

Skaldsagas

Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde

Herausgegeben von
Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich,
Heiko Steuer

Band 27



Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York
2001

Skaldsagas

Text, Vocation, and Desire
in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets

Edited by Russell Poole



Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York
2001

© Gedruckt auf säurefreiem Papier,
das die US-ANSI-Norm über Haltbarkeit erfüllt.

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde / von Johannes
Hoops. Hrsg. von Heinrich Beck ... – Berlin ; New York : de Gruyter
Bis Bd. 4 der 1. Aufl. hrsg. von Johannes Hoops
Ergänzungsbände / hrsg. von Heinrich Beck ...
Skaldsagas : text, vocation, and desire in the Icelandic sagas of poets /
ed. by Russell Poole. – Berlin ; New York : de Gruyter, 2000
(Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde : Ergänzungsbände ; Bd. 27)
ISBN 3-11-016970-3

© Copyright 2000 by Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, D-10785 Berlin.

Dieses Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Das gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

Printed in Germany

Druck und buchbinderische Verarbeitung: Hubert & Co., Göttingen
Einbandgestaltung: Christopher Schneider, Berlin

Table of Contents

RUSSELL POOLE	
Introduction	1
MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS	
The Skald Sagas as a Genre: Definitions and Typical Features	25
KARI ELLEN GADE	
The Dating and Attributions of Verses in the Skald Sagas	50
EDITH MAROLD	
The Relation Between Verses and Prose in <i>Bjarnar saga Hítðcelakappa</i>	75
RUSSELL POOLE	
The Relation Between Verses and Prose in <i>Hallfredar saga</i> and <i>Gunnlaugs saga</i>	125
PREBEN MEULENGRACHT SØRENSEN	
The Prosimetrum Form 1: Verses as the Voice of the Past	172
TORFI H. TULINIUS	
The Prosimetrum Form 2: Verses as an Influence in Saga Composition and Interpretation	191
JOHN LINDOW	
Skald Sagas in their Literary Context 1: Related Icelandic Genres	218
ALISON FINLAY	
Skald Sagas in their Literary Context 2: Possible European Contexts	232
THEODORE M. ANDERSSON	
Skald Sagas in their Literary Context 3: The Love Triangle Theme	272
DIANA WHALEY	
Representations of Skalds in the Sagas 1: Social and Professional Relations	285

JENNY JOCHENS

Representations of Skalds in the Sagas 2: Gender Relations 309

Literature 333

Notes on contributors 350

Index 353

Introduction

By RUSSELL POOLE

Four scenes to establish our theme, each centring on a medieval Icelandic poet.

A poet is cursed by a sorceress so that he will never consummate his love, even though he lies in the same bed as his beloved.

A poet affronts his patron, the Christian king of Norway, by expressing reluctance to renounce the heathen gods.

Smarting from a seal-bite, a poet ridicules his rival for picking up a new-born calf by its tail end.

In a fatal duel, fought on Norwegian soil, a poet kills the rival who has considerably brought him water.

Each scene, however poetic or unpoetic it might seem to us, finds its expression within a poetic composition.

The names and nicknames of the women these poets pursued:

Steingerðr:	“stone”-Gerðr, a name found nowhere else and suggestive of a fine necklace
Kolfinna:	“coal-black Finna”, named for her dark complexion and hair; with her name, compare, from a related saga, Þorbjörg kolbrún (“coal-black eye-lashes”)
Oddný eykyndill:	“candle of the island”
Helga in fagra:	“the beautiful”

And the poets themselves:

Kormákr:	Irish by name if not by ancestry
Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld:	“difficult poet”
Björn Hítöelakappi:	“champion of the people of Hítardalr”
Gunnlaugr ormstunga:	“serpent-tongue”

The nicknames in this list foreshadow what ensuing chapters in this book will make explicit: these poets use, and provoke, aggression, both physical and verbal. Their temperaments can only be described as troublesome, not least to themselves.

The sagas

Our focus, then, is the small set of Icelandic sagas where the lives of those men are selectively chronicled: *Kormáks saga*, *Hallfredar saga*, *Bjarnar saga Híndelakappa*, and *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*. Although the prose in these narratives is of comparatively late composition, thirteenth-century in the main, elements of the story materials may derive from older oral traditions. Related, but with different emphases and handling of detail, are two further works written down at approximately the same period, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* and *Fóstbræðra saga*.¹ These works centre, respectively, upon the poet and warrior Egill Skalla-Grímsson and the two foster-brothers Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld and Þorgeirr Hávarsson, of whom the former, like Egill, was both a poet and a warrior. The present book will offer some discussion of these two related sagas insofar as they shed light upon the principal four (the latter to be referred to as the “core” sagas, the former as “outliers”, for reasons that will be explained in the next chapter).

A group of texts such as the principal four just mentioned amply deserves its own monograph. These are works that centre on the perennial, and perhaps even universal, literary themes of love, warfare, poetry, and death. Their mutually complementary status has long been recognized by scholars and critics. Many years ago, German translations of precisely these four texts were put between the covers of Thule vol. 9 with the title *Vier Skaldengeschichten*. Collectively they offer a convenient and attractive initiation into the realm of Icelandic saga literature, being shorter, less complexly plotted, and endowed with a more compact cast of characters than such staple classics as *Njáls saga* and *Laxdæla saga*. Amongst the four, *Gunnlaugs saga*, a work with a clearly defined and economical story line, elegant structure, strong characterization, and marked emotional impact, ranks as an internationally recognized masterpiece. *Gunnlaugs saga* is commonly read both in translation and in the original by beginners in Old Norse/Icelandic language and literature studies; *Hallfredar saga*, though more complex in textual terms, also lends itself to this use.

Perhaps surprisingly, given what I have said so far, the present volume is to our knowledge the only English-language monograph so far devoted to the Icelandic sagas of poets (to whom, from this point, I shall refer by the anglicized version of their native name, *skáld*).² Our aim has been to collaborate in the production of an integrated volume which will serve scholars and students in a variety of fields including medieval studies and comparative literature. We

¹ In this volume the sagas will henceforth be consistently referred to by the short form of these names, thus *Bjarnar saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga*, and *Egils saga*.

² The skald sagas are referred to in modern Icelandic as *skáldasögur*.

believe that it offers new evidence, arguments, and viewpoints in terms of both traditional philology and recent theoretical and critical approaches. Naturally the contributors occasionally differ among themselves: although such differences are not foregrounded in a debate format, equally it has not been our policy to artificially gloss over them. To assist readers whose own specialisms lie elsewhere, the book supplies comprehensive guidance on the complex terminology and issues that attach to the sagas and to skaldic poetry, some of it internal to the chapters and some in the index. Translations of all Icelandic quotations are appended (these, except where otherwise noted, are by the editor and/or the relevant chapter author).

The skalds

So who exactly are the skalds? So far as our records tell us, the Old Norse/Icelandic noun *skáld* applied first to the early Norwegian court poets of ninth-century Norwegian kings and jarls (a *jarl* being a major ruler ranking below a king).³ Subsequently, with the settlement of Iceland, the term came to apply pre-eminently to the many Icelanders who became specialists in court poetry. As a kind of national (or, better, “trans-national”) treasure of poetry, consulted by the Danish writers Sven Aggesen and Saxo Grammaticus, at around the turn of the thirteenth century, in deference to their famed mythological and historical traditions, they appear to have eclipsed practitioners hailing from other Scandinavian nations. It is with the skalds born and bred in Iceland that we are concerned in this book.

To judge from medieval Icelandic literature, the art of poetry was widely diffused through the Icelandic population. Apparently both men and women (and even children) could compose, though it is inevitably the adult male skalds whose lives and work have assumed prominence. Many of them enjoyed prestige and prosperity both at home and abroad, not least because of their verse-making skills. To take a few examples down the centuries, Sighvatr Þórðarson⁴ used his unsurpassed poetic facility amid eleventh-century turbulence to maintain values of harmony, reconciliation, and sweet reasonableness, even when interceding between leaders whose chief mutual feeling was hatred. From the twelfth and thirteenth centuries we could cite Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, whose travels abroad gained him the respect of foreigners but who was esteemed at home as well for his craftsmanship in wood and iron, his expertise in law and medicine, his

³ It is customary to append the word *jarl* to the name of the person concerned, thus Eiríkr jarl or Hákon jarl, and that practice is followed in this book.

⁴ An alternative spelling in common use is Sigvatr.

retentive memory, his swimming, his archery. He was dark-haired and good-looking, and, perhaps surprisingly after this lengthy recital of personal assets, less than prolific as a poet (*Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* 1987:2). Finally, we can scarcely omit Snorri Sturluson himself, a man of illustrious lineage who numbered the Norwegian leaders among his friends and held a series of positions of power at home, until, like Hrafn, he met his end through assassination.

