisation of the titular Iclander. In both cases, Halldórr is a formidable man known for his laconicism and uncompromising attitude, which proves a major factor in the king's dissatisfaction with his conduct and prompts Halldórr's eventual return to Iceland. Even if the likelihood of the version of *Morkinskinna* consulted in the compilation of *Heimskringla* containing the *þættir* is contested, access to a shared narrative tradition that provides the broad framework for Halldórr's exploits in the Norwegian *hirð* is evident.

Instances such as this demonstrate the substantial differences in the narrative discourse between *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*. In *Morkinskinna*, the conflict between Haraldr and Halldórr takes the form of *Halldórs þáttr*, a dramatic and extended shift in the narrative discourse in which an unyielding king and an unyielding retainer jostle at length for respect and reward. Their disagreement has serious consequences for the stability of the *hirð*, but it also demonstrates the prominence and wealth an obstreperous individual can enjoy within this elite milieu (see 7.1.4). In *Heimskringla*, conversely, Halldórr has a strictly

auxiliary role within the narrative, as a disloyal follower whose exploits merit only a brief synopsis devoid of the nuanced agency and sustained focus that typifies *Halldórs þáttir*. Halldórr is relegated to a diminutive status in comparison to Haraldr harðráði's sustained narrative centrality, which, in *Heimskringla*, is not subjected to frequent, large scale disruptions of the sort that would undermine the text's comparative conformity to Aristotelean poetics.⁹¹

Heimskringla does not maintain the same degree of controlled focus on the actions of kings as *Fagrskinna*; the actions of disruptive figures, even the enemies of kings, are prominently presented within the text, particularly in *Óláfs saga helga*. Such sequences in *Heimskringla* initially share the effect of destabilising the narrative discourse with the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna*, but the disruption they occasion is softened as these episodes are rationalised in their incorporation into larger 'conversion structures' that stress Óláfr's salvific agenda with regard to the people of Norway and the acceptance of his authority at multiple social scales. In the case of the third section of *Heimskringla*, for which *Morkinskinna* is a source, no *þættir* are present and the actions of troublemakers are not given prominence within the text but either omitted or treated synoptically, diminishing the effect of the dramatic representation of strife that is central to the narrative history of *Morkinskinna*.

4.4 Hulda-Hrokkinskinna

Hulda (AM 66 fol.) and *Hrokkinskinna* (GKS 1010 fol.) are almost exclusively discussed in tandem, due to the extreme similarity of their accounts of Norwegian kingship 1035-1177. *Hulda* was written in the latter part of the 14th century and *Hrokkinskinna* in the first half of the 15th century, but the latter has been demonstrated not to be a copy of the former, with

⁹¹ Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Amplified Saga', 57. Ármann stresses that Snorri was not necessarily aware of Aristotelian conventions of narrative form despite the adherence of *Heimskringla* to its aesthetic principles.

both texts rather being derived from a shared lost exemplar (*H).⁹² Louis-Jensen argues for a compilation date for *H after 1280 and certainly not before 1268, based on comments within *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*.⁹³ Less certain, however, is whether *H ‘was an original or a copy of earlier MS’.⁹⁴ The issue of *H’s originality is rendered less important by the general critical consensus, based on Louis-Jensen’s pioneering work, that the manuscript was compiled using material from the *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna* traditions.⁹⁵ The transmission of material from these two texts is not, however, straightforward, with *H being taken to derive its material from *Heimskringla* from a version of the y-class that diverged at an earlier point from the more-closely related texts found in *Eirspennill*, *Jöfraskinna*, and *Gullinskinna*, while the material it derives from the *Morkinskinna* tradition comes from a lost sister text to GKS 1009 fol. (*m).⁹⁶

As the structure of *Heimskringla* has been discussed in this chapter and the complexities of *Morkinskinna*’s narrative aesthetics are the subject of the thesis, the effect produced by their combination in *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* will not be laboured excessively here. The *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* tradition is not, conversely, purely derivative and should not be dismissed without discussion as is the case in many general surveys of the *konungasögur*.⁹⁷ In general, despite the substantial reordering of the material and the re-contextualisation of many of the *þættir* amongst a higher proportion of synoptic material derived from *Heimskringla*, the effect of narrative insurrection occasioned by the insertion of a given *þáttir* is maintained, as is the fraught depiction of elite Norwegian society typical of *Morkinskinna*, in which kingly centrality is not guaranteed and must rather be negotiated with

⁹² Louis-Jensen, *Kongesagastudier*, 7-15.

⁹³ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁴ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 7.

⁹⁵ Louis-Jensen, *Kongesagastudier*, 16-94.

⁹⁶ For the stemmata that document these manuscript relationships, see Ibid., 35, 40, 43, 59, 72, 93.

⁹⁷ *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* are not substantially discussed in Ármann Jakobsson, ‘Royal Biography’ or in Andersson, *The Sagas of Norwegian Kings*.

marginal figures. It is tempting to argue, therefore, that *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* is more indebted to *Heimskringla* in terms of phrasing but to *Morkinskinna* in terms of structure.

The most pertinent sequences in the text with regard to the current thesis involve the integration of three *þættir* not preserved in either *Morkinskinna* or *Heimskringla* and seemingly derived from independent sources: *Þorgríms þáttir Hallasonar*, *Hrafn þáttir Guðrúnarsonar*, and *Gísli þáttir Illugasonar*.⁹⁸ In terms of their themes and effect upon the narrative, all these *þættir* differ somewhat from those found in *Morkinskinna*. In the first place, the three sequences extend the narrative duration of the events that befall their titular characters *prior* to these figures' interactions with Norwegian kings, with dialogue between the king and the marginal figure not forming the centrepiece of these *þættir* in the manner typical of those preserved within *Morkinskinna*. *Hrafn þáttir Guðrúnarsonar* occurs primarily in Iceland and has, consequently, been dubbed an 'outlaw *þáttir*',⁹⁹ with Magnús góði playing a comparatively minor role in the narrative, only appearing in its final section. Icelanders are also subject to more immediate and dire physical threat in these three *þættir*: Hrafn and Gísli are both almost executed for their respective crimes before receiving last-minute reprieves. *Þorgríms þáttir* is even more atypical in featuring the killings of two Icelandic characters, Þorgrímr Hallason and Bjarni gullbrárskáld Hallbjarnarson as part of a protracted feud cycle initiated due to their differing loyalties to Óláfr helgi and Kálfr

⁹⁸ Þorgeir Guðmundsson and Rasmus Rask, eds, *Sögur Magnúsar konungs Góða, Haralds konungs Hardráða ok sona hans eptir gömlum skinnbókum*, Fornmanna sögur 6 (Copenhagen: Hið norræna fornfræða félag, 1831), 30-36, 105-119; Rasmus Rask, ed., *Sögur Noregs konunga frá Magnúss Erlíngssonar*, Fornmanna sögur 7 (Copenhagen: Hið norræna fornfræða félag, 1832), 25-40. It is possible that *Þorgríms þáttir Hallasonar* and *Hrafn þáttir Guðrúnarsonar*, as *þættir* situated in the sole-rule of Magnús góði, were present in the *Morkinskinna* textual tradition, as they would fall within the six-leaf lacuna at the start of the saga that accounts for much of Magnús' reign. They do not appear in the 15th-century version of *Magnús saga* present within *Flateyjarbók*, from which the lacuna is often glossed, and their substantial length, when coupled with a full account of the travels of Haraldr harðráði would seem to exceed the space afforded by a lacuna. The possibility of all three *þættir* being present in the version of *Morkinskinna* that *H used as a source but having been removed in later manuscripts is possible, but no more plausible than the addition of this material in the *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* tradition.

⁹⁹ Marion Poilvez, 'Between Kings and Outlaws: A Space for Dissent in Medieval Icelandic Literature', paper delivered at 16th International Saga Conference, Zurich, 12th August 2015.

Árnason, respectively. Magnús appears only as a conciliatory figure at the conclusion of the *þáttir* to defuse the violence and compensate the surviving members of the Icelandic party.

Issues surrounding Christian ethics are also far more overt within these episodes than in the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna*. Hrafn is pardoned by Magnús góði after being granted a vision of St. Óláfr, while the saint and (later) bishop Jón Ögmundarson succeeds in getting Magnús berfœttr to give Gísli a stay of execution with an evocative sermon that concludes with a peroration on the ferocity of the hellfire awaiting rulers who give unjust commands.¹⁰⁰ The didacticism of such an exhortation would seem incongruous in the context of the moral ambivalence that typifies *Morkinskinna*, where royal behaviour is depicted as socially negotiated rather than the result of spiritual castigation. The strength of the ecclesiastical presence in *Gísli þáttir Illugasonar* imparts a strong salvific theme on the episode and renders it closer in form to an *exemplum* focused on various forms of clemency and forgiveness.¹⁰¹

The addition of these *þættir* in *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* significantly alters the depictions of Magnús góði and Magnús berfœttr, with the former, in particular, appearing more overtly draconian than his depiction in *Morkinskinna* suggests (see 6.1 and 7.2). The three *þættir* in *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* more often depict action outside the set confines of the Norwegian *hirð*; stress the precarity of the Icelander abroad and the resultant threat of violence or death; and present dialogue between kings and disruptive figures as shorter, less dynamic, and less crucial to the progress of the episode. When taken in combination, these *þættir* do not allow for a conclusion to be reached regarding a different set of organisational principles within *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, but these episodes' markedly different themes do demonstrate the

¹⁰⁰ Rask, *Sögur Noregs konunga frá Magnúss Erlingssonar*, 37-8.

¹⁰¹ Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and Salvation in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018), 50-5. The *þættir* relating to kings have previously all been considered to function like *exempla*, see Lars Lönnroth, *European Sources of Icelandic Saga-Writing: An Essay Based on Previous Studies* (Stockholm: Boktryckeri Aktiebolaget Thule, 1965), 17. This generalisation belies that the *þættir* usually depict a tension between different behavioural models that cannot be satisfactorily reduced to a simple moral and are instead usually concluded through the characters involved achieving an equitable compromise.

consistency of the narrative effect evinced by the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna*. The creation of narrative insurrection in *Morkinskinna* relies on the *þættir* maintaining the primacy of the presiding kings and the established social conventions of the *hirð*. These elements are then placed in tension with the ethos of the newly-introduced character and concurrent shifts in the narrative discourse. The characters introduced in the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna* do not evince a carnivalesque reconfiguration of the norms of Norwegian society but nor do they operate precariously on the outskirts of the narrative or community as is the case in the *þættir* specific to *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*. In *Morkinskinna*, disruptive figures are introduced into the familiar narrative setting of the Norwegian *hirð*, where their presence as a foil to the established central character of the king produces a civil, interpersonal conflict, which often concludes to the benefit of all involved, in contrast with the violent political strife that otherwise comes to dominate the synoptic elements of this narrative history. The *þættir* unique to *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, conversely, show the mortal danger present to peripheral figures who enter the Norwegian *hirð*, the incompatibility of these newcomers with pre-established social norms, and that Icelanders abroad operate at a significant distance from the king.

4.5 *Flateyjarbók*

Flateyjarbók (GKS 1005 fol.) is a distinct outlier amongst the *konungasögur* corpus for a variety of reasons. In the first place, it was compiled by Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þorhallsson between 1387-1394, at the behest of Jón Hákonarson of Víðidalstunga, a historical context distinct from the early to mid-13th century, the most concentrated period of *kounungasögur* composition. Secondly, *Flateyjarbók* is not organised chronologically to cover a particular span of Norwegian history, as is typical of kings' sagas compendia, but rather centres on greatly expanded versions of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* and *Ólafs saga helga*, which act as hubs for an extensive project of compilation and redaction loosely centred

around a selection of Norwegian kings.¹⁰² From this expansive tendency arises *Flateyjarbók*'s third distinguishing feature: its prodigious size. An estimated forty-four manuscripts were employed to make up the contents of its initial two hundred and two leaves. The text interlaces material, which if distinguished by genre, would class amongst the *konungasögur*, *Íslendingasögur*, *biskupasögur*, *fornaldarsögur*, material rubricated as *þættir*, both eddic and skaldic verse, *rímur* and annals. *Flateyjarbók* stands as the climax of the *konungasögur* compendium as a form, as the broadest and richest assemblage of disparate sources into a cohesive project of royal biography.

Morkinskinna and *Flateyjarbók*, despite their considerable differences in compositional scope and structure, have been grouped together as *konungasögur* similarly typified by the presence of *þættir* (see 2.2 and 2.3). This association between the two texts is one of limited accuracy: none of the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna* are rubricated as such, and while the label *þáttir* is used regularly in *Flateyjarbók* to denote the start of a semi-independent narrative strand within a larger saga, the deployment of the term is by no means standardised. Sequences that modern critics consider as *þættir* are not denoted as such, while material from *Íslendingasögur* for example, when interlaced within the larger structure of a royal biography, is sometimes classed as a *þáttir* (see 2.3).¹⁰³ In the absence of a standardised medieval classification system, such a comparison between *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* as 'þættir-ed' compilations must be established in terms of narrative effect. This is not to say that such a comparison is without merit, but rather the relationship between the two texts should be considered with a greater sensitivity to the polysystemic development in the usage

¹⁰² Elizabeth Ashman Rowe has produced the most comprehensive analysis of *Flateyjarbók*'s structure, demonstrating the shifting nature of the compilation project, which initially centred around the production of a diplomatic gift and *speculum regale* for Óláfr Hákonarson who might be edified in reading of the exploits of his righteous namesakes: *The Development of Flateyjarbók*, 54-6.

¹⁰³ See for example the division and rubrication of *Jómsvíkinga saga* material into *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*: Norðal, *Flateyjarbók I*, 103.

of *þættir*, or structures analogous to them, throughout the *konungasögur* (see 3.1). The elements denoted as *þættir* in *Flateyjarbók*, compiled over a century after the completion of GKS 1009 fol., should not be understood to have the same function in relation to the wider text as do the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna*.

The function, order, and interconnection of the *þættir* of *Flateyjarbók* have been discussed rigorously by Würth, Rowe, and Grønlie, with all three scholars reaching the conclusion that the insertion of *þættir* is systematic and produces a sophisticated effect within *Flateyjarbók* as a whole (see 2.3). Such scholarship has proved foundational to the narratological approach to *Morkinskinna* employed in this thesis but, in light of such comprehensive research, there is neither the necessity nor the scope in the current study to offer a comprehensive survey of the narrative structure of a text as extensive as *Flateyjarbók*. Furthermore, Grønlie, in particular, has discussed the disruptive potential of the *þættir* in relation to the wider narrative of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (see 2.3) in which such episodes ‘create a dialogue with the main narrative, contest its preconceptions, and suggest fictional alternatives to established versions of his missionary exploits.’¹⁰⁴ Grønlie’s primary focus is *Rögnvalds þáttur ok Rauðs*, which she convincingly argues is ideologically discordant from the saga it is inserted into due to the episode’s focus on merciful conversion, in opposition to Óláfr Tryggvason’s otherwise brutal approach to Christianisation.¹⁰⁵ Grønlie extends this point to suggest that the episode functions as a specific foil to *Þáttur Rauðs hins ramma* through problematising and critiquing the intensity of the torture and slaughter Óláfr employs in that sequence.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Grønlie, ‘Þáttur and Saga’, 32. Rowe has also discussed the productive manipulation of conflicting ideologies between different sections within *Flateyjarbók*; see ‘Origin Legends and Foundation Myths in *Flateyjarbók*’, in Margaret Clunies Ross, ed., *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, The Viking Collection 14 (Odense: Odense University Press, 2003), 198–216.

¹⁰⁵ Grønlie, ‘Þáttur and Saga’, 29.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Grønlie's understanding of the effect produced by *Rögnvalds þáttir ok Rauðs* is compatible with the narrative insurrection occasioned by the presence of a *þáttir* in *Morkinskinna*, in that the initiation of the episode destabilises the depiction of the normative practices of the king within the narrative and is complemented by a tonal shift from the historical to the comic. The primary difference between the narrative effect of *Rögnvalds þáttir* and similar sequences in *Morkinskinna* is that the disruption is spiritual rather than social in this case: it is the destabilising intermingling of the heathen and Christian faiths, rather than royal and marginal individuals, which is central to this *þáttir*'s reconfiguration of the narrative discourse. If, as is probable, Jón Hákonarson owned *Hulda* while *Flateyjarbók* was being compiled,¹⁰⁷ then the narrative structure of the *Morkinskinna* textual tradition may indirectly have contributed to the use in *Flateyjarbók* of the *þættir* as qualifying and complicating features on the central narratives with which they are associated. Just as the textual differences between *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* are palpable in terms of scale and content, however, important distinctions should be raised between the varying usages of *þættir* within them. Due to their explicit rubrication, the *þættir* within *Flateyjarbók* appear as newly-initiated narrative sequences, more fully distinguished from the surrounding prose, rather than effects within an integrated single text. It is possible to consider the *þættir* in *Flateyjarbók* as analogous in function to an interlinear gloss, in providing a diverse range of commentaries on the material with which it is interwoven while employing a distinguishable register and form.¹⁰⁸ Such a function allows for the flexible utility of the *þættir* within this

¹⁰⁷ Louis-Jensen, *Kongesagastudier*, 70.

¹⁰⁸ The preponderance of marginalia in Norse manuscripts, of which the sub-section of glosses comprises a considerable proportion, is encapsulated succinctly in Matthew Driscoll, 'Postcards from the Edge: An Overview of Marginalia in Icelandic Manuscripts', *Variants*, 2.3 (2004), 21-36. Such a lively paratextual culture lends itself well to the possibility of the insertion of literary devices such as the *þættir* into *Flateyjarbók* being considered as an analogue process of augmentation and clarification of a pre-existing narrative. Both the interlinear gloss and the *þáttir* achieved much of their effectivity from their ability to provide immediate responses to the material with which they are placed in dialogue; for a study of the effectiveness of interlinear glossing upon literary comprehension, see Atefeh Elekaei, Sajad Faramarzi, and Mansour Koosha, 'The Impact of Gloss Types on Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary Gain and Vocabulary Retention: A Comparative Study', *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 4.5 (2015), 97-103.

text, as these episodes sometimes reinforce the themes of the surrounding narrative, sometimes expand the detail afforded to a segment of the narrative, and sometimes, as Grønlie notes, undercut established themes. The image of disparate courses meeting in a single body of water, supplied by Jón Þórðarson to explain the structure of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* (see 2.3), can, therefore, be extended to imagine the various tributaries feeding waters of different qualities into a greater torrent, increasing its flow, but also often causing turbulence in the currents where streams meet rivers.

If the discursive scope of *Flateyjarbók* allows it to employ the *þættir* with several different functions, *Morkinskinna*'s comparative brevity and narrower focus on depicting a limited span of Norwegian history are complemented by the more consistent usage of the *þættir* to facilitate moments of narrative insurrection within the text. To extend Jón Þórðarson's limnological analogy to this text, *Morkinskinna* forms one direct, if tempestuous, river wherein the boundaries of the *þættir* can be seen as dams along its course: frustrating the flow at the point of each disruptive structure and causing the waters to swell and deepen at times and thin and quicken at others. As such, *Morkinskinna* exhibits a structure both more contrived and more unified than that of *Flateyjarbók*: the absence of the term *þáttir* in *Morkinskinna*'s rubrication integrates these episodes more fully with the surrounding prose, suggesting all elements of the text are to be consumed commensurately, rather than in the discrete manner possible in *Flateyjarbók*. The redactor of *Morkinskinna* rarely gives a justification for an episode's presence, and the comparative consistency of the text's narrative effect renders the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* collectively akin to a poetic conceit, as an unconventional and extended stylistic effect, in which, through the intrusion of a contrasting

tone and structure into a consistent narrative universe, ‘we are made to concede likeness while being strongly conscious of unlikeness.’¹⁰⁹

A medieval narratological response to the principles of *Morkinskinna*’s compilation can be observed within *Flateyjarbók* itself, in which a variant of the *Morkinskinna* textual tradition is included (see 1.2). The material relating to *Morkinskinna* is included in a 15th-century interpolation, totalling twenty-three leaves and falling between excerpts from Styrmir Kárasón’s *Óláfs saga helga* and *Einars þáttir Sokkasonar af Greenlandi*. It was added when *Flateyjarbók* was owned by Þorleifur Björnsson. Rather than constituting a complete copy of *Morkinskinna*, however, only the *Saga Magnús góða ok Haralds harðráða* of the *Morkinskinna* type is preserved alongside a number of *þættir*, here organised as independent narratives: *Auðunar þáttir vestfirzka*, *Sneglu-Halla þáttir*, *Halldórs þáttir Snorrasonar*, *Þorsteins þáttir forvitna*, *Þorsteins þáttir Ásgrímssonar*, and *Blóð-Egils þáttir*.¹¹⁰

Due to the composition of this material falling after *Flateyjarbók*’s primary compilation period of 1387-1394, Elizabeth Ashman Rowe considers this version of *Magnús saga góða ok Haralds harðráða* and its attendant *þættir* to form part of the manuscript’s afterlife and discusses this section only briefly in her concluding remarks as to *Flateyjarbók*’s fate under Danish rule and its eventual repatriation.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Rowe does not include the texts from the fifteenth-century interpolation in the appendix in which she lists the major works copied into *Flateyjarbók*.¹¹² The implication is that this material, separated by decades from the compilation of the rest of the codex, is an unrelated addendum the presence of which is largely irrelevant to an appreciation of the organisation of *Flateyjarbók*. A survey of

¹⁰⁹ Helen Gardner, *The Metaphysical Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), xxiii.

¹¹⁰ Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Flateyjarbók IV* (Akraness: Flateyjarútgáfan, 1945), 15-230. Hereafter referred to as *Flateyjarbók IV*.

¹¹¹ Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók*, 405.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 415-23.

the distinct redactorial decisions made in the *Magnús góða saga ok Haralds harðráða* in *Flateyjarbók* in comparison with the extant older version of the saga within the *Morkinskinna* text as preserved in GKS 1009 fol. demonstrates, however, an effort to adapt material from the *Morkinskinna* tradition in a manner cohesive with the structural aesthetics of *Flateyjarbók* in the fifteenth-century variant.¹¹³

In the first place, thirteen stanzas or half-stanzas are absent in the *Flateyjarbók* account that are present in *Morkinskinna*. Secondly, the text contains a substantial number of minor expansions to the prose, usually for the sake of additional clarity, such as replacing pronouns with proper names or clarifying points of action. Thirdly and most significantly, in *Flateyjarbók* six *þættir* are not present that appear in *Morkinskinna*: *Hreiðars þáttir heimiska*, *Halldórs þáttir Snorrasonar*, *Auðunar þáttir vestfirzka*, *Brands þáttir ǫrva*, *Íslendings þáttir sǫgufróða* and *Sneglu-Halla þáttir*.¹¹⁴ As mentioned above, three of these *þættir* are placed in a collection of short narratives following the end of the saga proper. These episodes comprise a sizable portion of *Magnús saga ok Haralds* as it is preserved in *Morkinskinna* and their omission significantly changes the saga's form. The editorial process has not led, however, to the removal of the *þættir* wholesale with a number of them remaining in the same position and form in which they are placed in GKS 1009 fol.. The *þættir* that are included within the

¹¹³ A comparison of GKS 1009 fol. with this section of *Flateyjarbók*, however, requires an important caveat: the *Flateyjarbók* variant descends from *m, a lost sister text to *Morkinskinna*, which also acted as the source text for *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*; see Louis-Jensen, *Kongesagastudier*, 90. As *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* contains the same selection of *þættir* as the *Morkinskinna* manuscript, however, it appears unlikely that the *þættir* were excluded during the compilation of *m. It is uncertain, however, as to the number of manuscripts in the chain separating *m from the fifteenth-century material within *Flateyjarbók*. One possible candidate for an intermediary text is AM 325 IV beta 4to, a two-leaf fragment of *Magnús saga Góða* with *Karls þáttir Vesala* dating from the late 14th century, and which is very closely related to the version found within *Flateyjarbók*. It is unclear whether AM 325 IV beta 4to is a parent or sibling text to the *Flateyjarbók* insert and the fragment does not extend far enough to conclude as to the presence of the *þættir* in this version. It is important to stress that the possibility remains that the compiler of the *Magnús saga góða ok Haralds harðráða* present in *Flateyjarbók* merely replicated earlier redactorial decisions rather than imposing their own. In the absence of firm evidence to the contrary, however, a literary analysis of the structuring of the 15th-century version and its concordance with the wider structure of *Flateyjarbók* is productive by way of offering a potential explanation for the substantial and regular differences in structure between the two versions.

¹¹⁴ Louis-Jensen, *Kongesagastudier*, 75-6.

Flateyjarbók version of *Magnús saga ok Haralds*, as are as follows: *Þorkels þáttur dyðrils*, *Þorsteins þáttur Síðu-Hallssonar*, *Arnórs þáttur jarlaskálds*, the episode concerning an unnamed Icelander and Þorfinnr kaupmaðr, *Þorvarðar þáttur krákunefs*, *Stúfs þáttur inn skemmri*, King Haraldr's encounter with a man in a boat, and *Odds þáttur Ófeigssonar*.

While it would be a mistake to attempt to create too neat an organisational distinction between the *þættir* that remain within the saga in *Flateyjarbók* and those that have been removed, a broad comparison of the two groups reveals some productive contrasts. Amongst the *þættir* omitted are some of the longest episodes in *Morkinskinna*: *Hreiðars þáttur heimska*, *Halldórs þáttur Snorrasonar*, *Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka* and *Sneglu-Halla þáttur*. The extent of these sequences may justify their exclusion in the mind of a redactor with a narrower conception of what constitutes relevant material in compiling a *konungasaga* (see 3.5.4). It is possible that the 15th-century redactor felt such extensive departures from the more momentous activities of ruling a kingdom were not compatible with a unified narrative centring the exploits of monarchs, an editorial sensibility at odds with those of the *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* compilers. Furthermore, the preservation of three of these *þættir*, *Halldórs þáttur Snorrasonar*, *Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka*, and *Sneglu-Halla þáttur*, in an expanded form following *Magnús saga ok Haralds* is potential evidence for the evolution of the reception of the *þættir* in Iceland by the fifteenth century, as the most dramatic and extensive of these narratives have been converted into an independent short saga form. In a polysystemic understanding of the shifting manner in which *þættir* were employed over time (see 3.1), this organisational tendency prefigures the continued removal of *þættir* from their original narrative context and their preservation as unintegrated narratives in the compilation of 19th-century editions.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, *Íslendingaþættir*, 124-6

Narrative length alone cannot completely account for the exclusion of material, however, with both *Brands þáttur orva* and *Íslendings þáttur sǫgufróða* being excised despite their relative brevity, while the longer *Þorsteins þáttur Síðu-Hallssonar* and the episode concerning Þorfinnr kaupmaðr remain. This can, in part, be accounted for if the 15th-century compiler is assumed to have had a more sophisticated engagement with the material of *Magnús saga góða ok Haralds harðráða* than has previously been considered, an argument evidenced by the thoroughness with which the internal consistency of elements of the plot are maintained through the redaction process. *Íslendings þáttur sǫgufróða* culminates with the storyteller revealing that his comprehensive knowledge of King Haraldr's adventures stems from Halldórr Snorrason's dissemination of this material on his return to Iceland (see 3.1). With *Halldórs þáttur Snorrasonar*, which recounts Halldórr's flight back to his home country, now positioned as a separate narrative after the saga's conclusion, the narrative logic of *Íslendings þáttur sǫgufróða* is compromised, perhaps accounting for its absence. Conversely, Þorsteinn Síðu-Hallsson plays a small but important role in attending the death-bed of King Magnús following his return from a pilgrimage to Rome and *Þorsteins þáttur Síðu-Hallssonar* may have been deemed necessary to account for his presence in this climactic scene (see 6.1.2).¹¹⁶ Þorfinnr kaupmaðr and the unnamed Icelander are rendered somewhat instrumental to the mounting tensions between Einarr þambarskelfir and Haraldr harðráði (see 7.1.3) and as such the *þáttur* is justified in its position in contextualising the king's subsequent murder of his powerful magnate.

The above differences in compilation render this version of *Magnús saga góða ok Haralds harðráða* as a more linear narrative better focussed upon kingly action, but other elements of the restructuring of the saga can be more specifically associated with the compilation principles of the pre-existing text of *Flateyjarbók* into which this saga was

¹¹⁶ *Flateyjarbók* IV, 105.

interpolated. The comparison initially seems counterintuitive due to the general principle of the excision of material in the 15th-century interpolation not being in keeping with the compendious expansiveness typical of *Flateyjarbók*. This version of *Magnús saga góða ok Haralds harðráða* can, however, be compared with the versions of *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* inserted by Magnús Þórhallsson.¹¹⁷ Magnús apes Jón Þorðarson's schema for compiling the sagas relating to Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr helgi by denoting a variety of episodes from *Sverris saga* as *þættir*.¹¹⁸ In *Hákonar saga*, ecclesiastical voices that espouse alternative values, most often those of bishops in advisory roles, are diminished to the benefit of centring King Hákon as the single authoritative presence at the saga's centre.¹¹⁹ Magnús's compilation methodology in these two sagas appears balanced between the inclusion of relevant supplementary material and the minimisation of the presence of figures who call into question the centrality of royal authority.

This balanced approach to compilation may have influenced the structure of the 15th-century interpolated saga. The importance of the inclusion of substantial supplementary material, as provided by the *þættir*, is viewed as complementary to *Flateyjarbók*'s macro-structure, but such is the density of the *þættir* in the *Morkinskinna* tradition, that for the interpolation to emulate the wider text that it has been added into necessitates a reduction in the impact the *þættir* have upon the narrative centrality of kings, as the density of instances in which royal authority is challenged is less in *Flateyjarbók* than in *Morkinskinna*. A similar urge to the one that compelled Magnús Þórhallsson to diminish the authority and presence of Cardinal William might, therefore, account for the omission of *Brands þáttr qrva* (see 3.4).¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ *Flateyjarbók III*, 141-597.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 253, 256-7, 260, 270.

¹¹⁹ Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók*, 234-8.

¹²⁰ *Flateyjarbók III*, 171-2.

The positioning of Brandr as a rival authority figure whose wisdom threatens to exceed that of the king may well have occasioned the exclusion of this *páttir*.

The argument for the thematic compatibility of this redaction of *Magnús saga góða ok Haralds harðráða* with the structural and thematic aesthetic of *Flateyjarbók* can be further enhanced through Elizabeth Ashman Rowe's concept of the economics of charity as applied to *Óláfs saga helga*. Rowe suggests that the *pættir* concerning St. Óláfr often demonstrate that generosity freely proffered by a retainer is multiplied in return by a grateful and magnanimous lord.¹²¹ The *pættir* that remain within the *Flateyjarbók* version of *Magnús saga góða ok Haralds harðráða* adhere better to this concept of dutiful service being based on a transactional view of reciprocity than those that are excluded. The included *pættir* tend to present kings' initial suspicion as to the utility of unpromising figures, which gives way to the recognition and reward of these figures as valuable followers. *Þorkels páttir dyðrils* (see 6.1.1) and *Stúfs páttir* both feature initially unpromising or insulting figures whose utility to the king is demonstrated by the *pættir*'s conclusion, be that through the preservation of the king's wealth in gold or the preservation of his legacy in poetry.¹²² This process often includes the mediation of established Norwegian *hirðmenn* who facilitate the reconciliation, such as Einarr þambarskelfir in the case of Þorsteinn Siðu-Hallsson or Eysteinn orri in the case of Þorvarðr krákunef;¹²³ the conciliatory presence of these powerful magnates further suggests that the integration of the newly-arrived figure into a productive elite community is a central theme.

The omitted *pættir*, conversely, present the self-interest or uncontrollable independence of less cooperative individuals: Halldórr Snorrason and Sneglu-Halli are both

¹²¹ Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók*, 104-7.

¹²² *Flateyjarbók IV*, 84-5, 160-2.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 91-5, 134-6.

disruptive presences who prioritise personal recompense or self-gratification. Hreiðarr and Auðun operate freely between different king's *hirðir*, which calls into question the quality of their loyalty in the context of the political turbulence of periods of co-rule (see 6.1.2 and 7.1.4).¹²⁴ The removal of the *þættir* that depict more fraught relationships between kings and their followers re-configures *Magnús saga góða ok Haralds harðráða* in that it reshapes the narrative so that initial resistance inexorably makes a transition to reconciliation, reward, and loyalty in a model that mimics many of the *þættir* associated with St. Óláfr. The impact of the disruptive newcomer, whose presence is so central within *Morkinskinna*, is much diminished in the *Flateyjarbók* version.

The only exception to this general trend of excluding recalcitrant troublemakers or isolating their narrative impact through their placement as independent narratives in this 15th-century version of the saga is in the case of *Odds þáttr Ófeigssonar*. This *þáttr* depicts Haraldr at his most tyrannical and hapless in his repeated failure to discover where Oddr has stowed his taxable cargo, despite the king's violent threats against the Iclander.¹²⁵ Oddr eventually escapes, unreconciled with the king, in part due to the aid of Þorsteinn who, due to their friendship, disobeys his lord Haraldr. Amongst the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna*, this sequence is unusual as a rare case in which the interaction is purely detrimental to the king, with Haraldr neither demonstrating his wisdom nor gaining an obvious social benefit from the encounter: nowhere else is Haraldr so comprehensively outwitted. In the context of the *þættir* that remain within *Magnús saga góða ok Haralds harðráða* in *Flateyjarbók*, which focus on the loyal service of the *hirð* to its king and the integration of initially individualistic characters into the elite community, *Odds þáttr* appears oppositional in function.

¹²⁴ Miller, *Auðun and the Polar Bear*, 28-38.

¹²⁵ *Flateyjarbók* IV, 162-7.

Such an exception from the general trends that inform the assimilation of this saga into *Flateyjarbók* does act as a caution against a strict structuralist approach to the deployment of the *þættir* – noting similarities in effect between sequences does not preclude a counterexample being employed to different ends within the same text. With regard to *Odds þáttr*, a specialised function can be suggested. The *þáttr* is the last in which King Haraldr features and is placed directly before the beginning of the extended narrative of Haraldr's fateful campaign into England, which results in his death at Stamford Bridge. In line with the *þættir* functioning to dramatize more general historical discord on an interpersonal scale, *Odds þáttr* depicts a form of defeat for Haraldr in a social context, wherein the disloyalty of members of his *hirð* and the escape of his enemy functions as a prelude and parallel to the king's later military defeat and death and the subsequent complete disintegration of his *hirð*. The inclusion of this *þáttr* in this particular position in all extant versions of the texts in the *Morkinskinna* tradition supports the association of *Odds þáttr* with Haraldr's waning wisdom and increasingly violent temperament towards the end of his reign, an aesthetic consideration that supersedes the more general desire within the *Flateyjarbók* version to reassert the centrality of kingly action.

As befits such an extensive and varied compendium of *konungasögur*, *Flateyjarbók* utilises the *þættir* in a variety of ways, both concordant and discordant, in relation to the surrounding text – in certain instances the effect of narrative insurrection is visible. The rubrication of the *þættir* distinguishes them from the surrounding text to a more significant degree than in *Morkinskinna*, where the *þættir* are better assimilated in their function as literary structures in an integrated narrative. The 15th-century interpolation of a version of *Magnús saga góða ok Haralds harðráða* into *Flateyjarbók* has also been understudied in relation to *Morkinskinna*. Elements of this later version appear to have been edited to align with the structural principles of *Flateyjarbók*, such as in preserving reciprocal interactions

between kings and their followers rather than more fraught social interactions. The subtle distinctions in organisation between the *Flateyjarbók* version and the comparable sections of *Morkinskinna* further illuminate the disruptive narrative effect of the *þættir* in their prose context.

4.6 Further Applications of Narrative insurrection in Saga Literature

The survey of compendia of sagas of kings undertaken in this chapter has yielded two, arguably incongruous, conclusions. The first is that the notion of narrative insurrection, as developed in this thesis, proves a productive framework when applied to a range of episodes in *konungasögur* compendia, despite the differing scopes and aesthetics of these texts. The dual introduction of a disruptive character and a disruption of the narrative discourse is, consequently, a relatively common device by which a point of instability in narrative history is reflected. The second is that in no text is this effect as consistent as in *Morkinskinna*, in which the clustering of the *þættir* comes to dominate the narrative's structure and the negotiation of unavoidable interpersonal strife becomes a core aspect of royal biographies. The regularity of these destabilising challenges to the values and prominence of central characters within saga narratives renders *Morkinskinna* uniquely idiosyncratic within saga literature: an unusual experiment, perhaps, in producing a narrative structure complementary to the time period under consideration and reflecting, in this case, the chaos of a society descending into civil war.

There is no necessity, however, for the applicability of narrative insurrection to be limited to the *konungasögur* corpus. While a comprehensive investigation is outside the scope of this thesis, saga literature is littered with tonally and structurally dissonant episodes that might be better understood by a limited application of the general approach to *Morkinskinna* undertaken in this thesis. The relationship between *Grettis saga* and *Spesar*

þátrr would be an obvious initial candidate for such a treatment. The adventures of Þorsteinn dromundr in Byzantium are relevant to the narrative of his vengeance upon Þorbjörn ǫngull for the slaying of his half-brother Grettir,¹²⁶ but the sequence is a tonal and structural departure from the action in Iceland that preceded it. The presence of *Spesar þátrr* introduces themes typical of continental Romance, the *konungasögur*, and hagiography, all embodied in the jarring introduction of Spes around whom the *þátrr* is oriented.¹²⁷

Narrative insurrection is a productive method by which to reconcile traditional critical concerns surrounding the interpolation of the discordant *Spesar þátrr* into *Grettis saga* with an appreciation of the saga as a unified whole,¹²⁸ as the model allows the consideration of discrepancies in theme and form as effect cultivated through skilful redaction.¹²⁹ A preliminary suggestion for the function of the *þátrr* in relation to the wider saga could be related to the previous narrative focus on Grettir, whose characterisation explores the complex blend of personal failure, social prejudice, and misfortune that renders someone an outlaw or monstrous.¹³⁰ Spes, conversely, demonstrates the equally mixed character of a figure who comes to be considered as being amongst the *mestu gæfumenn* (most fortunate people) in gaining social approbation, love, and spiritual salvation.¹³¹ Following the bleakness of Grettir's degeneration, Spes, as befits her name, concludes the saga as an embodiment of the virtue of hope, in demonstrating that the complex interplay of fated action

¹²⁶ Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1936), 279-90. Hereafter referred to as *Grettis saga*.

