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THE NEGLECTED GENRE
OF RÍMUR-DERIVED PROSE AND
POST-REFORMATION JÓNATAS SAGA

JUST AS it became fashionable in the fourteenth century to render the sagas of preceding centuries into poetic form, the dictates of taste at a later time reversed this trend and encouraged the production of prose narratives derived from the poems of earlier ages. To date, such post-Reformation "sagas" have received little attention, although it appears that enough such reworkings exist so that one can justifiably speak of an entire genre. To name just a few tales which are usually just briefly noted in other editions, there are *Hrings saga ok Tryggva*, derived from *Geðraunir* and found in paper manuscripts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,¹ a prose version of *Krossrímur* in the late-eighteenth-century *Lbs. 714, 8vo*,² and *Hemings þátr*, extant in three paper manuscripts and stemming from Benedikt Sigurðsson's *Hemings rímur*, a poem which he composed in 1729.³ There is also a prose redaction of a saga derived from *Skikkju rímur* and extant in two manuscripts, *Lbs. 1509, 4to* and *Lbs. 2081, 8vo*,⁴ a short prose recension of *Núma rímur* in the nineteenth-century manuscript *Lbs. 254, 8vo*,⁵ as

¹ Agnete Loth, *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, 5 vols. in Editiones Arnarnænae, Series B, vol. 24 (Copenhagen, 1965), V, pp. ix-x. (Although in Icelandic a single canto is a *ríma* and a poem is normally composed of several cantos (pl. *rímur*), this latter term will be treated as a singular noun in English when used to refer to a single poem).

² Mariane Overgaard, *The History of the Cross-Tree Down to Christ's Passion. Icelandic Legend Versions*, in Editiones Arnarnænae, Series B, vol. 26 (Copenhagen, 1968), pp. cxc-cxcii.

³ Gillian Fellows Jensen, *Hemings þátr Áslákssonar*, in Editiones Arnarnænae, Series B, vol. 3 (Copenhagen, 1962), pp. lxxxi-lxxxv.

⁴ Marianne Kalinke, *Mottuls saga*, in Editiones Arnarnænae, Series B, vol. 30 (Copenhagen, 1987), p. cxlv.

⁵ Sigurður Breiðfjörð, *Núma rímur*, 3rd edn. (Reykjavík, 1937), p. xxiii.

well as several manuscripts of a young version of *Haralds saga Hringsbana*, probably composed in the seventeenth century.⁶

Evidently a much later, nineteenth-century phenomenon is *Perseus saga sterka*, refashioned from the *Persíus rímur* of Guðmundur Andr-ésson, who died in 1654.⁷ On at least one occasion a *rímur*-derived saga served as the source for even younger *rímur*. *Andra saga jarls*, possibly dating from the eighteenth century, is based on the fifteenth-century *Andra rímur (hinar fornu)*. Another set of *rímur*, by Hannes Bjarnason and Gísli Konráðsson (printed 1834 and 1905), were in turn independently produced from the *rímur*-derived saga.⁸ In at least one instance the *rímur* appeared in print a year after the composition of the poem, but the derivative saga is only preserved in much younger manuscripts. *Agnars rímur Hróarssonar* was written by Árni Böðvarsson in 1776, published in Hráppsey in 1777, and is extant in three manuscripts in the Landsbókasafn, all postdating the year 1880.⁹ The practice of writing sagas from *rímur* evidently continued right up to the beginning of the twentieth century. *Sagan af Pontus konungssyni* is extant in only one manuscript, *Lbs. 1509, 4to*, and seems to have been written by Magnús hreppstjóri Jónsson from Tjaldanes (1835–1922).¹⁰

In some instances it did not take very long after the composition of the poetic version for a prose recension to be fashioned. From the popular *Randvers rímur og Ermingerðar*, composed in 1794 by Einar Bjarnason and extant in a dozen manuscripts, a prose reworking was apparently made. The *Saga af Randveri fagra* is known from one nineteenth-century manuscript, *Lbs. 1504, 4to*.¹¹ Evidently the record for prompt “sagatization” of *rímur* belongs to *Hraknings saga Magnúsar Hrólfssonar*, composed in the year 1813 and attributed to Gísli Sigurðsson, for a prose version derived from the *rímur* appears in the nine-

⁶ Ólafur Halldórsson, *Haralds rímur Hringsbana* in *Íslenzkar miðaldarímur*, vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 1973), p. 17.