But silver-tongued diplomats like Sighvatr, gilded chieftains like Hrafn, and movers and shapers like Snorri are little to our purpose in this book. To constitute a leading figure in the sagas we are concerned with, the skald must possess some darker tincture. Unlike Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson and, for that matter, his namesake Hrafn Qnundarson, Gunnlaugr's rival, our archetypal skald should be dark of eyes or hair and ill-looking. And that applies not just to his complexion but to his psyche. The archetypal skald radiates trouble. When Gunnlaugr bad-mouths a member of Eiríkr jarl's following as "einkar meinn, [...] illr ok svartr" – that is "particularly malignant, [...] bad and dark" – he could with equal justice be describing himself. Egill Skalla-Grímsson huddled up at the court of Aðalsteinn⁵ is a monument of menace. As summed up by Margaret Clunies Ross in chapter 2, skalds were credited with great physical strength but poor judgement, a violent temper, and an inability to get on with other people. The name *skáld* itself intimates as much, if we subscribe to an etymology that connects it with the English word *scold* and other cognates of pejorative meaning (Stebelin-Kamensky 1969). In medieval Scandinavian mythology, skaldic art is linked to Óðinn, the treacherous and vindictive god whose powers encompass warfare, prophecy, love, sex, secrets, and sacrifice. This medieval Icelandic mystification of poets, with their abiding self-destructive "dark side", seems to belong within a perennial conflict of attitudes in human culture to what we construct as "giftedness" or "genius". There may be a William Wordsworth for every Samuel Coleridge, a Rudyard Kipling for every Oscar Wilde, a Sighvatr for every Gunnlaugr, but it is Coleridge and Wilde and Gunnlaugr whose more sombre life stories have left their mark upon the communal memory.

The hero of the skald sagas, as analysed by Clunies Ross, is a compound of most if not all of the following features. He possesses high status in his native community; composes many verses (public or personal, or both); incurs some kind of enduring trauma or loss in a love relationship; travels abroad in order to give his ambition wider fulfilment than would be afforded by the narrow limits

⁵ The native Icelandic forms of names occurring in the sagas will be used throughout this book. Alternative forms are listed in the index. This policy extends to such English kings as Aðalsteinn (Ædelstan) and Aðalráðr (Æðelred) and is intended to underline the fact that saga personages should not be identified simplistically with historical figures as they are known from other sources.

of parental or community authority within Iceland; succeeds in both poetry and battle and sometimes, less romantically, in trading as well; throws himself into the furtherance of rivalry and vengeance, often both at home and overseas. We see a life lived with energy, ferocity even, and yet strangely inconclusive and wavering in its sense of purpose. Tellingly, one of the most salient characteristics of the skald saga is the negative one of its not being a family saga (a common alternative term for the sagas of Icelanders);⁶ instead, its emphasis falls upon individuals at the margin of the Icelandic social order, who do not succeed in perpetuating their family line. These are men whose talents augur success, yet whose temperament, arguably implicated with their art, amasses them detractors and mortal enemies. In an obscure verse Egill Skalla-Grímsson even appears to boast of the strange gift of converting uncertain acquaintances into definite foes.⁷

We have no evidence to show that sagas of skalds enjoyed contemporaneous recognition as a distinct sub-genre. And yet, at least to some degree, as the preceding paragraph suggests and as Clunies Ross argues in detail, they follow a formula, so long as we avoid applying that formula with excess zeal – always a hazard in genre studies. We find that in some sagas the poet's role as a professional is significant for the story line, in others it is only marginal. In some his love is fulfilled, in others it is thwarted. In some he falls victim to a vendetta, in others it might be tempest or other misadventure that brings him to his death. Nor is the fact that the hero makes verses a decisive genre marker in itself. There are various works featuring a verse-making hero which resist classification as a "skald saga" in other respects: two famous examples are *Gísla saga Súrssonar* and *Grettis saga*, both of which have an outlaw as protagonist. Formally, a notable aspect of the skald sagas is their characteristic blending of prose and verse, a format that would seem a natural corollary of encapsulating the life-story of a poet. But this is no conclusive genre marker either, since many sagas of Icelanders, whether they are centrally concerned with poets or not, contain an essentially similar blend. So our formula is a fuzzy one in various ways. But that should not dismay us, as students of literature. Quite as fuzzy is the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic formula, since the numerous novels and short stories that can be categorized as "Gothic" turn out on close inspection to contain varying sub-sets of characteristic features. Likewise, there are confusing overlaps with other fictions that are not usually felt to be "Gothic". And yet the usefulness of the Gothic formula is not in doubt.⁸

⁶ The native term in modern Icelandic is *Íslendingasaga*, plural *-sögur*.

⁷ See *Sonatorrek* v. 24 (*Skjaldedigtning* B1.37).

⁸ For further discussion see for example Kosofsky Sedgwick 1980.

Poetry in the skald sagas

The mixed prose-verse form which I have just mentioned is often termed *prosimetrum*, in imitation of classical taxonomy, though use of the term involves some tendentious assumptions. Presently I shall discuss the aesthetic properties of *prosimetrum*. For the moment, however, I want to concentrate on a key literary-historical property of works in that format in Old Icelandic: they rank as our chief source of knowledge about skaldic poetry. Were it not for the cultivation of *prosimetrum* in medieval Icelandic narrative and other written discourse,⁹ skaldic poetry would have perished almost entirely. And that would have been a loss of considerable magnitude. Altogether skaldic poetry stands as a body of work with enormous aesthetic and cultural significance. It is true that we might ascribe its recent rise in critical esteem to such twentieth-century vogues as the cultivation of difficult poetics and compositional virtuosity, the fascination with self-reflexive texts, and the “New Historicist” interest in types of discourse that serve to situate and maintain but also interrogate power within the community – all, needless to say, parameters that readily accommodate skaldic poetry. But this is already to show that the appeal of skaldic poetry is broadly based, and even if scholars of earlier generations sometimes grumbled at its obscurity, its questionable political morality, and its formulaicity, there was something about skaldic poetics that compelled their admiration and inspired their scholarly travails as well.

The skald sagas, then, along with many other texts, serve as a conspectus or mini-anthology of the various kinds of skaldic composition. They show how, on the political front, poetry was used as a vehicle for praise, commemoration, and satire and, on the personal front, symmetrically, expressed love, grief, and abuse. From the aesthetic point of view, certain of the verses embedded in the skald sagas rank among the very finest known to us. Had these sagas perished we could not have known Kormákr’s description of the stormy sea beating against cliffs; Hallfreðr’s forebodings of punishment in Hell; Björn’s outrageously fishy chronicle of his rival’s origins; and Gunnlaugr’s erotically-charged nostalgia on his return home. Much of the skaldic poetry embedded in the sagas is presented as single verses, spoken by a character as mood and circumstances inspire. The single-stanza package contains a characteristic blend of narrative and lyricism, where the blending process is helped by a syntactic structure that makes free use of parentheses, interlacing of clauses, and a decided break at the end of the first half-stanza, so that the verse moves in supple fashion from event to reaction, action to emotion.¹⁰ Altogether, these miniature poems

⁹ On the background to this see the detailed discussion in chapter 6 of this volume.

¹⁰ The half-stanza will henceforward be referred to by its native name, *helmingr*.

appeal to many modern readers in a way that what the poets' contemporaries may have regarded as more staple skaldic fare, namely official praise and satire, does not. Indeed, the prose narrators themselves seem to have steered clear of official poetry, perhaps out of a cultivation of spontaneity or for a variety of other reasons discussed in chapter 11 of this volume.

A single example, albeit an atypically simple one, may serve to illustrate some characteristics of skaldic poetry. The poet is Hallfreðr and the stanza-form is termed *dróttkvætt* (translatable roughly as "court measure", in reference to the fact that many poems performed at courts were composed in this format).

Þykki mér, es ek þekki
þunnísunga Gunni,
sem fleybrautir fljóti
fley meðal tveggja eyja,
en þás sék á Sögu
saums í kvinna flaumi,
sem skrautbúin skríði
skeið með gyldum reiða.

It seems to me, when I see the woman, as if a ship floats on the sea between two islands, and, when I spy her amidst a group of women, as if an ornamented ship scuds along with gilded tackle.

What translation cannot convey is the sonority of alliteration and assonance and the subtle rhythm of the individual line, to be analysed in greater detail presently; the similes, whose selection from the maritime world has the effect of bringing the domestic and public spheres into juxtaposition; and the kennings, or poetic circumlocutions, which represent the busy woman who presides over the working farm as a "valkyrie of the fine-spun head-dress" or a "goddess of the seam". Still more elusive is the overtone of strife – and this woman as the occasion of it – that lies latent in the word "Gunn", translated generically above as "valkyrie". What does emerge, however, is the strongly personal element in this praise, a feeling of spontaneity and of the dramatic that would not seem amiss were it Romeo or perhaps Antony speaking rather than Hallfreðr.

But here we must pause in our aesthetic enjoyment to put on our scholarly spectacles. When we read a verse like this, how far are we actually confronting Viking Age spontaneity and overflow of powerful feelings? How far can we trust the saga when it says, as it does, that Hallfreðr "spoke" this verse? What precisely does the act of "speaking" mean in this context? These are not trivial or merely vexatious questions. If we could lend credence to the skald sagas they would rate as a source without peer where the composition of medieval poetry is concerned. They would bring us into maximal closeness to the skald himself describing and constructing the events of his life even as they unfold. So we

ought to proceed cautiously, sceptically even, and to interrogate our documents thoroughly before we put pressure on them as sources for literary history.