¹²⁷ Robert Glendinning, 'Grettis saga and European Literature in the Late Middle Ages', *Mosaic*, 4.2 (1970), 49-62; Marion Poilvez, 'Pourquoi le *Spesar þátrr*? Echos tristaniens dans les exils norrois de *Grettis saga*' Master's thesis University of Western Brittany (2010-11), 83-96.

¹²⁸ Joost De Lange, *The Relation and Development of English and Icelandic Outlaw-Tradition*, Nederlandsche Bijdragen op het Gebied van germaansche Philologie en Linguistiek 6 (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1935), 64.

¹²⁹ *Spesar þátrr* can be classed as a disruption of the narrative of *Grettis saga* only in a technical sense as no further events occur in the story following the *þátrr*'s conclusion, but the sequence is followed by a chapter relating to the testimony of Sturla lögmaðr regarding Grettir's character: *Grettis saga*, 290.

¹³⁰ Alexander James Wilson, 'Engi maðr skapar sik sjálf: Individual agency and the communal creation of outsiders in Íslendingasögur outlaw narratives', unpublished PhD thesis, Durham University (2017), 86-119.

¹³¹ *Grettis saga*, 289.

and social pressure can just as readily lead to happiness as misery.¹³² In this manner, *Spesar þátr* undercuts the pre-established ethos, motifs and tone of the saga,¹³³ just as *Spes* challenges the tortured heroics of *Grettir*. In doing so, both the episode and the character demonstrate an aesthetic sensitivity to the utility of a dissonant scene as a method of qualifying and complicating the themes of the wider text.

Section Two: Challenging the King, Disrupting the *hirð*

The second section of this thesis is dedicated to the production of an original reading of *Morkinskinna* through the application of the narratological study conducted in Section One. When narrative insurrection is taken as the central effect across the royal biographies of *Morkinskinna* (see 3.6), which renders it idiosyncratic amongst the *konungasögur* (see 4), subsequent analysis of the text must consider the disruption of elite Norwegian society and attempts at its resolution as central themes. The different methods by which strife, most commonly in the form of challenges to kingly authority, is presented are crucial to the interpretation of the text put forward in this section. As the quality of such challenges rests on the interplay of the challenger and the challenged, this section does not seek to provide characterisations of kings in isolation as, despite their centrality in *Morkinskinna*, rulers are best understood in relation to the disparate figures with whom they interact. The original reading that follows makes the case for kings' legacies in *Morkinskinna* depending predominantly upon their management of their intimate social circle – the elite institution of

¹³² *Spes*' name is Latin for hope, one of the three Christian theological virtues, which sharpens the contrast afforded by her presence and eventual fate in comparison with the bleaker lot afforded to *Grettir*. A thirteenth-century appreciation of *Spes* as both a virtue and a figure in the cultural imagination is by no means anachronistic: see Moshe Barasch, 'Despair in the Medieval Imagination', *Social Research*, 66.2 (1999), 565-76.

¹³³ O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 214-6. O'Donoghue views language as a central theme of *Grettis saga* and *Spesar þátr* as introducing new and challenging forms of discourse in troubadour song and the generic conventions of romance, as well as recontextualising the Norse trope of the unreliable oath. To this list of challenging forms we can add the disruptive narrative mode of the *þátr* in relation to the wider saga.

the *hirð* (see 5). The operation of the *hirðir* and the presiding kings' authority over these organisations are repeatedly destabilised by the arrival and activity of disruptive figures. The different ways in which kings deal with interpersonal strife comes to define their reigns; the different ways in which narrative insurrections affect the narrative mode comes to define their sagas (see 6 and 7).

5 The Depiction of the *hirð*

The cast of characters presented as populating the expansive world of *Morkinskinna* is both rarefied and limited. The text is concerned with the nuclei of elite individuals who are afforded regular interaction and intimacy with the rulers of Norway.¹ Such a collective group of preeminent men is commonly referred to within *Morkinskinna* as the *hirð*, but the preservation of reliable information concerning the structures and traditions of *hirðir* between 1030 and 1157 should not be assumed to have been entirely possible, or even fundamentally desirable, within a thirteenth-century compilation of *konungasögur*.² This shorter preliminary chapter provides important context for Chapters Five and Six in stressing the centrality of the dynamics of the *hirð*, rather than the characterisations of kings, as vital to the narrative of *Morkinskinna* and the function of the *þættir*. The depictions of *hirðir* in *Morkinskinna* complement the literary effect of the text while maintaining a degree of historical fidelity, as demonstrated by a review of the contrasting information preserved in other sources concerning the structure of the Norwegian *hirð*. In particular, it will be argued the *hirðir* within *Morkinskinna* are presented as social, rather than political or martial, institutions

¹ Thomas Kingston Derry suggests that the nobility of Norway would not have numbered more than one hundred families even by the beginning of the fourteenth century, see *The History of Scandinavia: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 59.

² For a full discussion of the problematic historical value of the Kings' Sagas, see Shami Ghosh, *Kings' Sagas and Norwegian History: Problems and Perspectives*, *The Northern World: North Europe and the Baltic c.400-1700 A.D. Peoples, Economies and Cultures* 54 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 95-100.

within which regular intimacy with the king is available to all, including uninitiated newcomers.

It has been established that the term *hirð* was being used to refer to kings' followers in the 11th century, so its usage is not anachronistic within *Morkinskinna*.³ Prior to this, it is possible that the traditional value system of the *comitatus* developed and formalised over time into the values of the *hirð*, with the strong sense of interpersonal loyalty between a chieftain and his closest followers being preserved in a 'relationship that can be described as initially having been a patron-client one, which was personal, asymmetrical, and reciprocal, with the hirdman (sic) rendering service to the king in return for his protection'.⁴ Arguments for a continuity between the 'Germanic' tribal warband and the organisations surrounding late-medieval Norwegian kings have, however, been contested,⁵ although it is not overly speculative to note the strong bonds of personal intimacy that ensure loyalty to a lord in both cases. It is certainly inaccurate to conceive of the *hirð* purely as a bodyguard of elite troops, as its members would have had numerous administrative and political responsibilities. The *hirð*'s function of protecting the king is never fully replaced but, in the context of discussing *Morkinskinna*, it is necessary to examine whether the depiction of the *hirð* as 'the core of the king's administrative organization and the realm's leading political and social network' is largely an invention of the thirteenth-century saga compilation or somewhat reflective of a historical reality.⁶

³ Birgit Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, Circa 800-1500* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 94.

⁴ Hans Jacob Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence: Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 85. See also Dennis Howard Green, *The Carolingian Lord; Semantic Studies on Four Old High German Words: balder, frô, truhtin, hêrro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 84-9.

⁵ See Hans-Werner Goetz, 'Social and Military Institutions' in Rosamond McKitterick, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), vol. 2, 470. For specific detail on the original values of the *comitatus*, see Stephen Evans, *The Lords of Battle: Image and Reality of the Comitatus in Dark-Age Britain* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997).

⁶ Randi Bjørshol Wærdahl, 'Friends or Patrons? Powerful Go-Betweens in the Norwegian Realm in the High Middle Ages', in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Thomas Småberg, eds, *Friendship and Social Networks in Scandinavia, c.1000–1800* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 93-115, at 95.

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, in charting the increasing sophistication of the systems of governance adopted by Norwegian kings c.900-1300, notes that the title of *merkismaðr* (standard-bearer) was in use from 900, and *stallari* (marshal) is present in accounts c.1000.⁷ Both words clearly have martial roots, although Jón stresses that either position could be converted to that of a close advisor during peacetime.⁸ Conversely, the bureaucratic terms of *féhirðir* (treasurer) and *kannslari* (chancellor) do not come into use until the period of *hirð* formalisation around 1250 (see 5.1). From this transition, it may be tempting to argue for a progressive demilitarisation of the *hirð* from an elite group of shock troops into a cabinet of trusted advisors. It is also possible, however, that throughout the period, the *hirð* was valued for its ability to present the king as surrounded by a group of well-armed and intimidating followers, but equally, that these individuals functioned as an intimate group of men acting in social and political support of the king due to strong bonds of loyalty.

5.1 The Organisation of the *hirð* in *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá*

Evidence as to the structure of *hirðir* is significantly expanded in *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá*, thirteenth-century codifications of these elite organisations, which extensively describe their hierarchies and traditions.⁹ *Konungs skuggsjá* was probably written between 1240 and 1260, by an anonymous member of the clergy in the retinue of Hákon Hákonarson.¹⁰ It forms part of the wider European tradition of the *specula regale*: treatises intended to inform princes of the nature of the societies they would eventually lead and to

⁷ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Viking Friendship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 60.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See Ludvig Holm-Olsen, ed., *Konungs skuggsiá*, *Norrøne tekster* 1, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Kjeldeskriftfondet, 1983); and Steinar Imsen, ed. and trans., *Hirðskráen. Hirdloven til Norges konge og hans håndgangne menn. Etter AM322 fol.* (Oslo: Riksarkivet, 2000).

¹⁰ Sverre Bagge, *The Political Thought of The King's Mirror* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1987), 218-24.

demonstrate just modes of rulership. The text can be divided into three distinct sections, on the behaviour expected of merchants, *hirðmenn*, and the king himself.¹¹

Konungs skuggsjá presents the *hirð* as the exemplary nucleus of all Norwegian society and the source of all righteous practice and behaviour. The text's author argues for the pre-eminence of the king's company in matters of social refinement as stemming from its members' preservation of ancient traditions of just ways of living.¹² While the text primarily offers idealised guidelines for how those in service to a king should operate, these are accompanied by the concession that etiquette levels vary between individual members and that poorly informed retainers spread misinformation regarding the values of the *hirð*: *Sva værðr oc æf usnotrer mænn koma til konongs hirðar. Þa soekia þeir þægar sina maka oc næma þat af þeim er þeim er auðnæmzt oc hann var aðr orðenn mæst askynia en þat er ækki nema skamsyni oc heimska.*¹³ Similarly, the reasons given for why an individual might seek a close relationship with the king rather than an independent living as a farmer are also pragmatic. Personal poverty and a desire to escape from potential feuding are supplied as understandable reasons to seek the king's company, as is the mutual protection afforded by co-inhabiting with many powerful men. The text places repeated emphasis on the equalizing nature of loyal service within the *hirð* for all men who join and the increased social stature of a king's company in comparison to their provincial peers: *Nu vallda slíker lutir því at konongr hæf opt oc iðulega þa hott af sinni miskunn er fatæker ero oc hætta firi því marger a at fara til konongs at þærs vænta aller at þeir muni þaðan sæmð oc mikel mætorð fa oc*

¹¹ Sverre Bagge, 'Nature and Society in *The King's Mirror*', *Arkiv for nordisk filologi*, 109.1 (1994), 5-42, at 7-8. Bagge does note, however, that this distinction does not completely reflect the manner in which the text's author conceives of the classes of Norwegian society: the peasantry and the clergy are also specified as separate social groups, but neither merits a specific section.

¹² Holm-Olsen, *Konungs Skuggsjá*, 38-9. The use of 'king's company' as synonymous with the term *hirð* is informed by references to the organisation through the phrase *konongs fōruneyti* within the text.

¹³ Ibid., 39. 'This also happens when unwise men come into the king's *hirð*. Then they immediately seek those they are most comfortable with and learn from them the easiest thing – the behaviour that they already know well. That amounts, however, to nothing but short-sightedness and foolishness.'

sæmilega upreist.¹⁴ Fostering a strong relationship with the king, with the expectation of benefiting from his wealth and favour, is here presented as an effective and socially approved method by which poorer individuals could influence their social rank.¹⁵

Despite this ability to initiate men of disparate ranks into an elite fraternity, the *hirð* is conceived of within *Konungs skuggsjá* as a highly stratified system, in which various retainers are afforded differing privileges in accordance with their pay and their intimacy with the king. Bagge distinguishes three primary groups within the wider company of the king, these being, from least to most prestigious, the *húskarlar*, the *gestir*, and the *hirðmenn*.¹⁶ This strict hierarchy may be something of an oversimplification, however, due to ambiguity over the differing roles attributed to *húskarlar*. Within *Konungs skuggsjá*, the term is simultaneously used when referring to two distinct groups within the *hirð*. The first group of *húskarlar* are the lowest echelon of the men who serve a king, who receive no pay beyond the promise of the king's protection and are comprised of a loosely affiliated assortment of peasants and merchants who rarely cohabit with the king. Their primary function is to act as aides to the king's *sysselmenn*, officials tasked with various administrative roles.¹⁷ The other subset of the king's company designated as *húskarlar* does receive monetary payment from the king, and draws its members from the families of Norwegian magnates, although wealthier peasants were also able to join. While the relevant passage in *Konungs skuggsjá* lacks detail, it appears this group was responsible for regional administration and was a

¹⁴ Ibid., 40. 'Due to examples such as this, the king will often display more of his grace to those that are poor and because of that many risk going to the king because they hope that they will subsequently receive honour and many precious goods and elevation in rank.' For a discussion of the enduring attractiveness of entry into the *hirð* to Icelanders in particular, see Randi Bjørshol Wærdahl, *The Incorporation and Integration of the King's Tributary Lands into the Norwegian Realm c.1195-1397* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 89-112.

¹⁵ While also attractive to many Norwegians, the idea of closer proximity to a king elevating one out of comparative poverty and obscurity would have had a particular resonance in relation to the mid-13th-century Icelandic *goðar*, who sought favour with the king of Norway to increase their standing in relation to their rivals during the Sturlung Age. See David Brégaint, 'Conquering Minds: *Konungs skuggsjá* and the Annexation of Iceland in the Thirteenth Century', *Scandinavian Studies*, 84.4 (2012), 439-66.

¹⁶ Sverre Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway, c.900-1350* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2010), 103.

¹⁷ Holm-Olsen, *Konungs Skuggsjá*, 41.

visible signifier of the king's authority that operated independently from the procession of the king's *hirð* around the country.¹⁸ The underlying logic behind these two groups sharing the same title, despite their disparity in wealth and status, may be due to their lack of personal intimacy with the king, which united them at the bottom of the *hirð*'s hierarchy in the mind of the author of *Konungs skuggsjá*, who was committed to demonstrating the king's centrality to Norwegian society.

The *gestir* are presented as a more prestigious cohort of the *húskarlar* with additional duties, which merit them receiving half the pay of the *hirðmenn*. *Konungs skuggsjá* conceives of the group as something akin to an amalgam of a secret police force and a posse under the control of the king, which is tasked with the surveillance and execution of the monarch's enemies throughout the country.¹⁹ This wage is, however, supplemented by the potential wealth the *gestir* could exact in the discharge of their duties, as they were permitted to seize the property of those that they deemed to be their king's foes.²⁰ The *gestir* were not permitted to feast alongside the king with higher status retainers, apart from on major religious holidays such as Easter and Christmas, but, as their duties when in the king's fellowship consisted of guarding their lord as an auxiliary to the *hirðmenn*, this may have had practical defensive motivations.²¹ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson has suggested the distinction between the *hirðmenn* and

¹⁸ Ibid., 41-42. For discussion of the regular movement of the *hirð* throughout the country, and the importance of the king holding feasts in a variety of locations, see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Viking Friendship*, 59-60.

¹⁹ Medieval analogues with the specialised role that the *gestir* occupied within Norway, as covert enforcers of the king's authority within the common populace, are difficult to suggest. A parallel may be tentatively posited with the secret accusers affiliated with the *birri* who policed late 13th and 14th-century Siena, who denounced their neighbours in return for a percentage of the fine levelled on the criminal, although they lacked the violent capability of the *gestir*, see William M. Bowsky, 'The Medieval Commune and Internal Violence: Police Power and Public Safety in Siena, 1287-1355', *The American Historical Review*, 73.1 (1967), 1-17, at 7. The *gestir* also prefigure the much later *sekretnye sotrudniki* (secret co-workers), a section of the Tsarist secret police who monitored peasant and student dissent from within these communities and were similarly brutal in reinforcing their lord's interests, see Fredric S. Zuckerman, *The Tsarist Secret Police and Russian Society, 1880-1917* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 39.

²⁰ Holm-Olsen, *Konungs Skuggsjá*, 39.

²¹ Ibid., 39-40.

the *gestir* could have been established as early as the 11th century, making the function described above contemporary with the events narrated within *Morkinskinna*.²²

The final and most prestigious group referred to in *Konungs skuggsjá* are the *hirðmenn*. The crux of their role is to act as the most intimate and constant protectors of the king's person as an ever-vigilant bodyguard for their lord. The author extends this duty to a symbolic level in arguing for the *hirðmenn*'s obligation to safeguard the peace of the country, through the implication that the duty to protect the king also applies to his kingly authority and, therefore demands a preservation of the state over which he rules: *En þeir er þat skipaðu firi anndværðu þa sættu þat agoðan grunndvoll firi því at hirðmaðr þyðez sva sœm hirzlo maðr oc gezlo oc skolu þeir er þætta nafn vilia mæð retto æignaz væra retter hirzlo mænn oc gezlo mænn konongs oc allz konongsdomsens*.²³ In comparison to the duties of the lower orders of the *hirð*, the obligations stipulated of the *hirðmenn* in *Konungs skuggsjá* are notably non-martial, with their especial personal intimacy with the king instead demanding an avoidance of vulgarity or shameful behaviour (c.f. Sneglu-Halli's behaviour in the *hirð*, 7.1.4).

In *Konungs skuggsjá*, the section concerning the *hirð* concludes with several specific instructions on how to conform to the standards of etiquette demanded within this elite sphere. Amongst these, the text presents a step by step account of entering into the *hirð*, and the manner in which an initiate should present himself to the king. While this ceremony revolves around showing appropriate deference to the presiding monarch, including advice on grooming and fashion, the pragmatism often visible in *Konungs skuggsjá* is again apparent in the admission that the most critical advantage in gaining entry into the *hirð* is a

²² Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Viking Friendship*, 60.

²³ Holm-Olsen, *Konungs Skuggsjá*, 43. 'And those people in earlier times who created the title of *hirðmaðr* had good grounds for doing so, because *hirðmaðr* signifies the same as protector and warden, and those that wish to truly possess this title will also truly be keepers and guardians of the king and kingdom.'

recommendation from the king's trusted advisers.²⁴ For a more ritualistic variant on the process by which individuals were sworn into the *hirð*, it is necessary to turn to *Hirðskrá*, a set of prescriptions upon both entry into and behaviour within the king's company.²⁵ This collection of laws was drawn up during the reign of Magnús lagabætir (1263-1280), at some point after 1273 by the logic of its internal dating.²⁶ It is, however, currently only preserved in 14th-century parchment manuscripts. It may have served as an attempt to codify an elite hierarchy that placed all members of the Norwegian nobility directly beneath the king, rather than allowing preeminent chieftains autonomy and status parallel to their position within the *hirð*.²⁷

Many of the obligations placed upon *hirð* members within *Hirðskrá* are similar to those prescribed in *Konungs skuggsjá*. In particular, both texts emphasise that courteous refinement is necessary for intimate service to a king and that the *hirð* acts as the primary protective force of both the king's person and his royal authority.²⁸ *Hirðskrá* is distinguished by the greater detail it offers with regard to the most distinguished positions than can be held within the *hirð*. The text's adherence to the tripartite elite hierarchy documented within *Konungs skuggsjá* is supplemented through the addition of the so called 'non-seated' retainers, those who only intermittently follow the king, into a unified hierarchy of the Norwegian elite.²⁹ Holders of the titles of *hertogi* and *jarl*, despite their practical role as independent regional chieftains, are placed within the *hirð* proper; while both roles are

²⁴ Ibid., 47-48.

²⁵ Imsen, *Hirðskráen*, 63.

²⁶ Ibid., 9-23.

²⁷ Steinar Imsen, 'King Magnus and his Liegemen's Hirðskrá: A Portrait of the Norwegian Nobility in the 1270s', in Anne J. Duggan, ed., *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe. Concepts, Origins, Transformations* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 205-22.

²⁸ Imsen, *Hirðskráen*, 109.

²⁹ Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence*, 346.

designated unique privileges that demonstrate their high rank, strict limitations are also stipulated as to the symbols of authority that these powerful individuals could display.³⁰

Hirðskrá also makes mention of the *lendir menn* (landed men), those powerful figures who have been given stewardship over sizable amounts of land by the king. Although the governance of their lands would have made it unlikely for the *lendir menn* to permanently accompany the king, they are here presented as the most influential inner circle of advisors to the monarch, who owe the greatest loyalty to their king by the tenets of mutual reciprocity due to the extreme value of the gift they have received.³¹ A *lendr maðr* may also appoint a limited number of *húskarlar* to support the management of his lands, although this number is capped at a non-threatening level. The *kannslari* (chancellor) appears to be a specialised position adopted by one of the *lendir menn*, or at least an official who holds an equal rank to them. This member of the *hirð* had control of the king's seal and manages the king's correspondence, as well as overseeing the ebb and flow of the crown's land as the monarch gifts and seizes land.³² In addition to the *merkismaðr* and *stallari*, mentioned above, who also occupied the upper echelons of the *hirð* presented within *Hirðskrá*, the *skutilsveinar* (pages) are also distinguished as being of superior rank to other *hirðmenn*.³³ Despite the seemingly menial status of the *skutilsveinar* as attendants to the king during feasting, this role guaranteed much-valued intimacy with the king, with the unique sub-positions of *dróttseti* (master of the royal household) and *skjenkari* (cupbearer) being particularly influential, as their duty of serving the monarch his food and drink placed them quite literally at the king's ear.

³⁰ Imsen, *Hirðskráen*, 112.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

³² *Ibid.*, 126.

³³ *Ibid.*, 132.

As late thirteenth-century texts, *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá* were probably influenced by continental courtly culture and the prescriptive treatment of the organisation of the Norwegian elite that these texts constitute is probably informed by a changing value system with regard to elite society.³⁴ Knut Helle, when discussing the reliability of the two texts, was nevertheless satisfied that both were fairly trustworthy sources of information regarding the structuring of *hirðir*, despite both producing inherently normative depictions of elite society.³⁵ It is important, however, not to minimise the schematic idealism that informs the manner in which *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá* present the *hirð*. In both cases, a heavily curated picture of elite society is given, influenced by the attempts of Norwegian kings in the second half of the 13th-century to establish a more stable and loyal retinue, which is kept in check not only by the demands of reciprocity but also due to the more formalised place individuals hold in a hierarchy descending directly from the king. At the crux of both texts is the concept that the *hirð* is an organisation of loyal and courteous men who facilitate a king's ability to rule his kingdom justly and prosperously.

5.2 The Depiction of the *hirð* in *Morkinskinna*

The schematic codifications of the *hirð* in *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá* may, therefore, prove problematic to a historian interested in the practicalities of how the individuals surrounding a king interacted with their leader and each other. For the purpose of the present study of *Morkinskinna*, however, to acknowledge the ideological biases which have led to the *hirð* being presented in this particular manner in these two thirteenth-century

³⁴ For discussions of the adoption of a 'courtly culture' in Norway during the period in which *Konungs skuggsjá* was written, see Sverre Bagge, 'The Structure of the Political Factions in the Internal Struggles of the Scandinavian Countries During the High Middle Ages', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 24.3-4 (1999), 299-320. It is also arguable that the existence of texts such as *Konungs skuggsjá* are themselves catalysts for the adoption of a more courtly ethos, in their attempts to make uniform prescriptions upon elite behaviour, see Marlen Ferrer, 'State Formation and Courtly Culture in the Scandinavian Kingdoms in the High Middle Ages', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 37.1 (2012), 1-22, at 18.

³⁵ Knut Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt 1130–1350*, Norge Historie 3 (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2005), 173.

texts only allows for a more apt comparison with the presentation of the *hirð* within the *konungasögur*, which also provide highly partisan approaches to the depiction of the Norwegian elite. The idealisation of elite society in the *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá* is with the aim of fostering loyal service to a politically secure monarch. In *Morkinskinna*, conversely, the narrative is dominated by intrusions into and destabilisations of the *hirð* and the ensuing social upheaval engendered by the presence of figures atypical within the context of Norwegian elite society. This is reflected in the substantial differences in the presentation of the *hirð* within the text.

In *Morkinskinna*, the *hirðir* are far less formal social structures than those presented in either *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá*, with a particular focus on the regular unceremonious intimacy with the king that a position in such an institution affords, as exemplified in the regularity of extended dialogue between kings and newcomers typical of the *þættir* (see 3.4 and 3.5.4). This is not to say, however, that the text exhibits an ignorance of the specifics of the *hirð*'s structuring; it is intriguing to note that the terminology used in *Morkinskinna* to refer to the king's followers is remarkably consistent with that of *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá*, lending some support to Andersson and Gade's argument that the individual responsible for the composition of much of the text c.1220 may have served abroad themselves.³⁶ At the most general level, this is reflected in the frequent deployment within the text of terminology appropriate to a discussion of the Norwegian elite: *Morkinskinna* at various points makes use of the terms *hertogi*, *jarl*, *merkismaðr*, *lendr maðr*, *stallari*, *hirðmaðr*, *kertisveinn*, *gestr*, and *húskarl*, to define individuals' respective ranks.

Several specific examples exist, however, that demonstrate a more precise knowledge of the organisation of a king's followers. The first is when Sigurðr jórsalafari is preparing an

³⁶Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 82-3.

intimidating force to support him in his potential conflict with his half-brother Eysteinn: *Nú stefnir Sigurðr konungr til sín ǫllum lendum monnum ok lendra manna húskǫrlum*.³⁷ This point is incidental in terms of its narrative context of the differing tactics of maintaining authority by two kings (see 7.3), but it demonstrates an awareness in *Morkinskinna* of the function of the role of a *lendr maðr* that is consistent with the description of the rank within *Hirðskrá*, in which *lendir menn* are allowed to assemble a small personal retinue. Another example is present in the brief saga recounting the reign of Óláfr kyrri, in which an account is given of the king's decision to increase the size of his *hirð*:

Lét hann þá gera stallarastóla ok setti þar á stallara ok spekinga sína. Óláfr konungr tók með sér hundrað málamanna; [þeir]váru hirðmenn hans, en forn lög váru til þess at konungr skyldi hafa sex tigu hirðmanna. Hann hafði ok sex tigu gesta, en áðr höfðu konungar haft þrjá tigu. Hann hafði jafnan sex tigu þeira manna er at borði váru ok á vistum ok at veizlum, ok váru þó eigi handgengnir. Váru þeir í minna yfirlæti. Fluttu þeir þat er konungr þurfti eða ármenn hans eða fóru í kaupferðir ok váru skyldir í allt konungs starf.³⁸

He had marshals' seats constructed and appointed his marshals and counsellors to them. King Óláfr took a hundred paid-men to support him; they were his *hirð*-men, but ancient laws stipulated that the king should have sixty *hirð*-men. He also had sixty *gestir*, when kings had previously had thirty. He always had sixty men who were at his table and received food and gifts, but had, nevertheless, not been made retainers – they were less highly favoured. They carried out the orders of the king or his

³⁷ *Morkinskinna II*, 122. 'Now King Sigurðr summons to him all the landed men and all the landed men's housecarls.'

³⁸ *Ibid.* 9.

stewards or went on trading voyages and were required to assist in all the king's business.

This vignette of the structure of the *hirð*, which correlates almost precisely with the accounts of a tripartite hierarchy within kings' companies preserved in *Konungs skuggsjá* and *Hirðskrá*, demonstrates that there is a comprehension of the organisational intricacies of the Norwegian *hirð* in *Morkinskinna*. Passages such as this reflect a clear knowledge of the range of roles, and the varying levels of esteem, men could occupy within the *hirð*.³⁹

At the same time, it is important to note that such specificity with regard to the structure of the *hirð* is not consistent throughout *Morkinskinna*; for instance, the above passage is the only example within the text of the term *gestr* being used to refer unequivocally to an individual's role within the *hirð*. Precise terminology to demarcate particular positions within the *hirð* is often utilised in high-density groupings within synoptic passages concerning a king's establishment of their political authority over Norway, while being far rarer in the *þættir*, which approach the *hirð* as a vaguer and more homogenous group when recounting the intrusion and integration of disruptive figures. In opposition to the ritualised initiation documented by *Hirðskrá*, the entry of such characters into the king's company in *Morkinskinna* is informal and based on personal chemistry between the monarch and his subject.⁴⁰

³⁹ By way of contrast, the term *hirð* is made use of several times in *Breta sǫgur*, the Old Norse adaptation of Geoffery of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*; Russell C. Black, ed. and trans., *Breta sǫgur from AM 544 4to: an Edition and Translation*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Washington, 2014), 22, 28, 50, 56. In these legendary and pseudo-historical instances, however, its usage is as a Norse term that is considered broadly analogous with the range of ways that king's follower are presented. No further information is provided regarding the specifics of the organisation of *hirðir* in *Breta sǫgur*, unlike in *Morkinskinna* where the term is clearly being used with a higher degree of precision.

⁴⁰ Perhaps the most striking example of the unceremonious manner in which Icelanders are initiated into the *hirð* is Hreiðarr heimski, who actively flouts social convention to endear himself to the king (see 6.1.2). While Hreiðarr is an extreme case, his experience does exemplify the ways in which entry to the *hirð* are intimate and dialogic rather than legal or formulaic.

It might appear self-evident that the differing textual aims of *Morkinskinna* and codifications of the Norwegian *hirð* would account for a difference in the presentation of this group, in that the primary aim of the *þættir* is not to impart precise information regarding Norwegian elite society. Nevertheless, the above evidence for a sophisticated understanding of *hirð* terminology, coupled with the infrequency of the use of this terminology in the *þættir*, supports the case for the temporary dissolution of formalised hierarchies within *hirðir* in the *þættir* for narrative effect. A less strictly organised *hirð* is in stylistic sympathy with the narrative insurrections created by the *þættir* as the prominence of peripheral characters is predicated upon regular close interaction with kings. If the text was to adhere to the organisational logic of a hierarchal retinue in which more established elite members receive greater intimacy with the king, the moment of disruption to discourse and society that provides a *þáttir* with its narrative force could not be represented so starkly. The text makes little mention of methods of initiating new members into the *hirð*, which conceals the probable necessity of having a powerful Norwegian patron to even enter a king's company at the lowest positions; the diminishing of the power of such gatekeepers permits the sudden intrusion of outsiders.⁴¹ The particular infrequency with which the terms *gestr* and *húskarl* are used in *Morkinskinna* can be accounted for by a literary desire to downplay the presence of the more menial or peripheral positions within the retinue, to which it might be expected for newcomers to be assigned. The lack of representation of subservient positions with more menial duties allows characters introduced in *þættir* access to an idealised *hirð* in which they are able to engage swiftly in dialogue with preeminent members of the Norwegian nobility, while being unconstrained by their non-elite backgrounds.

Chapters Six and Seven of this thesis analyse two markedly different sets of relationships between kings and the cast of figures who seek proximity and intimacy with

⁴¹ Wærdahl, 'Friends or Patrons?', 97-101.

them. Both chapters extend from the dual perspective of the *hirð* discussed above, wherein this elite company is rigorously codified at times but yielding to the intrusions of disruptive figures at others. The depiction of the *hirð* in *Morkinskinna* is, therefore, mutable and subject to rapid reconfiguration. The flexibility in the presentation of the *hirðir* is necessary to allow for the depiction of a range of relationships between kings and their followers, be they intimate, fraught, productive, or irreparable. As rulers and retainers are depicted as having equal narrative prominence with unusual regularity in *Morkinskinna*, the text might be considered as much as a sequence of *hirðasögur* as *konungasögur*, a distinction that better reflects the portrayal of relational elite dynamics within the narrative rather than individual royal biographies. Even if this somewhat radical reconfiguration of the genre of *Morkinskinna* is not adopted, foundational to this thesis is the argument that the *hirð* is the consistent backdrop for scenic action in *Morkinskinna*. Kings are almost always accompanied by the men who serve them: even in the sparring of rival monarchs, these moments are not private spats but public jostling for power and prestige. For characters to receive significant narrative focalization they must first enter the social confines of a *hirð*, whether they are an Icelander seeking prestige or a magnate with a grudge against the presiding ruler. While kings' actions are central to the narrative, so too are the responses, loyal or dissenting, of their closest acquaintances – the narrative of *Morkinskinna* does not truly concern the entire kingdom of Norway nor the affairs of royal individuals in isolation but rather the management of small elite communities. Crucially, therefore, the *hirð* is the system through which challenges to royal authority are mediated and it is primarily through a limited focalization that simulates the perspective of a *hirðmaðr* that interpersonal conflict is depicted (see 3.5.5).

The framing of the ensuing chapters around the differing features of the harmonious and undisciplined *hirðir* is designed to decentre the characterisation of kings as of primary

importance in *Morkinskinna*. The following argument instead consider how the nature of the *hirðir* is established by repeated presentation of monarchs' actions and retainers' reactions (and vice versa), which combine to depict the elite social and political body of the *hirð* as shaped by the relationships of the presiding king and a host of followers of varying temperaments. The various forms *hirðir* take in *Morkinskinna* is key to the overall construction of narrative history within the text. The centring of the *hirð* within the narrative history of *Morkinskinna* comes, however, with an important caveat – primary focus on the organisation of elite men highlights the scarcity of depictions of women in the text. Queens and other noble women are intermittently presented and formidable figures such as the Empress Zoe and Margret are vividly portrayed, but the agency of elite women is limited even by the standards of the *konungasögur* and disruptive women do not feature as prominent figures in the *þættir*.⁴²

6 The Harmonious *Hirð*: Intolerable Challenges to Kingly Authority

The attitude towards kingship displayed in *Morkinskinna* has been described as more sceptical than is the case in other *konungasögur*. This is largely attributed to the text reflecting an Icelandic perspective on Norwegian authority (see 3.3). Critical sensitivity to this scepticism, however, tends only to extend to the ambivalent depictions of the likes of Haraldr harðráði or Sigurðr jórsalafari, whose authority and nobility are intermingled with more negative traits (see 7.1 and 7.3). Scrutiny of kingly characterisations has been less focussed on those rulers who appear more straightforwardly benevolent: Magnús góði, Óláfr kyrrí, and Eysteinn Magnússon. Theodore Andersson describes them as 'peaceable kings who

⁴² Auður Magnúsdóttir has argued convincingly and comprehensively for women having an important role in the text in ensuring political continuity within Norway and there being a moral element to kings' differing treatment of women, see 'Kingship, Women and Politics in *Morkinskinna*', in Kim Esmark, Lars Hermanson, Hans Jacob Orning, and Helle Vogt, eds, *Disputing Strategies in Medieval Scandinavia* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 83-106.

devote themselves to domestic projects ... Although the author devotes considerably less space to the latter group, whose tranquillity was not the stuff of adventure tales, he seems to have a preference for them.¹ Andersson attributes this attitude to the threat of a Norwegian invasion of Iceland due to increasing tensions between the two countries c.1215-1220, contemporary with the composition of the earliest version of *Morkinskinna*, resulting in a preference for non-expansionist rulers who were focussed on domestic issues.²

Numerous issues can be raised in opposition to this interpretation of *Morkinskinna*, which over-simplifies the modes of kingship performed by Magnús, Óláfr, and Eysteinn and elides differences in their characterisations. All kings in *Morkinskinna* demonstrate their willingness to engage in combat and the dichotomy between foreign expansionism and the defence of Norway is not as pronounced as Andersson proposes: both Magnús góði and Haraldr harðráði clash with Sveinn Ástríðarson, for instance, despite these kings' opposing temperaments. In narratological terms, the concept that the redactor of *Morkinskinna* prefers the kings who are provided with less focus within the narrative is not as straightforward as Andersson suggests. To be the principal subject for a smaller portion of the narrative diminishes a king's presence within the version of history constructed within the text and the ways in which different kings' reigns are structured has deeper significance than a simple aesthetic judgement of the degree to which a given king's reign is eventful. Most crucially, Andersson's argument that the 'adventure tale' forms the basis for the narrative structure of *Morkinskinna* should be challenged. *Bildungsroman*-type adventures abroad are more closely associated with aggressive kings, but their inclusion is not the principle technique by which the length of specific sections of Norwegian history is expanded: the presence of the *þættir* is the method by which kings' actions are most vividly dramatised and embellished. Previous

¹ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 65.

² Ibid.

scholarship has not discussed the uneven distribution of the *þættir* within *Morkinskinna*, beyond noting the preponderance of narrative material concerning Icelanders that is associated with Haraldr harðráði – the comparative dearth of *þættir* associated with benevolent rulers and periods of concord in Norway has not been satisfactorily explained.

A revised interpretation of the characterisations of Magnús, Óláfr, and Eysteinn and their relationships within the *hirð* is necessary to account for the above issues. In the first place, it is important to note that these kings interact with different individuals and groups in different ways. These three kings benefit from good relationships with powerful and wealthy Norwegians, which form the foundation of their comparatively stable dominion. This is not to say that these rulers do not face challenges to their modes of kingship, but their responses are focused on the suppression of strife and the maintenance of their authority. This prioritisation of group cohesion and staunch loyalty produces harmonious *hirðir*. The focus on the de-escalation or defusal of conflict, while seemingly a positive trait, is not presented as uniformly beneficial. As the figures introduced in the *þættir* benefit from disruptions to the established social order to advance their interests, better-disciplined *hirðir*, in which kings less readily brook challenges to their authority, do not as readily allow for the advancement of the interests of peripheral figures. The royal biographies of Magnús, Óláfr, and Eysteinn consequently contain fewer *þættir* and fewer instances of narrative insurrection with the majority of those that do feature Magnús and Eysteinn serving as extensions of their conflicts with their co-rulers Haraldr harðráði and Sigurðr jórsalafari. In this chapter, it will be argued that the kings who foster harmonious *hirðir* are depicted as powerful rulers but ones who achieve peace and prosperity in Norway at the price of a reduction in the independence and prominence of more peripheral newcomers. These figures, who are often Icelanders, do not achieve the intimacy with these kings that they enjoy elsewhere in the text.

6.1 Magnús góði

The extant text of *Morkinskinna* begins at the nadir of Norwegian history – after the death of Óláfr helgi, during the cruel rule of Sveinn Knútsson (see 3.5.2). The brief and highly negative depiction of Sveinn serves as an example of the extent to which partisan ideology can impact upon the narrative discourse. Sveinn is a Danish occupier and, therefore, receives the limited focus typical of non-Norwegian kings in *Morkinskinna*, despite his initially unchallenged rule of Norway. Little narration is afforded to Sveinn's actions as ruler in comparison to the reactions of the Norwegians he oppresses. Furthermore, Sveinn's treatment as an antagonist in the kingdom he rules shifts the primary focus of the narrative outside of Norway to the court of King Jarisleifr of Garðaríki, where Óláfr helgi's son Magnús is being fostered.³ Magnús's precocity in his appearance, physical prowess, and willingness to seek revenge even for minor slights stresses his suitability for kingship and positions him as the Norwegian heir apparent.⁴ The structuring of the narrative history of the period of Sveinn's dominion of Norway as a brief phase of preparation for the reinstallation of Magnús is an early indication of the plasticity of narrative duration in *Morkinskinna* and the extent to which political authority can be undermined by shifts in narrative focus (see 3.5.4 and 3.5.5).