⁷ Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur* (Stuttgart, 1987), p. 279.

⁸ Halldór Hermannsson, *Bibliography of the Mythical-Heroic Sagas*, in *Islandica*, vol. 5 (New York, 1912), p. 72.

⁹ Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Brávallarímur eftir Árna Böðvarsson*, in *Rit Rímnafélagsins*, vol. 8 (Reykjavík, 1965), p. clxxi.

¹⁰ Grímur M. Helgason, *Pontus rímur* in *Rit Rímnafélagsins*, vol. 10 (Reykjavík, 1961), p. xlvii.

¹¹ Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 2 vols. (Reykjavík, 1966), I, 392.

teenth-century annals for the same year.¹² *Hrakningsríma* Magnúsar Jónssonar, based on a difficult whaling expedition survived by the poet, probably at the end of 1812, also winds up as a prose report in the annals of the nineteenth century.¹³

It is quite probable, however, that the composition of prose narratives from poetic texts is a very old phenomenon and one that was not confined to *rímur* sources. There is evidence, for example, that *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra* is not an original mythical-heroic saga, but rather derived from an older ballad.¹⁴ If foreign-language sources are taken into consideration, then one of the oldest examples of a derivative romance would be *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, evidently translated in Norway from Thomas' *Tristan* in 1226. Of course, the tradition of prose reworking in a wider sense is also known in Iceland from around the same time, cf. *Völsunga saga* and Snorri's *Prose Edda*. Viewed in this light, the *rímur*-derived sagas are simply part of a much larger literary tradition.

The production of a derived-prose narrative need not always be a simple one, however, as shown by the saga of Ásmundur Flagðagæfa, written down around 1700 by Eyjólfur Jónsson, a priest in Svarfaðardalur.¹⁵ Here it has so far proved impossible to determine whether the extant *rímur* stem from the prose narrative or vice versa. Other complexities involve the possibility for a single saga to be indebted to more than one *rímur*-version and for more than one redaction of a single "saga" to exist, as in *Áns saga bogsveigis*, in *Hrings saga ok Tryggva* (mentioned above), and in *Ormars saga* (discussed below).¹⁶

It will not be a simple matter, however, to define members of the genre of *rímur*-derived prose, since they will have to be differentiated from those sagas stemming from older Icelandic prose narratives as

¹² Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, I, 246–247, 245. Other tales of tribulations at sea are known to exist in both *rímur* and prose versions, but their relationships have yet to be determined; Finnur Sigmundsson, I, 241, 243, 250, 251.

¹³ Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, I, 244–245.

¹⁴ Davíð Erlingsson, „Illuga saga og Illuga dans“, *Gripla*, I (Reykjavík, 1975), pp. 9–42.

¹⁵ Judith Jesch, „Ásmundar saga Flagðagæfu“, *ARV: Scandinavian Yearbook of Folklore 1982*, XXXVIII (Stockholm, 1984), p. 103.

¹⁶ Ólafur Halldórsson, *Áns rímur bogsveigis* in *Íslenzkar miðaldarímur*, vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1973), pp. 57–68. Agnete Loth, p. x.

well as from those which are independent (and possibly even younger) translations from European sources.¹⁷ That the relationships may be quite complicated is demonstrated by the version of *Samsons saga fagra* discussed below, as well as by *Móðars þáttur*, which is preserved in two parts. The second portion obviously stems from the *rímur*, while the first part has no parallels in the poetic text at all.¹⁸ In the case of drastic shortenings amounting to no more than a brief plot outline, it may well prove impossible to distinguish between the different types of sources. This difficulty is further demonstrated by *Ármanns saga in yngri*, which is apparently indebted in its first part to *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, but in the latter part it seems to rely either on *Ármanns rímur* or on a version, probably from memory, of *Ármanns saga ok Þorsteins gála*. To complicate matters it should be noted that this latter work is itself an example of *rímur*-derived prose, being a late seventeenth-century reworking of *Ármanns rímur*.¹⁹ Sometimes only a single canto of the poem would be turned into a saga, as was the case with *Ásmundar saga Sebbafóstra*, a reworking, probably in the seventeenth century, of the ninth canto of the popular *Geðraunir* (also called *Hrings rímur ok Tryggva*).²⁰ There is even an example of a disjointed "saga," modelled on *Æneas rímur*, a poem written by Jón Jónsson í Möðrufelli, who lived from 1759 to 1846. The prose paraphrase is placed at the beginning of each *ríma*, and it is obvious that these passages were intended as an aid to understanding the poetic text.²¹ The placement of the prose is important, because it may point to the ultimate reason for the rise of *rímur*-derived prose, namely that by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the unusual poetic diction and