Kari Ellen Gade's contribution in chapter 3 sifts evidence internal to the poetry itself. She surveys the verses in our four principal sagas in an attempt to determine their date of composition and authenticity of attribution. The various criteria used in the past are supplemented here with new ones derived from Gade's current research into skaldic metrics. She shows that past investigations have often been compromised by preconceptions concerning the issues under debate, combined with an overly intuitive approach to skaldic language and metre. Little reliance, for instance, can be placed on archaic forms of names or on conspicuous morphological variants, such as uncontracted forms in the declension of adjectives, since such gross, easily recognized features were readily imitated by skalds who lived several generations later than the protagonists in our sagas. The only such feature to hold any significance for dating is the particle *of*, a kind of linguistic relic that successive generations of skalds handled with diminishing facility.¹¹

Instead, Gade places her chief reliance upon close observation of the way skalds constructed the individual verse line within the *dróttkvætt* form. Before we look at her detailed arguments it will be useful to have available a brief and simplified summary of the relevant rules. Let us re-visit the Hallfreðr stanza cited above:

Þykki mér, es ek þekki
 þunnísunga Gunni,
 sem fleybrautir fljóti
 fley meðal tveggja eyja,
 en þás sék á Sógu
 saums í kvinna flaumi,
 sem skrautbúin skríði
 skeið með gylдум reiða.

In each set of couplets, we see the same pattern of alliteration: the odd lines contain two alliterating syllables and the even lines contain one. Thus in the first couplet "þykki" alliterates with "þekki" within the line and with "þunn-" within the couplet. The rule is strict: no fewer and no more than three alliterating syllables is permissible. In most couplets we also see a pattern of internal rhyming such that the odd lines contain consonance and the even lines contain full rhyme. Thus in the first couplet "þykki" is in consonance with "þekki" and "þunn-" is in full rhyme with "Gunn-". Here the rule is less strict.

¹¹ For an approximate analogy in English poetry we might contrast Spenser's use of proclitic *y-* (as in *y-cladd*, *y-drad*) in the sixteenth century with Chaucer's in the fourteenth century.

Sometimes, as in the second-last line, consonance in the odd line may be suspended in favour of a postponed consonance with the full rhyme in the ensuing even line. Thus “skríði” sits free within its own line but provides consonance with “skeið” and “reiða” in the next. Alternatively, consonance in an odd line can sometimes be omitted entirely, as line 5.¹² As to syllable count, it will be observed that every line has six syllables, or, as in lines 1 and 4, would have been pronounced with elision, resolution, or other forms of syllable compression so as to reduce a higher raw count to the mandatory quota of six. The final two syllables in each line are always trochaic, in other words in a configuration where a strongly stressed syllable is followed by a weakly stressed one. The remaining four syllable slots in each line could be filled in a variety of ways, though strict rules still applied. The primary rule for these first four syllables aligns them with the five metrical types identified for early Germanic verse by Eduard Sievers (1893). Only lines of the following general configuration are permitted (line types not exemplified in the verse above are taken from other verses by Hallfreðr):¹³

Type A	saums í kvinna	strong, weak, strong, weak
Type B	en trauðr þvát vel	weak, strong, weak, strong
Type C	sem fleybrautir	weak, strong, (half-)strong, weak
Type D	þunnísunga	strong, (half-)strong, (less-)strong, weak
Type E	skölkving of þák	strong, (less-)strong, weak, strong

As one of various refinements to these basic patterns, it was invariably the case in ninth- through eleventh-century skaldic poetry that the fourth slot in each line might not be occupied by a monosyllabic noun or adjective unless it consisted of a light syllable. Thus the words “skeið” and “trauðr” would not be permissible in this slot. The rule, whose full complexities cannot be entered into here, is named Craigie’s Law in honour of its discoverer, the Scottish lexicographer William Craigie (1900).

Gade’s approach in her chapter centres on a very close analysis which tabulates the disposition of strongly and weakly stressed syllables, the placement of lexical and syntactic components, and the arrangement of alliteration and internal rhyme. In combination, these patterns generate a restricted number of possible configurations for each line. These configurations did not remain static over the centuries, despite the tight constraints placed upon the poet, but underwent subtle shifts. Thus, to take almost the chronological extremes, lines

¹² The native terms for line-internal consonance and full rhyme respectively are *skothending* and *adalhending*.

¹³ The notation of relative syllable stress is of course technically imprecise, from a linguistic point of view, and should not be taken *au pied de la lettre*.

in the corpus of verses affiliated with Bragi Boddason, the earliest attested skald whose work survives, contain a higher incidence of certain types of configuration than lines affiliated with Snorri Sturluson. Each new period of skaldic activity seems to have ushered in subtly mutated configurations not to be found in previous eras, while, correspondingly, some older configurations tended to obsolescence. A key aspect of these configurations is that they were never codified by contemporary practitioners, so far as our extant texts tell us, and seem to have existed at an intuitive rather than a cognitive level. Certainly they slip through the mesh of categories used by Snorri in his *Edda*, which among other things provides a conspectus of poetic metres and stanza-forms. Occasional endeavours at imitation on the part of later skalds, for whom a particular type of configuration was not “natural” or intuitive, show awareness as limited to the gross features and not reaching to the subtleties that Gade has identified.

In sum, Gade’s analysis produces good justifications for upholding the authenticity of most verses attributed to Kormákr and Hallfreðr but casts suspicion on most of those attributed to Björn Hítðelakappi and Gunnlaugr. An important consequence is that the erotic verses affiliated with Kormákr and Hallfreðr stand revealed as isolated in literary history from their later counterparts in Provence and northern France, though not necessarily from the fragments of Old English poetry that centre upon love, loss, and regret. This result would provide further support for Peter Dronke’s proposition (1968:1.2), discussed in chapter 9 of this volume, that the genre of love and erotic poetry arose independently at many times and places, both within Europe and elsewhere. What specifically happened at these diverse historical moments can be viewed as the articulation of a meta-language of desire, a construction of love within a particular generic framework. Hallfreðr and Kormákr’s verses also afford us invaluable insights into late Viking Age mentality in respect of honour, religious belief, and transactional mores. It follows that Gade’s results are of great significance not merely for the history of skaldic poetics but also for fields such as comparative literature and the study of “emotionology”.

If certain verses are as old as the tenth or early eleventh century, what precisely is their relationship to the saga’s prose narrative in its extant shape, as committed to writing perhaps two hundred or two hundred and fifty years later? Just how much authority can we attribute to the oral traditions that we posit as having bridged that gap? Could the “packaging” in which we find the verses be as misleading as some other types of packaging? Starting in the nineteenth century, a long series of scholars have pointed to cases where “goodness of fit” between prose narrative and inset verses is deficient. When discrepancies arise between verse and prose, we may suspect that the verses were designed for a purpose other than that they are serving in the extant saga or that realizations of the story line may have varied over time. Scholars have also

pointed to cases where verses fit more neatly and meaningfully with each other than with the surrounding prose. In complementary chapters these observations are taken up by Edith Marold and Russell Poole, who deal respectively with the verses in *Bjarnar saga* and in *Hallfreðar saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*.¹⁴

Marold and Poole adduce evidence that while sometimes the verses inset in a saga acted as a source for the prose sometimes too they represent an alternative version of the story which the prose may only partially take account of. In either case, the compilers of sagas seem to have favoured a formal approach where extended poems were broken down into their constituent stanzas, which were then used piecemeal, sometimes widely dispersed through the prose narrative. In *Bjarnar saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, and *Gunnlaugs saga* alike it is possible to reconstruct *flokkear* (singular *flokkr*) or informal poems from which the inset *lausavísur* (literally “loose or independent verses”) were excerpted. On occasion, as evidently in *Bjarnar saga*, the narrator even interwove two or three verse sequences with each other and distributed them through a series of prose episodes. Through the quasi-archaeological study of compositional stratification, it becomes possible to consider the verses as an independent entity. The continuity between verses, when they are abstracted from the prose narrative and strung together by the scholar, creates a second narrative level with its own structure and meaning. The result may be to disclose hitherto concealed affiliations. For instance, Marold tentatively posits a connection between Björn’s *Eykyndilsvísur* and European fabliaux, with Anglo-Norman narratives as conceivably the immediate contact-point. Both Marold and Poole postulate that a series of adversarial verses between pairs of poets in *Bjarnar saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, and *Gunnlaugs saga* might exemplify a poetic genre for which the native term is *senna* (“flyting” is a better-known English term).

In sum, compositional stratigraphy has the potential to lead us to new discoveries, almost as surely as what is properly termed archaeology. But we nevertheless need to assimilate it into a more holistic view of the sagas. On the negative side, our modern acumen in source criticism can easily lead us into distinctions and arguments that would be foreign to the sensibility of those who compiled and consumed the sagas. For instance, when a saga says that a skald “spoke” a verse, we cannot run “headlong”, as Michael Frayn’s amateur art historian does, into an attribution in the scientific, bibliographical sense, where “this is a Hallfreðr poem” would run in parallel to “this is a Shakespeare play” or “this is a Rembrandt painting” or “this is a Mozart sonata”. The saga is saying merely that the poet “spoke” the verse, not necessarily that he or she made it up for that occasion or even that that particular poet was its author. In one

¹⁴ Parallel considerations of the verses in *Kormáks saga*, which has been much more intensively discussed by scholars, can be found in O’Donoghue 1991, Poole 1997, and references there given.

notoriously problematic case, *Kormáks saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga* happen to show their respective heroes speaking the same verse.¹⁵ Comparing the two texts in a scientific spirit, we can determine that the ascription to Kormákr has a better claim to authenticity. Yet the person who shaped *Gunnlaugs saga* as we now have it probably did not set out either to impart accurate data or to practise deceit. The possibilities are diverse: he may have known a variant tradition (oral or written) about the authorship of the verse; he may have intended the verse as Gunnlaugr's implicit quotation of Kormákr, not an original composition; or he may have given the question little consideration, beyond thinking that the verse supplied an appropriate expression of emotion for his stylized poet-hero.