This effect is achieved through a large section of the account of Sveinn's reign being comprised of *Karls þátrr vesæla* in which the titular figure is tasked by Jarisleifr to recruit Norwegian magnates to support Magnús.⁵ When the conspiracy is discovered, Karl is

³ *Morkinskinna* I, 3-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁵ *Karls þátrr* has received the most sustained accusations of being a later interpolation into the original *Morkinskinna*, in large part due to a seeming contradiction between the logic of the arrival of the Norwegian magnates in Garðaríki in the *þátrr* and the following prose, although some stylistic arguments have also been advanced, see Finnur Jónsson, *Morkinskinna*, xxxv-xxxvi; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Om de norske kongers sagaer*, 71; Louis-Jensen, *Kongesagastudier*, 80-2. More recent studies have, however, queried the extent to which the apparent discrepancies necessitate that *Karls þátrr* is an interpolation, see Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 58-9, 100-1; Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 419. *Karls þátrr* exists as an independent narrative only in the fifteenth-century manuscripts AM 533 4to and AM 557 4to. For differences in these redactions, see Lasse Mårtensson, *Den fristående redaktionen av Karls þátrr vesæla. Undersökning, utgåva och*

captured but manages to escape after plying his guards with alcohol and goes on to persuade Kálfr Árnason to betray Sveinn and side with Magnús.⁶ Karl's exceptionally low status as a *saltkarl* (salt burner) is commented upon in the episode and the shift from narrating the rivalry of royal houses to a lengthy account of the covert escapades of a lower-status figure is the first example of narrative insurrection in *Morkinskinna*. As the *þættir* function to compound the depiction of strife in Norwegian society, it is fitting that the temporary centrality of the impoverished and subversive Karl within the text reveals the extent of opposition to Danish rule in Norway and the fragility of Sveinn's authority. *Karls þáttr* is distinguished, however, by the slight presence of the presiding king. Sveinn and Karl engage in very little dialogue as the king immediately resorts to bribery and the threat of torture. Dialogue is instead conducted with the magnates Grímr enn grái and Kálfr Árnason and, at the *þáttr*'s conclusion Magnús himself, who recompenses Karl for his many tribulations.⁷ Sveinn proves the least effective king depicted in a *þáttr* within *Morkinskinna* as he is unable to curtail the challenge to his authority engendered by even a humble *saltkarl* nor maintain a prominence within the narrative to rival that of Karl. Later kings who appear in *þættir* tend to maintain a central role that places them in tension with the newly-introduced *þáttr* character, with their kingly virtues often allowing them to find compromise solutions to the instability caused by these disruptive figures' actions. Sveinn, as a Danish monarch so obviously inferior to Magnús góði, is deposed from centrality in Norwegian narrative history by a *þáttr* that demonstrates that figures from the whole gamut of Norwegian society, from poor salt burners to magnates, are actively involved in his deposition.

översättning, Sällskapet Runica et Mediævalia 5 (Stockholm: Centrum för medeltidsstudier, Stockholms universitet, 2013).

⁶ *Morkinskinna I*, 15-19. For a discussion of the importance of narratives of flight from Norway within Iceland, see Theodore Andersson, 'From News to Narrative: Escape Tales in Medieval Iceland', *Scandinavian Studies*, 86.4 (2014), 379-97.

⁷ *Morkinskinna I*, 19.

6.1.1 The Relationship between Magnús góði and Norwegians

Unlike other peace-loving kings presented in *Morkinskinna*, whose styles of kingship are largely consistent, Magnús's behaviour is adjusted early in his reign. He initially persecutes the Þrændir, for their part in the betrayal of his father Óláfr helgi, in a manner comparable with Haraldr harðráði's later antagonisation of Norway's magnates (see 7.1.3): *Ok nú eptir þetta harðnaði konungr mjök við Þræendr, svá at sumir létu alla eign sína, ok enn fleiri stukku ór landi, svá sem Kálfr, en sumir guldu fé.*⁸ Magnús is remonstrated with and persuaded to exhibit more clemency towards the Þrændir through the intercession of the Icelandic skald Sigvatr Þórðarson, who agrees, albeit reluctantly, to recite *Bersöglisvísur*, an extensive verse protest at the king's conduct.⁹ Ármann Jakobsson considers *Bersöglisvísur* as a semi-independent section within the text, the anecdotal quality and prominent Icelandic hero of which aligns it with the *þættir*.¹⁰ To class this portion of the text as a *þáttur* would be to stretch the prosimetric potential of the term to its limit and the narrative function of verse in *Morkinskinna* should not be conflated with that of the prose *þættir* (see 3.5.5). It is important to note, however, a similarity in as much as this moment of incipient rebellion against Magnús corresponds with the extended narrative prominence of the tough-talking Sigvatr, who betters both himself and his lord through a dialogic interruption of Magnús's vindictive actions. The effect of *Bersöglisvísur* within the context of *Morkinskinna* demonstrates that the redactor has alternative methods of engendering forms of narrative

⁸ *Morkinskinna* I, 30-1. 'And now after that the king became much more severe towards the Þrændir, so that some relinquished all their property, and others fled the country like Kálfr, and some gave up their wealth.' It is tempting, in this account of Magnús' flirtation with a more draconian style of rule more associated with his uncle Haraldr, to consider the potential punning on the near homophones *harðnaði* and *harðráði*.

⁹ *Bersöglisvísur* is preserved in several versions within the *konungasögur* corpus, with the variant in *Morkinskinna* being the most extensively and elaborately structured, see Gareth Lloyd Evans, 'The Construction of Diplomacy in the Various Accounts of Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Bersöglisvísur*', *Saga-Book*, 38 (2014), 49-60.

¹⁰ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 107-8.

insurrection, including through skaldic verse, although the *þættir* remain the most prevalent method.

With the conflict with the *Þrændir* resolved, Magnús enters the mature stage of his rule of Norway in which his benevolence is his defining feature: *Ok gørisk Magnús konungr heðan frá svá ástfólginn öllu landsbúinu at menn þóttusk unna honum hugástum, ok var hann kallaðr Magnús inn góði*.¹¹ While this is an effusive statement as to the devotion Magnús receives, the specific use of *landsbúi* to describe the individuals who adore the king may prove significant, in excluding reference to a vital presence in the Norwegian *hirð*: foreign visitors. Such an argument is given additional credence by the many comparisons made between Magnús and his co-ruler Haraldr harðráði. As Haraldr is demonstrated to be the particular friend of Icelanders and known for championing their interests (see 7.1), the use of the term *landsbúi* to refer to those who prefer Magnús may suggest, in contrast, his particular good relations with those people dwelling in Norway.

The king's establishment of intimacy with Norwegians is reinforced in a series of short scenes featuring Magnús immediately following Haraldr's return from Norway. The two most relevant examples concern Þorkell dyðrill and Ormr Ingibjargarson, both high-status Norwegian men – a *sýslumaðr* (steward) and a *høfðingi* (chieftain). Both men initially risk angering Magnús: Þorkell through his alleged avoidance of taxation and Ormr through his decision to spare Sveinn of Denmark in battle.¹² In both cases, Magnús's displeasure is fleeting as the men demonstrate their abiding loyalty, with Þorkell revealing that he has safeguarded a large sum of Óláfr helgi's wealth as Magnús's inheritance and Ormr professing that he and Magnús share the Christian value of clemency. The high honour both men receive

¹¹ *Morkinskinna I*, 42. 'Henceforth, King Magnús became so beloved by all the inhabitants of the country that people thought that they loved him with all their hearts and he was called Magnús the good.'

¹² *Ibid.*, 131-2.

at the conclusion of the scenes reproduces, on an interpersonal level, the pattern of *Bersöglisvísur*, with Magnús's initial suspicion of Norwegians, as the betrayers of his father, transforming into a recognition of his countrymen's loyalty and culminating in the fostering of closer friendships. These two episodes function at the very boundary of being classified as *þættir* in terms of effect: the structural disruption caused by the minor shifts in narrative discourse in these brief scenes is slight, as are the mild challenges to Magnús's authority offered by Þorkell and Ormr, which are swiftly revealed to be accidental or inconsequential.¹³ In consequence, the structural impact of disagreements between Magnús and Norwegians upon the king's biography is minimised by the brevity of such scenes.

6.1.2 The Relationship between Magnús góði and Icelanders

Immediately following these two scenes, however, the narrator supplies a judgment of Magnús's character that qualifies the previous depictions of his benevolence: *Svá er frá sagt at um alla þá menn er mýkðusk til Magnúss konungs, þeim var hann öllum linr, en hinum er í mót brutusk, þeim var hann grimmr.*¹⁴ *Grimmr* is not a word typically used to denote political enmity but rather denotes an intemperate personality, suggesting that an oppositional temperament to that of the king could earn his enmity.¹⁵ The figures whose behaviours prove the most disruptive in *Morkinskinna* are introduced within the *þættir*, a number of which recount Magnús's interactions with unruly Icelanders. It is necessary, therefore, to establish if Magnús's good relations with Norwegians come at the expense of the harsher or more distant treatment of Icelandic figures found within the *þættir*.

¹³ For discussion of edge cases in the classification of *þættir*, see Gimmler, *Die Thættir der Morkinskinna*, 63-5.

¹⁴ *Morkinskinna* I, 134. 'So it is said, that King Magnús exhibited kindness towards all those people that were completely pleasant to him, but was brutal against those that were abrasive to him.'

¹⁵ Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 215; Aldís Sigurðardóttir et al., eds, 'grimmr', in *The Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o28857>. (Last visited 06/03/2020)

Þorsteins þáttr Hallssonar is an apposite starting point for such an investigation in centring upon a disagreement between a king and an Icelander. Þorsteinn Hallsson undertakes a trading voyage to Dublin without Magnús's consent and refuses to pay landing tax for himself or his men, which he believes to be his right as a *hirðmaðr*.¹⁶ Magnús disagrees but is more offended that Þorsteinn travelled abroad without his permission and this leads him to outlaw Þorsteinn. When Þorsteinn next returns to Norway from Iceland, he is a social pariah but manages to persuade Eindriði, son of the Norwegian magnate Einarr þambarskelfir, to accept a gift of stud horses, despite Einarr's opposition. Einarr subsequently travels to Magnús's *hirð* to attempt to reconcile himself, his son, and Þorsteinn with the king. Although Magnús initially avoids the issue, he is clearly displeased, but Einarr is able to gain reconciliation for all three men through an emotional outburst concerning his previous loyal service as Magnús's foster father.¹⁷

The *þáttr* begins in a manner typical of *Morkinskinna*, with the introduction of the disruptive Þorsteinn, whose independence of behaviour places him in opposition to the will of the king. Atypically, the two parties come into conflict, but not contact, during the sequence, with the king and the Icelander not being depicted in dialogue, although such unruly conversations often form the central elements of the *þættir*. Even more unusually, Þorsteinn's case is represented to the king, albeit reluctantly, by Einarr þambarskelfir, a high-status Norwegian. The *þáttr*, despite its brevity, reflects an Icelandic fascination with the fluctuating power dynamics between members of three central roles within *Morkinskinna*: the king, the established Norwegian, and the lower status newcomer, in this case an Icelander. More precisely, it demonstrates Magnús's stronger relationships with Norwegians who have

¹⁶ *Morkinskinna I*, 140-143.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 142-3.

previously committed their loyalty to him, as compared with the failure of intimacy between the disobedient Þorsteinn and Magnús.

Þorsteinn is a more notable figure elsewhere within the Icelandic literary tradition than his presence in *Morkinskinna* as an ostracised figure in Norway might suggest. He is a *goði* and his family is powerful within Iceland: he is the son of Síðu-Hallr Þorsteinsson, the leader of the Christian faction during the Alþing's debate on whether to accept the new faith.¹⁸ Two other texts survive in which he is the central figure: *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, the extant version of which is fragmentary, and *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*, a brief and uncanny account of Þorsteinn's death at the hand of his slave Gilli.¹⁹ *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, probably written in the mid-13th century, potentially drew on the *Morkinskinna* account of Þorsteinn's exploits to produce a more comprehensive depiction of this figure.²⁰ It is worth noting, in support of this claim, that *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, in its otherwise effusive characterisation of Þorsteinn, mentions the specific negative trait of his arrogance in his dealing with his social superiors after his entry into the Norwegian *hirð*:

Þorsteinn var vinhollr, glaðr og lítillátr, vitr og þolinmóðr, djúpsær ok langrækr, en grimmr mótgerðarmönnum sínu, góðr við qlmusur ok alla þá, er hans þurftu, en ina stærri menn bar hann opt ofríki, þá er hann var hér á landi.²¹

¹⁸ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1954), 270-272.

¹⁹ The exact relationship between *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* and *Njáls saga* is unclear, see Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, 'Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar', in Phillip Pulsiano, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 674. Miller is, however, persuaded that *Njáls saga* polishes the events previously narrated in *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* to a higher literary standard: William Ian Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody? A Reading of Njáls saga* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 296-298.

²⁰ Jamie Cochrane, 'Gossips, Beggars, Assassins and Tramps: Vagrants and Other Itinerants in the Sagas of Icelanders', *Saga-Book*, 36.1 (2012), 43-78, at 56.

²¹ Jón Jóhannesson, ed., *Austfirðinga sögur*, Íslenzk fornrit 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1950), 302.

Þorsteinn was steadfast as a friend, happy and humble, wise and patient, perceptive and unforgiving but stern to men who offended him, and charitable in dispensing alms to those in need, but he often treated more powerful men arrogantly when he was in this country.’

The specificity of this flaw, which is not directly relevant to the events narrated within *Þorsteins saga Siðu-Hallssonar*, correlates with the events of *Þorsteins þáttur Hallssonar*, and suggests, if not a direct knowledge of the *Morkinskinna* account, a general cultural awareness of Þorsteinn’s characterisation as including his role as a obstreperous presence in Norway.

The argument for Þorsteinn being understood as an archetypal troublemaker abroad in the saga tradition adds significance to his position as a foil to Einarr þambarskelfir in the *þáttur*. The dynamic between Þorsteinn and Einarr qualifies the narrative insurrection occasioned in this particular *þáttur* as the disruptive Icelandic, whose misbehaviour is initially centred, is revealed to be incidental to the episode’s crux: the *þáttur* is ultimately a reaffirmation of the affection and respect shared between Magnús goði and Einarr þambarskelfir. Although the *þáttur* concludes with the readmittance of Þorsteinn into the king’s *hirð*, his reconciliation with Magnús does not come as a result of an effort on Þorsteinn’s part or even as an expression of Magnús’s forgiving nature: the king is forced, rather, into reintegrating Þorsteinn into his court to maintain a good relationship with Einarr.²² In disobeying the king’s commands and gifting away valuable stud-horses, Þorsteinn offers a challenging display of his wealth and status, which stand independent to that of Magnús and the threat of which the king is sensitive to: *Ok gerir nú Magnús konungr Þorstein fyrir þetta útlagan ok lézk svá skulu leiða qðrum lagabrotit, þó at mikils sé verðir.*²³

²² Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 281.

²³ *Morkinskinna* I, 140. ‘And for that King Magnús made Þorsteinn an outlaw and said that he would dissuade others from lawbreaking, even if they happen to be powerful.’

Unlike disruptive characters in other *þættir*, Þorsteinn's machinations do not bring him closer to the king in terms of their friendship or even physically; Einarr ensures a resolution to the dispute in Þorsteinn's absence, and the traditional *hirð* hierarchy is reinforced by the resulting display of affection between the king and the powerful Norwegian magnate, with the fate of Þorsteinn proving instrumental to their intimacy.

Þorsteins þáttur Hallssonar depicts what might be seen as a pragmatic preference on the part of Magnús góði for a loyal and established Norwegian retainer over a disobedient Iclander, who can abscond back to his homeland rather than face the consequence of his actions. The obvious point of distinction may be nationalistic, but the comparison of Einarr and Þorsteinn, whilst acknowledging both as powerful men, is also grounded in their differing personal legacies. Both men participate in climactic battles within saga literature; Þorsteinn at the Battle of Clontarf and Einarr at the Battle of Svöldr. While it is uncertain if the *Morkinskinna* redactor had access to the same narratives of these events as in the sagas preserved for the modern reader, both battles are central events in Northern European medieval narrative history and, as such, an awareness of the general traditions surrounding both conflicts can be assumed.²⁴ At Svöldr, Einarr is exemplary in his martial prowess and bravery in the defence of Óláfr Tryggvason, while, at Clontarf, Þorsteinn refuses to carry the cursed raven-banner of Sigurðr Hlökkvisson and, during the ensuing rout, is spared from being killed while tying his shoelaces due to the witty retort he makes when caught.²⁵ This contrast seems pertinent in reading *Þorsteins þáttur Hallssonar*, in which the redoubtable loyalty of

²⁴ Kari Ellen Gade relies on a knowledge of Einarr's past skill as an archer, and by extension his service to Óláfr Tryggvason, in her argument that the episode in which Haraldr induces Einarr to fart by grasping a straw is a piece of calculated mockery (see 7.1.3): Kari Ellen Gade, 'Einarr Þambarskelfir's Last Shot', *Scandinavian Studies*. 67.1 (1995), 153-162, at 156.

²⁵ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 451-452; Jón Jóhannesson, *Austfirðinga sǫgur*, 301-2. Sigurðr's raven banner was reputed to kill the individual who carried it, so Þorsteinn's disobedience is an act of self-preservation. For a discussion of the wider place of this standard with Norse literature, see Leon Wild, 'The Raven Banner at Clontarf: The Context of an Old Norse Legendary Symbol', in Katrina L. Burge, ed., *Vikings and their Enemies: Proceedings of a Symposium held in Melbourne, 24 November 2007* (Melbourne: Viking Research Network, 2008), 37-48.

Einarr towards Magnús overshadows the machinations of Þorsteinn, who unashamedly prioritises his interests over those of the rulers that he serves. Neither Þorsteinn's actions at Clontarf nor in his actions in this *þáttr* are depicted as wholly negative, rather blending the prioritisation of self-interest with a healthy sense of self-preservation; nevertheless, the suggestion is that even powerful newcomers with extensive adventures abroad cannot compete with the qualities of the exemplary retainers who already bolster Magnús's power. Einarr, in his affectionate relationship with Magnús, and matchless pedigree as a ferocious defender of the king's predecessors, represents the established Norwegian hierarchy that loyally supports Magnús and with which newly introduced figures struggle to compete for the king's affection.

In a manner similar to *Þorsteins þáttr Hallssonar*, *Arnórs þáttr jarlaskálds* does not feature direct dialogue between an Icelander and King Magnús but rather the fostering of intimacy between the two figures by means of a proxy. Arnórr Þórðarson, a major eleventh-century skald, recites poetry before Haraldr and Magnús simultaneously, at a point when the rival *hirðir* have congregated within one hall.²⁶ On first inspection, Arnórr appears to enjoy the most profitable interaction with Magnús of the Icelanders within *Morkinskinna*, as a skald who delivers a skilfully crafted set of verses in praise of a king and is rewarded handsomely for doing so.²⁷ Yet Arnórr's success should not be accepted as inevitable: while skalds frequently serve multiple masters, it is highly unusual for them to have to negotiate their competing loyalties to different patrons in a single bout of poetic recitation.²⁸ The episode's positive conclusion, in which both kings are at least partially mollified, belies serious

²⁶ For context regarding Arnórr's skaldic career and style, see Diana Whaley, ed. and trans., *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld: An Edition and Study*, Westfield Publications in Medieval Studies vol. 8. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 65-113.

²⁷ *Morkinskinna* I, 143-6.

²⁸ For an example of the flexibility of a skald's loyalties, see Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld who despite his devotion to Óláfr Tryggvason goes on to serve his enemy Eiríkr Hákonarson: Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga, Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks saga, Hrómundar þáttr halta, Hrafnar þáttr Guðrúnarsonar*, Íslensk fornrit 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1939), 135-200.

underlying tensions and high stakes with the symbolic prize of a superior poetic legacy to one's rival acting as a prestigious token of monarchic authority. Yet, in contrast to Þorsteinn Hallsson who gets no hearing from Magnús, Arnórr's cultural capital as a skald, coupled with the social instability occasioned by the close proximity of two kings, provides an opportunity for the Icelander to make a personal case for his friendship with King Magnús.

Arnórr's impetuous agency is displayed in his entrance to the hall: *Hann fór þegar ok þó ekki af sér tjöruna. Ok nú er hann kom at stofunni þá mælti hann við dyrvörðu: 'Gefið rúm skaldi konunga!'*²⁹ Ármann Jakobsson notes this dialogue as unnecessary to the episode's progress but crucial to the central role that Arnórr conceives of for himself within Norwegian *hirðir*.³⁰ As he barges into the presence of two kings in such a manner, Arnórr's intrusion and outburst dramatizes the moment of narrative insurrection engendered by the *pátttr*, as actions that introduce him as a figure who is suddenly of narrative consequence: he literally bursts into elite society. Arnórr's dramatic rise in prominence is even suggested by the formulation of his outburst, which plays on his established nickname *jarlaskald* to suggest Arnórr's enthusiastic awareness of his promotion to *skaldi konunga*. Arnórr's tarred hands are an unusual detail and sufficiently specific for Andersson and Gade to suggest that the episode may have been passed through the narrative tradition from Arnórr himself.³¹ It is worth noting, however, that Hreiðarr heimski is also revealed to have dirty hands when Magnús inspects them, and that this may constitute part of a wider motif of insinuating the more marginal status of Icelanders when viewed from within the Norwegian *hirð*. Another possibility, while less immediately apparent, is that the adhesive quality of tarred hands signifies Arnórr's ability to grasp hold of the highest reward in coming to be compensated by

²⁹ *Morkinskinna I*, 144. 'He went straight away even though he had not washed the tar off of himself. And when he reached the room he said to the door-wardens: "Make room for the skald of kings!"'

³⁰ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 117.

³¹ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 431.

both kings, a possibility lent credence by Sneglu-Halli's tarring of his head as a means of maximising his reward after a king tells him he can keep any silver that sticks in his hair (see 7.1.4). While all of the above offer partial explanations, the tarred hands can also be considered as a fine example of a *punctum* detail within a *þáttr*: an unexpected and incidental piece of minutiae that renders the subject arrestingly relatable and disturbs established social expectations (see 3.5.3). In contrast with the metrical regularity and deft praise contained within the skaldic verse he goes on to recite, Arnórr's dirty hands suggest both his impetuous haste and his unkempt oddity as a temporary focal figure within the *hirð*. Reciting *dróttkvætt* with tarred hands could be said to symbolise the wider issue of the partial integration of disruptive figures in *Morkinskinna*, as such characters blend esteemed traits with irremovable markers of their social externality.

Once inside the hall, Arnórr acts as an arbitrator of the king's respective merits, a role that ensures the attention of both kings, albeit with the constant danger that the excessive praise of one lord will be construed as an insult to the nobility of the other. Arnórr's preference for Magnús góði is suggested by the decision to prioritise praising him over Haraldr. The first verse recorded in the *þáttr* irritates Haraldr by suggesting that Magnús is a peerless ruler, and Haraldr's critique of the verse establishes the prosimetric pattern that comprises most of the sequence, in which Arnórr's verses are followed by asides from Haraldr:

Magnús, hlýð til máttigs óðar,
 manngi veit ek fremra annan;
 yppa røðumk yðru kappi,
 Jóta gramr, í kvæði fljótu.
 Haukr réttir estu, Hørða dróttinn,
 hverr gramr es þér stóru verri;
 meiri verði þinn en þeira

þrifnuðr allr unz himinn rifnar.

Þá mælti Haraldr konungr: ‘Lofa konung þenna sem þú vill,’ segir hann, ‘en lasta eigi aðra konunga.’³²

‘Magnús, listen to a mighty poem, / I know of no-one else more outstanding; / I mean to extol your valour / in a quick verse, ruler of the Jótar. / You are a righteous hawk, lord of the Hǫrðar / every other ruler is far worse than you / all your accomplishments will prove greater than theirs / until the sky rips open.

Then King Haraldr said, “Praise this king any way you like,” he said, “but do not insult other kings.”

In contrast with Haraldr, Magnús does not respond to Arnórr during the *þáttr*, other than to bestow his gifts upon the skald at the *þáttr*’s conclusion. His only speech is directed towards Haraldr, an aside that establishes Magnús’s wisdom in predicting Arnórr’s loyalties. Magnús also makes no efforts to defend Arnórr’s poetry from Haraldr’s retorts, and, in general, seems unresponsive to effusive praise. The *þáttr* again suggests the difficulty for Icelanders in forging a meaningful personal relationship with Magnús: even skaldic poetry, the conventional means of engendering closer ties between king and retainer, here seems ineffective in eliciting a reaction from this particular king.³³

The same cannot be said, however, for Haraldr, whose interjections on Arnórr’s compositions ‘resemble either literary criticism or the commentary of a modern sports broadcaster’.³⁴ Haraldr is critical or at least surly, but he is engaged with both the poetry and the poet and demonstrates not only his ability to understand the nuances of skaldic verse, but also an awareness of the importance of skaldic verse in curating a king’s legacy.³⁵ It is

³² *Morkinskinna I*, 143-4.

³³ Clunies Ross, ‘From Iceland to Norway’, 60.

³⁴ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 118.

³⁵ Finlay, ‘History and Fiction in the Kings’ Sagas’, 92.

Haraldr who stresses the lasting significance of the verses composed about Magnús, in a display of appreciation that is simultaneously effusive and grudging: *en drápa þessi er ort er um Magnús konung mun kveðin meðan Norðrlönd eru byggð*.³⁶ Turville-Petre considers this sensitivity to poetic craft as pivotal to Haraldr's character, a tendency that may account for the king's reaction to praise for another monarch here: 'No king of Norway was himself a better poet, and none showed a deeper appreciation for the art than Haraldr did: none expressed his views about it in more forthright terms.'³⁷ Haraldr's dismissiveness of the *Blágagladrápa* composed for him is linked to his concerns over his treatment in verse compared to that of Magnús, although it is tempting to agree with Ármann Jakobsson that the statement is ironic as the poem may have already been forgotten by the time of *Morkinskinna*'s composition.³⁸

In ironic contrast with Einarr þambarskelfir staking the strength of his friendship with Magnús on the king's reconciliation with Þorsteinn Hallsson, Haraldr inadvertently champions Arnórr's skill as a poet to Magnús through his critiques of the skald's verse, stressing that they praise Magnús effusively and are not to Haraldr's satisfaction.³⁹ The *þáttr*, therefore, retains Magnús's personal indifference to the Iclander on a dramatic level, while presenting him in a positive light, by stressing how differing responses to skaldic recitation exemplify the character dichotomy between the two kings: Magnús proves just but aloof, Haraldr proves formidable but engaged. The *þáttr* ends with a statement of Magnús's ensuing friendship towards Arnórr: *Magnús konungr gaf honum síðan knorr með farmi ok gerðisk*

³⁶ *Morkinskinna I*, 146. 'but this *drápa* that was composed concerning King Magnús will be repeated as long as the lands of the North are inhabited.'

³⁷ Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Haraldr the Hard Ruler and his Poets*, Dorothea Coke Memorial Lectures (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1968), 5.

³⁸ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 119; Ármann Jakobsson, 'Um hvað fjallaði Blágagladrápa?', in Gísli Sigurðsson, Halldóra Jónsdóttir and Torfi Tulinius, eds, *Guðrúnarstikki kveðinn Guðrúnu Nordal fimmtugri 27. September 2010* (Reykjavík: Menningar og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen, 2010), 11-14.

³⁹ For other examples of Norwegians mediating Icelandic genius see Clunies Ross, 'From Iceland to Norway' 69.

mikill ástúðarvinr hans.⁴⁰ Magnús does not establish a personal relationship with Arnórr through the course of the *þáttr* that would justify this final statement of enduring affection, but the maintenance of boundaries between king and Icelander may in fact account for why the skald eventually comes to be rewarded by Magnús. The Icelander operates at a distance from Magnús and does not disrupt his harmonious *hirð* as the strife Arnórr's entrance and performance engenders is absorbed by Haraldr, the king whom Arnórr interacts with, leaving Magnús free to profit from memorialising praise without risking his authority in contending with the unkempt Icelander. Even when praise of Magnús is the primary goal for a skald such as Arnórr, it is of note that an intermediary is once again inserted to facilitate interaction between Magnús and a disruptive figure.

The only instance of Magnús fostering a close personal relationship with an Icelander, without the mediation of a Norwegian, is in *Hreiðars þáttr heimska*, amongst the best studied of the *þættir* preserved within *Morkinskinna*, largely due to its idiosyncratic central character and its reputation for literary sophistication and independent narrative strength.⁴¹ A number of previous critical interpretations of Hreiðarr's characterisation have contended that the Icelander must possess an inherent cunning that allows him to survive and prosper within the *hirð* and justify his narrative prominence. As examples of Hreiðarr's non-normative behaviour are numerous and condemned by his brother Þórðr,⁴² critics have suggested several interpretations that attempt to reconcile this apparent foolishness with a simultaneous demand for latent doughtiness or craftiness. Björn Sigfússon contends that Hreiðarr is imbued with some of the indomitable spirit of Germanic legendary heroes, which allows him to rise from his lowly origins to overcome his adversaries effortlessly: *Allt er þetta eins auðvelt fyrir Hreiðar og þjóðsagnakappana, sem rísa úr öskustó og leysa síðan nokkurn veginn án*

⁴⁰ *Morkinskinna I*, 146. 'King Magnús later gave him a ship stocked with cargo and became his firm friend.'

⁴¹ Faulkes, *Two Icelandic Stories*, 20.

⁴² *Morkinskinna I*, 154-5.

*fyrirhafnar hverja þraut, sem vera skal.*⁴³ Sauckel offers a reading of Hreiðarr as a committed trickster who is revealed to be a *künstlicher Narr* (contrived fool) through his manipulation of Magnús and mockery of Haraldr.⁴⁴ Similarly, Harris observes ‘a tendency to cynical manipulation’ in Hreiðarr’s invocation of the imperative of familial responsibility to persuade Þórðr to allow him to also travel to Norway.⁴⁵

Most radically of all, Faulkes contends that Hreiðarr’s cleverness is manifest throughout the *þáttir* and is masked by his eccentricity. He conceives of the young Icelander as an inexperienced, but innate, artistic genius, who, by the end of the saga, is an adult who has reached productive maturity through his tribulations.⁴⁶ For Faulkes, the narrative is a delicately-handled account of artistic ‘self-discovery’ and of Hreiðarr’s apotheosis as a fully-fledged skald.⁴⁷ Within this formulation, the *þáttir* is a rare attempt in Norse prose to portray a ‘dynamic’ individual whose character develops over time, rather than being restrained by a single static depiction.⁴⁸

A reading of Hreiðarr as an adept and intelligent actor may be tempting if one assumes that the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* were included within the text with the sole objective of exploring the wit, resilience, and adaptability of Icelanders abroad.⁴⁹ To consider Hreiðarr

⁴³ Björn Sigfússon, ed., *Ljósvefninga saga með þáttum, Reyðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu, Hreiðars þáttir*, Íslensk fornrit 10 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1940), xci-xcv, at xciii. ‘Everything is as effortless for Hreiðarr as it is for legendary heroes who come from humble origins and yet afterwards solve in some way without trouble every challenge they are faced with.’

⁴⁴ Anita Sauckel, “‘Von unberechenbarem Wesen?’” Der literarische Trickster in den Isländersagas’, *Nordeuropa Forum. Zeitschrift für Kulturstudien*, 18 (2016) 56-73, at 64.

⁴⁵ Richard Lynn Harris, ‘On the Decline of Proverbial Cognitive Patterning in Some Later Icelandic Sagas’, presented at the Old Norse Discussion Group, MLA Chicago, Concordance to the Proverbs and Proverbial Materials in the Old Icelandic Sagas, 10 January 2014.

⁴⁶ Faulkes, *Two Icelandic Stories*, 14.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 14. It should be noted, however, the *þáttir* does not preserve any poetry attributed to Hreiðarr, nor is the feedback Magnús gives the verses composed for him strictly laudatory.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹ *Morkinskinna* contains the earliest surviving version of *Hreiðars þáttir*, so it cannot be proven conclusively that the *þáttir* predates the manuscript. Several scholars have contended, however, that the style of the episode is noticeably archaic in comparison with the wider narrative and that a number of linguistic idiosyncrasies suggest that it is potentially 12th century in origin, see Faulkes, *Two Icelandic Stories*, 18 and Jón Helgason, ed., ‘Introduction.’ in *Morkinskinna. MS. No. 1009 fol.*, 7-15. Stylistic variation does not, however, necessitate that an episode is an interpolation, see Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 61-2. It has been argued, furthermore, that the archaisms may be specifically utilised to give Hreiðarr’s speech a provincial quality;

as deceptive and of mature independent intelligence, however, is not a position conclusively supported by the given details within the *þátrr*'s narrative, particularly in that Hreiðarr's feckless characterisation is consistent throughout the sequence rather than a persona deployed only when he wishes to endear himself to monarchs. This is best demonstrated by the low esteem in which he is held in his homeland of Iceland in the period prior to his travel to Norway: *Ok firna allir Þórð um ef hann flytr útan afglapa*.⁵⁰ This sequence has drawn comparisons to a similar instance in *Egils saga*, in which Egill Skallgrímsson also manipulates his brother Þórólfr into taking him abroad.⁵¹ In contrast to Egill's early maturation, Hreiðarr, however, is a homebound layabout, contrasted unfavourably with his more intelligent and attractive brother, with Hreiðarr's superior size and strength being rendered impotent by his inability, at the *þátrr*'s outset, to feel anger and act violently.⁵² The issue at hand is why Hreiðarr would adopt a feckless persona that elicits contempt from his countrymen long prior to his arrival in the Norwegian *hirð*, the space in which such a performance might be argued to prove effective. It seems unlikely that such a display of feigned foolishness would be so thoroughgoing as to needlessly deceive Hreiðarr's own countrymen to the extent that their opinion of him as a capable adult is revoked.

A counter to the above point would be the argument that Hreiðarr, at the narrative's outset, fulfils the more typical role of a *kolbíttr* (although there is no indication that he is an adolescent) and that the *þátrr* functions as a compressed *Bildungsroman*, in which the idle fool realises his utility and latent gifts, and in doing so gains social approbation (see 7.1.1).⁵³ This reading is based on the *þátrr*'s concluding remarks on Hreiðarr's conversion of his idiosyncrasies into wealth and renown: *Ok hefir hann gort sér at mestum hluta þau kynjalæti*

Mariateresa Esposito, "'Hann er ljótr ok heldr ósyknlig": Archaisms and Linguistic Oddities in Hreiðars þátrr heimská', unpublished M.A. Thesis (Háskóli Íslands, 2019), 18-49.

⁵⁰ *Morkinskinna I*, 153. 'Everyone reproaches Þórðr about him bringing a simpleton abroad'.

⁵¹ Faulkes, *Two Icelandic Stories*, 14; Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 432.

⁵² *Morkinskinna I*, 152.

⁵³ Terese Gaille Puguo Teo, 'Accepting Fools as Heroes', *Simplicissimus*, 1.1 (2013), 55-62, at 60.

er hann sló á sik inn fyrra hlut ævinnar.⁵⁴ While it is undeniable that Hreiðarr's fortunes improve throughout the narrative's course, instances of his foolishness are present until the *þáttur*'s conclusion. The most startling of these is his reaction to Magnús's reward of a small island for his recitation of poetry, an exceptional gift, in response to which Hreiðarr exclaims, *Þar skal ek samtengja með Nóreg ok Ísland*.⁵⁵ Hreiðarr's vision of the gifted island acting as a bridging point between the two countries, and an analogue for his role as an Icelandic conciliatory to royal authority in Norway, runs counter to the forthright defences of personal independence practised by other *þættir* characters who seek to maintain their freedom to extricate themselves from the influence of Norwegian monarchs at the point of their choosing (see 3.1 and 7.1.4). Due to the unequal power structures between the two countries, the suggestion of further uniting the two countries could invoke contemporary fears of abetting an increased Norwegian influence in Iceland, despite Hreiðarr's positive rhetoric: by the summer of 1220, Jarl Skúli was gathering a force for a military expedition to Iceland to the backdrop of ongoing tensions between the two countries' merchants.⁵⁶

Andersson and Gade suggest that Hreiðarr's idea has 'a real parodistic edge in this context', in its inversion of Óláfr helgi's earlier attempts to take the island of Grímsey from Icelanders, with the suggestion being that each nation should continue to control their traditional territories (see 4.3).⁵⁷ While Andersson and Gade view the parody to be at Óláfr's expense in comparing his ambitions to those of an idealistic fool, the comparison is doubly damning with regard to Hreiðarr's foolishness, as his desire to unite Norway and Iceland lacks the explanation of expansionist intention and is, conversely, to the detriment of Hreiðarr's homeland. It falls to Magnús to demonstrate his lack of interest in expanding his

⁵⁴ *Morkinskinna I*, 164. 'And he made the best of the eccentricities which he was formerly prone to in the early part of his lifetime.'

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 164. 'In that place I will unite Norway and Iceland.'

⁵⁶ See Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga: A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, trans Haraldur Bessason (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974), 240-41.

⁵⁷ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 433.

kingdom and to defuse the situation by revoking his gift.⁵⁸ While the king's given reason is to protect Hreiðarr from potential swindlers and the wrath of Haraldr harðráði it is of note that the king diplomatically disparages the Icelander's idea of uniting the two countries: *Eigi veit ek hversu þat ferr*.⁵⁹ If this interaction is taken as the concluding point of Hreiðarr's maturation, then it is a maturation that shifts him from the physical foolishness of a clumsy comic body, through a foolishness of poor etiquette within the *hirð*, and finally into a political foolishness in his obliviousness to the self-preservation necessary for a marginal figure in Norway. While Hreiðarr's prospects improve, the presentation of his foolishness is thoroughgoing.