¹⁷ Ólafur Halldórsson, *Haralds rímur Hringsbana*, p. 17. Sigurður Breiðfjörð, *Núma rímur*, p. xxiii.

¹⁸ Jón Helgason, *Móðars rímur og Móðars þáttur* in *Íslenzk rit síðari alda*, vol. 5 (Kaupmannahöfn, 1950), pp. xxii–xxiii.

¹⁹ Guðni Jónsson, *Íslendinga sögur*, vol. 12 (Reykjavík, 1947), pp. xiii–xiv.

²⁰ Björn K. Þórolfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, in *Safn Fræðafjelagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga*, vol. 9 (Kaupmannahöfn, 1934), p. 316.

²¹ The attribution of authorship to Jón Jónsson í Möðrufelli in Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, p. 120, is far from certain, and the 4 mss. listed there, *Lbs. 991, 4to, JS 339, 451, 645, 4to*, do not contain this *rímur*, which is rather to be found in *ÍBR 93, 4to* and *Lbs. 188, 8vo*. Both extant mss. end at the beginning of the sixth *ríma*, so it is not known if the poem was ever finished, and no mss. of the *rímur* without the accompanying prose are known to exist.

complicated metrics of the *rímur* were proving too difficult for much of the Icelandic populace, which demanded a more straightforward narrative.

It is well within the bounds of possibility that some *rímur*-derived sagas will preserve material from lost *rímur* or from lost older sagas on which these *rímur* were based. Although the *rímur* from which the nineteenth-century *Mábilarsaga sterku* was derived has not been lost, the original prose version that gave rise to *Mábilars rímur* is no longer extant.²² In the second half of the seventeenth century *Hrómundarsaga Gripssonar* was composed from the fifteenth-century *Hrómundars rímur* (also called *Griplur*), but here, too, the alleged prose source of the poetic version has disappeared.²³ Likewise based on a lost *fornaldarsaga* is *Úlfhams rímur*, written around 1400 and turned into a saga some 300 years later (mss. *AM 601a, 4to* – written around 1700 and *Lbs. 1940, 4to* – written in 1820). The relationship of this derived prose version to that found in the mid eighteenth-century manuscript *Kall 613, 4to* has not yet been clarified.²⁴ Three additional examples of *rímur*-derived prose are to be found in the same manuscript which contains *Úlfhams saga, AM 601a, 4to*. The first of these is *Ormars saga* (f. 1r–4r), based on one of the older *rímur* (ca. 1500), in turn stemming from a now lost Icelandic saga. Besides the *rímur*-derived prose version in *AM 601, 4to*, a second, independent prose version is also known to exist.²⁵ On folios 4v–6r is *Gríms saga ok Hjálmars*, indebted to a *rímur* published in Erik Julius Björner's *Nordiska Kämpadater*, which makes it one of the oldest *rímur* to be published (1737).²⁶ Björner also supplied Latin and Swedish prose translations of the *rímur*. Last in the ms. *AM 601a, 4to* is *Sigurðarsaga Fornasonar* (f. 12r–17r), based on a sixteenth-century *rímur* evidently indebted to several sources, including *Blómsturvalla saga*.²⁷ *Bragða-Ölvis rímur* is an ex-

²² Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson, p. 235.

²³ Ursula Brown, "The Saga of Hrómund Gripsson and Porgilssaga," *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, XIII (1947–48), pp. 52–53. Judith Jesch, "Hrómundr Gripsson revisited," *Skandinavistik*, XIV (1984), p. 91. Peter Foote, "Hrómundarsaga Gripssonar," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1982–89), VI, pp. 312–313.