On the positive side, the archaeological approach reminds us that if we envisage the skald sagas purely as an aesthetic unit, ascribable to a definite author, that may be more an artifact of our own consciousness than a conclusion to be drawn unequivocally from the witnesses. The state of *Bjarnar saga*, which has to be re-assembled from fragments, and of *Hallfreðar saga*, which exists in two different major redactions, reminds us how important it is to acknowledge the existence of variant redactions and to avoid enshrining one version as the *textus receptus* – a temptation that is especially strong for anyone who reads the sagas in translation. In the case of *Kormáks saga*, the prose narrative is so scrappily told that the inset verses dominate the work, which again might warn us not to over-do the topos of critical apologia. There is increasing evidence that the skald sagas, like many other sagas, as we see them now, represent just one selection and arrangement of story materials that would have varied in substance and sequence from performance to performance. Additionally, poststructuralist criticism talks of finding gaps and fissures in texts and availing ourselves of them in order to diagnose wider tensions and ambivalences in the culture: these are texts whose gaps and fissures it would be positively perverse to gloss over.

Somehow, in the face of the competing claims that I have described in the preceding pair of paragraphs, we need to keep the different aspects of the saga in perspective. Marold, Poole, and, in chapter 6, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen concur upon the need for a simultaneous appreciation of the synchronic and the diachronic dimensions or, to express the idea a little differently, a sense of balance between approaches to the work *as product* and *as process*. A point to be borne in mind is that medieval production and reception may themselves have been double-visioned. Analogues can be located in genres closer to our own time. Victorian novels such as *Vanity Fair*, *North and South*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Middlemarch* first greeted the public as serials and only subsequently were re-issued in volume format. The authors and publishers of those works calculated from the outset on a double-visioned reception from their public, many of

¹⁵ For details see chapter 5 in this volume.

whom enacted it in the most gratifying possible fashion – by buying the “product” twice: Dickens speaks in self-praise of the skill required if an episode is to make sense in the two different contexts.¹⁶

In speaking of a medieval double vision, I mean in part that the audience of a particular performance of a saga might well have been aware that a verse used there was also to be found embedded in some totally different context, say within a different saga (ascribed to a different poet) or as part of a free-standing poem. To work variations on the contexts for verses may have entered into the artistry of saga narration, an artistry that would depend on what we should now call intertextuality. The invention of novel, perhaps even deliberately far-fetched “aetiological anecdotes” for inset verses may have been one of the marks of a resourceful story-teller. Some story-tellers may have devised their newfangled explanations under pressure of newly fashionable literary genres (on this see the suggestions by Alison Finlay in chapter 9). Variation may have extended as far as the conscious revamping of verses to fit new contexts, as Marold suggests in relation to a pair of verses whose essential logic, along with many verbal parallels, is reproduced in both *Bjarnar saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*, with attributions to different skalds. Verses are not uniquely vulnerable, since, as Poole shows, nicknames too can become the subject of aetiological anecdotes whose content and placement within different saga redactions can vary considerably. Bjarni Einarsson himself, normally anxious to defend the skald sagas as seamless aesthetic entities, posits use of legendary source-material as the reason for apparent flaws and jaggedness in the conclusion of *Gunnlaugs saga* (1956). If we resort to special pleading to smooth over unevennesses in the prose narrative we are likely to miss the saga narrator’s special brand of intertextual artistry.

Once again, a quick review of other literatures furnishes us with plenty of analogues for the devising of narratives that purport to explain the circumstances in which given poems came to be composed. It is as if in many cultures the gap between poetic discourse and unmarked narrative is so wide that some kind of bridge is called for. Modern performance poets often bridge the gap themselves, sometimes, it would seem, by inventing elaborate *ex post facto* rationalizations of what impelled them to compose a given poem. Likewise in medieval and other “traditional” literatures, it is common to find poems accounted for by means of a reconstruction of supposed or purported events that led to the act of composition. A classic case is the Provençal *razo*, which purports to supply the “rationale” of composition (*Vidas of the Troubadours* 1984), but comparable examples could be found in the court poetry of Japan and elsewhere (see, for instance, McCullough 1997). Comparison of these diverse genres from diverse regions suggests that elsewhere, as in early Iceland, ingenuity

¹⁶ See for example Butt and Tillotson 1957 and Sutherland 1974.

in rationalizing or motivating the act of poetic composition, for instance by an insistent literalism in the interpretation of metaphor, counted for more than strict verisimilitude or historical veracity.

In the following pair of chapters Preben Meulengracht Sørensen and Torfi H. Tulinius¹⁷ make it their particular brief to renew discussion of the function of the inset verses in a mixed prose-verse form. Such attention to formal matters is timely, in that the last dozen years have seen an increasing interest in prosimetrum and the publication of a number of significant book-length comparative discussions, notable among them Friis-Jensen 1987, Dronke 1994, and Harris and Reichl 1997. Although Jan Ziolkowski is surely right to point out that the term prosimetrum is “not currently a household word” (1997:45), the current generation of critics and scholars finds a fascination in literary self-reflexiveness, liminality, and postmodernity *avant la lettre*, all of which are characteristics that can be read into this singular and highly labile form.

Prosimetrum form is characteristic, as Meulengracht Sørensen notes, not merely of the “core” skald sagas but also of many sagas of Icelanders or of the Norwegian kings. Where the latter (the kings’ sagas or *konunga sögur*) are concerned, Snorri stated his reason for quoting skaldic verses, namely that they are invaluable in providing corroboration of an historical narrative. In Meulengracht Sørensen’s opinion, however, Snorri may not have accurately represented his own practice in writing thus and in any case his comments can only mislead us if we attempt to apply them to the sagas of Icelanders, a distinct genre, as best we know, from what Snorri had in mind. Using examples from *Fóstbræðra saga*, Meulengracht Sørensen argues that modern scholarship has overemphasized the role of skaldic verses as sources. Correspondingly, it has paid insufficient attention to the mutual relationships between verse and prose within the total economy of the saga – narratological and aesthetic. Meulengracht Sørensen sees the inclusion of verses in sagas as centrally motivated by the wish to incorporate a voice that is specific to the past. What confers this sense of pastness is not so much the historical events alluded to in individual stanzas but rather the tradition-bound form in which the stanzas are composed, a form that harked back, in the fond fancies of emerging nationalism, to the Asian prehistory of Scandinavian culture and society. Even when certain stanzas were not the work of the poet to whom the saga attributed them, the crucial point, for the audience, was nonetheless that, in virtue of their formal correctness, the stanzas in question *could* have been composed in the distant past.

Like Meulengracht Sørensen, Torfi takes as his major premiss the idea that the inset verses are not just a decorative add-on but constitute an organic

¹⁷ Throughout this volume Icelanders will be referred to by their given names, e.g. Torfi, and not their patronymics, e.g. Tulinius. The same policy applies in the bibliography.

element in the total economy of the skald sagas, guiding narrators and audience alike on how to compose and construe. It is Torfi's contention that thirteenth-century Icelanders brought a special blend of interpretive skills to their reading and listening. Lay audiences anywhere in Christian medieval Europe faced daunting challenges when they confronted doctrinally orthodox interpretations of the Songs of Solomon, the Psalms of David, and other books of the Bible. But the Icelandic audience came to the task already issued with hermeneutical equipment of a sort, since they had been inculcated for generations, and indeed from prior to their christianization, with an extending native form of *fræði*, or "learning", namely skaldic poetry. At the time the sagas were assuming a written form, in the early thirteenth century, skaldic poetry was still enthusiastically practised in leading families, particularly, it seems, on the part of young men of high social standing. To this period as well belongs the theorization and codification of skaldic practice that we see most notably in Snorri's *Edda* but of which other manifestations, some of them earlier than Snorri, also exist. The community's skaldic interpretive skills sat side by side with the Christian interpretive skills that we see evidenced in such contemporary works of doctrine and learning as the *Icelandic Homily Book* and the Norwegian *Konungs skuggsjá*, and both were at a high level of sophistication.

It is a key element in Torfi's argument that the skald sagas, along with the other sagas of Icelanders, represent a genre where the narrative line might not have been transparent even to a contemporary audience, or certainly not upon an immediate unreflective hearing. If one hoped to appreciate the story line and the themes properly, nothing would substitute for a minute observation of fine details and hints along the way. The presence of skaldic verses within the narrative would itself have exerted a retarding effect upon reception, as the audience took in the subtleties of the diction and syntax and the beauty of the form. Other stimulation towards careful reflection would arise from the notorious parsimony of saga narrative concerning clarifications of motivation or even the exact turn of events: a well-known example occurs in *Gísla saga*, whose narrator, wittingly or unwittingly, has bequeathed us a murder mystery that resists straightforward solution.¹⁸ Painstaking reading and listening would be the natural outcome, in a process analogous, Torfi thinks, to an audience's careful decoding of skaldic stanzas.