Hreiðars þáttr achieves a significant disruption of the text as an extensive sequence that introduces a character whose behaviour is atypical within the Norwegian *hirð* and who proves disorderly in all the scenarios in which he is placed (see 3.5.4). Hreiðarr is successful in gaining wealth and prestige from his adventures abroad and returns to Iceland wealthy and respected. In opposition to other *þættir* figures, however, who often display a competence distinct from the kings with which they interact, Hreiðarr appears as 'the child who understood nothing and stuck out like a sore thumb at court'.⁶⁰ Hreiðarr's depiction is unusual, therefore, in raising the possibility that the prominence of this destabilising figure comes despite, or possibly due to, his mental incapacity and ready susceptibility to Norwegian influence. When considered in relation to Magnús's previous distant remoteness from Icelanders, Hreiðarr's differing characterisation reflects an anxiety that newcomers must debase themselves within the *hirð* to achieve their desired intimacy with the king.

This anxiety over the possibility of the marginalisation of competent Icelanders is exemplified in the figure of Þórðr, Hreiðarr's brother. His description is attractive: despite

⁵⁸ *Morkinskinna I*, 164.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 164. 'I don't know how that would turn out.'

⁶⁰ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 290.

being small in stature, he is handsome and well regarded as a member of Magnús's *hirðmenn*.⁶¹ Magnús himself refers to Þórðr positively, with his service to the king used as an indicator of Hreiðarr's good character: "*Sá maðr mun vel vera, segir konungr, ef þér er líkr*".⁶² Faulkes, however, is disparaging of this 'conventional and mediocre' characterisation, and dismisses Þórðr as an individual of 'hopeless pomposity', overly concerned with 'appearances and bourgeois outlook'.⁶³ Besides lacking the idiosyncratic spontaneity of his brother, the chief complaint here seems to be his sensitivity to elite convention in urging his brother to dress more respectably.⁶⁴ Þórðr's concern about how Hreiðarr presents himself does not seem to be born out of simple pomposity, however, but rather a desire for integration. Þórðr is sensitive to the prestige that being close to a monarch affords and wishes to assimilate into the *hirð* to secure a profitable and long-term relationship with the king. Þórðr's concern with clothing constitutes an attempt to teach his brother about the performative nature of becoming a *hirðmaðr* and stresses how appropriate garments can often be the shibboleth for integration into an elite group.⁶⁵

Þórðr's wish to imitate the fashions of his Norwegian peers is partly similar to the sycophantic aping of Norwegian customs and behaviour that renders Þjóðólfr Arnórsson less sympathetic and compelling than Sneglu-Halli (see 7.1.4). Þórðr's depiction is more complex and charitable than that of Þjóðólfr, in demonstrating that his primary concern is with familial dignity: he believes that both he and Hreiðarr are worthy of respect equal to that of other retainers, and pragmatically suggests that they present themselves in a manner appropriate to the status they deserve. The respectful and conventional manner in which Þórðr goes about

⁶¹ *Morkinskinna I*, 152.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 154. "That man must be fine" said the king, "if he is like you".

⁶³ Faulkes, *Two Icelandic Stories*, 16.

⁶⁴ *Morkinskinna I*, 157-8.

⁶⁵ See Jennifer Craik, 'Uniforms Exposed: The Proliferation of Uniforms in Popular Culture as Markers of Change and Identity', in Gabriele Mentges, Dagmar Neuland-Kitzerow, Birgit Richard, eds, *Uniformierungen in Bewegung: Vestimentäre Praktiken zwischen Vereinheitlichung, Kostümierung und Maskerade* (Münster: Waxman, 2007), 37-56.

attempting to demonstrate his worth to Magnús forms a direct contrast with Hreiðarr's irreverent exuberance and inability to conform, even in matters as trivial as clothing.⁶⁶ Faulkes' more cynical reading of Þórðr can be modified by applying a similar scepticism to the portrayal of Hreiðarr to reinterpret the *þáttr* as depicting the two polarised performances Icelanders resort to when confronted with the problem of how to gain social prominence when faced with the impenetrable stability of Magnús's *hirð*. The options open to the brothers are either to mimic established retainers as a 'little Norwegian' or to contravene *hirð* protocols through sustained impropriety and incomprehension in a disruptive inversion of conventional service to a monarch.⁶⁷ In *Hreiðars þáttr*, neither of these performances leave much opportunity for dignity for the Icelander abroad, although the focus on Hreiðarr and his comic antics allows for the disarmingly light-hearted tone the *þáttr* takes in portraying the serious issue of Icelandic marginalisation in Norway.

The *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* are never solely focused, however, upon the disruptive figures they introduce: the kings present in these episodes are under equally sustained scrutiny. *Hreiðars þáttr* features characterisations of both Magnús góði and Haraldr harðráði and while the critical depiction of Haraldr's more aggressive style of rule has been noted,⁶⁸ it will be argued here that the *þáttr* also presents a nuanced critique of the side-effects of Magnús's benevolent and stable leadership. In this context, the intensity of the narrative focus on Hreiðarr is more readily understandable due to his status as an 'all licensed fool'⁶⁹ who can disrupt and stand witness to both kings' *hirðir*. As such, he is an appropriate agent through which to examine the different ways in which the rival monarchs deal with a

⁶⁶ Anita Sauckel, *Die literarische Funktion von Kleidung in den Íslendingasögur und Íslendingaþættir* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 191.

⁶⁷ See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 183-90.

⁶⁸ Andersson, 'The Politics of Snorri Sturluson', 64.

⁶⁹ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Reginald A. Foakes, ed., Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 1.4.186.

problematic scenario: how a ruler should react to the intrusion of a troublesome interloper who is seemingly without utility. Þórðr, conversely, in his mimicry of the Norwegian style of service, has assimilated to the point of being unobjectionable; his dutiful and understated mode of service would probably be met by mild approbation by either monarch.

Hreiðarr, upon meeting Haraldr harðráði, has already established himself as an enemy of the king through his strong alignment with Magnús góði and, after being provoked, through the killing of Haraldr's *hirðmenn*.⁷⁰ Figures who have achieved outright enmity with a ruler are unlikely to safely receive an audience from them, as in the case of Þorsteinn Hallsson and Magnús – as such, Hreiðarr's insistence on meeting the irascible Haraldr appears another demonstration of his foolishness. Hreiðarr's plea for clemency focuses on his potential utility to the king, to which Haraldr initially responds positively: while this *þáttr* is often cited as amongst the most negative depictions of Haraldr in *Morkinskinna*, it is of note that the king's initial inclination towards reconciliation is consistent with his broader reputation for friendship with Icelanders (see 7.1.4). Haraldr sees the value in Hreiðarr's skill with silver when the Icelandic gifts him a metalwork pig and is further willing to forgive the Icelandic for the murder of his retainers in return for undertaking a dangerous mission for him.

The revelation that Hreiðarr has produced a sow with teats, an oblique reference to Haraldr's father, the petty king Sigurðr sýr (sow), leads the king to conclude that the man he praised as *ófælinn* (bold) is in fact impudent.⁷¹ Hreiðarr's disruptive status is further compounded by the potential for his gift to function as a subversion of the *høfuðlausn* (head ransom) topos, where the art being offered to the king in payment for Hreiðarr's life is revealed to be an attempt to compound his aggravation of the ruler.⁷² Haraldr's violent

⁷⁰ *Morkinskinna I*, 160.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁷² For discussion of the most famous *høfuðlausn*, when Egill Skallgrímsson's attempt to appease King Eiríkr, see Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Høfuðlausn and *Egils saga*', *Notes and Queries*, 51.2 (2004), 114-8, at 116. It is of

response to such provocation is not portrayed positively within the *þáttr* but a king seeking vengeance upon a low-status intruder who has rejected an offer of reconciliation and intimacy does not constitute egregious tyranny by the standards depicted in *Morkinskinna*. *Brands þáttr* and *Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar* both attest to Haraldr's sensitivity to symbolic critiques of his kingship (see 3.1 and 3.4); Hreiðarr's conduct is sufficiently inflammatory, in the king's mind, that the fledgeling relationship between lord and retainer cannot be salvaged and for this Iclander to be without utility to him.

Hreiðarr also acts in a manner that could be construed as mockery within Magnús's *hirð* when he urges the king to stand and disrobe so that he may better evaluate his person.⁷³ This is reflected in Magnús's initial suspicion that Hreiðarr's request is born out of *ginning* (derision).⁷⁴ As mentioned above, the *þáttr* is preoccupied with clothing and its relationship to status and Magnús may, therefore, be concerned that the request to take off his cloak is due to the Iclander seeking to remove the physical signifier of the two men's disparity in rank. Hreiðarr's obliviousness to the deference to which monarchs are accustomed challenges the authority and regal performances of both of Norway's rulers, either through invoking Haraldr's inglorious ancestor, or through stripping Magnús of the finery that reflects his royal status.

The kings' responses are, however, radically different. Ironically, the insult against Haraldr is only revealed through the king's detection of and reaction to it; in his self-conscious defensiveness of his humble ancestors, Haraldr transforms what his retainers considered to be the gift of a fine piece of craftsmanship into an object of biting satire. Magnús, conversely, refuses to take offence at Hreiðarr's unusual requests and instead turns them to his advantage. After humouring Hreiðarr's inspection, which confirms the king's

note that there is possible parodic subtext to Egill's poetic head ransom; it is crucially far more oblique than Hreiðarr's straightforward insult with Egill's attempt appearing *prima facie* as effusive praise of Eiríkr.

⁷³ *Morkinskinna I*, 155-7

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

splendour, and only reveals the single minor flaw of slightly mismatched eyes, Magnús reverses the process and demands that Hreiðarr now also stand and remove his cloak. His judgement, although light-hearted, firmly redefines the disparity between the two men: '*Pat ætla ek at eigi fæðisk ljótari maðr upp en þú ert.*'⁷⁵ This reassertion of the hierarchical relationship between a handsome Norwegian king and a poor and ugly Icelander, immediately before the king's dispensation of generosity and advice, allows the *þáttir* to demonstrate Magnús's wisdom and compassion to even the lowliest and most dysfunctional visitors to his court, while asserting the unsuitability of such newcomers to contend with him.⁷⁶

The *þættir* have been considered as *exempla* of good royal behaviour, but this categorisation is traditionally argued for in simple structural terms to justify the *þættir*'s insertion within their larger textual context.⁷⁷ The effect is more precise and complex within *Hreiðars þáttir*, however, in depicting Magnús shaping an impressionable visitor with the aim of gaining a retainer who the king can exercise his exemplary qualities upon. Key elements of Hreiðarr's later characterisation, such as his ability to experience anger and his skill as a craftsman, are predicted by Magnús and this foresight blurs the distinction between counsel and control in influencing Hreiðarr to develop the positive attributes he was lacking.⁷⁸ This reading could be extended to view Magnús's interaction with Hreiðarr as the king applying his *Konungs gæfa* (king's good fortune) to transform an Icelandic layabout into a productive *hirðmaðr* who serves the king in a more conventional and useful manner, as demonstrated by

⁷⁵ Ibid., 156. 'I think that no uglier man than you has ever been born'.

⁷⁶ This interpretation is at odds with previous readings that have seen in Magnús's relationship with Hreiðarr an equal relationship born out of mutual affection, see Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2001), 192; and Maria Eliferova, 'Body and Society in Pre-Norman England', in Logie Barrow and François Poirier, eds, *A Full Bodied Society* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 7-31, at 24.

⁷⁷ Sverrir Tómasson, 'Old Icelandic Prose', trans Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir, in Daisy Neijmann, ed., *A History of Icelandic Literature* (University of Nebraska: Lincoln, 2006), 64-174, at 111-3.

⁷⁸ *Morkinskinna I*, 156-7.

Hreiðarr's eventual composition of a laudatory skaldic verse for his king.⁷⁹ Magnús's comment following the poem's delivery, is revealing: *Þetta kvæði sýnisk mér undarligt ok þó gott at nestlokum. En kvæðit mun vera með þeim hætti sem ævi þín; hon hefir fyrst verit með kynligu móti ok einrænligu, en hon mun þó vera því betr er meirr líðr á.*⁸⁰ Magnús clearly approves of the transformation Hreiðarr has undergone but, as noted above, this is a transfiguration of the Icелander's prospects rather than his character and one which is largely evinced through the gifts and advice given by Magnús. In *Hreiðars þáttr*, Magnús is generally presented as a just and wise king and the *þáttr* is consistent with the monarch's wider positive legacy within the text. The *þáttr*, simultaneously, complicates Magnús's characterisation as his treatment of Hreiðarr is presented as an opportunity for the king to demonstrate his magnanimity and create for himself a devoted follower, rather than as a moment of parity between king and newcomer in which the struggle between determined individuals results in mutual profit and respect (see 3.4). While the resulting tone is not condemnatory, when read in relation to the forthright self-interest typical of characters in other *þættir*, the provisory nature of this interaction, in which the gifts Hreiðarr receives come at the expense of his agency, appears more obvious.

Hreiðarr's two incursions into Magnús and Haraldr's *hirðir* demonstrate foolishness in differing extremes: his overt offending of Haraldr leads to his violent ejection from the king's presence while his deference to Magnús results in the revocation of his independence. Elsewhere, figures introduced in *þættir* navigate balances between enmity and acquiescence in their relationships with kings far more delicately. Hreiðarr's characterisation in part

⁷⁹ *Gæfa* is sometimes conceived of as an innate aura that surrounds an individual, allowing them to more easily overcome challenges, see Faulkes, *Two Icelandic Stories*, 82. For a more detailed inspection of the multiple ways in which *Konungs gæfa* can be manifested, see Chandar Lal, '(Re)visions of Royal Luck in the Sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 10 (2014), 99-128.

⁸⁰ *Morkinskinna I*, 164. 'This recitation seems unusual to me and yet good towards the end. And the poem has progressed in the same way as your life: at first it passed in a strange and peculiar way, but it will nevertheless improve the more time passes.'

celebrates Magnús's generous investiture of such an ignoble figure but an anxiety remains that the only way for marginal figures to attain an intimate and profitable relationship with Magnús, in the context of his stable *hirð*, is in a form similar to Hreiðarr, where their inexperience and provincial reputation are accentuated. Magnús patronises Hreiðarr in both senses of the word and his high level of control over the poor newcomer's successes qualifies the king's kindness through having it manifest as a form of authoritarian benevolence, which in its implicit condescension asserts the contingent and menial status of the Icander in Magnús's *hirð*. Hreiðarr, transfigured into a loyal skald, is assimilated as fully as his brother Þórðr: neither man maintains their independence in their attempts to gain intimacy with Magnús.

The three *þættir* discussed above form a cluster within *Morkinskinna* that is situated towards the end of Magnús's rule – a period within the narrative that has been otherwise dominated by the king's peerless character and the great reciprocal affection between the monarch and his Norwegian countrymen. These *þættir*, however, can be viewed together as a more critical presentation of this social harmony and its side-effects, which demonstrates there are limited options for Icelandic prominence in Magnús's *hirð* when the king is already amply served by powerful men. Furthermore, Magnús's personality is suggested to be somewhat incompatible with those of the Icelanders who enter his *hirð*, with their forthright actions clashing with the king's desire for stability and straightforward demonstrations of loyalty from his followers. Hreiðarr proves a slight exception to this rule in embodying a complementary concern, wherein, even in this rare instance of Magnús championing the cause of a newly-introduced outsider, the individual's fortunes are too heavily controlled by the king, running against the theme of reciprocal utility that typifies other *þættir* within *Morkinskinna* and rendering the Icander a vassal.

6.2 Óláfr kyrri

Following the cataclysmic defeat of Haraldr harðráði at Stamford bridge, Óláfr kyrri succeeds to the Norwegian throne. This is a momentous event in the context of the narrative history constructed within *Morkinskinna*; in political terms almost the entirety of a generation of the Norwegian elite has been destroyed, while, with regard to the narrative, the central character of King Haraldr has been removed, necessitating a shift in focalization from the charismatic figure who has dominated a large portion of the text. The construction of this epoch shift is further heightened by Óláfr kyrri having the shortest narrative dedicated to a king's period of sole rule within *Morkinskinna* despite his twenty-six-year reign being the longest of any monarch in the narrated period 1030-1157. Scholars have associated the extreme brevity of this section of the narrative with Óláfr's nickname *kyrri* (quiet or peaceful), suggesting that his muted temperament and peaceful reign were not readily convertible into an expansive saga.⁸¹ Yet the account of Óláfr's reign cannot be said to be without incident – he brokers peace with Denmark following a brief conflict between the kingdoms, expands the institution of the *hirð*, defuses elite dissent against the extent of his power, oversees a period of prosperity unparalleled since the days of Haraldr hárfagri, and pays homage to his namesake Óláfr helgi.⁸² Yet each of these achievements, all portentous in their own right, is only tersely summarised in the dense summative account of Óláfr's long reign, giving the narrative a sense of historical scope similar to the earlier synoptic histories (see 4.1), where the detailed characterisation of any given king is subsumed to the need to succinctly recount large swathes of history.

The case for the briefness of the section of the narrative history of *Morkinskinna* dedicated to Óláfr being related to the uneventfulness of the period in question need not be

⁸¹ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 3.

⁸² *Morkinskinna II*, 3-12.

completely dismissed; conciseness, however, does not necessarily derive from a failure of imagination with regard to past events. A consistent feature of *Morkinskinna* is the expansion of narrative duration during moments of particular strife, which overinflates the presence of interpersonal and political conflicts to the point that the narration of such events comes to have a commensurately disruptive effect within the wider text (see 3.5.4). The account of Óláfr kyrri's reign exhibits the inverse operation in which the most harmonious span of this period of Norwegian history is swiftly and tersely accounted for without the embellishment of dramatic moments and the consequent expansion of narrative duration in simulation of the orderly and tranquil status of the kingdom of Norway at this point. *Óláfs saga* contains not only a large percentage of synopsis and skaldic verse, which give the sensation of a more impersonal and authoritative appraisal of Norwegian history (see 3.5.5), but also contains many fewer *þættir* than the royal biographies of other rulers. As such the opportunity for alternative perspectives on Óláfr's reign, as provided by the focalization of disruptive *þættir* figures, is curtailed. Without the frequent narrative insurrections achieved through the presence of *þættir*, Óláfr's reign appears as a peaceful and prosperous era of little consequence in which conflict within his *hirð* is not represented.

It is testament, however, to the persistence of challenges to royal authority within *Morkinskinna*, that even the brief saga dedicated to Óláfr contains a single *þáttr*, which is situated immediately prior to the cursory account of king's death. Conventionally denoted as *Kráku-karls þáttr*, it stands as a deft example of narrative insurrection through its incongruity with the synoptic material that precedes it and the alternative characterisation of Óláfr kyrri it provides. Due to the obscurity of the content of this *þáttr* and its especial suitability to demonstrating the disruptive capability of a *þáttr* in relation to the surrounding royal biography, the episode will be summarised in full.

King Óláfr asks his men, who have just returned from collecting taxes for him, where in the country they received the best welcome. The *hirðmenn* claim that they took the most pleasure in speaking with a wise old farmer, who was able to answer all their questions. The men further believe the old man is capable of understanding the language of birds, though the king dismisses this as a false report. At a later point, during a voyage, Óláfr is informed that he is passing by the old man's residence. The king orders his men, on the pain of death, to slay the farmer's horse without leaving any evidence and to bring the animal's head back to the ship. The old man is then to be summoned to meet the king. The retainers reluctantly comply and the farmer is commanded to help guide the ship around the coast. During the voyage, three crows fly by, increasingly close to the ship, each cawing louder than the last. The farmer responds cryptically to each bird's screech. The scream of the last crow causes the farmer to cease rowing and, when pressed by the king, he reveals in a verse that the three crows have told him that he is rowing near to his horse's head and that the king is responsible for the destruction of his property. The king admits he orchestrated this trick for his own amusement but rewards the farmer with an exemption from land taxes and other gifts before they part ways.⁸³

The *páttr* is an oddity even when read in isolation; it initially follows the conventions that might be expected of more light-hearted conversion *þættir* associated with Óláfr Tryggvason or Óláfr helgi, in which a king comes into contact with non-normative behaviour in a remote region of their kingdom.⁸⁴ Here, however, the king does not correct the errant supernatural practice of his subject, as in the case of *Vǫlsa páttr* for example,⁸⁵ instead acknowledging the authenticity of the phenomenon and compensating the old farmer for his treatment rather than exhorting him to take up Christian or social norms. The *páttr*'s

⁸³ *Morkinskinna II*, 12-4.

⁸⁴ Grønlie, 'Þáttir and Saga', 22.

⁸⁵ *Flateyjarbók II*, 441-6.

strangeness is further compounded by the fact that Óláfr confesses that his killing of the Kráku-karl's horse and subsequent interrogation are simply a *bragð* (trick or scheme). That such a ploy is perpetrated at the command of the otherwise benevolent and mild Óláfr stands at odds with his characterisation in the preceding passages concerning his wider rule.

Andersson and Gade admit the peculiarity of both the *páttr* and its position within the text with their suggestion of its misplacement encapsulating the critical uncertainty as to how best to approach the episode:

It is strange that a single such story should have been preserved about King Óláfr, especially one so out of keeping with the personality otherwise attributed to the king. The humour is so perverse that we may wonder whether an anecdote originally connected with Haraldr harðráði was somehow transferred to Óláfr kyrri. That surmise derives plausibility from the fact that a contest of intelligence is in line with Haraldr's literary personality.⁸⁶

Medieval compilers seemed no more certain of the purpose and position of the *páttr*, with *Fagrskinna* and the majority of *Heimskringla* variants not including the king's interaction with the Kráku-karl, despite using *Morkinskinna* as a central source for their accounts of Óláfr's reign.⁸⁷ The presence of this *páttr* here can be employed to exemplify the manner in which *Morkinskinna* varies from other *konungasögur* texts and the *páttr*'s discordant relationship with the surrounding narrative of Óláfr kyrri is worth further investigation.

Prior to the *páttr* beginning, Óláfr's reign is established as a social and political golden age within Norway. One manner in which this era of prosperity is depicted is through the portrayal of the increasing levels of hospitality enjoyed by Norway's population. This is

⁸⁶ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 447.

⁸⁷ Louis-Jensen, *Kongesagastudier*, 37-39, 87-94.

primarily related to Óláfr's expansion of his *hirð* so more individuals might enjoy his personal generosity while he benefits from more secure support: the *Morkinskinna* account offers precise details as to how this enlarged retinue is organised during feasts (see 5.2). Even outside the king's personal social circle, however, Óláfr is noted as founding the town of Björgvin, which becomes a seat of wealth and feasting: *Þá hófusk mjök drykkjur ok skytningar í kaupstöðum, miklu meirr en fyrr hafði verit.*⁸⁸ In the short description of Óláfr's reign, the king's prowess as a host and the resulting pleasure experienced by those around him is an important aspect of his depiction and, in the absence of further detail in his royal biography, constitutes an important aspect of his identity as a ruler. Óláfr's question to his followers at the outset of the *þáttr* as to where else in the country they have received the best hospitality is not, therefore, an idle one: it relates to the king's self-association of his peerless hospitality and his unchallenged authority. The existence and, more importantly, the praise of a rival social centre, presided over by the Kráku-karl, is a threat to the king's reputation and his monopoly on the prestige and stability associated with being a host of unmatched generosity.

Furthermore, Óláfr reacts particularly vehemently to the report that the farmer may be so wise as to even be able to understand the language of birds, a suggestion which he condemns as *hégómi mikill*.⁸⁹ The *þáttr*'s narrative suggests otherwise, however, as the old man gains access to concealed information regarding his dead horse solely from the report of three crows and neither the king nor the narrator attempt to debunk the validity of this phenomenon. Timothy Bourns, who is one of the few scholars to have dealt with this *þáttr* at any length, suggests an opposition between the wise and eloquent Kráku-karl and the taciturn

⁸⁸*Morkinskinna II*, 7. 'Then drinking and tavern-going became commonplace in merchant towns, much more so than had been the case previously.'

⁸⁹*Morkinskinna II*, 12. 'A great nonsense.'

and comparatively foolish Óláfr.⁹⁰ In this reading, Bourns notes that the typical equation of wisdom and kingship in scenes featuring communication with birds in Old Norse literature is problematised in this case as it is the farmer rather than the king that possesses uncanny knowledge. This effect is further compounded by the Odinic associations evoked in the depiction of a mysterious and wise old farmer capable of communicating with birds.⁹¹

Bourn's argument is important to the current study, as the loose correspondence between the Kráku-karl and Óðinn is important with regard to the usage of bird-speech being to the detriment of the king, in providing a source of supernatural wisdom distinct from Óláfr, as a pious Christian king who is antagonistic towards the old farmer. In *Kráku-karls þáttr*, the narrator, by withholding a further explanation, replicates for the reader the king's incomprehension of the exact information that the crows convey to the old farmer, although a sense is given of the birds' increasing urgency from the volume at which they communicate. In addition, a wry legendary parallel is potentially drawn between the old man's behaviour in this case and Sigurðr Fáfnisbani's ability to understand the language of birds after consuming Fáfnir's heart. In both *Fáfnismal* and *Völsunga saga*, Sigurðr is alerted to the treachery of Reginn through exhortations from birds who, in sequence, increase the severity of the information they convey: first revealing Reginn's treachery and finally urging his murder.⁹²

It is only in the farmer's recitation of a verse, however, that it is revealed that he, like Sigurðr, has been incrementally alerted to the duplicity of a supposedly trustworthy figure:

Segr vetrǫ[mul,
ve]it ekki sú,

⁹⁰ Timothy Bourns, 'Between Nature and Culture: Animals and Humans in Old Norse Literature', unpublished DPhil thesis (Oxford, 2018), 292

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds, *Eddukvæði II: Hetjukvæði* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 309-10; Ronald G. Finch, ed., *Völsunga saga: The Saga of the Volsungs* (London: Nelson, 1965), 34. For a general survey of this substantial trope, see Vladimir Kulakov and Mikhail Yu Markovets, 'Birds as Companions of Germanic Gods and Heroes', *Acta Archaeologica*, 75 (2004), 175-88.

ok tvévetr segr,
trúik eigi at heldr,
en þrévetr segr,
þykkira mér glíkligt:
Kveðr mik róa
á merar hofði,
en þik, konungr,
þjóf míns féar.⁹³

The year-old crow says:
‘I know nothing’,
And the two-year old says:
‘I do not know any more’
But the three-year old says this,
Although it seems unlikely to me:
It calls out that I row
Upon a mare’s head,
And you, king,
Are a thief of my property.

While the stakes in this *þáttr* are only the slaying of a farmer’s horse, rather than the potential slaying of a legendary hero, the suggestion of similarities in conduct between the tall and benevolent Óláfr kyrri and the cunning dwarf Reginn, however faint or ironic they may be, further complicates the portrayal of the king in this episode by giving additional credence to the suggestion that Óláfr may be acting unreasonably, or even malevolently, in his test of the old man. Neither the Odinic parallel nor the similarities to an episode from the Völsung cycle should be overstressed to the point of allegory in reading this *þáttr*,⁹⁴ but it is sufficient to

⁹³ *Morkinskinna II*, 13-14.

⁹⁴ For the range of forms and functions Odinic figures can take within saga literature, see James C. Doolan, “‘Geys morg heiti hafi þér gefit honum’: The Mutability of Óðinn as a Literary Device in Old Norse Texts of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Cambridge, 2011).

note that even as latent allusions, such references advance the unsettling general implication of the episode that the otherwise just King Óláfr is rendered capricious and cruel in the face of an alien wisdom.

To consider why Óláfr's presentation is so jarring at this point is, by extension, to consider the effect achieved by this *þáttir* within the larger context of his royal biography in *Morkinskinna*. The straightforward answer is that its presence is intended to highlight a defect in the king's character, be it the limits of his hospitality or his wisdom. To consider Óláfr as a foolish king, however, is not in keeping with the account of his rule in which the *þáttir* is embedded, where his sagacity is stressed as a cause for the exceptional stability and prosperity of his reign: *Hann var mildr af gulli ok silfri ok öðrum góðum gripum ok gersimum, en hann helt fast á ríkinu, ok olli því mest vit hans, ok þar með sá hann hvat konungdómin hæfði, ok eru mörg verk hans at telja, þau sem bæði eru góð ok konunglig.*⁹⁵ In synopsis, where the narrative focus is macro-political, Óláfr's conduct appears independent and faultless, as the king features as a distant but effective overlord, in comparison to the often intimate depictions of the social affairs of other monarchs. Prior to *Kráku-karls þáttir*, Óláfr is depicted as the architect and beneficiary of an elaborate political and social system in which he is the only focalized character: a harmony exists between the king's actions and the wider fate of Norway.

The account of the king's interaction with the *Kráku-karl*, however, radically departs from this model. The synoptic style in which events concerning Óláfr have been narrated gives way to extended dialogue. The earlier focus on summarising a sequence of successful deeds and decrees changes here into an interrogative pattern with the king's unassisted and

⁹⁵ *Morkinskinna II*, 10. 'He was generous in dispensing gold and silver and other good treasures and things of value, but he held fast to the kingdom, and he achieved that mainly through his intelligence and also he knew was appropriate to the running of the kingdom and his works are many to tell of, and included those that were both good and kingly.'

forthright administrative action being replaced with enquiry and uncertainty, command and objection, scepticism and the uncanny. The shift to a slower narrative pace and narrower focus are typical of a *þáttr* (see 3.5), but it is exceptional that King Óláfr acts as a disruptive intruder to a supernatural space that is presided over by the Kráku-karl, considering that the *þættir* tend to depict the unruliness of peripheral figures who travel to seek intimacy and reward from the king. The inversion of this topos, wherein Óláfr acts as the uninitiated newcomer whose actions prove troublesome to the wise figure whose realm he has entered, functions as a sustained challenge to the established depiction of Óláfr's sagacity and hospitality. An anonymous farmer is instead invested with these virtues and, consequently Óláfr's kingly authority is challenged. Óláfr is forced, through an encounter with this uncanny figure, to acknowledge the existence of a locus of power distinct from his own. The Kráku-karl is a marginal figure who is invested with a degree of personal authority and, in being brought into close proximity with Óláfr, challenges him for narrative centrality and sympathy.

The expectation of mutual reciprocity, a foundational tenet of the relationship between king and retainer, is also abrogated in this *þáttr*. Here, interaction with a king leads to the destruction of property, in this case livestock, rather than the multiplication of it, and, unlike the mutually beneficial dealings between a generous lord and a loyal retainer, Óláfr threatens to take from his subject without giving.⁹⁶ Only at the conclusion of the episode, with his admission of his previous actions being an amusing diversion, does the king revert to more conventional royal behaviour in giving the old farmer good gifts, though this act is still problematised by the interpretation that the king is in fact offering compensation for his earlier property damage. Such a characterisation does not rescind Óláfr's otherwise

⁹⁶ Óláfr's father, Haraldr harðráði, is met with a similar situation in *Brands þáttr ǫrva*, in which the king's test of another figure's wisdom and generosity also comes to be a trial of the monarch's munificence (see 3.4).

benevolent reputation but the *þáttir* does demonstrate that even the most clement of kings is capable of cruel and capricious behaviour when he feels his authority is being eroded. In synoptic prose, Óláfr maintains a harmonious *hirð*, in that no figures of dissent rise to challenge him from the elite community he fosters. *Kráku-karls þáttir* serves as a reminder, however, that marginal figures, with their radically different perspectives and position in relation to royal authority, are always present and that even purported golden ages in Norwegian history can be interrogated and qualified. This episode contributes to a crucial wider theme in *Morkinskinna* – a thoroughgoing scepticism about the possibility of a purely benevolent monarch. While instances of rulers acting virtuously are frequently present, *þættir* are consistently offered that complicate simplistic moral evaluations of the kings presented within *Morkinskinna* and that highlight the dangers, as well as the benefits, of close interactions with kings.

6.3 Eysteinn Magnússon

Of all the kings who receive sustained characterisation in *Morkinskinna*, prior to the shift occasioned by the depiction of the Norwegian civil war era, Eysteinn Magnússon is the only one who is not sole ruler of Norway at any point in his reign. Following Magnús berfœttr's death, the kingdom is split with Eysteinn's half-brothers Sigurðr and Óláfr, an arrangement that continues until Eysteinn's death; as such, the account of Eysteinn's reign does not focus on his characterisation in isolation, but consistently in contrast with Sigurðr jórsalafari.⁹⁷ In terms of the quantity of the text devoted to narrating his exploits, Eysteinn is rather overshadowed by Sigurðr, whose extensive foreign travels give him a dominant presence in

⁹⁷ Óláfr Magnússon's lack of capacity in comparison to his brothers seems to have precluded him from not only independently participating in the rule of Norway but also from attaining a nuanced characterisation or significant narrative role to rival that afforded his two adult brothers. His relatively few depictions show him as strongly benevolent in both deed and speech, but his actions align closely with Eysteinn's and he is never given sustained focus within the narrative: see, for instance, Sigurðr's accusation that Óláfr merely serves as a proxy vote for Eysteinn in *Þinga saga*, *Morkinskinna II*, 126. Óláfr's narrative presence is, therefore, too slight for him to feature prominently in the ensuing discussion.

the account of their co-rule. In narrative terms, this imbalance has a more sophisticated function than a mere preference for the preservation of adventure tales; in the discussion of the shifting characterisation of Sigurðr jórsalafari it will be argued that the two kings operate in a fraught equilibrium with one another, wherein concessions to one another's modes of kingship ensure the productivity of their power-sharing compact (see 7.3). As the relationship between the two kings will be analysed in relation to the characterisation of Sigurðr jórsalafari it will not be the focus of discussion in this section, which will instead focus on instances in which Einarr's reign and *hirð* are presented in separation from that of Sigurðr.

Following the conclusion of the extensive account of Sigurðr's adventures and at the point at which narrative focus returns to Norway, the narrator establishes that Eysteinn has also been an active ruler during the same period: *Eysteinn konungr hafði ok eigi ekki at sýst í landinu meðan Sigurðr konungr var í útferðinni*.⁹⁸ Eysteinn's achievements are largely infrastructural and ecclesiastical as he commissions impressive secular and religious building projects: a great wooden hall; several churches and a monastery in the Björgyn area; a fortress at Agðanes; a harbour and church at Vágar; a large *dreki* (dragon-prowed longship); and a church at Niðaróss.⁹⁹ He also *aukaði konungdóminn* (expanded the kingdom) through diplomatic overtures to the people of Jamtaland through which he persuaded them to accept his overlordship in return for protection from the king of Sweden.¹⁰⁰ The redactor stresses here that the integration of Jamtaland into the Norwegian sphere of influence was achieved through irenic wisdom: *Vann svá Eysteinn konungr Jamtaland með djúpsettu ráði, en eigi*

⁹⁸ *Morkinskinna II*, 101. 'King Eysteinn had also not been unoccupied in the land while King Sigurðr was abroad.'

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 101. For further information on Eysteinn's building programme, see Knut Helle, *Bergen bys historie: Kongssete og kjøpstad – fra opphavet til 1536* (Bergen, 1982), vol. 1, 115-16.

¹⁰⁰ *Morkinskinna II*, 101.

með ófriði né áhlaupum sem sumir hans forellrar.¹⁰¹ Eysteinn is also noted in this passage as a great lawmaker, renowned for his knowledge, munificence, and good cheer.

Sigurðr's achievements are depicted in a sequence of embellished scenes speaking to the grandeur of his travels,¹⁰² while Eysteinn's considerable accomplishments are dealt with as a synoptic catalogue. The narrator employs litotes in the phrase *hafði ok eigi ekki at sýst* (had also not been unoccupied) to stress that Eysteinn's domestic achievements are comparable with Sigurðr's grand adventures in terms of their historic significance, but the quality of the narrative discourse is markedly different between these two sections of royal biography (see 3.5.4). The established explanation of the *Morkinskinna* redactor's preference for gripping tales of adventure over narration of the peaceful administration of a kingdom only partly accounts for this discrepancy. When even momentous events like the annexation of Jamtaland are dealt with synoptically, despite the adjective *djúpsettr* (deep-laid) hinting at the possibility of a more elaborate version of Eysteinn's tactics for securing the region, then the issue of narrative effect should also be considered. In a similar manner to the synoptic account of the reign of Óláfr kyrri, the time of peace and prosperity in Norway under Eysteinn's rule is reflected in the uniformity of the synopsis and the consistency of the focus on Eysteinn's productive actions. It is only with the return of Sigurðr to Norway that depictions of social instability re-emerge and with them extensive scenes detailing the resulting tumult engendered by his irascible temperament.

In contrast to Óláfr kyrri's depiction in *Kraku-karls þáttr*, however, the *þættir* that concern King Eysteinn's interactions with marginal figures accentuate the king's benevolent features. *Ívars þáttr Ingimundarsonar* begins with the trope of an Icelandic love triangle,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 101. 'King Eysteinn, therefore, won Jamtaland with a deep-laid plan and not with warfare nor an invasion as some of his forefathers did.'

¹⁰² Ármann Jakobsson, 'Image is Everything: The Morkinskinna Account of King Sigurðr of Norway's Journey to the Holy Land', *Parergon*, 30.1 (2013), 121-40.

where the skald Ívarr, a respected member of Eysteinn's *hirð*, is cheated out of betrothal to Oddný by the machination of his brother Þorfinnr.¹⁰³ Ívarr is despondent and for the majority of the *þáttr*, Eysteinn coaxes answers from the Icelander concerning the nature of his distress and, upon learning of his heartbreak, suggests several rewards that might somewhat redress the situation.¹⁰⁴ Eysteinn's offers of an alternative marriage to a high-status Norwegian woman, promotion within the *hirð*, or wealth and independent travel are all rejected by Ívarr, who instead accepts the king's final offer:

Far þú nú hvern dag, þá er borð eru uppi, á fund minn ok ek sitk eigi um nauðsynja málum, ok mun ek hjala við þik. Skulum vit ræða um konu þessa alla vega, þess er (þú vilt) ok má í hug koma, ok mun ek gefa mér tóm til þessa, því at þat verðr stundum at mǫnnum verðr harms síns at léttara er um er rætt; ok þat skal ok þessu fylgja at aldri skaltu gjaflaust í brot fara frá mínum fundi.¹⁰⁵

You will come here every day when the tables are put away to find me as long as I am not presiding over important matters and I will chat with you. We will discuss this woman in any ways that you want and that come to mind and I will devote my time to this, because sometimes people have their sorrows lessened when they are spoken about. On top of that, you will never go away from an audience with me without a gift.

After a number of conversations with Eysteinn, Ívarr's mood improves and the *þáttr* concludes with the Icelander's return to his initial status as a glad member of Eysteinn's *hirð*.