²⁴ Björn K. Þórolfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, p. 312.

²⁵ Björn K. Þórolfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, pp. 416–418.

²⁶ Björn K. Þórolfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, pp. 336–338.

²⁷ Björn K. Þórolfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, pp. 444–446.

ample of a derivative work for which the *rímur* source was almost lost, since the vellum *AM 603, 4to* now contains only a fragment of the sixth canto, but fortunately a copy was made by Markús Magnússon in the second half of the eighteenth century when the vellum was still complete.²⁸ While the *rímur*, also known as *Ölvis rímur Hákonarsonar* or *Ölvis rímur sterka*, probably dates from the beginning of the sixteenth century, the derivative prose version stems from the end of that same century.

To date there has been no thorough catalog of the members of the genre of *rímur*-derived prose, and the ease with which it has been possible to find examples of such works indicates that there might exist scores of such "sagas." A cursory reading of *JS 46, 8vo*, for example, (referred to below as *46*) turned up a deviant version of *Samsons saga fagra* (ff. 26v1–58r11) that partially stems from the unpublished *rímur* composed by Guðmundur Bergþórsson in 1683. The poem is rather lengthy, containing 16 cantos in all, and must have enjoyed some amount of popularity, since it is known to exist in eight manuscripts.²⁹ What is of special interest in the derived saga is that it unabashedly begins with the initial *mansöngr* or amorous preamble found in the *rímur* manuscripts, before launching into a prose refashioning of the poetic text. The alliteration of the original is even occasionally preserved, as when it is said about Samson in the *rímur* that he: *stundadi mest á skart og skraut* (*Lbs. 1889, 8vo*, p. 3,12), while *46* writes: *hann stundade miðg a skraut og skart*, (f. 28r1 – note that the *rímur* version in *Lbs. 2468, 4to* also uses *skart*).

Language in the derived saga similar to that in the *rímur* is also to be found:

1889, p.3,1 Budlung öl vid brudi þar
46, f.27v17–18 kongur ol vid drottinjngu sinne

1889, p.3,5–6 vinsæll fram til elli
46, f.27v22 vinsæll fram til elli

²⁸ Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island i det 15. og 16. Århundrede* (København, 1888), p. 143. Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson, pp. 44, 264–265.

²⁹ Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, I, 412–413. For comparison with the *rímur*, ms. version *Lbs. 1889, 8vo* (referred to here as *1889*) was used, while the original saga text employed (i.e. *Samsons saga fagra*) is found in Bjarni Vilhjálmsón, *Riddarasögur*, 6 vols. (Reykjavík, 1949–51), III, pp. 345–401.

1889, p.4,1 tytt ad bruka um tyma þann
46, f.28r5 ij þann tima tijtt ad bruka

Numerous details are common to the *rímur* and the derived saga. Both state that the wife of Artus was named Philipija, but she is called Silvía in *Samsons saga fagra*. In both *rímur* and derived saga, Artus and his wife are said to have two children before Samson and his sister are described in turn, while the earlier saga omits this piece of information and begins with a description of Samson. The two later redactions report that the hero stayed with his foster father Salmon until he was 13, while the original prose work states that he was with Salmon until the age of 11. Salmon's daughter is named Olempija in 46 and Olemphia in 1889, but Olympia in the older saga.

In 46 the first eight divisions or chapters are unnumbered, but the text corresponds to the first eight *rímur* in 1889, and each of the chapters begins with the corresponding *mansöngur* from the *rímur*. There can be no doubt that the first eight chapters in 46 have been heavily influenced by the poetic version. However, the subsequent chapter in 46, which should be number 9, is labelled XV. It has no *mansöngur*, and follows the text of the older saga (called there Chapter 11) quite closely.³⁰ This correspondence continues to the end of the story (ch. 25 in 46, ch. 24 in the edited version of the older saga).

It should also be noted that the "sagas" discussed here do not usually exist in many copies and their manuscripts are often signed and/or dated. There is a good possibility that patterns of geographic distribution could also be determined, at least for some of the works. Besides the philological aspect of reconstructing sources and studying obscured motifs, the *rímur*-derived sagas can be regarded as repositories of information about the Icelandic language and prose narrative style. And just as the *rímur* genre has to some extent overcome the negative biases of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars, so, too, must such saga retreads eventually become legitimized as literature.