Five essential traits of "skaldic saga composition" show up: intertextual allusions, formal and semantic unity, interlacing of plot lines, suppression of connective tissue, and planned ambiguity or indeterminacy of meaning. An interpretive community with these skills, along with the patience and leisure to apply them not merely to the comparatively brief skaldic poems but also to full-

¹⁸ See, for instance, Meulengracht Sørensen 1986.

length sagas, would register subtleties that have eluded modern scholars and critics. As exemplification, Torfi shows how *Hallfredar saga* hints at the hero's reasons for evading marriage with Kolfinna, an episode which has puzzled modern interpreters and led to adverse criticism of the saga's structure. To understand the text one has to register Hallfredr's exact social status vis-à-vis that of Kolfinna, her family, and her eventual husband Gríss, as measured according to thirteenth-century norms. Similarly in *Egils saga* the audience would have been well aware of the need to suspend judgement until a complex plot-line, such as the process by which Egill marries Ásgerðr, had been followed through to its logical conclusion. Altogether, Torfi traces a pattern where *Hallfredar saga* (a "core" skald saga) represents an early endeavour in the direction of "skaldic saga composition", to be followed later by the very much more complicated *Egils saga* (an "outlier").

The skald sagas in relation to other genres

While, as I have already noted, it is tempting to cite analogues for the skald sagas, or aspects of them, from around the globe, the identification of precise affiliations and literary lineages is naturally far more imposing a task. The ensuing set of three chapters by John Lindow, Alison Finlay, and Theodore M. Andersson, respectively, begins with a look at the native literature before engaging in wider searches in European literature. Lindow's chapter establishes commonalities not so much with the lengthy, classic sagas of Icelanders (the likes of *Njáls saga* and *Laxdæla saga*) but with the considerably shorter and less-known *þættir* – mini-sagas, as it were – which often centre upon the relationship between a visiting Icelander and a Norwegian king. Scholars have analysed these *þættir* so as to reveal a so-called "travel pattern", where different stages of the Icelander's visit and reception at a foreign court, very often that of a Norwegian king or jarl, follow a stereotyped progression. Subordinate to the travel pattern, though not entirely absent either, is a classic pattern seen in the sagas of Icelanders, that of a steadily escalating vendetta which eventually leads to violent deaths and resolution. Once again, we cannot speak of any rigid formulas or genre markers. For instance, in the *þættir* the focus is upon the king whereas in the skald sagas it is naturally upon the poet. A given body of story materials might have been multiply re-worked so as to fit different manuscript contexts. Thus, if the eventual destination of the story was a king's saga compilation, then naturally the king would be put in the limelight. If, on the other hand, the story found itself incorporated into a matrix like that of the manuscript *Möðruvallabók*, where sagas of Icelanders enjoy pride of place, the focus would inevitably be upon the poet.

Among the core skald sagas *Gunnlaugs saga*, *Bjarnar saga*, and pre-eminently *Hallfredar saga* can be shown as containing the "travel pattern". To some degree they work within this pattern but to some degree too they re-work it, enlarging on some of its facets while perhaps disregarding or omitting others. For instance, the extent to which the Icelander becomes the king's man differs greatly from one saga to another; likewise, the conflict between the need to travel and the skald's love life is accentuated more in some sagas than in others; still another variable is the extent to which rivals become reconciled. Among the peripheral sagas, *Fóstbrœðra saga* and *Egils saga*, but the former more than the latter, also exhibit an interest in both travel and the complex relationships between kings and Icelanders. By contrast, *Kormáks saga*, our other core saga, does little more than skirt past these topics, even though, to judge from other sources, the potential for a full realization of the pattern must have existed in the wider community's repository of knowledge about Kormákr. In sum, we see that although the skald sagas contain recognizable patterns, these are not used slavishly or predictably; it is not possible to speak of some simple template for saga composition. Rather, Lindow emphasizes the essential heterogeneity of the skald sagas taken as a group.

Complementing Lindow's chapter, with its focus on native analogues, Finlay's objective in her chapter is to survey developments in European literary culture for their possible impacts upon the skald sagas. Here the major piece of existing scholarship to be evaluated is Bjarni Einarsson's study of the different versions of the story of Tristan and Isolde in relation to the skald sagas (1961). Bjarni's conclusion was that the Tristan material, taken over in an oral form in the late twelfth century, underpinned *Kormáks saga* and hence by extension the other skald sagas. His views, substantially repeated in his later studies, have won qualified assent from a few scholars but not, at least as yet, general acceptance. In reaching a position on Bjarni's hypothesis Finlay considers two main types of evidence. First, we have the well-known contact of Rognvaldr jarl of Orkney with the Provençal court, with indications in one or two of his verses that he might have absorbed ideas from the poetry of the troubadours. Secondly, we must assess Bjarni's citation of numerous incidental similarities between the skald sagas and the stories of Tristan. A thorough examination, motif by motif, of these pieces of evidence, particularly in relation to *Kormáks saga*, leads Finlay to the view that at best they are inconclusive, at worst delusive. That of course does not exclude the possibility of some diffuse infiltration of literary impulses from Europe – perhaps from Icelandic clerics in Northern France or Germany or through trading connections with Europe or the British Isles. Finlay points to a specific possibility of such indebtedness in the account of Björn Hítðælakappi's adventures abroad at the beginning of his saga. Possibly too the author of *Kormáks saga* may have tinkered with existing episodes in order to follow a fashionable foreign example. What does seem excluded is derivation of

the essential story-line, at either motivic or verbal level, from the European texts. In sum, the story of Tristan cannot have been the original inspiration of the love stories in the skald sagas.

For Finlay, the sagas of poets are better explained as drawing chiefly upon a mixture of indigenous impulses. With Dronke (1968:1.2) she takes the view, as we have noted, that love and erotic themes must have been a time-honoured element of early Icelandic story-telling. Were it not for two special social pressures, she believes, we should see a correspondingly strong thematization of love in the extant sagas. These pressures consisted of stringent legal sanctions against erotic verse and against ritualized verbal abuse (*níð*) in medieval Iceland. Finlay ventures the hypothesis that pre-existing *níð* verses may have supplied a basis for the skald sagas. Male aspersions on another male who monopolizes a young woman back home in Iceland or Norway seem to exist in germ at least as early as the first decades of the eleventh century, in praise poetry as well as *lausavísur*. Although the motif did not, to our knowledge, achieve realization in full-scale narrative form at that stage, it evidently constituted a familiar situation that no more than a few hints would be sufficient to conjure up. One can imagine fuller narration developing in a series of easy steps:

1. a contrast between the Viking at war and the farmer at home, the latter watching protectively over a woman, as in *Liðsmannaflokkur*, with an expression of the speaker's love or lust for this woman;¹⁹

2. sentiments of definite jealousy or rivalry on the part of the Viking, taking expression as *níð*, as in v. 58 in *Kormákes saga*;

3. the narrativization of these pieces of *níð* in the form of sustained rivalry and even vendetta concerning the woman on the part of the Viking and the farmer, as in the fully developed skald sagas.

Rivalry of that kind could be seen as intrinsic to an economy in transition, where male prospects in marriage might depend upon the fluctuating status of two competing livelihoods, husbandry on a local farm or harvests of Danegeld and other bounties abroad. To compose love poetry was in itself an inflammatory act in the escalating conflict. We can understand why if we bear in mind that the true meaning of *mansöngur*, the native approximation to our "love poem", is occluded by this conventional translation and by its purely fortuitous resemblance to German *minnesang*. The element *man*, "(female) slave/servant" indicates that in reality the desired woman (so far from the idealization practised by the troubadours) is being treated by the skald as a social inferior, as in Torfi's analysis of the Hallfreðr/Kolfinna story, lovable as a mistress but not as a wife – a deadly insult to her protector and her family in general.

¹⁹ See Poole 1991:95.

Andersson contributes to the foregoing hypotheses on literary history by showing how European influences could have modified the Icelandic traditions identified by Lindow and Finlay. Once the distinctively Icelandic ingredients have been strained out, a key motif in the four core sagas emerges as theft or alienation of the poet's intended bride. This motif, as Andersson points out, resists unequivocal demonstration in the inset verses, even those which probably originate not long before the writing down of the sagas. The idea of a rival obtaining the skald's future bride by trickery or deception might have been read into the verses by a prose narrator, but it could not have been straightforwardly derived from them. On the other hand, bridal quest duplicity seems to be a genuinely early feature of German handlings of the story of Brynhildr and of a profusion of other stories. The best approach to the love triangle in the skald sagas, Andersson thinks, is not to trace it to a single literary impulse but to consider it in the general context of impulses from a refashioned Brynhildr legend, a first exposure to German bridal quest narrative (perhaps in oral form), glimmerings of Continental romance exemplified by the Tristan story, and medieval readings of the story of Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid*. All these phenomena seem to have been concomitant with and contributory to a growth of romanticism and the development of something resembling psychological illusionism in eddaic verse and saga prose narrative. Here the inception of dialogue writing that centres upon the emotions, sometimes with surprisingly detailed and sensitive analysis, is the crucial element. We could well hypothesize that from the European sources identified by Andersson a veneer of sentiment, sophistication, and psychology was applied to the originally cruder and earthier narratives posited by Finlay. From such a process of cultural grafting, to be localized as a late twelfth-century development, the key characteristics of the skald sagas as they have come down to us may have evolved. Implicit throughout these three chapters is the view that definite advances in the literary-historical discussion can be achieved by the patient analysis of evidence and the avoidance of grand assumptions, such as used to be fashionable, regarding the wholesale import and adoption of literary fashions from elsewhere. Rognvaldr's stanza in praise of Ermengarda of Narbonne, discussed in Finlay's chapter, is a telling example of how a process of simultaneous reproduction and innovation within traditional literary forms constitutes the most plausible model of literary evolution.