¹⁰³ *Morkinskinna II*, 102-3. The trope of a love triangle involving an Icelandic skald failing to marry their beloved is more fully developed in *Kormáks saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, and *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 104-5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

Ívars þáttur Ingimundarsonar has been the subject of extensive analysis by Ármann Jakobsson, who uses it as an exemplar of the *þættir*'s capability to offer characterisations of kings as well as Icelanders and as dramatizations of kings' qualities.¹⁰⁶ Ármann also draws a parallel between modern talking therapies and Eysteinn's offer to Ívarr to discuss his issues.¹⁰⁷ The *þáttur* also differs from those analysed previously in this chapter in depicting an intimate and affectionate interaction between king and *hirðmaðr*, and one which Eysteinn, as the presiding lord, devotes energy to repairing and sustaining. In the case of Magnús góði and Óláfr kyrri, kings seek to maintain their authority in the face of the disruptive behaviour of hard-to-control characters, usually to the detriment of the figure in question. Ívarr's melancholy does constitute a disruption of Eysteinn's *hirð* in robbing the king of a *vitr maðr ok skáld gott*,¹⁰⁸ but his depression is the negation of his positive qualities; in contrast to other *þættir*, the issue that initiates this episode is the loss of a loyal and well-adjusted figure from the *hirð*, rather than the introduction of a combative and unruly one. In accordance with instances such as *Hreiðars þáttur* or *Sneglu-Halla þáttur*, Ívarr's brother Þorfinnr, as a trickster or troublemaker who finds it difficult to assimilate to the etiquette conventions of elite society, would seem to be a better fit for the role of a central character in a *þáttur*. Ívarr, much like Þórðr in *Hreiðars þáttur*, is a dutiful and understated character; unlike Þórðr, however, Ívarr is given sustained narrative focus throughout the episode.

The manner in which the *þáttur* proceeds also inverts several conventions present in other *þættir*. Eysteinn, in his capacity as king, seeks an audience with his retainer, Ívarr, to offer the latter man a service. It is also, unusually, the king who is more animated and

¹⁰⁶ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 113-6. Ármann notes that the rubric for this *þáttur*, *Frá Eysteinn konungi ok Ívari*, suggests the episode offers a considered characterisation of both men. It is also of interest that this is one of the few sections within *Morkinskinna* introduced in the first person, as the redactor justifies the presence of the account as a demonstration of Magnús' affection for his friends irrespective of their sorrows, *Morkinskinna II*, 102. The redactor may, therefore, have considered the interaction recounted within the *þáttur* as sufficiently unusual to warrant a primer as to Eysteinn's motivations.

¹⁰⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 93-6.

¹⁰⁸ *Morkinskinna II*, 102. 'A wise man and a good skald.'

talkative in the ensuing dialogue and who stresses the importance of the enduring friendship of the two figures in the conversation. Ívarr's dejection also means that he makes no demands upon the king, going even further in rejecting the king's gifts of material or social advancement as unsuitable remedies for his misery. The strengthening of the relationship between the two men is, however, treated as the ultimate reward that the king can offer, which is in keeping with the wider lionisation of friendship with monarchs in *Morkinskinna*, although, here and elsewhere, friendship and physical gifts are never entirely disassociated. In the case of Ívarr, the fostering of this relationship has a further significance – the bond between lord and retainer is perhaps the only interpersonal connection with a significance that exceeds that of marriage in Norse culture. As such, Eysteinn offers Ívarr a more fulfilling personal connection than his potential marriage to Oddný and, through repeated conversations, works to develop a deep enough intimacy to mitigate Ívarr's grief.

The *páttr* is somewhat unusual, therefore, in depicting little friction between a king and an Icelander beyond the melancholic taciturnity of the latter. It also depicts the reconciliation of two men who have not offended one another. In terms of the narrative insurrection engendered, the destabilising quality is that of a shift in affect, as physical signifiers of Ívarr's emotional state inflect the tone of the *páttr*.¹⁰⁹ The *páttr* follows immediately after the catalogue of impressive projects – diplomatic, military, and infrastructural – that Eysteinn has completed, which is the basis for the synoptic account of this period of Norwegian prosperity. To follow the account of Eysteinn's betterment of an entire kingdom with the king's concerted efforts to mitigate the misery of a single Icelander presents a depiction of negative affect as equally vital to royal biography as the context of wider political progress. The *páttr*'s resolution is important within *Morkinskinna*, however, in

¹⁰⁹ For a comprehensive application of affect theory in a Norse context, see Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature: Translations, Voices, Contexts* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017).

depicting a loyal retainer receiving respect and affection from a king as a method of maintaining the harmony of the *hirð*. Ívarr's treatment by Eysteinn provides a foil to the ostracization of more disruptive figures by the likes of Magnús góði and Óláfr kyrri. Eysteinn's similarity in temperament to his predecessors shows that kings of the type discussed in the chapter are not *de facto* prejudiced against all peripheral figures but rather champion those who share their temperament and reject those who threaten the communities they seek to foster.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the characterisations of three kings depicted in *Morkinskinna*, Magnús góði, Óláfr kyrri, and Eysteinn Magnússon, who have been grouped together due to the reputations for peacefulness, wisdom, and their focus on Norwegian prosperity over foreign expeditions. The centrality of these traits to the presentation of these three kings has not been contested and these qualities are the primary means by which these kings secure the loyalty of the Norwegian elite and maintain their authority. As such, the *hirðir* over which these kings preside are presented as more harmonious institutions, whose members offer fewer challenges to their lord's rule. There are, consequently, fewer *þættir* in the royal biographies of these kings, a structural feature that reflects the comparatively smooth passage of narrative history during their reigns. The variability of kings' behaviour and the incapacity of any ruler to act with consistent benevolence are both crucial themes within *Morkinskinna*; accordingly, this chapter has made the argument that these three kings are not evaluated uncritically within the text despite their reputations for just action.

The *þættir* that feature these kings, as devices that both enact and recount the destabilisation of the established narrative and social order, evince challenges to otherwise stable regimes, with the kings' responses demonstrating that peaceful dominion cannot brook

disruptive intrusions. Magnús góði has an affectionate relationship with Norwegian magnates, particularly Einarr þambarskelfir, which contrasts with the king's comparative indifference toward the Icelanders whose efforts to attain intimacy with him are recounted in several *þættir*. These episodes preclude direct contact between Magnús and *þættir* characters and often rely on better-assimilated Norwegian figures acting as intermediaries between the king and Icelanders. Only *Hreiðars þáttr* proves exceptional in depicting Magnús engaging with a marginal figure. It has been argued in this chapter, however, that Magnús utilises Hreiðarr's foolishness to fashion himself a pliable model follower whose change in fortunes reflects well upon the king's munificence. Such a reading is informed by Icelandic anxieties concerning the ability of impoverished or unrefined figures to act independently amongst the Norwegian elite, which transforms the *þáttr* into an investigation of the extent to which the powerful will tolerate discrepant behaviour. A comparable urge to interrogate and master non-normative figures motivates Óláfr kyrri's interactions with the Kráku-karl. While in the brief synopsis of his broad reign Óláfr is portrayed as a model of a benevolent ruler, this characterisation is not sustained in his testing of the poor Norwegian farmer, with the king responding negatively to the alternative forms of wisdom and hospitality on offer at the uncanny edges of Norway. This antipathy on the part of Óláfr towards his Norwegian countryman complicates a reading of these three kings as national partisans and, therefore, only prejudiced against foreign entrants. More precisely, disruptive figures in general, who are incapable of being assimilated into the harmonious *hirðir* that these king foster, are met with aloof indifference or outright hostility. This reading is strengthened by Eysteinn Magnússon's treatment of Ívarr, whose loyalty to his lord is undiminished despite his grief. The Icelandic does not seek to disrupt Eysteinn's authority through disobedience or assertions of independence and, consequently, the king puts sustained effort into facilitating Ívarr's recovery so he may, once again, serve as a dutiful retainer. In tandem with the praise

these three kings receive in *Morkinskinna* as just and generous leaders is a pragmatic admission: kings who are secure in their rule of Norway and well-loved by their countrymen need not befriend or reward unruly figures who refuse to offer straightforward loyalty. As the *þættir* often invest these same disruptive figures with an independent perspective and a prominent role in the narrative history of Norway, the presence of such episodes qualifies the virtuous legacies of these kings as being dependent on those they interact with.

7 The Undisciplined *Hirð*: Productive Challenges to Kingly Authority

Social and political unrest are ever-present in the period of Norwegian narrative history recounted in *Morkinskinna*. It has been argued in this thesis that the ubiquity of challenges to kingly authority reflect Norway's gradual slide into chaos and the civil-war era following the death of Óláfr helgi (see 3.5.2). The consistent presence of social instability within royal biographies and the intrusion of disorderly figures places the different ways in which kings respond to disruptive incidents as a crux to evaluating their various styles of rule. The previous chapter investigated those kings who attempt, albeit never with complete success, to suppress dissenting voices and create well-ordered systems within the longer-term period of upheaval. This chapter, conversely, focuses upon the fractious characters of the kings who harness and thus profit from the chaotic state of their *hirðir* and the kingdom to safeguard and affirm their authority. This different style of rule shifts the narrative history of *Morkinskinna* in increasing the impact of the *þættir* in these sections of the narrative, as kings allow challenges to their authority from disruptive figures due to the potential for both figures to profit from the interaction.

This chapter challenges the claim that there is a moral distinction central to the composition of *Morkinskinna*, between the acclamation of peaceful kings and the

condemnation of aggressive ones, a critical perspective associated with Theodore Andersson (see 3.5.2 and 6).¹ Haraldr harðráði, Magnús berfœttr, and Sigurðr jórsalafari are all given distinctive and complex characterisations, however, and the effect is rather that of differing, largely successful, methods of maintaining productive leadership, rather than the juxtaposition of benevolent rule with tyranny. Haraldr, Magnús, and Sigurðr are not presented as morally defective rulers; the characterisations of these figures in *Morkinskinna* function as distinct appraisals of kings who benefit from permitting or even encouraging different forms of disorder within their respective *hirðir*. This differs from the more negative presentation of the less fully characterised kings who succeed Sigurðr and whose reigns fall at the beginning of the civil-war period: Magnús blindi, Haraldr gilli, Sigurðr munn, Ingi Haraldsson, and Eysteinn Haraldsson.

This chapter does not constitute an inversion of Andersson's moral framework; headstrong and proud kings are not privileged within the text, although they do enjoy more extensive focus, but are rather assessed for their ability to harness, interact with, or engender instability as a means of maintaining their centrality to both *hirð* and narrative. Such attempts are not necessarily successful; kings are sometimes unable to maintain their authority in the face of the disruptive presences of marginal characters and the shifts in the narrative mode engendered by their actions. The effect is rather doubly layered. On the level of characterisation these rulers are typified by their irascibility, aggression, and implacability. On the narrative level of the accounts of their reigns, the events that occur around them are similarly inflected with conflict and upheaval, irrespective of a given king's agency in the matter.² This technique accounts for the denser clustering of *þættir* around Haraldr harðráði,

¹ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 65.

² *Konungs skuggsjá* offers a similar view on a king's conduct as inflecting the conduct of his *hirð*, which in turn stands as an exemplar to all of Norwegian society (see 5.1). The underlying philosophy is that of the multiplicative effect of kingship as a political structure upon the conduct of the people over whom it is exercised, an idea comparable to Aquinas's argument in *On Kingship* for monarchy as the most concentrated just form of governance and tyranny as the most effectively wicked; Thomas Aquinas, *On Kingship to the King*

Magnús berfœttr, and Sigurðr jórsalafari than their more peaceable counterparts. As the primary structure by which instability is introduced into the narrative, more *þættir* feature these figures than their royal counterparts whose *hirðir* seek to re-establish concord in the face of strife (see 6). The *þættir* associated with these kings do not need to explicitly mention the wider upheavals that characterize their reigns to act as an index for the tumultuous quality of their sovereignty: the particular density of the *þættir* in the sagas of these kings realises the form of their rule. Kings of the type discussed in this chapter are regularly and forcefully confronted with characters whose values or conduct prove antithetical to their own, but space is afforded to accommodate these disruptions, which often end in the aggrandisement of both king and follower as two refractory personalities struggle productively towards common ground. The ensuing chapter will discuss the characterisations of Haraldr, Magnús, and Sigurðr in the context of their relationships with their attendant *hirðir*, primarily with regard to selected *þættir* that significantly affect their royal biographies.

The advent of the civil war era has a substantial impact on the way in which kings are distinguished, and *Morkinskinna* changes substantially in terms of style and structure following the death of Sigurðr jórsalafari. Due to the comparative brevity of the accounts of their reigns, the kings depicted as ruling post-1130 will be discussed as a collective, in contrast with the individual considerations of previous kings. While these later truncated royal biographies all contribute to a more general social milieu typified by elite infighting, care will still be taken in distinguishing the characterizations of kings when pertinent and to discuss the functions of the few *þættir* present in this section of the text.

of Cyprus, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982), Bk 1, Chap 3. All rulers operate somewhere between the poles of just and tyrannical in *Morkinskinna*, but the character of each is depicted as being highly impactful upon surrounding events during their rule, an effect comparable with Aquinian thought on the heightened effects of an autocratic ruler's actions on his subjects due to the comparative efficiency of the system in comparison to aristocracies or polities.

7.1 Haraldr harðráði

Of the cast of monarchs depicted within *Morkinskinna*, Haraldr harðráði commands the most extensive and complex characterisation. Even in comparison to his co-ruler Magnús góði, Haraldr's presence dominates the first half of the text and the impact of his reign and character is felt more strongly in the second: all the ensuing kings in the extant text are his descendants and comprise the so-called 'Harðráði dynasty'.³ Due to the length of his royal biography and the larger number of *þættir* associated with his reign than with those of other kings, the structure of the narrative concerning Haraldr can be employed synecdochally as a means by which to understand *Morkinskinna* more generally, particularly the later undisciplined *hirðir*. By way of a point of departure, the following narratorial aside provided during *Haralds saga* offers pertinent evidence for a systematic program by which material was selected for inclusion in *Morkinskinna*:

Hann var fullhugi ok mikill á framkvæmð verka sinna, sem nú hefir lengi frá verit sagt, ok liggja þó niðri ósagðir miklu fleiri hlutir, þeir sem ósagðir eru af hans afreksverkum, ok kemr mest til þess ófróðleikr vârr ok þat með at vér viljum eigi rita vitnisburðarlausar sôgur, þótt vér hofum heyrt þær frásagnir, því at oss þykkir betra at heðan af sé við aukat heldr en þetta sama þurfi aptr at taka.⁴

He was a valorous man and his accomplishments were great successes, as has now been extensively recounted and nevertheless many more examples remain untold, including instances of his great achievements, and this derives mainly from our lack of knowledge along with the fact that we do not wish to write unattested stories, even

³ See, for example, Eric Christiansen, *The Norsemen in the Viking Age* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 58-9. Haraldr Gilli and his descendants are sometimes classed by modern historians as a separate dynastic line due to the uncertainty of his descent from Magnús berfœttir, although it seems as reasonable to consider them as a cadet branch of the harðráði line. Dynastic distinctions should be treated with some care, however, as Haraldr is treated in saga sources, including *Morkinskinna*, as directly descending from Haraldr hárfagri, which modern historians consider unlikely, see *Morkinskinna I*, 82.

⁴ *Morkinskinna I*, 204-5.

if we have heard those tales, because it seems to us better for this account to be augmented henceforth rather than any of it need to be removed.

The exact meaning of such a statement is not straightforward in relation to the structure of the extant *Haralds saga* in *Morkinskinna*. One reading would be that it suggests that the c.1220 compiler did not include the *þættir*, which were instead added in a process provoked by the demand that the text be supplemented in the future. The length of the narrative associated with Haraldr is already denoted as extensive within this passage, however, and is implied to be comprised of distinct *hlutir* (parts), which, considering that the word *þáttir* is not used within the text, may be how the redactor denotes the episodic structure of the narrative.

Alison Finlay has commented that the admission of ignorance may function as a modesty topos rather than evidence of a lost tradition associated with Haraldr.⁵ If this is the case, then the redactor arguably provides this humble caveat as to the limits of their compilation methodology as a *captatio benevolentiae*, although it is interesting to consider the extent to which such an admission also functions as a self-assessment of the success of producing a *konungasaga* of such atypical structure.⁶

If the passage is interpreted partly as an *apologia* for the contents of the surrounding text of Haraldr's reign, sensitivity to the specific language deployed advances the case that an indirect defence of the relevance of the included material is being attempted. The legal implications of the omitted narratives being *vitnisburðarlauss* (unattested) may also function as a tacit explanation of the preponderance of material relating to Icelanders in *Haralds saga*.

⁵ Finlay, 'History and Fiction in the Kings' Sagas', 91.

⁶ For a similar self-assessment of the success and limitations of a piece of Norse prose, see Ari Þorgilsson's prologue to *Íslendingabók*; Jakob Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók, Landnamabók, Íslenzk fornrit 1* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritfélag, 1968), pt.1, 3. For a summary of the adaptation of classical modesty topos in the medieval west, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard Ropes Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 407-13. For a literary appraisal of the double-edged utility of modesty topos in demonstrating both humility and defensiveness with regard to the work in question, see Alexander Alexakis, 'The Modesty Topos and John of Damascus as a Not-So-Modest Author', *Byzantine Zeitschrift*, 97.2 (2005), 521-30.

Considering the length of time between Haraldr's reign and the compilation of the text, the ability of selected narratives to 'bear witness' to events at hand in the strictly legal sense in which the term is conventionally used seems unlikely, as they cannot have been directly received by the redactor from witnesses to the action.⁷ The term can be more productively considered as having a metaphorical function in relation to manuscript compilation, where it could refer to 'unattested' or 'uncorroborated' narratives.

Even when considering the term *vitnisburðarlaus* in this more specialised sense, care must be taken not to consider the term as equating to a truth claim on the part of the redactor, considering their professed lack of knowledge concerning events in Haraldr's life. Rather, it seems plausible that a story proved *vitnisbærr* (able to bear witness) when it was widely circulated or had numerous variants in simultaneous circulation contemporary to the redaction of the text, which is to say that it was well attested.⁸ As the redactor is most probably Icelandic, this provides a justification for the preponderance of *þættir* in Haraldr's reign centred upon Icelanders, as such stories would be expected to comprise a larger proportion of Haraldr's royal biography in Iceland than elsewhere. If this claim is accepted and taken in conjunction with the redactorial admission that significant portions of the account of Haraldr's *afreksverk* (great deeds) are omitted in the *Morkinskinna* narrative, then

⁷ The adjective *vitnisburðarlaus* is *hapax legomenon* but the antonymic noun *vitnisburðr* is well attested, appearing most commonly, as one might expect, in texts concerning legal procedure such as *Grágás*, *Hirðskrá*, and *Konungs skuggsjá*: see for example, Vilhjálmur Finsen, ed., *Grágás: Elzta lögbók íslendinga ... eptir skinnbókinni í bókasafni konungs* (Copenhagen, 1852), 54; Rudolph Keyser, Carl Unger, and Peter Munch, eds, *Speculum regale. Konungs-skuggsjá. Konge-speilet: Et philosophisk-didaktisk skrift, forfattet i Norge mod slutningen af det tolfte aarhundrede. Tilligemed et samtidigt skrift om den norske kirkes stilling til staten* (Oslo: C.C. Werner & Comp, 1848), 402; Holm-Olsen, *Konungs skuggsjá*, 76, 136. It is not used, however, in a non-literal manner elsewhere, justifying the need for flexibility in interpreting its usage here in relation to matters of narrative transmission.

⁸ Lars Lönnroth, in discussing the tacit techniques of moral persuasion that operate behind the perceived 'objectivity' of the saga style, notes that the narratorial comment in *Droplaugarsona saga* that no-one but Helgi, Droplaug, and Þorgils heard their conspiratorial conversation, signals the wickedness of the participants, due to both the reader and Icelandic society being excluded from witnessing the dialogue; 'Rhetorical Persuasion in the Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies*, 42.2 (1970), 157-89, at 160. A similar rhetorical effect may be operating here, with the redactor placing some moral value on the assertion that unattested stories are not worthy of inclusion. By pleading a more general social attestation of the selected tales, the redactor avoids the accusation of the covert fabrication of material; the selected narratives are rendered transparent through their popularity.

the passage approaches an editorial manifesto closely comparable with a central argument of the present thesis: that episodes in which peripheral figures, particularly Icelanders, come into contact with kings are structurally privileged in their expansion into *þættir* at the expense of sequences depicting Norwegian kings enacting momentous deeds. Such a structural axiom is the foundation from which the narratives of the undisciplined *hirðir* extend.

7.1.1 Haraldr's Journey to Byzantium

The extensive account of Haraldr's adventures in the Varangian Guard, following the death of his half-brother Óláfr helgi at Stiklastaðir, serves as Haraldr's introduction in the *Morkinskinna* narrative and establishes a range of themes and stylistic techniques that are repeated throughout *Morkinskinna*.⁹ In the first place, it provides the most embellished example of the *Bildungsroman*-type adventures abroad that several kings within the text engage in.¹⁰ Haraldr's travels abroad also foreground his cunning, military prowess (both tactical and physical), and intemperate pride, traits that heavily inform his depiction upon his return to Norway. The expedition also provides a logic for Haraldr's vast wealth, extracted from both his campaigning and eventual rebellion against Mikael katalaktus, which allows him to essentially buy half the kingdom of Norway from his nephew Magnús.

⁹ Due to the six-leaf lacuna at the start of *Morkinskinna*, approximately half the account of Haraldr's exploits abroad is missing from GKS 1009 fol. This lacuna is conventionally filled from a 15th-century interpolation into *Flateyjarbók*, which is accepted to closely, if not perfectly, reproduce the account present in GKS 1009 fol (see 1.2) The analysis here will be caveated with the possibility that a degree of rephrasing or expansion has occurred with regard to Haraldr's travels in the *Flateyjarbók* account, but in relation to the issue of the sequence's general structure in relation to the wider text, productive analysis can still be conducted with relative confidence.

¹⁰ The term *bildungsroman* is not used loosely in relation to Haraldr, whose youthful adventures conform remarkably closely to the archetypal story of *Bildung* despite the concept's primary applicability to novels of the nineteenth and twentieth century. *Haralds saga* conforms to a number of typical motifs of a *Bildungsroman*, with the king moving from the provinces to a metropolis, engaging in formative love affairs during his time there, developing his faculties through an experiential education of sorts, before returning home better developed and more respected than he left; Jerome Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 17-8. By another metric, a moral distinction can be drawn between depictions of individuals coming of age in sagas and novels; while Haraldr is subject to 'sexual tests' and 'vocational tests', the saga form does not readily allow for tests of a character's ethos or morals, as they form part of a largely unrepresented psychological interiority, see Thomas L. Jeffers, *Apprenticeships: The Bildungsroman from Goethe to Santayana* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2005), 52-4. Ármann Jakobsson also sees the term as appropriate to the discussion of *Morkinskinna*, although predominantly in discussion of Icelanders: *A Sense of Belonging*, 287-92.

Most importantly to the current study, the disruptive manner in which this sequence is positioned within the narrative foregrounds the dissonant structuring typical of *Morkinskinna*. Ármann Jakobsson has a memorable formulation by which he describes the placement of Haraldr's introduction, which acts as a productive point of departure for a discussion of the sequence:

Another web is spun when King Haraldr harðráði comes sailing into the saga to meet King Magnús. His tale starts *in medias res* like the Odyssey, but then there is a larger tale told in flashback, relating the life of King Haraldr since he left his brother St Óláfr at Stiklastaðir. This narrative is a *þátttr*, albeit a large one, which is woven into the saga of King Magnus at this point of the narrative.¹¹

Ármann does not further explore the manner in which the account of Haraldr's formative years constitutes a *þátttr*, though, by the logic of his wider research on the text, it would qualify due to the way it amplifies the account of Magnús's rule and the redactor's self-conscious designation of the material as a distinct narrative thread (see 3.2 and 3.3).

Ármann's argument stresses the 'woven' quality of the accounts of Magnús's reign and Haraldr's youth, in pointed contrast with earlier critical sensibilities as to suitable storytelling within the sagas, but this over-correction fails to do justice to the strength of the disruptive force of Haraldr's return to Norway (see 3.5.2). By the terms laid out in this thesis, this effect is not precisely the same as that typical of a *þátttr*, in which a newly-introduced character is placed in dialogue with the established king (see 3.6). Instead Haraldr's travels function as an analeptic digression due to the temporal and spatial distance of the events related from Magnús and Norway. Nevertheless, the caesura created in the narrative of Magnús's reign by Haraldr's arrival has a thematic utility in associating Haraldr with Icelanders and justifying

¹¹ Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Amplified Saga', 38.

his particular friendship with them through the establishment of parallels between the king's conduct abroad and the *þættir*'s protagonists' behaviour in Norway.

In the first place, Haraldr's journey is from the peripheral Norway to the central Miklagarðr, and, on an intercontinental scale, from a poorer location to a richer one.¹² This movement from a marginal zone to a locus of wealth and power is shared with many characters who feature within the *þættir* (see 3.5.3), as is the mercantile motive of gaining fortune and renown in travelling to an area where both these commodities are readily available.¹³ The account of Haraldr's wealth makes it clear that the treasures he has acquired are contingent upon the unparalleled riches amassed by the Byzantine Empire: *Ok þykkir þetta mikil furða, hverjum er sér, er í Norðrlond skal svá mikit gull vera komit í einn stað. En þetta var þó reyndar Grikkjakonungs auðr, sem allir menn segja at þar sé rautt gull nær húsum fullum.*¹⁴ Haraldr, like later visitors to his *hirð*, is presented as an uninitiated but resourceful newcomer in the court of a more powerful and wealthy king. This effect is further heightened by Haraldr's decision to disguise himself as the lower status figure *Norðbrikt* – this pseudonym may have everyman connotations and positions the king as a generic exemplar of Scandinavian conduct abroad.¹⁵ The narrator supports the effectiveness of this

¹² For a general introduction to the conception of the Icelandic position in the world, see Judith Jesch, 'Geography and Travel', in Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden: Blackwell Press, 2005), 119-34. The concept that the Norwegian *hirð* is only a central location by certain subjective standards and that centres and peripheries are fluid dependent on context is highly compatible with Sverrir Jakobsson's spatial theory as applied to medieval Iceland: *Við og veröldin: Heimsmynd Islendinga 1100-1400* (Reykjavík: Heimsmynd Islendinga, 2005), 80.

¹³ For the prevalence of mercenary service and material gain as primary motivators for Norse travellers to Miklagarðr, see John Douglas Shafer, 'Saga-Accounts of Norse Far-Travellers', unpublished PhD thesis (Durham, 2010), 84-100.

¹⁴ *Morkinskinna I*, 127. 'And that was considered a great wonder by everyone that saw it, that so much gold should be brought into one place in the Northern lands. But that was in fact the wealth of the king of the Greeks as all men say that in Byzantium there are houses almost filled with red gold.'

¹⁵ Andersson and Gade note the uncertain etymology of Haraldr's pseudonym, suggesting *-brikt* as a corruption of *brigð* (forfeiture, breaking, breach), as alluding to Haraldr's self-imposed exile from the North, or, if *brigð* is taken in the legal sense, as the right to retrieve forfeited land, as the rightful heir to the Norwegian throne; see Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 426. This pun may well be present, but *-brikt* is also the Icelandic variant of the *-burt/-brecht* suffix, widespread in Germanic naming customs. While "Northbright" may have a degree of self-laudatory utility, its construction could equally be seen as a pastiche of a typical North-Germanic name suitable for a character entering the Varangian Guard.

disguise by referring to Haraldr by the pseudonym for the remainder of his time abroad. This further distances Haraldr's actions in this foreign sphere from his later kingly character and temporarily centres the quasi-independent characterisation of Norðbrikt who engages in self-serving behaviour at the expense of the presiding ruler, as is typical of many of the characters introduced in the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna*.

More specific parallels can also be drawn between Haraldr's exploits in Byzantium and those of the figures later attached to his *hirð* and introduced in the *þættir*. Haraldr's proud conduct as a general of the Byzantine emperor places him in conflict with the Greek commander Gyrgir, who serves as the hapless foil to Haraldr's ingenuity: *Fekk Norðbrikt jafnan bæði sigr ok fé, en Gyrgir fór heim til Miklagarðs með sitt lið*.¹⁶ This tension operates in a manner comparable to the strife engendered between recent entrants to the *hirð* and more established members of the elite social space, in which the newcomers often overtop their better-established rivals.¹⁷ Haraldr experiences a gradual disillusionment with regard to his role in the Byzantine court, which escalates into a firm break in the relationship between himself and Emperor Monomachus when slander against Haraldr leads to his imprisonment in a pit, where, in a more fantastic scene, he kills an enormous serpent.¹⁸ He is then released

¹⁶ *Morkinskinna* I, 93. 'Norðbrikt always claimed both victory and wealth, but Gyrgir went home to Constantinople with his army.' The character of Gyrgir is a Norse representation of Georgios Maniaces, though Byzantine sources depict him as a highly competent tactician, adding further credence to his representation here being a product of a project of aggrandisement of Haraldr. See Sigfús Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium: An Aspect of Byzantine Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 65-7.

¹⁷ The established rival is by no means a consistent figure in terms of social status or place of origin and it would be unwise to misconstrue this tension as purely a dichotomy between impoverished Icelanders and members of the Norwegian nobility. In some cases both figures are wealthy and powerful men despite being Icelandic and Norwegian, as in the case of Þorsteinn Siðu-Hallsson and Einarr þambarskelfir (see 6.1.2); in others the rivalry may be between two Icelanders when the latter has spent longer within the *hirð*, such as in the insults bandied between Sneglu-Halli and Þjóðólfr Arnórsson (see 7.1.4).

¹⁸ The serpent episode is of an overtly supernatural type unusual within *Morkinskinna*. The atypical effect present at this juncture is compounded by the possibility that it is largely comprised of a series of mythological and legendary allusions. Haraldr's use of his cloak to absorb the snake's venom when it goes into its death spasm parallels Ragnar Loðbrók's use of a fur cloak to absorb a serpent's poisonous blood while slaying it. The thrusting of his arm into the snake's mouth mimics the actions of Týr during the binding of Fenrir, while the ambush of the serpent to strike at its vulnerable belly evokes Sigurðr's slaying of Fafnir. The exact relationship of the *Morkinskinna* account to the extant sources of Norse legendary and mythic matter is unclear and such a typological reading might overstate the strength of the allusions. It is reasonable to state, however, that for the duration of this short sequence, Haraldr is invested with the qualities of a legendary hero.

by a widow, following her miraculous healing by St Óláfr, before breaking into the palace with his follower and exacting vengeance by blinding the emperor and escaping in stolen ships.¹⁹

While other comparisons have been general, this process of disenfranchisement from a courtly space and a subsequent seeking of redress against a ruler has strong parallels in *Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar*, which takes place when Haraldr is established as the sole king of Norway (see 3.1). In a passage strikingly similar to that of Haraldr's blinding of Monomachus, Halldórr and a band of his men infiltrate the king's residence at night and ambush him while sleeping. Halldórr stands armed above the defenceless king, with the queen warning of the mortal threat to his life: '*Sér þú eigi, segir hon, at hann stendr yfir þér uppi með víghug?*'²⁰ Crucially, however, Haraldr relents and pays Halldórr what he owes without coming to harm, a point that demonstrates that, while parallels between Haraldr's coming-of-age narrative and the later *þættir* that comprise much of the account of his rule of Norway do exist, these sequences differ in terms of the severity of the outcome of the encounter between the king and the visitor.

Differences in the narrative mode of the account of Haraldr's travels and later *þættir* are also present. The figures Haraldr encounters in Byzantium are not offered the same degree of focus as newly-introduced characters in the *þættir*, wherein the perspectives of the newcomer and the established ruler are presented with relative parity. The Byzantine nobility do not regularly engage their guests in dialogue, rather forming an exotic milieu outshone by their Scandinavian guests, who continue to act as a *hirð* in miniature, with their Byzantine hosts being depicted in the less fully-realised manner more reminiscent of Norway's enemies in Scandinavia (see 6.1). The aim is to demonstrate Haraldr's ascendance to fame and fortune

¹⁹ *Morkinskinna* I, 111-14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 186. 'Don't you see' she said, 'that he stands over you with murderous intent?'

and the formation of his kingly character rather than his parity with established figures.

Haraldr's centrality to the narrative during this sequence is therefore challenged in only the weakest terms by the hapless Gyrgir. This effect is not purely structural, however, but also has consequences within the story-world: Haraldr's disruptive and independent presence in Byzantium is formative to his approach to later disruptive presences in his *hirð*, whom he recognises for both their potential utility and potential threat to established authority.

Haraldr's friendship with Icelanders is not, therefore, purely a case of an affinity between kindred spirits but also a piece of political pragmatism. The distant and tyrannical Byzantine emperor is blinded by Haraldr after their relationship degenerates; it is unsurprising that Haraldr subsequently strives to appease the disenchanted Halldórr and manages, barely, to avoid a similar fate. In this context, Haraldr's expedition has the function of a *speculum principis* in demonstrating the difference between just and unjust authority to a fledgeling ruler who adjusts his behaviour in his reign accordingly. Strife within the Byzantine court tends to occur as a simplified burlesque in which Haraldr is a clear victor, differentiating the sequence from the complex interpersonal negotiations integral to many of the *þættir* and his reign of Norway.²¹

7.1.2 Challenges to Haraldr's Authority by Kings

Haraldr's return to Norway initiates a tonal and thematic shift, as during his reign the intractability of political discord, a key theme for *Morkinskinna*, is rendered in its most complex and detailed fashion.²² As such, challenges to kingly authority are at their most

²¹ A comparison could be made with the tonal movement between Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1* and *Henry IV, Part 2* with Part 1 offering a *Bildungsroman* for Prince Hal, who capitalises on the lessons of the Carnavalesque tavern setting to act as a competent princely figure in Part 2, a role that demands a rejection of the values demonstrated to him in youth, see Jonathan Crewe, 'Reforming Prince Hal: The Sovereign Inheritor in "2 Henry IV"', *Renaissance Drama*, 21 (1990), 225-42.

²² The deposition of Sveinn Knútsson and Magnús góði's intent to gain vengeance against the Þrændir are both events of sufficient gravity to warrant the depiction of a momentous struggle within the text; in both cases, however, Magnús is universally approbated after only token resistance from figures clearly subordinate to him in either character or authority (see 6.1.1), in a manner analogous to the comparative ease of Haraldr's victories in Byzantium. Only upon Haraldr's return does strife in Norwegian society begin to escalate.

concentrated in *Haralds saga* and the intricacy with which Haraldr's struggle against his many opponents is presented should not be understated. The conversion narratives associated with St. Óláfr have been argued to occur at a macro-, medio-, and micro- level within his royal biography in *Heimskringla* (see 4.3); a similar tripartite methodology will be employed here to elucidate the strife that typifies Haraldr's reign and the three-pronged struggle for authority in which he engages against other kings, magnates, and characters introduced in the *þættir*. The different types of adversity the king faces on each of these three scales have different functions, however, and the interplay of all three contributes to the depiction of an undisciplined *hirð*. This term applies to the idiosyncratic institution that comes to surround and serve the king due to the pan-social tumult occasioned by Haraldr's style of rule.

Strife occurs on the macro-level in the mutual antipathy between Haraldr and other kings, initially his nephew Magnús góði during their co-rule and, following his death, the Danish king Sveinn Ástríðarson. These figures stand outside of Haraldr's *hirð* and do not seek entry into it but, through displaying rival modes of kingship, they challenge Haraldr's style of leadership and the ethos of the community that serves him. It might be expected that depictions of Magnús's harmonious *hirð* (see 6.1) would reflect poorly on the less stable organisation that serves Haraldr but the interaction of the two kings and their companies is, in fact, deftly balanced. The *Morkinskinna* redactor, as Ármann Jakobsson has noted, often provides dramatic episodes by which to typify wider events;²³ the wider relationship of Magnús and Haraldr and that of their followers is encapsulated in their contest as to who has priority in berthing their ships. Magnús, when ceding half his kingdom to Haraldr, stipulated that he would be able to continue to moor his ship in the royal berth, but Haraldr contravenes this agreement when he arrives at the port first.²⁴ Magnús sails toward Haraldr prepared for

²³ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 113-37.

²⁴ *Morkinskinna* I, 129.

combat, with Haraldr giving way to avoid a skirmish that has ominous significance in the context of the later violence amongst kings in *Morkinskinna*, which eventually escalates into open civil war. Despite this underlying threat of conflict, considerable space within the text is devoted to stressing that neither king is shamed in the course of the interaction and that both display positive traits despite their opposition to one another:

Ok í þvílíkum viðrskiptum konunga fannsk þat á at vant var til at gæta ok gera svá at báðum líkaði vel. Kolluðu nú menn Magnúss konungs at hann hefði rétt at mæla, en þeir er óvitrari váru kolluðu Harald í þessu nakkvat svívirðan. En Haraldsmenn sjálfir mæltu þat at eigi væri skilt á aðra leið en Magnús konungr skyldi lægit hafa ef þeir kvæmi báðir senn til, en Haraldr væri eigi skyldr at leggja í brot ef hann kæmi fyrr. Ok tölðu þeir at Haraldr hefði af þessu vel ok vitrliga. En þeir er verr vildu um ræða tölðu at Magnús konungr vildi rjúfa sættina ok hann vildi gera ósæmð ok rangt frænda sínum, Haraldí konungi. Ok þvílíkar greinir gerðusk brátt á umræðum manna, ok hafa verit fleiri þeir hlutir er nokkur grein hefir á orðit með þeim frændum. Ok heldu nú landinu um vetrinn, ok var friðr ok mikil gæzka í landinu fyr árferðar sakir ok annarra hluta.²⁵

And in such interactions between the kings it became clear that it was difficult to serve and to satisfy both of them. King Magnús's men now claimed that he had spoken correctly but those who were less wise claimed Haraldr to be somewhat disgraced in this matter. But Haraldr's men said that nothing had been agreed more than that King Magnús should have the berth if both kings arrived at the same time, but that Haraldr would not need to move off if he came there first. They also said that Haraldr has acted well and wisely in this matter. But those who wished to speak for

²⁵ *Morkinskinna* I, 130.

the worse said that King Magnús wanted to violate the agreement and he wished to dishonour and wrong his kinsman, King Haraldr. And such quarrels went back-and-forth swiftly in people's conversations and there have been other matters that have caused some quarrels between those kinsmen. And they ruled the land during the winter and there was peace and many good things in the land in relation to the seasons and other things.