An excellent example of how such works can be examined is provided by *Jónatas saga*, a tale preserved in only one paper manuscript

³⁰ E.g. 46, beg. ch. "15": Eirn Tijma talar Olem. til Sams, so er nu komid, seiger hun, ad vid skulum nu forvitnast um höfdijngia hvað sem fram fer. *Samsons saga fagra*, ch. 11: Einn morgun talar Ólympía til Samson: „Svo er nú komið“, segir hún, „að vér skulum forvitnast hvað fram fer um höfðingja.“

from the eighteenth century, *JS 408, 8vo*. The Gothic cursive hand belongs to Sigurður Magnússon from Holtar in Austur-Skaptafellssýsla, who dated his copy February 15, 1772, giving it the title: “af einumm ägiætumm Læknara sem hiet Jónathas”.³¹ It is a tale about the youngest of three princes (Jónatas), who inherits three magical gifts from his father, a ring and brooch (which give him the love and support of all men), as well as a flying carpet. While he is away at school his girlfriend pretends to lose both the ring and the brooch, so the hero takes the young lady for a ride to the end of the world on his carpet, intending to leave her there. She, however, pulls the rug out from under his plans and returns home to live like a queen. Jónatas attempts to make his way back home and contracts leprosy by swimming across a lake and by eating apples, but he is healed by water from a second lake and apples from a different tree. Taking samples of each with him, he encounters and heals a king seriously ill with leprosy. Jónatas is then allowed to sail to the place of his schooling, where he disguises himself and establishes a reputation as a doctor. Meanwhile, his former girlfriend has contracted leprosy and has him summoned to her. He extorts a confession from her, offers the wrong medication, which causes her a painful death, and returns to his homeland to live happily ever after.

The tale sketched above is indebted to a *rímur* version which was composed prior to 1600 and extant in one vellum manuscript (*Sel-skinna*) from the end of the sixteenth century and in three paper manuscripts from the seventeenth through late-nineteenth centuries.³² The composition itself is divided into three cantos, each written in a different meter: the first two in four-line stanzas, *ferskeytt* and *stafhent*, respectively, and the third in *braghent* meter. Each *ríma* begins with a *mansöngur* of 9, 10, and 6 stanzas, respectively, with the total number of stanzas in each *ríma* being 63, 63, and 66. In content, *Jóna-*

³¹ Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins*, 3 vols. (Reykjavík, 1918–37), III, 698. The “saga” occupies all of pages 161 through 172, with 28 to 32 lines per page, and quotations here are by page and line number.

³² *AM 605, 4to* and *AM 612g, 4to*: Kristian Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 2 vols. (København, 1889–94), II, 10, 19. *Lbs. 990, 4to* and *Lbs. 2033, 4to*: Páll Eggert Ólason, I, 412–413; III, 271. Quotations are by *ríma* and stanza in *AM 605, 4to* and, where necessary, by line number after a period.

tas rímur is one of about only a dozen *rímur* which can be said to be derived from an *ævintýri*.³³

Dating the composition of *Jónatas rímur* unfortunately supplies only a very early *terminus post quem* for the saga. The presence of a final unstressed syllable in end rhyme (mannsönginn/menn I,9.1,3; *hann sig/merkilig* I,37.1,3; *frijda hring/ouirding* I,62.1,3; *hræðilig/pijner mig* II,18.3,4) probably indicates a composition for the poem no earlier than around 1550, as does the rhyming of *i* and *y* (e.g. *dylia/skilia* I,12.2,4; *neytir/beiter/veiter* III,22.1-3; *þydum/lydum/fridum* III,46.1-3).