The figure of the skald in the skald sagas

Whatever the blend of literary impulses, native and foreign, that combined inextricably to inform the skald sagas, we are left with a complex view of the protagonists in these texts. We can formulate two basic questions: What did the

skalds mean to the thirteenth-century interpretive community? Why the strong interest in that particular species of manhood? Diana Whaley's focus is on the dynamic between society and poets in their personal and professional development. She sees narrator and audience joining in a romantic complicity as they reconstruct a bygone era in the light of the present day. Systematic stylization attends the portrayal of the skalds: restless and troublesome at home during their youth, successful and prospering when given larger scope and royal patronage abroad, and finally often relapsing into frustration and objectionable behaviour on their return home to Iceland. Obviously some glamour attached to their profession, as viewed by thirteenth-century Icelanders. Scenes in the sagas display a keen interest in how poetry might have functioned as a component in social transactions. Kormákr, Hallfreðr, Björn, and Gunnlaugr are all shown vilifying their rivals in riskily memorable stanzas. The risks, which lay in possible legal proceedings and duels, are followed up by the narrator with considerable attention to technical niceties. Conversely, Hallfreðr and Gunnlaugr are shown exercising virtuosity in verse flattery and reaping rewards in the form of respectively a sword and a fur-lined cloak. That is merely for openers in Gunnlaugr's case, because his subsequent rewards soar into hyperinflation, culminating with the patron who contemplates the gift of two ships but desists upon fiscally prudent advice. From scenes like these we form the sense that verbal transactions and economic transactions – two sides of the same coin, of course – alike had the potential to engross the audience. The saga cultivation of skaldic art even extends to some ventures into poetological terminology, though naturally not on the scale or with the precision seen in Snorri's *Edda*. The narrator can distinguish between a *drápa* (a formal eulogy with a refrain) and the less esteemed *flokkr* (literally a "flock" of verses which might be quite loosely assembled).

What political and social impulses guided these stylizations is very difficult indeed for us to determine now. One thing that is clear is that the relevant social values must have shifted over time, since some older verses depict the skald as a man of action where the later prose characterizes him as a person inclined to agonize in indecision or to fritter away golden opportunities. We may guess that oppositional attitudes regarding the Norwegian power across the sea played a considerable role in the formation of the stylizations, but that role is circumscribed by the fact, noted by Whaley, that it is the poet, not the king (whether Norwegian or further afield), upon whom the narration typically centres. More fundamental to the pattern are probably ambivalences of attitude concerning Iceland. The skald on his restless though remunerative travels comes to epitomize an aspect of the Icelandic ethos as surely as do Grettir and Gísli on their paths of outlawry. The figure of the skald acts as a focal point for communal tensions between satisfaction with local opportunities and frustration at geographical isolation and social constraints. This ambivalence can express

itself both from the community's point of view and from the skald's. From the community's point of view, the skald may attract a mixture of admiration for his successful cultivation of distinguished people abroad and resentment for his sharp-tongued scorn of perfectly worthy people at home. And the sheer mobility of a successful itinerant is apt to cause tensions with those who through their livelihood must settle for comparative immobility. Likewise, poetry was sometimes felt, as in *Gunnlaugs saga*, to mirror the character of the poet, for better or worse. From the skald's point of view, the ambivalence is equally strong. Whether the island nation or the beloved woman is the point of return he contemplates, the prospect is equally uncertain: the "candle of the land" emits no constant illumination of joy but instead a fitful light, now of hope, now of disappointment. Through the protagonists (the poets, their rivals, and the contested women), the Icelandic audience could be thought to gain expression and validation for these equivocal and conflicting reactions to the Icelandic experience.

Jenny Jochens complementarily takes up saga representations of a concern that resists classification into today's familiar "private sphere" and "public sphere" dichotomy: the skald's place in a network of heterosexual, homosocial, and homosexual relationships, with, respectively, his beloved woman, his king, and his rival. In this assortment of relationships it is perhaps that with the king which would occasion most surprise from a modern standpoint (although some recent semi-fictional treatments of the patron/artist relationship have encompassed this dimension). Yet both the prose narrative and the inset verses in the skald sagas reveal the skalds' public display of intense affection for their kings. Particularly striking in this regard are the *erfidrápur* or memorial laments composed by such poets as Hallfreðr, Sighvatr, and Oddr Kíkinaskald. As Jochens remarks, Sighvatr's verses commemorating the death of Óláfr helgi include one which extols love between men over heterosexual love. Such displays of affection need to be seen in combination with the fact, foregrounded in the sagas and *þættir* about them, that skalds like Hallfreðr and Sighvatr composed praises for rival rulers as a corollary of an itinerant livelihood. It is therefore hard, if not impossible, for us to assess what might have been "sincere" and what mere posturing in the declarations of love and allegiance for one patron in particular. Certainly, though, the thirteenth-century conception of these behaviours avoided mere reductivist cynicism. The sagas posit a mix of homosocial attachment and detachment, trust and suspicion as lying at the heart of the relationship between poets and rulers. To this potentially explosive combination the sagas added, as Jochens points out, accounts of mutual tensions and hostilities between the skald and other personages at the patron's court such as we see in *Gunnlaugs saga*.

The expressions of heterosexual love for women are less surprising in psychological terms. Here, however, it is important to trace how far the sagas

operate with the notion of equal poetic and emotional opportunity. While there may be some mentions of women skalds and even sporadic attributions of love verses to women, notably Steingerðr in *Kormáks saga*, we do not hear a great deal about love relationships from the women's point of view, beyond assurances in some of the men's verses that the feelings were mutual (nor, I may observe, has it seemed in tune with our sources to pursue a gender-neutral characterization of skaldic and saga authorship in the writing of this book). The thirteenth-century understanding of gender relations two hundred to two hundred and fifty years before nevertheless contains its subtleties. Some cues are taken up from pre-existing verses. Kormákr, for one, describes his male gaze as contested, if not anticipated, by a gaze from Steingerðr. That, along with the experience of falling in love at first sight, appears to unnerve him. Hallfreðr's verses encompass both the incitation to rape and a possibly more sensitive recognition that the verbal abuse he lavishes on Kolfinna's husband is offensive from the woman's point of view. Here already we might sense a transition in the construction of heterosexual relations between persons of different social classes. The prose narration greatly elaborates on these love relationships and tends to a more equal treatment of the gender roles. *Hallfreðar saga*, as we have seen, attributes conspicuously independent attitudes to Kolfinna, who maintains personal dignity in defiance of the protagonist's recourse to physical coercion. Steingerðr, in *Kormáks saga*, grabs on to her father in order to prevent him adding his strength to an attack on Kormákr. When Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld equivocates about the true dedicatee of the *Kolbrúnarvísur*, an indignant Þorbjörg fits the punishment to the crime, giving her erstwhile adorer a pain in the eyes. In general the skald saga women are shown as no mere passive vessels but as acting deliberately, whether to thwart or to support their lovers' schemes. Helga in *Gunnlaugs saga* has been treated as an exception, but let us not forget that once she has realized Hrafn's duplicity in wedding her she brings the marriage to its collapse in short order.

As we have already remarked, the very composition of *mansöngur* concerning a woman married or betrothed to some other man, is legally speaking a hostile act which must be challenged if the woman's current protector is not to lose honour. Praise for the woman is *ipso facto* dispraise for her protector. For this reason, love verses are so double-edged that Jochens is prompted to argue for a more accurate translation of *mansöngur* as "erotic libel". Love and rivalry are almost inextricably intertwined in the account of gender relations that Jochens elicits from the sagas. As a generalization, rivalry dominates over heterosexual love. In the case of Þórðr and Björn a persistence in salvoes of libellous poetry prevents a final reconciliation and eventually results in Björn's death. Moreover, although centred on heterosexual love and rivalry, the relationship between a skald and his competitor is represented as admitting a homosocial dimension. Here again the *níð* verses spoken by Þórðr and Björn, along with the

accompanying prose, provide our clearest example, in that they presuppose a certain intimacy, albeit intimacy of a negative kind.²⁰ The *níð* verses spoken about Gríss by Hallfreðr by contrast lack this dimension.

The question here is how far the thirteenth-century community saw homosociality as apt to intensify into homoeroticism. One would expect mentions of homosexual activities to be sparse, since strong legal sanctions applied to any public declaration on that topic. Even so, at least in the case of Þórðr and Björn it seems possible that the violent mutual repulsion in the name of a contested woman was construed by teller and audience alike as being only the surface aspect of the story. Although bound to circumspection, as is conventional in saga style, the narrator throws out several strong hints that he construed the relationship between the two men as intermittently homosexual, before and during their lives as married men who fathered children – leaving aside for now the ticklish problem of which children were whose. Altogether, Jochens traces a development in representations of medieval Icelandic society whereby male homosociality, which had been privileged in early praise poetry as the bonding principle in the war-band, gradually becomes supplemented by a valorization of heterosexual love (as seen in the skald saga verses). This heterosexual strand in the story-materials is, however, interspersed with sporadic episodes (principally in the prose narration) where homosexuality is hinted at. Whether in an antiquarian spirit or, more plausibly, because this jostling of gender relationships in some way enacted tensions within its own social norms (see now Guðrún Nordal 1998), the thirteenth-century audience obviously found the skald's lifestyle preferences quite as engrossing as his art and his livelihood.