Such delicate balances in the qualities of the two kings and the manner in which these rulers are perceived by those who support them, refute readings of *Morkinskinna* that seek to present Haraldr as inferior to Magnús, with the above passage demonstrating that only ignorant members of the kings' *hirðir* consider one monarch's conduct as subordinate to the other's. Ármann Jakobsson argues that co-rule is depicted as a negative state, with this passage depicting retainers reinterpreting events to exacerbate the differences in quality between the two men.²⁶ An alternative reading can be offered, however, that suggests both more pragmatism and more optimism on the redactor's part: strife may at times be unavoidable but multiple kings can ensure prosperity for Norway despite their personal antipathy. The kings' clashes are not only shown from multiple perspectives but depicted as being open to multiple interpretations by different communities, who debate the relative merits of dual rulers without reaching a moral verdict. It may be difficult to placate both kings simultaneously, but groups of followers with different ideological positions gravitate to their preferred ruler: Haraldr's unruly pride is complemented and validated by the support he receives from his *hirð*. The passage lends support to the argument that *Morkinskinna*'s redactor views conflict as an inevitable aspect of Norwegian history and inter-monarchic relationships. When coupled with the assertion that Norway was peaceful and prosperous

²⁶ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 185-6; *Í leit að konungi: Konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1997), 272-8.

during this period it does not follow that inter-royal strife is necessarily corrosive to the stability of the elite organisations at the centre of the text.

From a narratological perspective, periods of co-rule are often narrated at greater length and with an increased concentration of scenic material, that depicts both the kings' clashes and their differing temperaments in isolation from one another. This alternation in primary character between two royal figures is not structurally disruptive, however, with focus tending to switch cleanly between royal figures dependent on which king is more active in a given episode. The exceptions are rarer *mannjafnaðr* sequences in which the kings, through the contrivance of ritualised dialogue, are given commensurate narrative prominence. No underlying social hierarchy is challenged by the rivalries of kings and as long as their interactions do not descend into fully-fledged conflict, co-rule is presented as a means by which differing talents can be brought to bear in the rule of Norway and different types of *hirðir* can be simultaneously presented. Even conflict with foreign kings does little to upset the conventions of the narrative discourse; the spatial representation of Scandinavia is sufficiently indistinct that synoptic accounts of territory gain or loss through warfare do little to affect a narrative in which strife is predominantly depicted on an interpersonal level.²⁷ The interactions between kings, despite their narrative prominence, are something of a marginal case, in as much as they constitute unusual cases in which the two participants both occupy equal positions at the top of the Scandinavian social hierarchy and, as such, have simpler interactions as kinsmen or rivals, rather than more stringently codified relationships predicated upon loyalty, generosity and reciprocity, as is the case between lords and retainers (see 4.2). Up to the end of the reign of Sigurðr jórsalafari, it can be argued that kingly rivalry is the least disruptive form of conflict depicted within *Morkinskinna*.

²⁷ For further work on Norse spatial conception, see Sverrir Jakobsson, 'Heaven Is a Place on Earth: Church and Sacred Space in Iceland.' *Scandinavian Studies*, 82.1 (2010), 1-20.

7.1.3 Challenges to Haraldr's Authority by Magnates

The initiation of social instability in Haraldr's reign occurs at the medio-level in the relationships between the king and the magnates, a tension commented upon in both historical and literary analysis of the *konungasögur*.²⁸ Some specificity is required, however, in the context of the presentation of Norwegian *hirðir* in *Morkinskinna*, as to which figures constitute members of the Norwegian nobility. Certain titles, such as *lendr maðr*, clearly define the high-status and wealth of the individual in question (see 4.1) but, in a literary consideration of this text, it is more productive to understand magnates not as a fixed class, but as a more nebulous group defined in opposition to the low-status characters introduced in the *þættir*. To this end, the magnates in *Morkinskinna* are Norwegians of express wealth and power, well-established in elite society, and who hold authority and territory semi-independent from their relationship with their king.²⁹ The resulting effect does not constitute a depiction of a 'magnate class' which is ideologically opposed to the monarchy, but nor does it reduce the conflict between king and magnate to a series of unconnected feuds between powerful men. A particular sensitivity to the dynamics of power is exhibited in *Morkinskinna*, which while not constituting an expression of modern class consciousness, does create a distinction between the consequences of the actions of wealthy and powerful

²⁸ This debate has largely centred on the political ideology of *Heimskringla* but has obvious relevance to *Morkinskinna*: see Gudmund Sandvik, *Hovding og konge i Heimskringla* (Oslo: Akademisk forlag, 1955), 45, 98; Sverre Bagge, 'Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen', *HT* (1986), 145-97; Richard Gaskins, 'Visions of Sovereignty in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 23:3-4 (1988), 173-88, at 185-6.

²⁹ Within *Morkinskinna*, the affairs of magnates are depicted largely through their interactions with, or presence within, the *hirð* and the frequency of their personal clashes with kings arises from dramatic convenience more than an attempt to accurately depict non-monarchic power centres in Norway. Orning's assertion that magnates' relationships with the king are defined by their greater spatial distance from affairs of the *hirð* is not uniformly applicable; see *Unpredictability and Presence*, 155-63. Einar Þambarskelfir is in close proximity to kings throughout his depiction in *Morkinskinna* and irrespective of his friendship or enmity with them; Úlfr auðgi, conversely, lives at a sufficiently remote distance from Haraldr harðráði that only Úlfr's disastrous decision to invite the king to a feast at his home leads to their conflict and the magnate's humiliation: *Morkinskinna I*, 226-30. In a similar manner to the depiction of the *hirð* (see 4.2), portrayals of the Norwegian nobility blend detailed knowledge of social convention and hierarchy with free adaptation for literary effect.

Norwegians and the consequences of the behaviour of their lower-status peers within the *hirð*.³⁰

The previous section noted that combative relationships between rival kings are depicted as inevitable and tend to resolve towards power-sharing between rivals of commensurate power. The quality of the relationship between a king and magnates is, conversely, a crucial means of depicting the solidity of a king's authority and the stability of his *hirð*. The difference in outcome for kings fostering friendship or enmity with magnates is well demonstrated in the episode concerning Þrándr from Upplönd. As a wealthy and powerful kinsman of the disgraced Kálfr Árnason, Þrándr is complicit by extension in the slaying of Óláfr helgi and would be expected to be a recipient of Magnús góði's enmity. Þrándr pleads that he was absent from the battle of Stiklastaðir and appeals to Magnús's *lítillæti* (humility) in suggesting an exchange of cloaks and weapons between the two men.³¹ The equal value of the exchanged goods suggests the parity in quality of the two men and their reconciliation is testament to Magnús's prioritisation of strong relationship with magnates irrespective of their previous transgressions. The profession of loyalty inherent in Þrándr's behaviour is not lost on Haraldr, however, who subsequently views the magnate as an enemy on the following grounds: *Þótti Þrándr brátt hafa á litit ok sýnt sik í því at hann vildi meira sóma gera Magnúsi konungi en sér*.³² Haraldr, when faced with the preference of Norwegian magnates for his co-ruler, turns to an accomplished foreigner, Sveinn gerzki, to

³⁰ This reading still aligns more closely with Bagge's conception of the conflicts of king and magnate as isolated feuds between powerful individuals than the older Marxist interpretation of *Heimskringla* favoured by Halvdan Koht: Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*, 70-5; Koht, *Innhogg og utsyn i norsk historie*, 76-91. The repeated depiction of the actions of magnates as distinct in consequence from those of both kings and lower-status figures is a literary effect underpinned by a political ideology concerning the shared ambitions of powerful, non-royal figures.

³¹ *Morkinskinna I*, 134.

³² *Ibid.*, 134. 'He thought Þrándr had deliberated too swiftly and consequently demonstrated that he preferred to honour King Magnús rather than himself.'

settle his grudge against Þrándr.³³ Haraldr's tactic of capitalising on the service provided by an outsider in the absence of productive relationships with powerful Norwegians will be discussed further in this chapter as a crucial element of the effect produced in the *þættir*.

In the ensuing comic scene, Þrándr outwits and humiliates Sveinn and his band when they come to his farm disguised as monks.³⁴ Magnús, fearing reprisals from Haraldr, comes to Þrándr's home, inducting him into his *hirð* over winter before sending him abroad in spring to avoid further reprisals from his co-ruler, suggesting Þrándr flee as far as Greenland. Þrándr is ambushed at sea by the vengeful Haraldr who only leaves off the engagement when Magnús threatens to engage him in his warship in an echo of the previous tensions between the two kings over mooring rights (see 7.1.2). Here, however, Magnús appears the victor in a more straightforward sense in safeguarding Þrándr's flight from Norway, with the episode lacking an assertion of the moral equivalence of the kings' actions. When it comes to fostering the loyalty of the Norwegian elite during the period in which the two kings co-rule, Haraldr is presented as the less successful ruler.

Following Magnús's death, the authority and legitimacy of Haraldr's sole rule of Norway are similarly challenged by Einarr þambarskelfir, with Haraldr's prolonged struggles with the magnate constituting a dominant element of the account of his reign. Einarr is totemic of the general opposition to Haraldr and enduring loyalty to Magnús present amongst

³³ The byname *gerzki*, which denotes that Sveinn is from Garðaríki, establishes that Haraldr is employing non-Norwegians as his agents in his rule of the kingdom, with the text also recounting how Sveinn was one of the figures who returned to Norway with Haraldr following his previous travels, *Morkinskinna I*, 135-6.

³⁴ If Sveinn's gang are portrayed as being disguised as mendicant monks, this is a significant anachronism in the portrayal of eleventh-century Norway; Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 430. Nevertheless, disguising the losing party in the conflict as friars has some literary utility. In the first place, it creates a contrast between the active secular masculinity of the *hirð* and its more passive ecclesiastical counterpart, which reflects negatively upon the warrior prowess of Sveinn and his men. Secondly, mendicants in thirteenth-century Scandinavia were known to travel exceptionally large distances to conduct pastoral services as Norway had comparatively few monastic centres in comparison to Sweden and Denmark; the detail of the monkish disguises may gesture playfully, therefore, to the foreign status of Haraldr's agents who are similarly 'far-travellers'. For a comprehensive discussion of Scandinavian mendicants see Johnny Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen, "'Them Friars Dash About': Mendicant Terminario in Medieval Scandinavia', in Marianne O'Doherty, ed., *Travel and Mobilities in the Middle Ages: From the Atlantic to the Black Sea* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 3-29.

Norwegians, which, while not limited to the magnates alone, is championed by the *ríkismenn* (powerful men); those figures who first reject Haraldr's entreaty to split the kingdom with Magnús and for whom Einarr acts as a spokesman.³⁵ In the wake of Magnús's death, Einarr goes on to instigate the abandonment of Haraldr's planned invasion of Denmark by the Þrændr, with the narrator providing the memorable formulation: *Hann lýkr svá málinu at honum kvazk betra þykkja at fylgja Magnúsi konungi dauðum en hverjum öðrum konungi lifanda*.³⁶ Einarr's political status is that of rival figure who holds power independent of the king and with particular influence in the Þrændalög district, but he is also presented as living reminder of a heroic Norwegian past that diminishes the prestige of Haraldr's exploits.³⁷

Of note in the depiction of Einarr's resistance to Haraldr, is that the full account of the deteriorating relationship between the two men within *Morkinskinna* undergoes several significant shifts between summary and scene; an investigation of the organisation and progression of the narrative of their conflict is useful in demonstrating the manner in which inter-elite strife is structured. The two men's adversarial relationship is first summarised in a synoptic passage: *Haraldr konungr varð ósáttur við Einar þambarskelfi fyrir þá sök at Einarr vildi jafnask við konung í ríkdóm sínum allt í Þrændalögum*.³⁸ This anxiety on the part of Haraldr, concerning Einarr's waxing power in the region, is then reinforced by a scene featuring an adept piece of prosimetrum. A striking image of Haraldr peering through a latticed window as Einarr and his supporters march through the street is established in the prose, before a *lausavísa* attributed to the king is supplied that complains of the excesses of

³⁵ *Morkinskinna I*, 121.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 173. 'He concluded his speech by saying that it seemed better to him to follow King Magnús in death than any other living king.'

³⁷ Einarr fought courageously at the Battle of Svöldr in defence of Óláfr Tryggvason and the issue of his abandonment of Óláfr helgi is noticeably avoided in *Morkinskinna*. As a figure from an older generation, the implication may be that Einarr's contempt for Haraldr arises from his personal acquaintance with the king's less illustrious father, Sigurðr sýr, and subsequent low esteem for this cadet branch of the *hárfagri* line.

³⁸ *Morkinskinna I*, 207. 'King Haraldr came into disagreement with Einarr þambarskelfir because Einarr wished to be equal to a king in terms of his power throughout Þrændalög.'

his rival.³⁹ The synoptic voice that first succinctly summarises the issue of the two men's dispute is, therefore, followed by the king's declamation of Einarr through a verse employed as dialogue.⁴⁰ This movement establishes a hierarchy of narrative voice, in which the omniscient account of the narrator is followed by a protest on the part of Haraldr: the agreement between the narrator and presiding monarch on the severity of the threat posed by Einarr foregrounds the high stakes of the more extensive ensuing material.

The next narrative structure to document the conflict between king and magnate is the extensive sequence concerning an unnamed Icelander and Þorfinnr kaupmaðr, which in terms of narrative effect should be considered a *þáttir*, though it has rarely been acknowledged as such.⁴¹ The inception of the *þáttir* is signalled in conventional terms, with the arrival of a poor Icelander from Norway. The unnamed Icelander chances to catch a Norwegian named Þorfinnr unearthing a treasure-chest belonging to Hákon jarl and demands three marks of silver, with the promise of the same amount paid at some point in the future, in return for his silence. Þorfinnr's lavish lifestyle earns him the nicknames *kaupmaðr* (the merchant) and *enn auðgi* (the wealthy) but, nevertheless, he refuses to pay the Icelander the agreed amount on their second encounter. The Icelander seeks support from Einarr þambarskelfir but fails to tell him that the treasure belonged to Hákon until after Haraldr has threatened Þorfinnr into revealing the source of his sudden wealth and confiscated his fortune. The initial conflict between Þorfinnr and the Icelander comes to act, therefore, as a proxy for the larger disagreement between Einarr and Haraldr with both men claiming a legal right to the treasure: the king through his right to all unearthed goods and Einarr through familial connection to Hákon jarl, the treasure's owner.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 207-8.

⁴⁰ O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 61-3.

⁴¹ Heinrich Gimmler counts this episode as a 'pseudo-þáttir': *Die Thættir der Morkinskinna*, 60-2. Guðni Jónsson gave the sequence the title *Íslendinga þáttir óráðga* in his edition: *Íslendinga þættir*, vol. 9, 125.

⁴² *Morkinskinna I*, 210-12.

The *páttr* concludes ambivalently for all parties involved, in not detailing whether the legal wrangling was resolved in favour of either king or magnate: *Standa nú þessi mál kyrr um hríð, ok sefask heldr hugr þeira er frá liðr, ok sjøtlask nú með fortølum þeira manna er vinir váru hvárratveggju, konungs ok Einars, ok góðan hlut vildu at eiga með þeim.*⁴³ The episode does not resolve the dispute between the two powerful men but rather reveals the wider social consequences of the conflict as the fortunes of poorer and more peripheral figures, such as the unnamed Iclander, are adversely affected. Furthermore, the less powerful figures featured in the *páttr* prominently display the negative qualities that Haraldr and Einarr are also complicit in: Þorfinnr's greed and the Iclander's covert, ill-judged behaviour are both analogous to the acquisitiveness and deviousness exhibited by their more powerful patrons. Just as neither Haraldr nor Einarr are able to overtop one another in the dispute, so too neither Þorfinnr nor the Iclander achieve enduring friendship or reward with either authority figure, being stripped of their assets or stipulated to return to Iceland unrewarded, respectively. The *páttr* depicts the significant political consequences of conflict between magnates and kings for all members of the *hirð*, as such animosity leads to non-productive factionalism within which neither ruler nor retainer profits as Norway becomes locked in stagnant animosity. A clear ideological distinction is drawn in *Morkinskinna*, between the conflicts of rival kings and the conflicts between rulers and magnates, although the detail with which powerful *lendir menn* are portrayed is sometimes comparable to that afforded to kings. The crucial difference is that conflicts between kings have the ability to develop into a productive truce despite the two rulers' inability to reconcile; conflicts between kings and magnates are not depicted as a sustainable dynamic within the Norwegian elite and the situation is resolved either through a profession of loyalty on the part of the

⁴³ Ibid., 211. 'This matter stood quiet for a while and their minds are somewhat soothed and settled as time passes due to the representations of those men who were friends with both the king and Einarr and wanted a good outcome for both of them.'

magnate or an escalation into violence. In the context of the conflict between the young king Hákon and Skúli jarl towards the end of the civil war era, the subtext of alarm regarding the rivalry of kings and magnates is easily understood.

In spite of the wider social impact of Einarr and Haraldr's enmity, the matter is depicted as an interpersonal issue between two male rivals rather than a systemic failure of the symbolic offices of king and magnate. This is underscored in the following scene in which Haraldr makes a test of the loyalty of powerful men within Norway, conducting a form of sting operation against them designed to ascertain if they would support Sveinn of Denmark if he invaded Norway. Einarr's response is frank and uncompromising, stressing his lack of friendship with Haraldr but also his commitment to supporting his king if Sveinn were to invade, proclaiming: *mun ek ekki svíkja hann né land undan honum*.⁴⁴ Such a profession of duty to one's kingdom, irrespective of private sentiment about its ruler, appears to Ármann Jakobsson to be a representation of honourable behaviour on the part of Einarr.⁴⁵ Care should be taken, however, to avoid the anachronistic argument that Einarr is displaying patriotism for Norway as a nation-state as an abstract alternative to personal allegiance to Haraldr. Einarr does not disassociate the kingdom from the king but rather qualifies his loyalty to the latter as extending to a minimal profession of faithfulness—defence from foreign invasion. Einarr's formulation withholds friendship from Haraldr, a crucial qualification when affection between elite men is not presented in *Morkinskinna* as an afterthought to the more important issue of practical political consensus, but rather as a vital aspect of productive rule. Einarr, consequently, fails to profess loyal service while also not declaring open rebellion.⁴⁶ This reading of Einarr's words as a cautiously negative response to Haraldr's test is reinforced in Haraldr's response when Einarr's words are reported to him, in which the king

⁴⁴ *Morkinskinna* I, 212. 'I will not betray him nor take the land from under him'.

⁴⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 241.

⁴⁶ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Viking Friendship*, 50-8.

states that such a profession of dislike is to be expected.⁴⁷ Haraldr makes no reference to the magnate's willingness to defend Norway, which is seemingly of lesser concern to the king – Einarr's failure to commit to friendship is of greater note than the staunchness of his defence of the realm.

Personal grudges between the most powerful men in Norway have disproportionately large effects within the restricted confines of the *hirð*, with the circumstances leading up to Einarr þambarskelfir's death serving as a fine example of how swiftly innocuous disputes between preeminent figures can become violent. The king invites Einarr to a feast, ostensibly with the aim of fostering friendship between them.⁴⁸ Following the meal, the company sit together on the straw-strewn floor and drink at which point the king begins to tell stories of his youthful travels. Einarr, very old and somewhat drunk, falls asleep,⁴⁹ which Haraldr interprets as an insult to his storytelling and emblematic of Einarr's more general dismissal of Haraldr's authority.⁵⁰ In response, Haraldr has Grjótgarðr, one of his retainers, weave some straw together, place it in Einarr's hand, and command the magnate to pull. Einarr, upon grasping the straw, awakes with a fart.⁵¹ The incensed Einarr returns later with his followers

⁴⁷ *Morkinskinna I*, 212.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁴⁹ Despite his frequent appearances within the text, this is the first instance at which Einarr's old age is mentioned, despite seemingly being advanced in years from the beginning of the *Morkinskinna* narrative. As this scene presents Einarr's bodily frailty as a humorous weakness at odds with his preeminent status and a factor in bringing about his subsequent downfall, this presentation of senescence seems to align with the wider trends in saga literature to present elderliness as a condition suddenly imparted through the loss of adult social utility rather than a naturalistic gradual decline; see Thomas Morcom, 'After Adulthood: The Metamorphoses of the Elderly in the *Íslendingasögur*', *Saga-Book*, 42 (2018), 25-49.

⁵⁰ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 242

⁵¹ Kari Ellen Gade offers the most plausible explanation for this ambiguous episode by suggesting that Haraldr's insult gains its force from a pun on the nickname *þambarskelfir*, which has been interpreted as both 'bow-shaker' and 'paunch-shaker'. The twined straw is a mock-bow that, in causing Einarr to fart, reduces him from a famous archer to an old man capable of only shaking his own bowels; see Kari Ellen Gade, 'Einarr þambarskelfir's Last Shot', 160. This episode has, however, generated a considerable amount of debate as to alternative interpretations of both this scene and the source of Einarr's sobriquet; see William Sayer, 'The Honor of Guðlaugr Snorrason and Einarr þambarskelfir: A Reply', *Scandinavian Studies*, 67.4 (1995), 536-44; Kari Ellen Gade, 'Einarr þambarskelfir, Again', *Scandinavian Studies*, 67.4 (1995), 547-50; Lotte Motz, 'More Thoughts on Einarr þambarskelfir', *Scandinavian Studies*, 68.3 (1996), 370-2.

to murder Grjótgarðr, which precipitates the complete breakdown of his relationship with Haraldr and the murder of Einarr and his son Eindriði at Haraldr's command.⁵²

The triviality of Haraldr's prank is in stark contrast to the severity of the events it precipitates, yet the centrality of everyday social interactions to Norwegian political stability is a theme which is repeatedly returned to within *Morkinskinna*. In this case, the implication is that Einarr is a great magnate but a poor retainer – inattentive to his king and violent towards his fellow *hirðmenn*. Unlike in the *þættir*, where figures of little consequence prove their parity with their king through vociferous action within the *hirð*, in this scene the powerful Einarr is recharacterized as passive (indeed, as unconscious) and as a figure for the otherwise inconsequential Grjótgarðr to act upon. Einarr's loss of agency in becoming the butt of a joke within Haraldr's *hirð* immediately precedes the collapse of his political power in Norway, with the ill-judged slaying of Haraldr's retainer precipitating his downfall and completing the causal chain from etiquette breach to violent killing. Einarr regains some agency in his death-scene, which plays out like the Battle of Svøldr in miniature with Einarr fighting valiantly against an ambush by overwhelming forces. Following his death, however, the redactor appears to realign their sympathies fully with Haraldr stating: *Ok í þenna tíma váru lendir menn í Nóregi svá ofkátir at þegar er þeim líkaði nokkut illa við konung þá hlupu þeir ór landi suðr til Danmerkr til Sveins konungs*.⁵³ The dual focus on Einarr and Haraldr collapses upon the magnate's death and is replaced with more straightforward support for the presiding monarch's ideology to complement the evacuation of his rivals from the narrative sphere.

⁵² *Morkinskinna I*, 215-6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 216. 'And in that time, landed men in Norway were so overbearing that the moment they were somewhat dissatisfied with the king they fled south to Denmark to King Sveinn.'

7.1.4 Challenges to Haraldr's Authority in the *Þættir*

In his dealings with Einarr, Haraldr achieves a pyrrhic victory in removing a powerful rival at the cost of the general animosity of Norwegian *lendir menn*, but this demonstration of the animosity between the king and the magnates does pose a thorny political question: how and who will the king rule when the most powerful of his countrymen have been killed or have fled abroad? Complementary to this problem is another issue – how can the social milieu of the *hirð* be represented in the narrative when the deterioration of the relationships between kings and magnates has reached the point of enmity, shattering the productive hierarchy of the Norwegian elite? The resolution of both questions within the text is through the representation of strife on a micro-level: the depiction of conflicts that have limited political repercussions for anyone beyond the figures involved in the interaction. This effect is primarily exhibited within the *þættir*. The *þættir* involving Haraldr appear in higher concentrations following the sections of the narrative concerning the king's conflicts with the powerful figures of Einarr þambarskelfir and Hákon Ívarsson and can be understood as responses to the socio-political dynamics established in the dealing between rulers and magnates. Moreover, the figures with which Haraldr engages in the *þættir* allow him to exhibit alternative forms of kingship and circumvent political constrictions that would otherwise stifle effective rule.

The death of Einarr þambarskelfir and the flight of Norwegian magnates to Denmark is followed in *Morkinskinna* by *Auðunar þáttir vestfirzka*, one of the most extensive of the *þættir* and amongst the most heavily analysed, albeit with most critics considering it in isolation from its narrative context.⁵⁴ In brief, the *þáttir* relates how Auðun, a poor Iclander,

⁵⁴ In the case of William Ian Miller, at least, such a treatment of *Auðunar þáttir* is justified by a preference for the expanded *Flateyjarbók* variant of the sequence, due to the likelihood of the *Morkinskinna* version undergoing considerable redaction to align with the surrounding prose, unlike the *Flateyjarbók* version which is presented as an independent narrative; Miller, *Audun and the Polar Bear*, 3-5.

transports a bear from Greenland to Norway, with the express purpose of gifting it to King Sveinn of Denmark. He is intercepted by Haraldr harðráði, however, who haggles with Auðun for the rare animal before becoming incredulous when he is informed the bear is reserved for his enemy. The king relents, however, and allows Auðun to continue on his way as long as he promises to return to tell Haraldr of his dealings with Sveinn. Auðun is almost swindled by a member of Sveinn's *hirð* but manages to deliver the bear, which the king rewards him for by funding his pilgrimage to Rome. Auðun, impoverished and infirm from his travels, returns to Denmark at Easter, and after some hesitation due to his decrepit condition, is reunited with Sveinn. Auðun soon wishes to return to Iceland, however, and Sveinn gifts the Iclander a boat, a pouch of silver, and a gold arm ring. Auðun returns to Norway, where Haraldr questions him as to Sveinn's generosity. Although Haraldr admits his munificence would not have extended as far as Sveinn's, Auðun gifts him the arm ring as thanks for ensuring his safe passage through Norway. Haraldr, in turn, rewards Auðun who then returns to Iceland, renowned for his good luck.⁵⁵

In previous scholarship on *Auðunar þáttir*, the complex politics of reciprocity have been thoroughly investigated,⁵⁶ as has Auðun's utility as an unwitting ambassador in engendering improved diplomatic relationships between Haraldr and Sveinn.⁵⁷ The *þáttir* celebrates the luck, humility, and perseverance of a poor Iclander while also exploring the subtle overtures of mutual respect being made by rival kings. *Auðunar þáttir* is a structural and thematic oddity in some respects, however, in providing a rare scenic depiction of the Danish *hirð* alongside its Norwegian counterpart and in not depicting Norway as the final destination of an Iclander's travels abroad. Other *þættir* also introduce characters on

⁵⁵ *Morkinskinna I*, 217-23.

⁵⁶ See Edward G. Fichtner, 'Gift Exchange and Initiation in the *Auðunar þáttir vestfirzka*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 51.3 (1979), 249-72; Santiago Barreiro, 'How to do Things with Gifts: *Gjafa-Refs þáttir* and *Auðunar þáttir vestfirzka*', *Revista Signum*, 16.3 (2015), 78-96; Miller, *Audun and the Polar Bear*, 96-141.

⁵⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 99; Miller, *Audun and the Polar Bear*, 61-7.

parabolic trajectories from their peripheral starting point to the central Norwegian *hirð*, before returning enriched to their homeland, but Auðun's journey more closely resembles a modified pilgrimage-type narrative than other *þættir* due to the furthest point of travel for the Icelander being Rome rather than Scandinavia.⁵⁸ As the *hirðir* of Haraldr and Sveinn are both presented as stopping-off points on a longer spiritual journey, the contention that Auðun's preference for Sveinn provides the primary narrative impetus for the *þáttr* can be reconsidered. Auðun practises an indomitable freedom in relation to his affiliation with any worldly lord: his refusal to gift the bear to Haraldr is the most obvious case but his independence is also demonstrated in insistence on returning to Iceland despite Sveinn's protests. In this regard, it is productive to read *Auðunar þáttr* in dialogue with *Hreiðars þáttr* (see 6.1.2). Both men are rendered idiosyncratic through their apparent *sancta simplicitas* but Hreiðarr chooses intimate friendship with Magnús at the cost of enmity with Haraldr and comes to defer to a single lord. Auðun, meanwhile, in never fully committing his loyalties through extended service within any *hirð* retains his independence and his productive relationship with both Haraldr and Sveinn.

In this manner, Auðun extracts the maximum in terms of wealth and prestige for himself but also provides space within the narrative for two different modes of kingship to be paralleled. Sveinn engages in traditional magnanimous generosity in which a gift from a lower-status guest obliges a greater gift in return. This is a king-retainer relationship predicated upon object-exchange – the interchange of bear, silver, and arm rings maintains the relationship. Haraldr's relationship to Auðun also involves elements of reciprocity but is not primarily predicated upon gift exchange but rather verbal exchange. The king delivers

⁵⁸ Marta Rey-Radlinska, 'The Old-Norse Narrative *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka* as a Parabolic Fiction', *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis*, 5.1 (2010), 95-110; Haki Antonsson, 'The Construction of *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka*: A Case of Typological Thinking in Early Old Norse Prose', *Scandinavian Studies*, 90.4 (2018), 485-508.

questions to Auðun and judges the Icelfander's merit on the basis of his responses. Haraldr's two extended interrogations, first of Auðun's intentions and then of Sveinn's response, are assertive and proud, with the subtext of the king's capability of violence being ever-present, but Haraldr is responsive to Auðun's demand for self-determination and modifies his initial threats through the course of their dialogue:

Haraldr konungr segir: 'Hvart er at þú ert maðr svá óvitr at þú hefir eigi heyrt ófrið þann er í milli er landa þessa, eða ætlar þú giptu þína svá mikla at þú munir þar komask með gørsimar er aðrir fá eigi komizk klaklaust þó at nauðsyn eigi til?' Auðun svarar: 'Herra, þat er á yðru valdi, en öngu játum vér qðru en þessu er vér hqfum áðr ætlat.' Þá mælti konungr: 'Hví mun eigi þat til at þú farir leið þína sem þú vill, ok kom þá til mín er þú ferr aptr ok seg mér hversu Sveinn konungr launar þér dýrit, ok kann þat vera at þú sér gæfumaðr.' 'Því heit ek þér,' sagði Auðun.⁵⁹

King Haraldr says: 'Is it the case that you are so unwise a man that you have not heard about the conflict that is ongoing between Norway and Denmark, or do you think your good fortune to be so great that you could travel there with treasures, to a place where others are not able to go unscathed, even though they need to?' Auðun answers: 'Lord, the matter is in your hands but we consent to nothing other than what we were set on beforehand.' Then the king said: 'Why should it not be the case that you go on your way as you wish, but then come and visit me on your way back and tell me how King Sveinn rewarded you for the animal – it might be that you are a lucky man.' 'I promise you that,' said Auðun.

Haraldr's initial indignation at Auðun's plans makes reference to the exodus of the magnates to Denmark and his resulting enmity toward these figures (see 7.1.3). This suggests

⁵⁹ *Morkinskinna I*, 218.

an integration of *Auðunar þáttir* with the surrounding synoptic material of *Morkinskinna* to an extent even greater than that advocated for by Ármann Jakobsson, as, at the very least, elements of the *þáttir*'s dialogue may have been revised to concord with the description of the wider political turmoil established in the text.⁶⁰ In this context, Auðun's use of the first-person plural pronoun *vér* in the passage above when seemingly only referring to himself in his forthright response to Haraldr, requires further consideration.⁶¹ Somewhat whimsically, it may be tempting to assume that Auðun is speaking on behalf of himself and his bear, but this construction would take the dual pronoun *vit* and can be discounted. Another, more plausible, suggestion is that Auðun is making use of the majestic plural to assert his parity with the king with whom he is conversing: a more subtle variant of the theme prominent in *Brands þáttir orva*, in which Haraldr and an Icelander achieve a quasi-regal status as both fail to fully enact their respective roles as king and retainer (see 3.4). A further intriguing option would be that Auðun is speaking on behalf of the *aðrir* who, as Haraldr mentions immediately prior, are also attempting to travel to Denmark. The plural pronoun widens Auðun's declaration of his intention into an aphoristic formulation suggesting the folly of Haraldr restricting passage to Denmark for any who might wish to go. Auðun, in effect, politely advocates a rejection of the king's control over the movements of those within his *hirð* and Haraldr, surprisingly, acquiesces; in doing so, he gives Auðun his liberty and his life, arguably the greatest gifts offered by anyone in the *þáttir*.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 96-100.

⁶¹ The substitution of *vér* for *ek* is possible in skaldic verse, though still relatively uncommon. In such cases, however, the substitution is almost always utilised to maintain the metre, which cannot be a consideration in a prose *þáttir*; see Einarr Skúlason, *Geisli* 37, Martin Chase, ed., in Margaret Clunies Ross, ed., *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 37-8; Eyjólfur dāðaskáld, *Bandadrápa* 7, Russell Poole, ed., in Diana Whaley, ed., *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 466; Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson, *Lausavísur* 14, Kari Ellen Gade, ed., in Kari Ellen Gade, ed., *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2: From c.1035 to c.1300*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 55-6.

⁶² Miller, *Audun and the Polar Bear*, 139.

Auðun's demands may be disruptive but their formulation is carefully couched: his admission of being in Haraldr's power coupled with his oath to return to Norway after visiting Sveinn allows for his movement to Denmark to continue without the attendant disavowal of the king as was the case in the flight of the magnates. In this case, where the king's magnanimity intermingles with his forcefulness and the Icелander's deference blends with his stubbornness, the disagreement does not escalate into enmity – rather mutual understanding is fostered and a contractual form of intimacy engendered. Haraldr relinquishes traditional tactics of kingship, centred upon authority and munificence, instead preserving the agency of his guest and proving his wisdom through conversations that end with him making just decisions. Auðun repays Haraldr by keeping his oath to return to Norway, rejecting the convention that exit from the *hirð* is final and destructive, and instead incorporating the Norwegian king into an even larger network of reciprocity and prestige established through Auðun's travels within the *þátttr*.

The above reading demonstrates, crucially, that the narrative insurrection occasioned by the extended focus on the movements of Auðun and his bear is great enough to disrupt notions of the king's centrality and agency to the point that Haraldr is unable or unwilling to control the movement of even a poor Icелander from Norway to Denmark. Auðun never attains, however, authority independent from the respect bestowed upon him by the kings he visits: his structural impact on the narrative is seismic but his threat to Haraldr's political power is slight. The preceding synoptic statement that unnamed magnates left Norway is, conversely, of great political significance but its short form, unembellished by scenes, has little effect on the text's narrative structure. Such a terse account of the rupture in relationships between Haraldr and his magnates, lacking in dramatic characterisation, precludes the presentation of the establishment of mutual respect fostered through dialogue and social intimacy, which is the primary method of defusing conflict in *Morkinskinna*. Kings

are presented within the text as beset by those who seek to challenge aspects of their authority but the nature of that challenge can vary widely. Unique to the *þættir* is the ability to engender a mutually productive strife limited in consequence to its two participants, and at odds with the ruinous effects of conflict between powerful rivals.

The productivity of reading the *þættir* in their precise context within *Morkinskinna* is further demonstrated by a consideration of *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* and the material that surrounds it.⁶³ The *þáttr* is preceded by the extended sequence concerning Haraldr's tumultuous relationship with Hákon Ívarsson.⁶⁴ Hákon, the son of a *lendr maðr*, aids Haraldr valiantly in the rout of King Sveinn's forces. Hákon is rewarded by Haraldr through the arrangement of his marriage to Ragnhildr, daughter of Magnús góði, with the king also promising to make Hákon a jarl to make the match more fitting. Haraldr later refuses to bestow the jarldom, however, perhaps out of fear of reviving the power base of his old rival Magnús. In protest, Hákon defects to serve Sveinn, who tasks him, as compensation for their prior enmity, to slay the king's nephew Ásmundr Bjarnarson. In return, Hákon is made jarl of Halland and he continues in his enmity towards Haraldr despite the ensuing peace between Norway and Denmark. The sequence concludes with a potted genealogy of Hákon's illustrious

⁶³ *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* is preserved in two versions: a shorter version incorporated into *Morkinskinna*, which is the subject of the present discussion and a longer version that forms part of the fifteenth-century interpolation into *Flateyjarbók*, where it is presented as an independent narrative. The relationship between the two versions is contested and no consensus has been reached as to whether the *Flateyjarbók* version constitutes an expansion of the original or whether the *Morkinskinna* account is a pared-down version of a more extensive narrative tradition: see, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Om de norske kongers sagaer*, 156, Tommy Danielsson, *Om den isländska släktsagans uppbyggnad*, 74-75, Harris and Rowe, 'Short Prose Narrative', 150-9.

⁶⁴ The portion of the *Morkinskinna* narrative in which Hákon Ívarsson features prominently has been associated with *Hákonar saga Ívarssonar*, a text preserved fragmentarily in the fifteenth-century AM 570a 4to. Narrative sequences dealing with similar content appear in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*, though all versions differ somewhat in form and detail. The exact development of *Hákonar saga Ívarssonar* in relation to the *konungasögur* accounts is unclear and is the subject of continued debate; see Sverre Bagge, 'Dateringen av Hákonar saga Ívarssonar. Svar til Theodore M. Andersson', *Maal og Minne*, 107.1 (2015), 79-88; Theodore Andersson, 'Hákonar saga Ívarssonar Once Again', *Maal og Minne*, 107.1 (2015), 61-77. Andersson proposes that the *Morkinskinna* version arises separately from the other versions, as an original adaptation from oral tradition, a view that will be adopted for the purposes of this thesis. The *Morkinskinna* version is stylistically consistent with the rest of the text, balancing focalization deftly between Haraldr and Hákon and incorporating their conflict into the wider war with Sveinn of Denmark, which suggests a comprehensive program of redaction to assimilate an extensive tale into the more general narrative style.

descendants.⁶⁵ If Einarr þambarskelfir signifies the threat posed to Haraldr by the old order of magnates who were established in Norway prior to the king's return from Byzantium, then Hákon stands for the *nouveau* gentry who, despite receiving their power from Haraldr personally, become disaffected due to the king's capricious behaviour and come to oppose him. As is the case elsewhere in the *þættir*, the morality of the situation is murky with both figures being at potential fault: Haraldr in reneging on his promise and his uncompromising behaviour but also Hákon in his overweening ambition and flexible loyalties.

The shift between the summary of Hákon's noble pedigree and the scenic beginning of *Sneglu-Halla þáttir* is perhaps the most jarring narrative insurrection in *Morkinskinna* as the account of inter-elite conflict gives way to the introduction of Halli, whose nickname, which has connotations of being 'unruly, stubborn, unusually agile, or perhaps just skinny', signals his disruptive potential.⁶⁶ Hákon's descendants include Eiríkr Lam, future king of Denmark, but Halli is initially characterised only in his dwelling in the north of Iceland,⁶⁷ with the omission of genealogical information implying his low status.⁶⁸ Halli's poverty is central to the *þáttir* as is his unwillingness to assimilate to the social conventions of the *hirð* – the rivalry between Halli and Þjóðólfr, another Icelandic skald, is often read in terms of an Icelandic pride in the former's 'authentic' or uncompromising behaviour abroad in comparison to the latter's more subservient attempts to assimilate.⁶⁹ While Halli operates without pretension and contravenes all established etiquette norms within the *hirð*, it is

⁶⁵ *Morkinskinna* I, 253-69.

⁶⁶ Christopher Abram, 'Trolling in Old Norse: Ambiguity and Incitement in *Sneglu-Halla þáttir*', in Stephen Alan Bargano and Elizabeth Louise Rambo, *Words that Tear the Flesh: Essays on Sarcasm in Medieval and Early Modern Literature and Cultures*, Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 21 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 41-62, at 43. For a discussion of the etymology of *snegla* as relating to 'a weaver's shuttle' or 'boisterous livestock' see Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), sv.

⁶⁷ *Morkinskinna* I, 270.

⁶⁸ Jeffrey Turco, 'Loki, *Sneglu-Halla þáttir*, and the Case for a Skaldic Prosaics', in Jeffrey Turco, ed., *New Norse Studies: Essays on the Literature and Culture of Medieval Scandinavia*, *Islandica* 58 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 185-241, at 195-6.

⁶⁹ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 291; Yoav Tirosh, 'Scolding the Skald: The Construction of Cultural Memory in *Morkinskinna*'s *Sneglu-Halla þáttir*', *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies*, 47.1 (2017), 1-23, at 12-14; Turco, 'Loki, *Sneglu-Halla þáttir*, and the Case for a Skaldic Prosaics', 206.

important to note that in the version of the *þáttir* preserved in *Morkinskinna* he is not depicted as reaching the same levels of extreme delinquency as in the variant of the narrative found in *Flateyjarbók*.⁷⁰ Halli is a deeply unruly presence but he poses no serious challenge to Haraldr harðráði, at worst offering sexual innuendo to the disguised ruler, but often reserving for the king a deference no other figure merits. This characterisation inverts that of the noble but rebellious Hákon Ívarsson.

Sneglu-Halli is an example, like Auðun, of a large personality with little power depicted in a long *þáttir* of little historical consequence. Ármann Jakobsson, in specific reference to the sequence of loosely-connected scenes that make up the *þáttir* states that ‘the Halli episode is a sort of *Morkinskinna* writ small.’⁷¹ While Ármann is speaking in strictly organisational terms, *Sneglu-Halla þáttir* is more generally typified by diminution, by which events which elsewhere in the text have wider social, spiritual, or symbolic ramifications are here attenuated to bathetic effect. Halli is characterised by his enormous and unrefined appetite, particularly in his preference for consuming *grautr* (porridge or gruel). Haraldr makes Halli the following promise *eigi spari ek mat við þik*;⁷² many of the episodes in *Sneglu-Halla þáttir* consequently play on the idea of food as a reward or, when offered in excess, a threat.⁷³ In a general sense, Haraldr’s relationship with Halli reduces the complex etiquette conventions between lord and retainer to the most basic element of hospitality – the provision of food. In specific terms, a parallel can be drawn with a scene preceding *Sneglu-Halla þáttir*, in which Hákon Ívarsson disguises himself to infiltrate Haraldr’s camp: *Ok of kveldit, er þeir snæddu er á landi váru, þá kom at þeim einn fátækr maðr ok bað matar ok var*

⁷⁰ *Flateyjarbók* IV, 200-15.

⁷¹ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 122.

⁷² *Morkinskinna* I, 271, ‘I will not withhold food from you.’

⁷³ The frequent presence of food, eating and the mouth in *Sneglu-Halla þáttir* has been commented on by Ármann Jakobsson, who equates eating and skaldic verse as similar practices when issuing from the mouth of a parochial Icelander; ‘Food and the North-Icelandic Identity in 13th-century Iceland and Norway’, in Sverrir Jakobsson, ed., *Images of the North: Histories – Identities – Ideas*, *Studia Imagologica* 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 69-79.

alltǫtrugr, en þeir gáfu honum.⁷⁴ This impoverished man turns out to be Hákon, who uses his disguise to exploit the hospitality of the *hirð*, make his escape, and further antagonise his rival King Haraldr. When Haraldr is in conflict with a magnate, feeding a humble stranger has serious repercussions for the king but in the case of Halli, the poor Icander's motives are not duplicitous or aggressive but instead self-interested: Halli, for all his raucous antics, is easier to contend with than Hákon.

The narrative insurrection engendered by a *þáttr*, typified by the elongation of the narrative duration of everyday events (see 3.5.4), might seem to complement poorly a programme of thematic diminution. In relation to *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*, the downsizing of issues of national political consequence to the scale of the personal impulses of an impoverished Icander has the attendant implication of lowering the stakes of interpersonal interaction with Haraldr, with the king's clashes with more powerful figures often having negative consequences for his kingdom (see 7.1.3). Such is the scope of the narrative effect the *þættir* produce within *Morkinskinna* that they attain a central role in characterising kings and *hirðir*, which leads to rulers and retainers being assessed as critically for their mundane activities as for their momentous ones. *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* renders Haraldr's *hirð* in the most trivial of terms: the mythological battle between Þórr and Geirrðr is reduced to the brawl between a blacksmith and a tanner, conflict between retainers is reduced to the squabbling of impoverished Icanders over whose youth was more pitiful, and even the skaldic verse supplied often references Halli's debased state rather than praising the nobility of the figures with whom he interacts.⁷⁵ The Frisian dwarf Túta, acting as a diminutive proxy for Haraldr *harðráði*, who renders the king's violent potential harmless when he is clad in his lord's war gear in the *hǫfuðlausn* scene, is emblematic of the reduction of serious threat to the point of

⁷⁴ *Morkinskinna* I, 267. 'And during evening, when those men who were on land took their meal, then a poor man, who was completely clad in rags, came to them and asked for food and they gave it to him.'

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 273-5.

farce during the *páttr*. The *hirð* presented here is microcosmic in the most literal sense of the word, diminishing grander types until they fit the confines of this cramped and chaotic social space.⁷⁶ This has obvious utility for Halli, who thrives in this comic realm of the *páttr*, a situation that he himself partially engineers in which his rowdy actions have less serious consequences, but this diminution also allows Haraldr to demonstrate his wit and wisdom without strong political challenge: in contrast with the company he keeps Haraldr appears a nobler and more preeminent figure.

This reading of the relationship between lord and retainer is somewhat cynical, however, and over-stresses the transactional nature of the relationship between Haraldr and Halli. Haraldr is protective of his poor retainer and acts in defence of Halli when he faces aggression from Þjóðólfr and Einarr fluga, defusing the violent potential of these interactions.⁷⁷ In the *Morkinskinna* version, Halli and Haraldr's relationship is often convivial and, in his own idiosyncratic manner, Halli is able to serve as a useful retainer to his king. Halli's trickery humbles Einarr fluga, a powerful chieftain with whom Haraldr has a tumultuous relationship: *ok var þá vingan þeira góð, þó at þat léki nokkvat á ýmsu*.⁷⁸ Halli's actions moderate the behaviour of a proud and aggressive magnate and while he does not act in this manner upon the king's command, his acquisitive course of action is very much in keeping with Haraldr's political goals of suppressing dissenting magnates elsewhere in *Morkinskinna*. As in the case of *Auðunar páttr*, Haraldr is unexpectedly well served by the stubborn self-interest of *pættir* characters.

⁷⁶ Turco has argued extensively for Halli as a type of Loki figure, here reduced to causing trouble of a much smaller scale; 'Loki, *Sneglu-Halla páttr*, and the Case for a Skaldic Prosaics', 208-19. It is unnecessary to agree with all of Turco's specific parallels between the behaviour of these two tricksters, some of which are only found in the *Flateyjarbók* version, to argue for Halli's behaviour making general mythological allusions to Loki as both are presented as barely domesticated troublemakers in elite environments.

⁷⁷ *Morkinskinna* I, 277-81

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 278. 'And at that point their friendship was good, although their relationship swung somewhat between good and bad.'

Also like Auðun, Halli determines to carry out a journey to Denmark, but first promises Haraldr he will return.⁷⁹ While a guest of a Danish chieftain, Halli wagers he can quieten the riotous crowd at a *þing*, which he achieves through proclaiming a confected legal case based on the loss of a strange assortment of household items, perplexing those gathered into silence.⁸⁰ Halli then travels to England where he stays with the king of England, for whom he composes a poem. While one of the king's followers praises the poem's quality, Halli is in haste to leave and, after he outwits an attempt by the king to cheat him of his reward, the verse is revealed to be a meaningless invention: *En kvæði þetta var endilausa ein, ok kvað hann þat fram af munni sér.*⁸¹ These two unusual scenes do not often feature prominently in studies of Sneglu-Halli's characterisation and may appear to simply function as further examples of his trickster role but Halli's ambiguous behaviour in non-Norwegian courts also serves as a profession of loyalty to Haraldr complementary to the Iclander's unruly character. The failure of intimacy between Halli and other rulers is demonstrated in the most literal terms possible when his words become meaningless gibberish that they cannot decode: it could be said that other leaders do not understand Halli as Haraldr harðráði does. The *Morkinskinna* version of *Sneglu-Halla þáttur* concludes not with Halli's ignominious death, as is the case in *Flateyjarbók*, but with a simple statement of Halli's return to Haraldr's company with the implication of enduring intimacy between the two men.⁸²

7.1.5 The Undisciplined *hirð*

This depiction of Haraldr harðráði's reign is the most extensive and nuanced exploration of a political ideology unique to *Morkinskinna* amongst the *konungasögur* in

⁷⁹ Ibid., 281.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 281.

⁸¹ Ibid., 283. 'But that verse was nonsense and he improvised it himself'. For further discussion, see Anthony Faulkes, 'What was Viking Poetry For?', Inaugural lecture, University of Birmingham (1993), 18.

⁸² *Morkinskinna I*, 284.

presenting a positive form of kingship that does not centre upon benevolent and unchallenged authority. The factors that influence this depiction of the unruly ruler can be summarised as follows. In the first place, strife, both interpersonal and political, is an unavoidable issue for Norwegian kings and a typifying feature of this period of Norwegian history. Rivalry between monarchs, prior to the death of Sigurðr jórsalafari is presented in terms of familial rivalries or matters of personal prestige that rarely affect the stability or prosperity of Norway. Conflicts between kings and magnates, conversely, are exceptionally destructive and Haraldr's inability to maintain the support of powerful chieftains is suggested to pose a serious political threat to his authority as the opposition or absence of elite figures diminishes the stability and prestige of his *hirð*. An alternative social system to the unproductive relationships between the king and magnates is provided in the *þættir*, wherein marginal characters are introduced, repopulating the *hirð* and reconfiguring it in their own image. These peripheral characters also have tempestuous relationships with Haraldr, but these interactions do not have far-reaching political consequences and are productively resolved in a manner beneficial for both the king and low-status figures.

In the fruitful relationship between a cantankerous, proud, and wily lord and the likeminded men who come to serve him, the undisciplined *hirð* is born. In this space, expected values of reciprocity, loyalty and obedience are disrupted: *þættir* characters maintain an independence of speech and action, often placing their own prosperity at least on par with service to their king. Together, the *þættir* constitute an alternative rendition of Norwegian society in which honouring or placating disruptive newcomers is a chief priority. Haraldr's style of rule changes when dealing with such figures, with violent struggle giving way to negotiation, compromise, testing, and trickery in a space where such behaviours are not weaknesses, but rather apt tools through which to rule. The above analysis challenges the traditional argument that Haraldr is presented as an inferior king, whose lack of self-control is

harshly judged by the redactor of *Morkinskinna*. Haraldr's reign is subject to the greatest number of narrative insurrections in *Morkinskinna* but this does not reduce his presentation to that of an ineffective king, pliant to the demands of the socially insignificant. Unlike Indrebø or Ármann Jakobsson who argue for a 'mixed' depiction of Haraldr's character that implies his complexity,⁸³ I argue in this thesis that Haraldr's varying temperament has a political and literary utility, in fostering the turbulent conditions in which *þættir* can be included and *þættir* characters thrive. Deep respect for Haraldr is intermingled with regular admissions of his flaws, but his crucial legacy in *Morkinskinna* is the undisciplined *hirð* he fosters in which traditional hierarchies are loosened without a consequent slide into social anarchy.

Haraldr only returns to a more conventional mode of kingship, in uniting Norwegian magnates behind him and acting with aggressive authority, in his disastrous decision to invade England (see 4.5).⁸⁴ Haraldr's preparations to invade are placed in parallel with the death of Úlfr stallari, the most loyal of Haraldr's Icelandic retainers, with the juxtaposition of the two events suggesting a transition from prosperous social interactions with Icelanders to disastrous military leadership of the Norwegian *mannval* (elite company).⁸⁵ Haraldr eulogises Úlfr in the following terms: *Hér liggir nú sá maðr er dyggvastr var ok dróttinhollastr*.⁸⁶ This statement, coupled with the burial of a dutiful Iclander, makes a fitting symbolic end to the long central section of the account of Haraldr's reign wherein the loyal service of Icelanders is central to the depiction of the king's effective if tumultuous rule and marks the beginning of his noble if foolhardy downfall.

⁸³ Indrebø, 'Harald Hardraade i *Morkinskinna*', 173-80; Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Individual and the Ideal: The Representation of Royalty in *Morkinskinna*', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 99.1 (2000), 71-86, at 80.

⁸⁴ *Morkinskinna I*, 299.

⁸⁵ On an interpersonal level Úlfr might also be considered as Haraldr's most steadfast friend, with the loss of his advice implied to weaken the king's judgement; see Theodore Andersson, *The Partisan Muse*, 123; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Viking Friendship*, 37, 66.

⁸⁶ *Morkinskinna I*, 303. 'Here lies that man who was most faithful and most loyal to his lord.'

Prior to his expedition to England, the depiction of Haraldr's *hirð* stresses the centrality of interactions with individuals who are not already established members of the Norwegian elite to demonstrating a king's wisdom and power, while also serving as a fantasy of Icelandic dignity and consequence abroad. The Icelandic redactor of *Morkinskinna* not only refers to the tradition of Haraldr's great friendship with Icelanders but also considers what forms such friendships could take to ensure the dignity of their countrymen. The concept of a *hirð* where poorer newcomers are the most prominent members and enjoy the deepest intimacy with a king is acknowledged to be destabilising but not destructive and provides a place for the Icелander in Norwegian narrative history. What has been overlooked in other discussions of the social dynamics operating within *Morkinskinna* is that Icelanders only predominate in Haraldr's reign – in the portions of the text concerning other kings, *þættir* centred on inconsequential Norwegians are also present and fulfil a comparable function. An interest in the characterisation of Icelanders is undeniably an important theme within the text but should be understood as an aspect of a broader interest in the interactions of the powerful and the powerless (see 3.6).

7.2 Magnús berfœttr

The sections of *Morkinskinna* devoted to the two other kings who preside over undisciplined *hirðir*, Magnús berfœttr and Sigurðr jórsalafari, constitute briefer versions of the political ideology and literary structuring presented in full during the account of the reign of Haraldr harðráði. As such, the depiction of neither king warrants as extensive a discussion as their forebear Haraldr, although care will be taken to demonstrate variations on the themes detailed above in relation to the royal biographies of both men. Kings are characterised with care in *Morkinskinna* and even subtle distinctions in their temperament are developed within the narrative.

The narrative concerning Magnús berfœttr appears atypical in *Morkinskinna* in resembling an *orrostusaga* of the *Fagrskinna* type (see 4.2), with the bulk of the prose devoted to Magnús's harrying in Scotland and Ireland and a high concentration of skaldic verses being supplied to embellish the account of his campaigns.⁸⁷ In actuality, the narrative concerning Magnús contains all the elements discussed in relation to Haraldr, above, but with differences in weighting that markedly influence Magnús's legacy. The period of rivalry with a co-ruler is introduced following the death of Óláfr kyrri when the Þrændir support Hákon Magnússon as their king, whose status as foster-son to the powerful magnate Steigar-Þórir echoes the close relationship of Einarr þambarskelfir and Magnús góði (see 6.1.2). Hákon's promises of friendship to his subjects are contrasted with Magnús berfœttr's acquisitiveness in a manner reminiscent of the initial characterisations of Magnús góði and Haraldr harðráði (see 7.1.2), but the conflict never reaches a head as Hákon dies suddenly chasing a ptarmigan.⁸⁸ The motif of violent struggle between the king and a powerful magnate is repeated at length (see 7.1.3), with Magnús engaging in open warfare with Steigar-Þórir before hanging him. Steigar-Þórir's corpulence can be compared to Einarr þambarskelfir's agedness in presenting magnates who continue to challenge their king's authority despite their physical decline. Even more pointedly than in relation to Haraldr harðráði's disputes with local chieftains, the senseless cost of conflict between king and magnate is portrayed in the hanging of Egill Áskelsson, a universally-respected figure who, despite his enmity to Magnús, the king is loath to kill: *Ok í því þótti monnum þat sýnask at konungr vildi beðinn hafa verit at Egill gengi undan.*⁸⁹ The notion that Magnús lacks retainers of sufficient bravery to intercede to correct his behaviour is an important theme throughout his royal biography.

⁸⁷ Else Mundal, 'King Magnús Bareleg's adventures in the West: the making of a King's Saga', in John Sheehan and Donnchadh Ó Corráin, eds, *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West*, Proceedings of the Fifteenth Viking Congress (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 240-7, at 246.

⁸⁸ *Morkinskinna II*, 16-8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 28. 'And therefore it seemed to people that this revealed that the king wanted to have been asked that Egill be allowed to walk from under the scaffold.'

The major difference between the structuring of the reigns of Haraldr harðráði and Magnús berfœttr is the comparative lack of *þættir* associated with the latter king and the consequent lack of narrative space devoted to demonstrating elements of Magnús's character beyond his aggressive militarism. In terms of episodes in which narrative insurrection is engendered by the presence of a destabilising figure in an expansive episode, two *þættir* can be distinguished – one concerning Sveinki Steinarsson and the other a Norman knight named Giffarðr. The former begins with Magnús's attempts to subjugate Sveinki, one of the most remote chieftains in his realm, by sending his emissary, Sigurðr ullstreng, to exile the magnate if he will not submit.⁹⁰ Sveinki appears in a disguise, a regular motif for noble figures in *Morkinskinna* that recasts them as disruptive outsiders while concealed,⁹¹ and he issues oblique and disparaging aphorisms regarding the intentions of the king, before inciting his men to attack the emissaries. Magnús responds with a formulation that summarises the root of tensions between aggressive kings and their ambitious magnates:

‘Of mjök dragask lendir menn þá fram er þeir vilja eigi þess gæta er til konungs kœmr, ok hefir þat aldri fyrr vel gefizk í þessu landi; fyrst um daga Óláfs konunga helga, mál þeira Erlings Skjálgssonar, svá ok um Einar þambarskelfi er jafnaðisk í ríki við Harald konung, frænda várn. Svá gafsk nú ok Steigar-Þori ok Agli. Nú kunna þeir eigi sjálfir meta sik, enda er bæði at Sveinki er ríkr, ok til þess ætlar hann ef hann vill við mik þreyta.’⁹²

‘The landed men put themselves forward too much as it is apparent that they do not wish to respect what is due to a king and holding such an attitude has never ended well in this land previously; first, in the days of King Óláfr helgi, with those matters

⁹⁰ Sveinki is specified as dwelling near the river Elfr, which would place him at the south-eastern extremity of Magnús' sphere of influence. Despite his high status in the region, it is again notable that Sveinki is stressed to have a peripheral relationship to the king.

⁹¹ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 215-29.

⁹² *Morkinskinna II*, 34.

concerning Erlingr Skjálgsson, similarly, when Einarr þambarskelfir proclaimed himself equal in power with King Haraldr, our kinsman. It also proved the same recently with Steigar-Þórir and Egill. Such men do not know the true value of their rank, and indeed Sveinki is as intemperate as he is powerful, if he wishes to take me on.’

Here the macro-political struggle between king and magnate is explicitly commented upon within *Morkinskinna* as a unifying feature across the undisciplined *hirðir* and a primary motivator of social unrest, as argued for in this thesis. Intriguingly, this trend is extended back beyond the text’s opening during the reign of Magnús góði to include the disputes between St. Óláfr and his *lendir menn* (see 4.3). As St. Óláfr’s reign is the conventional pinnacle of medieval Norwegian historiography, his inclusion in this list suggests that while such conflicts with the Norwegian nobility are disruptive they need not be interpreted as detrimental to a king’s legacy and that kings who are unable to harmonise elite society should not be considered as less impressive than their better-loved counterparts.

From the point of Magnús issuing such a threatening pronouncement, the encounter might be expected to escalate towards a violent conclusion. At this juncture, however, the narrative refocuses from the mustering of large opposing forces to a cast of three: King Magnús, Sveinki, and the king’s emissary, Kolbeinn klakka. The ensuing sequence, which is composed almost entirely of dialogue, is in keeping with the narrower focus on small-scale action typical of the *þættir*, as well as the increased length of this effort at diplomacy contrasting with the previous account of the gathering forces that is rendered synoptically. With the to-and-fro movements of Kolbeinn driving the sequence’s narrative, the aptest comparison is with the similarly structured *Brands þáttur orva* (see 3.4): in both cases, figures of noble mien reach compromise and understanding through not only their wisdom but the efforts of a harried messenger. Kolbeinn is more active than Þjóðólfr, his counterpart in

Brands þáttr, in tacitly ignoring some of his king's command and manipulating the offers made by Magnús and Steinki to ensure they appear more generous to the recipient, essentially concealing the truculence of both parties from one another. The king learns the values of clemency and acquiesces to a short exile of three years for Sveinki, while Sveinki recants his opposition to Magnús with the wry formulation: '*Hvat sé heldr þá en ek gøra konunugi eigi skapraun í hêrvist minni?*'⁹³ Both men depart in dignity, with Magnús recalling Sveinki to Norway after the Elfr district is raided in the absence of a strong local leader. The *þáttr* ends with an assertion of the two men's reconciliation and friendship. The key themes are of compromise and humility on the part of powerful men, virtues that may only be negotiated in the extended dialogic sequences possible in a *þáttr*. Kolbeinn is an exemplary member of Magnús's undisciplined *hirð*, going against his king's wishes in a manner that proves to serve his lord more loyally and maintaining his disruptive independence to fulfil a diplomatic function. Through Kolbeinn's efforts, the sequence concludes with a rare moment of a proud magnate achieving intimacy with a prouder king.

Giffarðs þáttr is also atypical by the standards of *Morkinskinna* in terms of the character and themes it introduces. Giffarðr is a Norman knight who travels to Magnús's *hirð* to offer the king his service. While initially welcomed into the king's company, Giffarðr soon humiliates himself when he is absent from a battle with the forces of King Ingi Steinkelsson and only returns to the *hirð* when Magnús is victorious. Giffarðr leaves for England in disgrace, only to be insulted in a verse by Eldjárn, an Icelandic skald, who denounces the Norman's laziness during the voyage. Giffarðr, offended, seeks recompense on arrival in England from a local reeve but Eldjárn recites a different verse when challenged, which is in effusive praise of Giffarðr military prowess – a piece of mockery that Giffarðr cannot expose

⁹³ *Morkinskinna II*, 37. 'What is better for me than not testing the king's temper with my presence here?'

without shaming himself.⁹⁴ The episode is heavily prosimetric and Gade makes a convincing argument for the sequence being constructed around authentic verses pertaining to Giffarðr as a historical figure and for it having been present in the oldest *Morkinskinna*, c.1220.⁹⁵ This is one of the very few *þættir* in *Morkinskinna* that can be considered a genuine digression, in removing Magnús and Norway from the narrative focus to solely recount Giffarðr's journey to England. The atypical absence of the presiding king from the episode also seems to distinguish this episode from the other *þættir* in the mind of the redactor, who unusually supplies comments that provide a narrative frame for the episode: *ok er nú at segja frá honum lítit ... Ok er nú lokit frá þeim at segja*.⁹⁶ Giffarðr does not reappear in the saga, leaving his ignominious treatment by an Icelander as his lasting legacy.

The unusual structure of the material related to Giffarðr differentiates this sequence from the typical *þættir* in *Morkinskinna*, at the core of which is the intimacy between low-status figures and kings (see 3.4). Here, however, the matter at hand is rather the incompatibility of lord and retainer, as the cowardly Giffarðr cannot provide suitable service to the warlike Magnús. Furthermore, Giffarðr's shameful conduct leads to his presentation as having an inverse function to a career skald: whereas a skald composes verses about a king for profit, Giffarðr has verses composed about him, in one instance by the king himself, to his detriment. Giffarðr cannot maintain close proximity to the king and when he leaves the *hirð* he is tormented and outwitted by the figure he stands in opposition to – the cunning Icelandic skald. When considered in relation to Magnús berfœttr's reign more broadly, the suggestion seems to be that the king does not achieve the same renown as his grandfather Haraldr harðráði due to the quality of his *hirð*. Haraldr is supported by figures who travel to Norway

⁹⁴ Ibid., 54-6.

⁹⁵ Kari Ellen Gade, 'Morkinskinna's Giffarðspáttir: Literary Fiction or Historical Fact?', *Gripla*, 11 (2000), 181-97, at 181-6.

⁹⁶ *Morkinskinna II*, 54-6. 'And there is now a little more to say about him ... And this is now the end of what is said about that.'

to serve him yet who blend their loyalty with unruly independence that allows them to forthrightly serve their king and advance their interests. Giffarðr, whose fine words promising loyal service are undercut by his cowardice, is unable to sustain the disruptive presence at the centre of the *hirð* typical of *þættir* characters, leaving his reputation to be decided upon by others. Gade suggests the political backdrop to Giffarðr's presence in Norway was as an emissary for Anglo-Norman earls seeking Magnús's support in overthrowing Henry I of England.⁹⁷ If this is the case, he would be culpable in instigating the campaign that ultimately leads to Magnús's death. It is unclear to what extent the redactor of *Morkinskinna* would have been aware of this subtext to Giffarðr's presence but it is of note that the account of the Norman's ignominious exploits shortly precedes the lengthy sequence detailing Magnús's death at the hands of an Irish army.⁹⁸ In a more general sense, the *Morkinskinna* account synthesises with Gade's suggested historical context, in suggesting that the arrival of a deficient retainer prefigures the king's downfall, where men of fiercer temperament might have corrected their lord's course.

7.3. Sigurðr jórsalafari

The tactics by which such corrections of a king's actions are enacted by figures within the *hirð* are best demonstrated in relation to Sigurðr jórsalafari, whose behaviour exceeds those of his forebears in both the positive and negative extreme.⁹⁹ Sigurðr gains his sobriquet from his role in leading the so-called Norwegian Crusade, an expedition to Jerusalem of which different portions of the journey function as raids, occupations, diplomatic missions,

⁹⁷ Gade, 'Morkinskinna's Giffarðspátttr', 192-3.

⁹⁸ *Morkinskinna II*, 56-63.

⁹⁹ For a more extended version of this discussion of the tactics by which Sigurðr's temperament is constrained, see Thomas Morcom, 'Inclusive Masculinity in *Morkinskinna* and the Defusal of Kingly Aggression', in Gareth Lloyd Evans and Jessica Hancock, eds, *Old Norse Masculinities* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2020), 127-46.

and religious war.¹⁰⁰ Sigurðr's youthful expedition echoes Haraldr harðráði's earlier journey to Byzantium in providing an aggressive foreign sojourn by which militaristic Norwegian kings can demonstrate their mettle (see 7.1.1) yet important differences exist between the two sequences. In opposition to Haraldr's use of disguise and entry into service of the Byzantine emperor, Sigurðr offers an aggressive performance of his nobility to foreign monarchs, in what might be considered a display of calculated haughtiness. Ármann Jakobsson has produced an insightful reading of Sigurðr's journey, stressing the effectiveness of the Norwegian king's performance of aristocratic peerlessness in spite of the comparative poverty and marginality of the nation he rules.¹⁰¹

The episode in which Sigurðr suppresses his reaction to the vast wealth being bestowed on him by the Byzantine Emperor Kirjalax is indicative of this aggrandisement of the Norwegian king. The value of Kirjalax's gifts increases three times, scaling from bags of gold and silver, to troughs of gold until, finally, the troughs are overflowing with *purpuragull* (purple gold) and topped by two magnificent arm-rings.¹⁰² The emotiveness of Sigurðr's response increases in tandem, from a refusal to look at the gift, to an acknowledgement of its worth, until, on putting on the arm-rings, he thanks his host in Greek for his generosity; in each instance, however, Sigurðr is careful to distribute the wealth amongst his men.¹⁰³ Multiple, seemingly conflicting, elements of Sigurðr's characterisation intersect here: his rapacious desire to accrue wealth combines with his munificence in redistributing it, and his

¹⁰⁰ For further historical and literary references to this military campaign see Leila K. Norako, 'Crusading Gone Global? The Icelandic *Magnússona Saga's* Visions of the World and Home', *Literature Compass*, 11.7 (2014), 424-34; Richard Unger, 'The Northern Crusaders: The Logistics of English and Other Northern Crusader Fleets', in John Pryor, ed., *Logistics of Warfare in the Age of the Crusades: Proceedings of a Workshop held at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 251-73.

¹⁰¹ Ármann Jakobsson, 'Image is Everything', 136-7.

¹⁰² *Morkinskinna II*, 96. *Pupuragull* is a hapax legomenon and seems to be an intensification of the more conventional red gold with the purple colour having connotations of the imperial splendour of Byzantium.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 96-7. This episode could be seen as an inversion of the structure of *Brands þáttur 9rva*, where an Icelander must demonstrate his generosity by being willing to give expensive gifts on three consecutive occasions, with the manner in which the third is delivered also demonstrating his wisdom (see 3.4).

haughty pride in twice snubbing Kirjalax is tempered by the wisdom he exhibits in expressing gratitude in the third instance. During his youthful journeys, Sigurðr's leadership is typified by its ferocity, in its association with his martial prowess and his unshakeable confidence in his noble quality, but the king retains a degree of moderation in his actions that allows him to be celebrated as an effective ruler. Sigurðr's actions abroad, however, align him more closely with the more powerful kings and emperors with whom he comes into contact, unlike Haraldr, whose performance of the role of a retainer associates him with the figures who will later offer him their service in Norway. This is a crucial distinguishing feature of the two kings – Haraldr's youthful experience leaves him more sensitive to the demands of his retainers than the proud Sigurðr.

On his return to Norway, Sigurðr divides the kingdom with his half-brother Eysteinn Magnússon (see 6.3), re-establishing a period of co-rule in which the opposing characters of rival monarchs are contrasted. *Morkinskinna* dramatizes this relationship in an episode in which Eysteinn is alerted to Sigurðr's increasing arrogance: the latter king, described as *fálátr* (silent) and *ókátr* (gloomy), honours only those who accompanied him on his foreign adventures.¹⁰⁴ The traits that were positively represented in Sigurðr's youth – his preferential treatment of the men he commands and his haughtiness – are taken to oppressive extremes as they are converted into unjust favouritism and distant aloofness. Implicit in his rejection of members of Eysteinn's *hirð* is Sigurðr's belief that his nobility exceeds that of his half-brother, as attested by Eysteinn's remonstrative appeal: *Erum vit eigi synir Magnúss konungs jafnbornir?*¹⁰⁵ Sigurðr's desire to achieve pre-eminence at the expense of his brother is presented as resulting from an unbalanced temperament and as a deficit in need of correction.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 131.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 132. 'Are we not King Magnús' sons of equal birth?'

The ensuing confrontation takes the form of a *mannjafnaðr*, a boasting contest in which both kings wittily recount their past achievements in an extended and frank dialogue, the social efficacy of which mirrors the productive dialogic sparring typical of the *þættir*. Sigurðr stresses his physical strength and martial achievements in far-off lands while Eysteinn emphasises his domestic legacy and legal acumen before offering these words as a final, stinging rejoinder:

‘Fórt svá fyrst ór landinu at þér var féfátt, ok gerðum vit Óláfr konungr þik í brot sem systur okkra, en eigi náir þú svá landinu at ek leysa þann knútinn. Líti nú vitrir menn á hvat þú hefir umfram. Ok vita skulu þér þat, gullhálsanir, at menn munu enn jafnask við yðr í Nóregi.’¹⁰⁶

‘You were short of money when you first travelled from the country, and King Óláfr and I gave you away as if you were our sister, and you will not gain control of the country so that I will loosen that knot. Now let wise men behold what you have done to surpass me. And you and your gold-necks shall know that men may be equal to you in Norway.’

The boasts and counter-boasts of Sigurðr and Eysteinn demonstrate the disparity between the attributes each individual prioritises in a great ruler. Yet Eysteinn’s equation of his funding of Sigurðr’s expedition with providing a dowry for a sister cautions his rival king against asserting the dominance of his mode of rule.¹⁰⁷ Sigurðr’s voyage is the experience that situates aggression and pride as central to his identity, but Eysteinn reconstrues his co-ruler’s

¹⁰⁶ *Morkinskinna II*, 134. The (un)tying of knots is referenced throughout the *mannjafnaðr* and appears to be an idiomatic signifier of one-upmanship. See Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 457.

¹⁰⁷ Carolyne Larrington has discussed the particular risk associated with utilising feminising insults in Eysteinn and Sigurðr’s *mannjafnaðr*, albeit in the distinct variant of the episode present within *Heimskringla*. See Carolyne Larrington, *Brothers and Sisters in Medieval European Literature* (York: Boydell and Brewer, 2015), 126. It is of note in the *Heimskringla* account, Sigurðr is the first to accuse his brother of effeminacy claiming to Eysteinn that he stayed at home ‘sem dóttir föður þíns’ (as your father’s daughter); *Heimskringla III*, 261.

exploits in a passive and feminine mode, humorously revealing the fragility and subjectivity of Sigurðr's martial identity.

Politically, the contest asserts, as Marianne Kalinke has argued, that the traits embodied by both kings are necessary to ensure a golden age in Norway: 'What *Morkinskinna* depicts in *Sigurðs saga Jórsalafara* is an ideal monarchy – but one that achieves its greatness only through the combined talents of the brothers. Either ruler, had he been charged with sole responsibility for the realm, would have been deficient.'¹⁰⁸ This, in turn, curtails the excesses either king might be susceptible to. In the period of co-rule, Sigurðr does not degenerate into a furious *berserkr*-type combatant and Eysteinn does not retreat into a less potent clerical identity — each man is kept within the limits of productive kingship by the counter-example of the other monarch.¹⁰⁹ *Morkinskinna*'s redactor argues that idealised kingship is unattainable by actual kings: in this manner compromise and comparison between leaders forms the basis for success on both a national and personal level.

After Eysteinn's death, Sigurðr's characterisation shifts markedly, as the king becomes more negative and unstable, a transformation that the redactor has foreshadowed several times throughout the more productive period of co-rule: *Ok þó var þat er á leið ævi hans at varla fekk hann gætt skaplyndis síns né hugar at eigi yrði þat stundum með miklu áfelli ok þunglingum hlutum.*¹¹⁰ Critics have viewed this as a comparatively sensitive depiction of the king's deterioration into a psychotic form of mental illness, a diagnosis that

¹⁰⁸ Marianne Kalinke, 'Sigurðar saga Jórsalafara: The Fictionalization of Fact in *Morkinskinna*', *Scandinavian Studies* 56.2 (1984), 152-67, at 164. Larrington similarly argues for a 'successful strategy of counter-identification' as the productive end point of the two kings' sibling rivalry, see *Brothers and Sisters in Medieval European Literature*, 127.

¹⁰⁹ For further discussion of clerical masculinity as a subject of suspicion and potential associations with effeminacy in the medieval period, see Pat Cullum, 'Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression in Late Medieval England', in Dawn Hadley, ed. *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 2014), 178-96.

¹¹⁰ *Morkinskinna II*, 131. 'And yet it came to pass in his lifetime that he could hardly control his temper or mind so that it was not at times troubled with great suffering and heavy oppression.'

fits the frequent references to Sigurðr's depression and emotional instability.¹¹¹ In addition to this medical prognosis, which should be regarded with caution as a modern psychological reading of a medieval literary characterisation, the king's instability during his sole rulership can be viewed as a phase in which the traits that typified his mode of kingship previously are warped to dangerous excess. It is, therefore, fitting that Sigurðr's condition is referred to as *vannstilli* (lacking moderation or self-control): the death of Eysteinn has destroyed the moderating force on Sigurðr's rule and, without this limiting factor, the surviving king's aggressive and proud traits become ungovernable.¹¹²

Considering the expectation for retainers to emulate their king's qualities (see 7), it would seem reasonable for an aggressive, unconstrained monarch to foster a *hirð* typified by similar values. The presentations of the undisciplined *hirðir* within *Morkinskinna* reject the notion that elite spaces should be typified by conformity and cohesion, however, with scenes being provided that concern efforts by lower-status members of the *hirð* to challenge and correct Sigurðr's behaviour. Each of the three episodes considered here bears all the hallmarks of *þættir*, in introducing a disruptive character within a discordant narrative structure, although their comparative brevity and depiction of poorer Norwegians rather than Icelanders has led to them not previously being characterised as such.

In the first episode, the king, consumed by a dark mood, tosses a precious book onto the fire and strikes the queen. The episode's narrative focus then shifts to Óttarr birtingr, a farmer's son who serves as a *kertissveinn* ('candle-boy'), a menial role within the *hirð*. Óttarr seizes the book from the flames and remonstrates gently with the king, urging him to cast off

¹¹¹ Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Madness of King Sigurðr: Narrating Insanity in an Old Norse Kings' Saga', in Sally Crawford and Christina Lee, eds, *Social Dimensions of Medieval Disease and Disability*, Studies in Early Medicine 3 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2014), 29-35.