The inception of work upon this volume took the form of a colloquium at Stanford University in May 1995. The colloquium was organized by Theodore M. Andersson, Kari Ellen Gade, and John Lindow, to whom the other contributors are grateful for their enthusiasm, vision, and hard work. Gratitude for financial subventions is due to the Office of the Dean of Humanities and Sciences and the Department of German Studies at Stanford University and to the Nordic Consulates of Washington DC. Each of us has been materially assisted by our respective institutions with conference leave, research funding, computing services, and the like. At a later stage we have been indebted to John Durbin, at Indiana University, and Victor Hansen, at the University of Sydney, for preliminary drafts of the translations of respectively chapters 4 and 6. As editor, I naturally owe a great deal to all the contributors but would like to

²⁰ An analogue in this respect from Middle Scots is the late fifteenth-century "Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie", attributed to William Dunbar and Walter Kennedy.

express special gratitude to Kari Ellen Gade for her help with organizing publication of the volume. I have also benefited from technical assistance generously provided by Astrid van Nahl in Germany and Ted Drawneek, Mike Ellis, and Jane Moran in New Zealand. Finally I am grateful to Debbie Rayner for numerous practical suggestions and support.

The Skald Sagas as a Genre: Definitions and Typical Features

By MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS

Prolegomenon to a Definition

It is generally accepted that the skald sagas or skald biographies, as they are sometimes called, form a distinctive sub-set of the sagas of Icelanders to the extent that one can relatively easily assign specific sagas to this sub-set and exclude others. This chapter probes the rationale upon which this classification has been based, and examines the literary and conceptual characteristics of the skald saga. Some of the problems which are central to the definition of the skald saga genre have also been central to general twentieth-century discussions of the evolution of Icelandic saga writing in the Middle Ages. In addition, questions of definition and identity lead naturally to considerations of why this particular literary class should take the form it does and what its larger social and cultural purposes were in medieval Iceland. Thus the exercise of defining the skald saga has the potential to illuminate wider-ranging issues in medieval Icelandic literature and culture as well as to clarify the nature of one of the most interesting sub-sets within the sagas of Icelanders genre.

Though it is convenient to refer to the skald sagas as a sub-set of a larger generic group, the sagas of Icelanders, the distinction is not clear-cut. While there is a small core of sagas that are universally accepted as belonging to the sub-set, there are other sagas that may be considered outliers, in the sense that they share some characteristics of the core group but have other features that are not represented there. Thus it seems plausible to identify a group of characteristics that are found in all members of the core and some of the outliers and other characteristics that do not achieve universal representation. When justifying consideration of members of the outlier group as having skald saga characteristics it will also be important to indicate the extent to which its skald saga character informs the outlier saga as a whole. Thus an aetiology of the literary form and content of the skald saga becomes feasible.

In defining the genre, I shall take someone else's views as a starting point, firstly in order to key the present discussion into what has gone before it and, secondly, to allow us to problematize the elements of the received definition. I

have chosen that offered by Bjarni Einarsson in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*, not only because it is accessible in an authoritative, recent book, but also because the author is well known for his work on the skald sagas. He wrote thus (1993a:589):

Skáldasögur ("Sagas of Skalds") is a modern name given to a group of *Íslendingasögur* that have famous skalds as principal characters: *Kormáks saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Bjarnar saga Hítðoelakappa*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, and *Fóstbræðra saga*. The first four are also sagas of tragic love.

There are several explicit or implicit defining criteria of skald sagas in Bjarni's text. We note first a listing of sagas that are said to belong to the sub-set, with an implicit distinction being made between the first four and the final two, which are separated from the others because they do not deal with the theme of tragic love. While we need to probe further the question of whether Bjarni's list adequately covers the sub-set, we can note that the first four sagas of his list, *Kormáks saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Bjarnar saga*, and *Gunnlaugs saga*, are the works that most scholars agree constitute the core of the skald saga group. A further inference is, therefore, that one of the major characteristics of the core group of skald sagas is that they should deal with "tragic love". We will need to examine later whether the term "tragic love" accurately describes the subject matter of these sagas and whether the love theme extends to the outliers and, if so, in what form. A second defining characteristic, and one that, implicitly, may be found in both core and outliers, is that the saga's protagonist must be a poet, hence the modern name "skald saga". Bjarni Einarsson's use of the plural, "famous skalds as principal characters", is perhaps deliberate, for, as we shall see, several of the skald sagas involve more than one famous poet.

We need to observe too, though Bjarni does not say so explicitly, that the poets in question are all Icelanders, not Norwegians, who were also practitioners of skaldic poetry. A third characteristic lies hidden in Bjarni's use of the adjective "famous" to describe the kinds of poets that figure in skald sagas, in both the core and its outliers. Evidently, the kinds of poets who are major characters in these sagas have to have enjoyed an established reputation in Iceland and in other parts of the Viking world, at least according to the authors of their sagas and, in some cases, other sources. So we infer from Bjarni's definition that all sagas that qualify for inclusion in the sub-set must have protagonists who are famous poets, while those in the core have protagonists who are famous poets and are also involved in tragic love affairs.

It will be necessary for us to go on and interrogate the terms of Bjarni's definition further, to query the list of members of the skald saga group, to ask what made a famous poet in medieval Icelandic tradition, to investigate how these sagas represent famous poets, and to examine whether the phrase "sagas of

tragic love” is an accurate description of the subject-matter of the core sagas. We will also have to consider whether we would wish to add any further defining characteristics of the skald saga group. Before we do this, however, it seems appropriate to devote a few paragraphs to an outline of the plot of each of the four core sagas in order to determine their common elements and to see whether the outliers fit the defined pattern, in terms of both their skald saga elements and their overall character. It is perhaps already apparent that the outliers are thematically and structurally more diverse than the core group.

The Core Sagas

Kormáks saga

The saga begins by bringing Kormákr’s father Ögmundr from Norway to Iceland in the days when king Eiríkr blóðøx, “bloodaxe”, made many men’s lives difficult. Ögmundr arrives in Miðfjorðr, in north-west Iceland, where he is granted land by the local landowner Miðfjarðar-Bjarni. He marries a woman named Dalla, daughter of Önundr sjóni, and they have two sons, Þorgils, a taciturn and gentle man, and Kormákr, dark and curly-haired, pale-skinned and rather like his mother in appearance, big and strong, and aggressive in temperament. We hear next that Kormákr and his brother pay a visit to a farm where a young woman named Steingerðr is being fostered. Kormákr falls in love with her at first sight, being particularly attracted by her feet, which he glimpses through the space between the bottom of a door and the threshold. He recites a number of love verses on this occasion, and Steingerðr seems equally attracted by him. However, the girl’s father becomes worried at the attentions Kormákr is paying his daughter and brings her home; meanwhile Kormákr has already begun to stir up trouble for himself by courting Steingerðr rather too flagrantly and at the same time engaging in fights with other would-be suitors, one of whom he kills. This man’s mother, who has a reputation for sorcery, lays a curse on Kormákr to the effect that he will never enjoy Steingerðr sexually.

The curse begins to take effect when Kormákr unaccountably fails to appear at his own wedding with Steingerðr and hereafter the saga details his escalating frustration and aggression towards other men who succeed in marrying her, first towards Bersi, with whom he eventually fights a duel (for which the native term is *hólmgangi*), and then with her second husband Þorvaldr tinteinn “tin stake” Eysteinnsson and his brother Þorvarðr. Both of Steingerðr’s husbands are poets in their own right, and many of the incessant hostilities between Kormákr and the men he sees as his rivals are conducted by means of verbal insults and slanders as much as by physical aggression. Throughout the period of her marriages, Kormákr continues to pay court to Steingerðr in a blatant and

frenetic way, and her reaction is mixed, sometimes showing signs of enjoyment and positive feeling towards Kormákr, while at other times she retreats from involvement with him. The fact that, after Kormákr has humiliated Bersi in their duel, she divorces herself from him should probably be understood partly as her way of indicating that she would have preferred Kormákr, if fate had not made their marriage impossible.

After Steingerðr marries Þorvaldr, Kormákr decides to go abroad with his brother. He visits Steingerðr to tell her this, and asks her to make him a shirt (a sign of sexual intimacy), which she refuses to do. He declares war (via poetic slander) on her husband and proceeds on a series of Viking adventures in Norway, and then goes on to Ireland, never being able to forget his beloved and the fact that she is enjoying the sexual attentions of the "tin stake". He returns to Iceland and by coincidence lands near where Steingerðr happens to be riding by. They spend the night together at a small farm separated only by a wooden partition. Once again, however, their love is unconsummated and Steingerðr refuses to accept a gold ring from him.