¹¹² *Morkinskinna II*, 146.

his dejection for the sake of his friends and queen, who have become similarly depressed at the king's imbalance.¹¹³ Sigurðr is outraged and responds threateningly:

Þá svaraði konungr: 'Hvat muntu kenna mér ráð, inn versti kotkarlsson ok innar minnstu ættar?' – hljóp upp þegar ok brá sverði ok lét sem hann myndi hoggva hann. Óttarr stóð réttr ok brásk øngan veg við, en konungr brá flötu sverðinu er ofan kom at höfðinu. En fyrst reiddi hann báðum höndum, en sletti nú flötu á síðu honum. Þá þagnaði konungr ok settisk niðr í sætit, ok þögðu ok allir aðrir.¹¹⁴

Then the king answered: 'Who are you to advise me, worst son of a cottager and of the lowest birth?' He leapt up immediately and drew his sword and made as if would strike him. Óttarr stood upright and did not yield in any way, but the king quickly turned the sword to its flat side when it came down towards Óttarr's head. And at first, he swung with both hands, but he instead slapped the flat of the sword on Óttarr's flank. Then the king was silent and sat down in his seat and all others there were also silent.

Sigurðr is then mollified and makes a speech condemning the eminent members of the *hirð* who let him act unjustly and praising Óttarr for his bravery and wisdom in defusing the king's rashness. He concludes by rewarding Óttarr in promoting him to the distinguished rank of *lendr maðr*.¹¹⁵

Óttarr's characterisation is deftly balanced, with the interplay between his low-status traits and praiseworthy qualities being stressed: *svart á hárslit, lítill ok vaskligr ok kurteiss*,

¹¹³ Ibid., 139-40. There may be some humour present in the king's 'candle-boy' so strictly managing the proper use of fire in the king's company.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 140.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 140.

*døkkliðaðr ok þó vel um sik.*¹¹⁶ Óttarr—small, swarthy, and of low status—is depicted as subordinate to Sigurðr but is not, however, condemned for failing to emulate the example of his lord: the word *vaskligr*, in particular, is associated with manliness as well as of a display of bravery.¹¹⁷ Óttarr is praised within the *hirð* despite his clear failure to conform to Sigurðr's behaviour, which, as implied by their lack of outrage at the king's actions, more preeminent members of the *hirð* have accepted or assimilated into. Indeed, the strength of the commendation Óttarr receives from Sigurðr stems directly from his resistance to the excessive manner in which his king acts and from the contrast his behaviour provides. In his remonstrance with his lord and non-resistant but unflinching acceptance of what he expects to be his deathblow, Óttarr intermingles respected traits of elite society in his bravery and sense of justice, with an unwillingness to defend himself and disobedience, features usually associated with lesser men. In doing so, Óttarr offers an alternative mode of behaviour within the *hirð* that while disruptive to the ethos established by Sigurðr's actions is, nevertheless, respected enough by the king for him to both tolerate and reward his disobedient retainer and to moderate his aggression.

A similar process occurs in the *þáttr* that concerns Áslákr hani, who confronts Sigurðr when the king demands to eat meat on a Friday in violation of the Christian fasting tradition. By the standards of the *konungasögur*, *Morkinskinna* is secular in tone, rarely attributing spiritual cause to political effect, but Sigurðr's actions clearly contravene the social expectations of the *hirð* and of a ruler of a Christian kingdom. Like Óttarr, Áslákr is described in mixed but subordinate terms: *Ekki var hann ættstórr maðr, hvatr ok lítill vexti.*¹¹⁸ Áslákr's interaction with Sigurðr lacks the dramatic structuring of the *þáttr* concerning

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 139. 'Dark in hair colour, small and valiant and courteous, dark-complexioned and nevertheless fine in and of himself.'

¹¹⁷ It has been noted that the root word *vaskr* not only can be translated as 'manly' but may also have initially been derived from *verr* (a man). See Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 681.

¹¹⁸ *Morkinskinna II*, 145. 'He was not a high-born man, but swift and small in stature.'

Óttarr, since the retainer's resistance, in this case, is purely verbal and the king's threat of violence is reflected in Áslákr's refusal to flee following his disobedience despite his expectation that his king may kill him. Both Óttarr and Áslákr share, however, the passive and static variety of courage that is used to signify an alternative code of conduct to the aggression and irascibility of Sigurðr.

The speech Áslákr gives to curb Sigurðr's voraciousness evokes Christian temperance as exemplified in the king's youthful travels and concludes with the following lines rebuking the king's behaviour: *Ok ef smæri menn gerði slíkt væri stórrefsinga fyrri vert, ok eigi er svá vel skipuð sveitin sem glíkligt er, er engi verður til nema ek, einn lítill maður, um slíkt at ræða.*¹¹⁹ Here the critical utility of the *lítill maður*, the socially insignificant retainer, is stressed as the only brake on the behaviour of kings. The majority of the *hirð*, despite their higher status, are unwilling to challenge their lord, probably through a mixture of fear and awe. Sigurðr himself, over the course of the episode, again shifts from a furious response at this unexpected opposition to an acceptance of the wisdom of an alternative course of action and an adjustment of his behaviour in response to the issues a social inferior has raised, a similar process to that discussed above in relation to the conversations of Haraldr harðráði and Auðun (see 7.1.4).

In the *páttir* in which Sigurðr seeks to marry Cecilía, despite his current queen still being alive, the figure of resistance is ecclesiastical rather than secular: the Bishop Magni.¹²⁰ The fact that a bishop is a central figure in this *páttir* is highly unusual within *Morkinskinna* and reinforces the theme of radically different behavioural models needing to be brought into close proximity with the king to temper his impulses. Furthermore, similarities with the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 145. 'And if lesser men acted that way it would be worth severe punishments, and the band of men is not as well-formed as is expected, that no-one except me, a small man, comes forward to speak about that.'

¹²⁰ A bishop should not, however, be considered a figure exterior to the *hirð* necessarily, as elsewhere archbishops are frequently depicted as having close relationships with Norwegian monarchs and functioning as their most trusted advisors. See Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom*, 74-5.

king's treatment of Óttarr and Áslákr consolidate this episode as a variation on the same topos of conflict between the king and a figure of drastically different temperament acting as a corrective force on the ruler. After Magni forbids the king to remarry, the bishop is depicted in a manner almost identical to Óttarr in the face of the king's wrath: *Ok meðan hann mælti þá stóð hann rétt ok sem hann rétti hálsinn ok væri búinn ef hann reiddi ofan sverðit.*¹²¹ Like Áslákr, Magni refuses to flee from the king's probable violent reprisals, as predicted by his friends. The bishop's response proves even more idiosyncratic, as following his altercation with Sigurðr he laughs with children and plays with his fingers.¹²² This performance of naivety and nonchalance that associates the cleric with young children, a group also distinct from the *hirð* and its ethos, accentuates Magni's attempts to disassociate himself from Sigurðr's style of rule, defusing its aggression through a display of pacifistic moral innocence.

Sigurðr does not come to reward Magni, as was the case in the previous two *þættir*, but the clergyman is unharmed, and when the less moral bishop of Stavanger agrees to the king's request in return for a large payment, it is stated that the king was no happier with this arrangement than with his dealings with Magni.¹²³ This suggests that, in the quandary of facing an irascible king, Magni's behaviour, which is far removed from that expected of a dutiful retainer, is considered at least as valid as other, more conventional, performances of loyalty. Furthermore, as Sigurðr's behaviours contravene social norms in an increasingly serious manner, to the point of threatening his spiritual welfare, as in this example, the figures that seek to correct and counter his behaviour become increasingly extreme in their actions in

¹²¹ *Morkinskinna II*, 150. 'And while he spoke he then stood upright and stretched out his neck as if he were ready if the king swung down the sword.'

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 151. Playing with one's fingers was associated with being happy and at ease. See Kari Ellen Gade, 'On the Recitation of Old Norse Poetry', in Heiko Uecker, ed, *Studien zum Altgermanischen: Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 11 (New York: De Gruyter, 1994), 126-51, at 137.

¹²³ *Morkinskinna II*, 151.

response. While the juxtaposition between Sigurðr and Eysteinn was between two differing modes of productive kingship in the comparison with Magni a behavioural schism has opened between the bishop's piety and the king's unrepentant sinfulness. This attempt to mediate Sigurðr's ungovernable actions through an appeal to the fundamental necessity of adhering to the Christian faith marks the terminal point of the efforts to moderate the king's behaviours: after this episode, all that is recounted concerning Sigurðr in *Morkinskinna* is his unhappy and angry death. On a structural level, this *þáttr* also serves as the last point in the text in which the undisciplined *hirð* operates effectively to temper a king's characterisation through the intercession into the narrative of a behavioural counter-example. As the civil-war period escalates, such productive encounters are no longer depicted as moderating kings' behaviour.

During Sigurðr's sole rule, the combination of unrivalled political authority and clear behavioural transgression on the part of the king validates the presence of more dramatic challenges to the king's authority than those found elsewhere in the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna*. The typical focus on the establishment of intimacy between king and retainer is less pronounced in relation to Sigurðr, with respectful resistance to his excesses providing narrative impetus instead. The notion of the ideal retainer providing a foil to his lord remains present, but here calculated disobedience re-establishes a point of contrast against which Sigurðr can reorient his identity. The values these figures embody are not dissimilar to those that King Eysteinn previously espoused except that the self-consciously subordinate *hirðmenn* cannot coerce Sigurðr through the threat of civil war, unlike a rival king. The equivalence of the counsels of the highest and lowest members of Norwegian society is here further implied, strengthening the argument for competition between co-rulers and interactions between kings and their most disruptive followers being productive, rather than destructive, elements of narrative history. Rather than employing political machination or

legal intrigue, the *þættir* characters' protests are effective on a symbolic level, utilising their physical vulnerability to remind Sigurðr of how far he has strayed from just lordship, which demands the protection of the men under a king's command. In this manner, the undisciplined *hirð* does not descend into overt tyranny, as the membership of individuals with counter-normative traits is acknowledged to have a preservative effect on the group as a whole.

7.4 The Civil War Era

Following Sigurðr's death in 1130, Norway enters the civil war era or *Borgerkrigstida*, which is typified by an increasing number of pretenders to the Norwegian throne, intense factionalism, and the establishment as a norm of full-scale conflict between rivals to the throne. The periodization of post-1130 as distinctive in terms of the destabilisation of Norway is something of a historical convenience; Sigurðr jórsalafari's twilight years are also deeply unstable due to the tensions between his potential successors, Magnús blindi and Haraldr gilli, and the king's failures to control their rivalries.¹²⁴ Furthermore, following Magnús's blinding, castration, and dismemberment, Haraldr gilli enjoys almost two years as sole ruler of Norway in an uneventful and peaceful period that is significantly elided within *Morkinskinna*. A sensitivity to the death of Sigurðr jórsalafari as a crucial boundary in Norwegian history is evident within *Morkinskinna*, however, which shifts radically in terms of narrative mode at this point and justifies a consideration of these later kings separately from their predecessors. The narrator shifts from careful impartiality as to kings' comparative qualities to overt condemnation of their wickedness as the regicides begin to multiply; the previous ideological commitment to presenting the productivity of a variety of modes of

¹²⁴ Ibid., 149.

kingship is here partially abandoned in the face of what the narrator considers to be irredeemable moral transgressions.¹²⁵

The considerable reduction in the length of each royal biography and the consequent diminished characterisations of monarchs constitute a marked shift in the account of this period. The final thirty years narrated in the extant *Morkinskinna* still has a large cast of characters but, rather than engaging in dialogue, many are introduced simply to be killed in the course of the escalating violence. This change in style may be an outcome of a heavy reliance on a specific source for civil war era events: Eiríkr Oddsson's *Hryggjarstykki, which probably focussed upon Sigurðr slembir.¹²⁶ Andersson and Gade suggest this shift in source as a potential reason for the difference in style: 'Whether for this reason or because the events were recent enough to be in more proximate memory, this part of the narrative does not subscribe to the patterns of adventure and dynastic tension that dominated earlier sections of the story.'¹²⁷ Such an explanation is satisfactory to an extent, but still poses the question as to why events closer in time to the composition of *Morkinskinna* are recounted with a comparative lack of detail when their place in Icelandic communal memory would be expected to be stronger.¹²⁸ The phenomenon also has a literary effect, however, as the brevity and comparatively loose structure of the text at this point reduce the nobility of the kings presented in this section and removes them, to a considerable extent, from the parallels in behaviour and action that have united previous rulers. A consideration of this section as

¹²⁵ See for example the condemnation of Haraldr gilli's treatment of Magnús blindi as not befitting a king, Ibid., 162.

¹²⁶ The exact scope of this lost text, which may have been amongst the earliest in saga literature, is unclear and the subject of some debate – scholars have not reached a consensus whether *Hryggjarstykki narrates 1130-39, 1136-39, or 1130-61. For a range of arguments as to the form this lost text may have taken see, *Heimskringla III*, lxiv-lxvii; Anne Holtmark 'Hryggjarstykki', *Historik tidsrift*, 45 (1966), 60-64; Bjarni Guðnason, *Fyrsta sagan*, *Studia Islandica* 37 (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa menningarsjóðs, 1978), 81.

¹²⁷ Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 4.

¹²⁸ For a survey of memory studies in the context of Old Norse literature, see Pernille Hermann, 'Key Aspects of Memory and Remembering in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', in Pernille Hermann, Stephen Mitchell, and Agnes Arnórsdóttir, *Minni and Muninn. Memory in Medieval Nordic Culture* (Turnhout: Brepols 2014), 18-40.

fractured from previous royal biographies in terms of its narrative structure complements the presentation of civil war kings as participating in a distinct era of ruinous Norwegian history.

The *þættir* previously typical of the undisciplined *hirðir*, which focus on the productivity of interactions between kings and unruly figures, are not as prominent a feature of this concluding section of the text. In general, scenic material is no longer provided to narrate intra-*hirð* social issues but instead we see inter-*hirð* violence as kings go to war, with a particular focus on the bloody details of combat, torture, and execution. It is not true to claim, however, that no *þættir* appear towards the conclusion of *Morkinskinna*, although the forms that these episodes take are reconfigured. The *þáttr* closest to producing the effect of narrative insurrection concerns events following the consecration of the Icelandic bishop Magnús Einarsson in the reign of Haraldr gilli. The king is presented as somewhat surly and discourteous, particularly in mimicking his queen's words, but treats the Iclander well, gifting the bishop cushions of precious fabric and a great chalice, both of which are later installed in the church at Skálaholt.¹²⁹

On one level, this *þáttr* continues the trend in *Morkinskinna* of adding nuance to the depictions of kings that may counter the account of their behaviour in synoptic prose – even Haraldr gilli, who is disgraced in both his maiming of Magnús blindi and in his adultery, is capable of a noble act of munificence.¹³⁰ The scene also provides a reason as to how the reprehensible Haraldr came by the nickname *gillikristr* (servant of Christ) through his generosity in relation to the church. The notion that Haraldr's actions towards an Iclander produce his sobriquet, arguably the foundational element of any king's legacy, is reminiscent of the role Halldórr Snorrason has in disseminating information about Haraldr harðráði upon the former's return to Iceland (see 3.1). In this case, the matter being controlled by Icelanders

¹²⁹ *Morkinskinna II*, 166-7.

¹³⁰ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 252-3.

is not just a king's reputation but also his salvation as Magnús decides to place the chalice in his church, rather than sell it, through the following logic: *Ok vilda ek at þeir inir helgu menn allir er hér er af helgum dómum í þessi inni helgu kirkju léti konung hvert sinn njóta er yfir honum er messa sungin.*¹³¹ This logic serves as a tacit criticism of Haraldr, whose soul is much in need of saving, but also maintains the reciprocal utility of the marginal figure within the *hirð*, even when the king is only nominally participating. Haraldr hastily assembles the objects nearest at hand as a gift to the bishop, who is able, almost miraculously, to turn the cast-offs from the king's table into the most precious liturgical items in Iceland. Implicit in the depiction of this process may well be a wry joke at the comparative poverty of Iceland but a reminder of the low price for a fond legacy in a less wealthy community is also present: Haraldr, for all his faults, has his reputation partially restored through a modicum of kindness to an Iclander.

The last Iclander to be afforded a *þáttr* in the extant text of *Morkinskinna* is Einarr Skúlason, the great skald best known for composing *Geisli*. His recitation of this poem is recorded at the beginning of the *þáttr* and results in a sweet fragrance emanating from St. Óláfr's tomb, signifying the king's approval for the work in his honour.¹³² That Einarr is introduced in such laudatory terms is significant, as his service of Eysteinn Haraldsson and Sigurðr munnr is that of a trickster-skald who seeks to overcome a series of challenges posed by the presiding kings and their *hirðir*, all of which centre on tests of Einarr's speed of composition. In this regard, the scenes concerning Einarr Skúlason have a structural and thematic resemblance to *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* (see 7.1.4), although the sense of drama and threat is significantly reduced in this case. While Halli must compose a verse swiftly on the

¹³¹ *Morkinskinna II*, 167. 'And I wish that all those holy men who are present in the form of holy relics in this holy church might let the king benefit each time when mass is sung over the chalice.' Haki Antonsson argues that this scene evokes Magnús góði giving his name as a gift to Þorsteinn Siðu-Hallsson in demonstrating how material wealth pales in comparison to the gift of salvation; *Damnation and Salvation in Old Norse Literature*, 186-7.

¹³² *Morkinskinna II*, 221-2.

pain of death, for instance, Einarr's penalty, if he is unable to compose a verse prior to the king finishing his drink, is merely a fine.¹³³ Einarr is also a less disruptive presence than Halli and better adapted to *hirð* conventions. This *þáttir* features a scene devoted to inappropriate eating akin to Halli's consumption of porridge but the transgression is on the part of a *leikari* (player or jester) named Jarlmaðr, who eats goat meat on a Friday.¹³⁴ Einarr again composes a verse swiftly to save Jarlmaðr, who is being whipped in the meantime, but is not at risk of injury or disgrace himself.

More so than previous characters in *þættir*, Einarr is presented as the preeminent figure in the *hirðir* of the period, even in comparison to the presiding kings themselves. Ármann Jakobsson notes the esteem in which Einarr is held in comparison to his Norwegian counterparts in acting as Eysteinn Haraldsson's envoy and confidant and equates Einarr's celebrated service with his countrymen Úlfr stallari's loyal service of Haraldr harðráði.¹³⁵ It is of note, however, that Úlfr's dutiful behaviour never leads to tension with Haraldr and that no *þáttir* detailing the intricacies of his relationship with his king is present in the text – stalwart and unproblematic loyalty is not well suited for use as the basis for a narrative structure predicated on interpersonal conflict. Úlfr is thinly characterised in comparison to the towering depiction of Haraldr harðráði, but Einarr enjoys a more vivid portrayal than the kings whom he serves. Eysteinn and Sigurðr Haraldsson both set the limits of Einarr's various poetic feats but they do not participate in their completion nor are they aggrandised by their undertaking.

The most pertinent example of this effect is when Einarr is again challenged by King Sigurðr to compose a verse during the grand departure of Ragnhildr from Björgvin. Here he

¹³³ Ibid., 222.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 223.

¹³⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging*, 285-6.

stipulates that he be given an *askr* (Norse unit of measurement equivalent to four bowls) of honey for each line of verse that the king and his *hirðmenn* are unable to repeat following the stanza's recitation. Sigurðr's response is somewhat lacking in only remembering the first and last lines: *Þá mælti konungr: 'Þat ætla ek at ek muna: Hola báru ristr hlýrum. Já, veit Guð. Barmr lyptingar farmi.' Aldregi munðu þeir þat er í milli var.*¹³⁶ Much has changed since the time of Haraldr harðráði, who not only critiqued the verse of Arnórr jarlaskald as it was recited (see 6.1.2) but was also adept at composing skaldic verse himself. It is debatable whether the prestige of a skald is diminished if the king fails to understand his art but rewards him regardless. It is certainly the case, however, that the delicate equilibrium in a *þáttr* between a ruler and a marginal figure is destabilised if the king in question has no qualities with which to counter the virtuosity of an Icelandic skald. The implication appears to be that through the actions of the likes of Eysteinn and Sigurðr Haraldsson, Norwegian kings now lack the strength of character to be aggrandised in their interactions with *þættir* figures.

In this unimpressive cast of kings, Sigurðr slembidjákn or slembir, possibly the son of Magnús berfœttr, is the king who achieves the most narrative prominence during the civil war period and is initially described in effusive terms: *at allri atgørvi var hann umfram langt alla sína jafnaldra ok nálíga hvern mann annan í Nóregi.*¹³⁷ Sigurðr's reign takes an unusual course, however, shifting from enthusiastic participation in civil war violence, including the murder of Haraldr gilli while he lies in his bed, to his own horrific torture and death derived from the hagiographic tradition probably surrounding Sigurðr in *Hryggjarstykki.¹³⁸ This

¹³⁶ *Morkinskinna II*, 225. 'Then the king said, "I think that I remember this: Cuts the hollow of the wave with the prow. Yes, God willing! Then, Rim, cargo of the aftdeck." They could never remember what was in between.' Both lines are grammatically incomplete, which further suggests the king's failure of comprehension. This inability to understand a skaldic stanza after one recitation could be due in part to Eysteinn being raised outside of Scandinavia, Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, 464.

¹³⁷ *Morkinskinna II*, 168. 'At all accomplishments he was far above all of his peers and nearly every other person in Norway.'

¹³⁸ For further discussion of soteriological themes associated with Sigurðr slembir, see Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and Salvation in Old Norse Literature*, 57-60.

movement from pretender to martyr is unique within *Morkinskinna*, but the strong focus on Sigurðr has the effect of centring his style of rule in the concluding section of *Morkinskinna*. Central to Sigurðr's characterisation is that he never achieves a stable form of kingship: from his introduction, the validity of his claim to the throne is contested. His slaying of Haraldr gilli leads only to his outlawry rather than his coronation, he fails to achieve the support of many Norwegians, and, even in his death-scene, he is recast as a saintly figure rather than an effective king.¹³⁹ In this manner, Sigurðr stands as an inversion of previous depictions of established royal authority in *Morkinskinna*.

It is fitting, therefore, that the royal biography of Sigurðr slembir also features an unusual narrative structure, the content of which could be considered the inverse of the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna*. Sigurðr, prior to beginning his campaign in Norway, embarks on a return journey from Orkney to Jerusalem, a momentous expedition which is dealt with synoptically.¹⁴⁰ Following this is an extended scene documenting Sigurðr's time in Iceland at Saurbær, home of Þorgils Oddason.¹⁴¹ Sigurðr is incognito at this point and has the lowest status within the household: *ok hafði Sigurðr minnst yfirlæti*.¹⁴² Sigurðr lets loose one of Þorgils' sheep, intercedes on behalf of a woman Þorgils wishes to punish to the point of threatening violence against the farmer, and helps a Norwegian beat an Icelander in a boardgame by baiting a kitten to attack a boil on the Icelander's foot.¹⁴³ Only at the episode's conclusion does Sigurðr proclaim his royal pedigree.

¹³⁹ For a comprehensive study of the importance of hagiographic models to Norse literature and the sophistication with which such models can be employed to produce 'not quite saint's lives', see Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, 259.

¹⁴⁰ *Morkinskinna II*, 172-3.

¹⁴¹ For further discussion of the context of Sigurðr's time in Iceland, see Bjarni Guðnason, *Fyrsta sagan*, 119-22.

¹⁴² *Morkinskinna II*, 174. 'And Sigurðr received the least honour'.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 174-5.

In *Morkinskinna*, a *þáttr* centres on the insertion of an unfamiliar or jarring figure into the familiar confines of the *hirð*, who causes a variety of self-aggrandising mischief in close proximity to the king (see 3.6). Here a royal figure makes low-stakes mischief for his newly-introduced host in a setting unfamiliar within *Morkinskinna*: the Icelandic household. Just as in a *þáttr*, the dramatic scene centres on the establishment of intimacy between the presiding and powerful Þorgils and the itinerant and powerless Sigurðr to the benefit of both men: the former showing his wisdom and generosity, the latter his charity and nobility. In opposition to a *þáttr*, however, Sigurðr's disguise inverts the actual power dynamic between the two men, just as his passage from Jerusalem to Iceland is a counterintuitive movement from the centre to the periphery: a mirror image of the socio-political reality depicted throughout *Morkinskinna*. This is, therefore, the one instance in *Morkinskinna* that can be termed carnivalesque as the established pattern of an Icelander going to battle wits with a king within the Norwegian *hirð* is boldly overturned. The episode in the homestead does not qualify as a narrative insurrection according to the terms established in this thesis as it does not offer a disruptive modification of the established narrative and social structure instead providing a brief vision of an antithetical storyworld, wherein a Norwegian royal figure enjoys Icelandic hospitality. Generally, the *hirð* is the space in which Icelanders and other figures of lesser renown are able to demonstrate their merits through the free acquisition of the cultural capital of the Norwegian elite: wealth, prestige, and intimacy with the king. At Saurbær, Sigurðr is better able to showcase his noble qualities than in the increasingly chaotic and bloody political situation in Norway; as such, a form of structural reciprocity is established in the text, wherein, however briefly, an Icelander repays a Norwegian king in kind for the prominence afforded to his countrymen in the *þættir*. Such an inversion of the established themes and structures of *Morkinskinna* seems appropriate to the unstable kingship practised by Sigurðr slembir and proves an important element in stressing the cultural shift in

Norwegian elite society during the civil war era. By this point in the bloody decline of Norway, the implication may be that it is possible to dream briefly of a world in which the tables have turned in the relationship between Icelanders and Norwegian royalty.

7.5 Conclusion

The undisciplined *hirð* is a crucial political and literary concept within *Morkinskinna* and presentations of such unruly institutions dominate the majority of the text. Central to this chapter's argument is that the characterisations of Norwegian kings are contingent on the company they keep. Up to the death of Sigurðr jórsalafari, the cantankerousness, pride, or aggression of some rulers is not presented as deriving from immorality or inferiority but as a response to – and reflection of – the thoroughgoing strife in Norway during the period, which threatens to destabilise their authority. The struggles of Haraldr harðráði and Sigurðr jórsalafari with their respective co-rulers reflect their irascibility but are not presented as being to the detriment of Norwegian society, with these rivalries instead producing constructive syntheses of different forms of kingship and periods of prosperity in Norway. Haraldr harðráði and Magnús berfœttr's temperaments also render them incapable of maintaining the support of Norwegian magnates, however, and the ensuing power struggles are invariably destructive. The rifts left when kings and preeminent Norwegians fail to cooperate must be filled for *hirðir* to continue to function and *Morkinskinna* presents lower-status characters, often from more peripheral locations in relation to the Norwegian *hirð*, as raucously taking up this space. This effect is principally achieved through the *þættir*, which, through narrative insurrection, temporarily centre marginal characters in fraught but productive engagements with the presiding kings. Both parties prosper from the interaction, as *þættir* characters gain narrative and social prominence while kings are provided with a range of benefits: an opportunity to display their own qualities in dialogue with an individual of similar character, to have a difficult task completed in an idiosyncratic manner, or to have

their behaviour corrected through the counterexamples provided by *þættir* characters. In Haraldr harðráði's case, this unruly intimacy is primarily established with Icelanders and an interest in such power dynamics probably springs from the Icelandic identity of the redactor of *Morkinskinna*. Other peripheral figures, especially low-status Norwegians, are also central to *þættir* in the reigns of other Norwegian kings – the political ideology in *Morkinskinna* is, consequently, more extensive than a nationalist interpretation of the text will allow for. The mutual utility of the powerful and the powerless and the strange spaces of productive insurrection achieved when such figures interact transforms the narrative history of Norway from a linear succession into a zone in which authority and prominence must be continually negotiated between individuals, irrespective of their positions in the social strata. The *þættir* consequently cluster in higher densities in periods of particular social instability to simulate the turmoil of these periods of history through the representation of a chaotic social milieu. This fascinating depiction of Norwegian society collapses as the civil war era begins to escalate, however, with subordinate rulers engaging in violence which their *hirðir* are unable to constrain. The few *þættir* present in this concluding section of *Morkinskinna* speak of an epochal shift in Norway and a catastrophic change in the prospects of those who would seek to enter *hirðir*.

8 Conclusion

In the broadest sense, this thesis has investigated the discordant poetics and radical politics of *Morkinskinna*. The central conclusion has been that the structure and content of narrative history cannot be disassociated in the case of this text (see 2.3) – the two combine to depict Norway as epitomized by strife and Norwegian kings as beset by challenges to their authority, as befits this account of the degeneration of elite society in the span from after the

death of Óláfr helgi into the civil war period (see 3.5.2). This socio-political turbulence is primarily represented through the presence of the *þættir*, which have been considered throughout this thesis as an essential element of the structuring of *Morkinskinna*. The changes within the narrative discourse engendered by the introduction of a *þáttir* are a specialised form of those occasioned by the shift from summary to scene, the two primary components of the saga form. The most pertinent similarities between scene in saga narrative and the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna* are in elongating narrative duration, reducing narrative space, and shifting the distance from which narrative history is recounted from the macro-political to the interpersonal (3.5.5). The *þættir* differ from scenes, however, in ‘supernourishing’ these shifts in the narrative discourse to the extent that they become disproportionate in terms of length and dramatic force in relation to the surrounding synoptic material (see 3.5.4). This disruption of the narrative discourse is paired with investing a character who is socially or geographically marginal in relation to the Norwegian *hirð* with narrative agency and centrality comparable with the presiding king (see 3.4). As such, the *þættir* do not constitute an amplification of *Morkinskinna*’s themes nor an interlacing of complementary episodes (see 3.2 and 3.3). Rather, their presence produces an effect that has been coined in this thesis as narrative insurrection, in which the disruption of the storyline of *Morkinskinna* occasioned by the *þættir* mirrors the disruption enacted in the storyworld by the sudden rises in prominence of the unruly peripheral figures the *þættir* centre (see 3.6). Taken together, the *þættir* both recount and enact the destabilisation of Norwegian elite society. In part, the employment of narrative insurrection allows for the insertion of an Icelandic fantasy of personal intimacy with kings into Norwegian narrative history, although *þættir* characters may also be low-status Norwegians or more geographically distant nobles. The *þættir*, consequently, constitute a broader invitation for the powerless to share prominence with the

powerful and an investigation of the subsequent effects on both the structure of royal biography and the legacies of kings.

The thoroughgoing presence of the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna* and the consistency of the disruptive narrative effect produced by their inclusion is unique within the *konungasögur* corpus. *Heimskringla* harmonises the themes of its narrative structures – saga, sequence, and scene – irrespective of scale, particularly in the reign of Óláfr helgi, whose conversion of Norway occurs on an interpersonal, social, and national level (see 4.3). This ordering of material would also account for the absence of the *þættir* in the section of Norwegian history derived from *Morkinskinna* in *Heimskringla*. *Fagrskinna* maintains its central focus on kings far more closely than *Morkinskinna* and rarely offers non-royal perspectives of Norwegian narrative history (see 4.2). Narrative insurrection provides a productive model, however, to better understand certain episodes throughout the *konungasögur* as the extended focus on a subversive figure's contact with a king is consistently employed in periods of misrule or instability. The early synoptic history *Ágrip* demonstrates this effect most starkly with the likes of Karkr and Snjófríðr achieving a disruptive narrative presence, with disastrous effects on the authority and fortunes of the kings with which they are associated (see 4.1). The *þættir* of *Flateyjarbók*, which have been considered as similar in function to the *þættir* of *Morkinskinna* in previous criticism, are here considered as having a more diverse set of functions than the comparatively precise effect visible in *Morkinskinna*. The rubrication of the *þættir* in *Flateyjarbók* also disassociates these episodes more forcefully from the surrounding prose, encouraging them to be read as a complement to, or qualification of, the text, rather than an essential component of the narrative as is the case in *Morkinskinna* (see 4.5).

The development of an original narrative framework through which to understand the function and effect of the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna* has also provoked a significant reappraisal

of the royal biographies contained within the text. Such a re-examination of the characterisation of the kings depicted in *Morkinskinna*, centring the negotiation of interpersonal conflicts, constitutes the second half of the current thesis and the three chapters contained therein reject the contention that kings are divided morally between the approbated and the condemned. Furthermore, the frequency of depictions of kings interacting with their followers and guests on an intimate level suggests that the resultant narrative history is better understood as centring the *hirð* rather than the king, as an individual. The *hirð* in *Morkinskinna* is a malleable social group regularly recast for the literary purpose of allowing marginal figures to swiftly reach the centre of Norwegian elite society and interact with the king (see 5.2). Rather than the traditional dichotomy of the just ruler and the tyrant, a division between harmonious and undisciplined *hirðir* proves a more appropriate reflection of the ideological foundation for the representation of Norwegian elite society in *Morkinskinna*. Crucially, the forms of rule and service found in both of the two kinds of *hirð* are examined critically in terms of the utility they provide for both the kings of Norway and for the unruly individuals who seek to advance their own interests.

In the harmonious *hirðir* of Magnús góði, Óláfr kyrri, and Eysteinn Magnússon, these kings' peaceful and wise temperaments lead them to rule in stable authority. This is reflected in the comparatively few *þættir* included in the accounts of these monarchs' sole rules and the more regular employment of terse synopsis to represent long periods of narrative history progressing without incident (see 6). The *þættir* that are present depict this type of king as distant, suspicious, or openly hostile to figures who challenge their authority or promote independent interests. Magnús góði fosters close relationships with the powerful Norwegian magnates who provide him with both political support and enduring friendship (see 6.1.1). He has less need, consequently, to tolerate the dissident behaviour of Icelanders, be that the mercantile behaviour of Þorsteinn Hallsson or the impetuous poetic virtuosity of Arnórr

Þórðarson, both of whom the king engages with only remotely. Hreiðarr heimski receives different treatment as a foolish figure who sacrifices agency for intimacy with Magnús and wealth, a forfeiture that is otherwise seen as untenable for *þættir* characters in *Morkinskinna* (see 6.1.2). Óláfr kyrri oversees a long period of peace, prosperity, and hospitality for Norway as a whole, but engages in a bellicose encounter with the Kráku-karl, a figure whose hospitableness and supernatural wisdom are of a markedly different type than the king's own (see 6.2). Eysteinn Magnússon's affectionate treatment of Ívarr Ingimundarson demonstrates that this implacability is not the only response kings of this character can offer; Ívarr's grief decreases his utility as a *hirðmaðr* but does not pose a challenge to Eysteinn's authority and the king works diligently to remedy the situation (see 6.3). *Þættir* are repeatedly placed within the text as qualifications, but never outright revocations, of the characterisations of benevolent rulers and to demonstrate that ostensible golden ages in Norwegian narrative history cannot satisfy the specific needs of peripheral individuals and may come at the cost of their exclusion.

The undisciplined *hirðir* constitute a somewhat more complex set in requiring a further subdivision between those kings ruling prior to the death of Sigurðr jórsalafari and those that rule later, with this division marking the beginning of the Norwegian civil war era. Haraldr harðráði, Magnús berfœttr, and Sigurðr jórsalafari are kings who combine their nobility with aggression, irritability, and intractability. These kings' temperaments tend to exacerbate turmoil in Norway, whether during their sole rules or during periods of co-rule due to their fraught relationships with other kings (see 7.1.2). These rulers also tend to enjoy less respect and affection from Norwegian magnates as compared with more benevolent kings, with these relationships often developing into open hostility which threatens the security of the kingdom (see 7.1.3). The *þættir* in these royal biographies not only evince the tumult of these kings' reigns in stiling the accounts of their political or martial

accomplishments with repeated, extended disruptions but also, radically, provide an alternative space in which disruptive figures can achieve independent prominence while still maintaining loyalty and utility to their lord. Haraldr harðráði's friendship with Icelanders stands in opposition to Magnús góði's indifference towards them and Haraldr is depicted as regularly establishing close relationships with Icelanders whose dispositions are comparable with his own (see 7.1.4). This requires a ceding of authority and narrative centrality on the part of the king, as space is made for this newly-introduced figure to pursue an independent agenda, as is the case in Haraldr granting Auðun's request to pass through his *hirð*. In some cases, Haraldr fosters the prominence of the *þáttir* figure at his own expense, as with Halldórr Snorrason, but, generally, the king is not humiliated by the encounters and often gains as much as he gives, be it in the tacit dispensation of advice from Brandr ǫrvi, or the utility of idiosyncratic service from Sneglu-Halli. Similarly, Sigurðr jórsalafari, even in the destructive throes of his instability, is confronted by a range of lower status or otherwise marginal characters, who challenge his behaviour in a series of short *þættir* (see 7.3). Figures such as Óttarr birtingr and Áslákr hani decentre Sigurðr's aggressive actions by providing a passive behavioural counterexample, but the king comes to appreciate the validity of such critiques, correcting himself and rewarding their loyal service. In the reign of Magnús berfœttir, the opposite effect, wherein retainers are not capable of intervening to oppose their lord's excesses, is presented negatively (see 7.2). The refractory symbiosis of fractious kings and ungovernable followers is not idealised within *Morkinskinna* but it is shown to have substantial benefits for all parties involved. In the account of the civil war period, the narrative discourse is drastically transformed in line with the political situation as a number of less vividly characterised kings share a broader focalization (see 7.4). The few *þættir* present in this concluding section produce a more destabilising effect in retaining the

independent capability of the characters introduced while diminishing the quality of the presiding kings.

The *konungasögur* are differentiated from the wider saga form through their fusion of royal biography with narrative history. *Morkinskinna* stands as a bold experiment in the interrogation and disruption of that union. At its core, the text exhibits suspicion concerning the extent of kingly authority and the stability of elite society, both of which provide only makeshift resistance to the entropic progress of Norwegian history. Kings are confronted with the persistent intrusion of characters with unruly temperaments and disruptive agendas to the point of seemingly never settling to the matter of ruling Norway – the text is instead dominated by the management of their social circle. Central to the achievement of *Morkinskinna* is the alteration of the narrative mode to express and reproduce the political volatility of the period recounted in the text. There is a genius, perhaps unique in saga literature, in so consistently twinning the intrusion of disorderly characters with the inclusion of discordant narrative structures and, between the two, creating a narrative discourse typified by insurrection. There is another form of genius, however, in the preservation of the humour, dignity, and humanity of one's characters in such a tumultuous storyworld. *Morkinskinna* is critical of kings, magnates, and poorer visitors alike but the redactor is never jaundiced in presenting the interactions of these figures. The text centres upon struggle, be it for power, reward, or focus within the narrative, but more often than not characters contend productively with one another, without the denigration of any of the parties involved. *Morkinskinna* offers a depiction of Norwegian history dystopian and utopian in turn – a kingdom hurtling towards civil war yet whose crumbling social hierarchies permit intimacy with kings for even the most marginal and eccentric.

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