The rest of the saga details Kormákr's obsessive and provocative attentions to Steingerðr, which eventually cause Þorvaldr's brother Þorvarðr to challenge Kormákr to a duel. The brother fails to appear, usually a cause of dishonour, but the humiliation that would normally follow for him and his family on account of his presumed cowardice is somewhat dissipated by the brothers' lodging a suit against Kormákr for defamation. Another invitation to a duel follows, and eventually both Kormákr and his brother and Steingerðr and her husband journey abroad and are involved in various adventures. At one point Kormákr rescues Steingerðr from a band of Vikings, and her husband professes himself willing to allow her to go away with Kormákr, but Steingerðr decides she does not want to exchange partners. Indeed, Kormákr himself eventually urges her to go with her husband. Kormákr makes his own way then to Scotland, where he dies fighting an enormous Scottish giant. His thoughts, however, are still upon Steingerðr, and his final reported utterances are a sequence of verses in the last of which her name is incorporated.

Hallfreðar saga

The saga of this "troublesome poet", as king Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway nicknamed him, begins in Norway with an account of the lives of two foster brothers, Óttarr Þorvaldsson and Ávaldi Ingjaldsson, who, after Viking adventures in the British Isles, emigrate to Iceland and settle in the Vatnsdalr area in the north of the island. Óttarr's son Hallfreðr falls in love with Ávaldi's daughter Kolfinna but is reluctant to marry her. He is described as big and strong from an early age, with beetling eyebrows, an ugly nose and red hair. He

is said to be a good poet, but given to composing insulting verse. He is also temperamentally unstable, and, hardly surprisingly, unpopular.

Ávaldi's friend Már advises him to marry Kolfinna to another man, Gríss Sæmingsson, and not to Hallfreðr, who has antagonized Ávaldi with his ostentatious flirting with his daughter and his refusal to marry her. From this point on, Hallfreðr deliberately offends and insults both Ávaldi and Már, both through the attentions he continues to pay to Kolfinna and through satirical verses. Within a short time Gríss and Kolfinna are married and Óttarr eventually persuades his truculent son to go abroad. Hallfreðr takes ship for Norway, though he is unable to forget his love for Kolfinna, which he proclaims in a couple of verses.

Hallfreðr now spends time first at the court of the pagan Hákon jarl and then, after his death, with the Christian evangelist king Óláfr Tryggvason, into whose presence he is forced by supernatural means. Hallfreðr is compelled by the king to convert to Christianity, and a large part of the middle section of the saga is taken up with an account of the skald's mental and spiritual struggles as he comes to terms with his abandonment of the old gods, with whom his practice of poetry is so closely bound up, and his grudging adoption of the new religion of Christianity. Many of the verses in this section give an insight into the poet's inner turmoil and his sense of loss as he abandons the old religion. Hallfreðr becomes a favourite of Óláfr, a situation which arouses jealousy and aggression towards him on the part of two brothers named Óttarr and Kálfr who are members of the king's bodyguard. Unfortunately, Hallfreðr kills Óttarr and the king banishes him from court, sending him on an expedition to the province of Upplönd to blind a recalcitrant heathen named Þorleifr inn spaki, "the wise". Hallfreðr puts out one of his eyes but refuses to harm the other.

There follows a series of adventures abroad which lead Hallfreðr eventually to dangerous and heathen Gautland. There he marries a heathen woman, Ingibjörg, and has two children by her. After some years, he is visited by king Óláfr in a dream and upbraided for settling among heathens. Abashed, Hallfreðr returns to the king with his wife and sons; he is shriven, composes a poem to make amends for his lapse of faith, and Ingibjörg and their sons are baptized, though she dies soon afterwards. Hallfreðr's thoughts now urge him to return to Iceland. The king gives him three precious gifts upon leaving, telling him never to part with them. The very first night back in Iceland, Hallfreðr makes his way to Gríss's shielings (shepherds' huts), where he finds Kolfinna without her husband, and he and his men sleep the night and have sexual intercourse with the women there. Hallfreðr sleeps with Kolfinna and, on the pretext of reciting verses against her husband which, he says, he has heard she composed herself, he delivers himself of a tirade of three verses that are grossly insulting to Gríss. They succeed in angering Kolfinna, who rejects one of the king's gifts, a cloak, which Hallfreðr had wanted to give her.

The scene is now set for physical aggression between Gríss and Hallfreðr and their respective supporters and for the continuation of Hallfreðr's poetic assault upon Gríss in a set of verses named as the *Gríssvísur*, "Gríss verses". The conflict leads to the death of a man on each side, the killing of Hallfreðr's brother Galti at the Húnavatn assembly by Kolfinna's brother Brandr being mentioned also in *Landnámabók*.¹ Then king Óláfr intervenes again on the eve of a single combat between Hallfreðr and Gríss, once more in a dream, telling his poet to avoid the fight which is in a bad cause and to pay compensation to Gríss. He advises him also to go in search of news of far greater moment, which turns out to be the fall of the king himself. Gríss, who has served the Emperor of Byzantium, understands Hallfreðr's position and the two men come to a settlement without loss of honour on either side.

The rest of the saga takes place mainly outside Iceland and involves Hallfreðr's attempts to come to terms with his sorrow at the death of king Óláfr, his accommodation to the new ruler Eiríkr jarl, son of Hákon, and the poetry he is reported as composing in honour of both rulers. He stays for a time with Þorleifr inn spaki and then joins in a voyage to Iceland with a fellow-poet, Gunnlaugr ormsunga. Reference is made to Gunnlaugr's own woman troubles (see below). After this, Hallfreðr spends most of his time travelling. On his final journey to Iceland, with his son, also called Hallfreðr, he is fatally injured by the swinging boom of the ship's sail. He sees a woman following the ship, presumably the fetch, or *fylgjakona*, of his family, and declares everything at an end between them, but his son takes her on. Hallfreðr dies and is laid in a coffin at sea, together with Óláfr's gifts. The coffin drifts to Iona, where servants of the abbot find it, break it open, steal the treasures and sink Hallfreðr's body in a fen. However, Óláfr appears in a dream to the abbot and apprises him of what has happened. The poet's body is retrieved, carried to the church and given honourable burial. The king's gifts are made into precious furnishings for the church. The poet's son, also nicknamed "the troublesome poet", returns to Iceland and becomes a prosperous farmer from whom many notable people are descended.

Bjarnar saga Hítöðlakappa

Though this saga takes its name from Björn Arngeirsson, its initial focus is upon another poet, Þórðr Kolbeinsson, who is well known in other sources as a court poet of Eiríkr jarl. According to *Skáldatal*, a list of court poets, Þórðr was also

¹ Literally, the "book of land-takings", i.e. those made when people of Scandinavian and Hibernian origins settled Iceland in the late ninth century.

one of the poets of king Magnús inn góði of Norway, who died in 1047, and the Danish Sveinn jarl (d. 1076). The saga writer makes use of what is likely to have been a better known reputation for Þórðr to place the otherwise little known Björn in the context of their joint poetic rivalry and contention for a beautiful woman named Oddný eykyndill ("island candle"). In the first chapter of the saga, Björn, "like many others", is represented as the victim of Þórðr's mockery and censure, surely a transparent literary move to play a relatively unknown protagonist into the centre of the saga's narrative action. Björn is said to be a big, powerful and good-looking man. He and Oddný quickly develop a mutual attraction and meet frequently.

In spite of this love interest, Björn is also attracted to foreign travel, and when some Norwegian merchants spend the winter at his foster-father's farm, he seizes the opportunity to travel back to Norway with them on their ship the next summer. Before he leaves, however, he becomes betrothed to Oddný eykyndill with the approval of both families. The arrangement is that she will wait for him for three years; if, after the third winter, he still does not return to Iceland, she is then free to marry another man if she wishes. Björn now travels to Norway and takes service in the retinue of Eiríkr jarl, his foster-father's patron. It turns out that Þórðr Kolbeinsson also has business abroad at this time, which first takes him to Denmark to claim an inheritance and then to the court of Eiríkr and so to a meeting with Björn, though they do not reveal their enmity in front of the jarl. Þórðr tries indeed to persuade Björn to return to Iceland rather than stay away another winter, and it is soon apparent to the saga audience that his motives in doing so are hostile. When Björn declares he wants to go harrying the following summer, Þórðr offers to take a token of Björn's love for Oddný back to Iceland when he returns himself. When he gets to Iceland he goes to visit Oddný, gives her the ring (a gift to Björn from the jarl) and tells her that Björn had given him right of marriage ("ráðahaginn") with her if her betrothed died or did not return to Iceland.

Björn has all sorts of adventures in the east and spends time in Byzantium. Meanwhile, back home, Þórðr pays some traders to spread the word that Björn has been wounded and killed abroad. He then proposes marriage to Oddný and is accepted after the time limit for Björn's return has elapsed. Eventually, Björn gets to hear what has happened, but this does not spur him on to return to Iceland; rather, he takes off on further adventures, which include saving king Knútr inn ríki of England from a flying dragon.

Some time now passes, enough to allow Oddný and Þórðr to have had eight children. Þórðr needs to go abroad to claim another inheritance and there encounters Björn again, who this time gains the upper hand when they meet, spares Þórðr's life but robs him of his money and trading ship and sends him off shamed and dishonoured. Óláfr helgi, who by then is reigning in Norway, arbitrates a settlement between them and Þórðr returns to Iceland, but does not