Since the narrative content of the *rímur* versions is so fixed by the meter, one would expect to encounter difficulty in placing the saga in the *rímur* tradition. However, the name of the hero's father in the saga, which is given there as Golifridus, indicates that *Lbs. 990, 4to* could not be the source, since it gives the king's name as Golferius, as opposed to Golifridus in *AM 605, 4to* and as Golefrijdus in *AM 612g, 4to*. In addition, *Lbs. 990, 4to* omits numerous stanzas, among which are several containing information used in the saga (II,11; III,18; III,22). *AM 612g, 4to* leaves out a half stanza at II,45.1-2 with the important fact that Jonatas returns to his mother, but this information is to be found in the saga (165,22-23). Near the end of the *rímur*, *AM 612g, 4to* reverses two stanzas (III,42-43), but this is not reflected in the derived prose version (170,18-24). It would appear that the saga is closely related to the vellum *AM 605, 4to*, but whether from this manuscript directly or from earlier or later related versions cannot be said with certainty.

The *rímur* is in turn indebted to a fifteenth-century *ævintýri*, but it is obvious that *JS 408, 8vo* must be derived from the *rímur* and not from one of the seven extant *ævintýri* manuscripts. First of all, there is no striking verbal parallel between the saga and the *ævintýri*, which one might reasonably expect between two related prose works. There are several passages in *JS 408, 8vo* which deviate significantly from the prose versions, but in each case these can be derived from the *rímur*. During Jónatas' trek from the end of the world, for example, the hero in both the *rímur* and the saga is afflicted with leprosy after swimming

³³ Björn K. Þórolfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, p. 236.

across the *first* body of water, while the apples from the first tree worsen the affliction. The *ævintýri*, on the other hand, has the water cause cancer and the apples the leprosy. Likewise Jónatas' love affair with the *skóla þjónusta*, dwelt upon in some detail in the saga, finds only the barest outline in the *ævintýri*, but a similar, fleshed-out version in the *rímur*.

Jónatas saga provides an excellent example of how a post-medieval author went about the task of putting together a prose story. Since the source employed is a poetic one, there is much that can be inferred about stylistics, but information about general composition can also be gleaned from a comparison. For the latter purpose it is not so much those features which the versions have in common which are of interest, but rather the deviations of the saga from the *rímur* which are revealing.

Omissions are of course to be found in the prose rendering, but not to such a degree as might be expected. The *mansöngvar* (27 stanzas in all) leave no trace, but these are so atypical of Icelandic genres that their disappearance is hardly surprising. There are even instances where the *mansöngvar* have been omitted from a *rímur* manuscript.³⁴ From the first *ríma* the saga omits the descriptions of each of the three inherited treasures (six stanzas in all), but their particular powers are later made clear during the course of the poem. Likewise in the saga there is no coyness on the part of the hero before finally revealing the secret of his first gift (163,9), while in the *rímur* it takes a full thirteen stanzas for the girlfriend to wheedle the information from him (I,41–53). It is quite rare, however, that such large segments of information are omitted entirely in the prose retelling, and even condensed passages are infrequent. An example of this latter phenomenon, however, is found in the second *ríma*, where Jónatas' trip home to his mother after losing his ring comprises only seven lines in the saga (164,12–18), while this section is told in five stanzas in the poetic redaction (II,20–24).

Besides omitted material there is also action added as well, which indicates that the saga author felt a certain freedom to take liberties of a creative nature with his source. In both *rímur* and saga, after Jóna-

³⁴ E.g. *JS 340, 4to*. Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímur af Flóres og Leó* in *Rit Rímnafélagsins*, vol. 6 (Reykjavík, 1956), p. xviii.

tas' clever concubine has lost his magic brooch, he foils her attempted but feigned suicide. Thereupon the saga adds that she fainted and that he brought her to with a dousing of cold water (165,12). In the third *ríma* Jónatas rides to the castle and is immediately granted an audience with the king, while in the saga the king commands that the hero first be given fine clothing and velvet shoes (169, 20–21). Both *rímur* and saga mention that Jónatas was not recognized upon reentering the city where he had studied, but only the latter supplies some motivation by having the hero don a disguise and allow his hair and beard to grow (170,24–25).

Of interest in the saga is the mention of a special trip to the school which Jónatas' mother makes in order to give him the ring (162,17), for this fails to appear in any *rímur* or *ævintýri* manuscripts. Since the *rímur* author had previously stated that the mother was keeping the gifts for her young son (I,13–14), the saga writer evidently felt obliged to explain how Jónatas happened to have the ring with him in school, although his mother's return home is never mentioned.

Much more usual than additions which increase the action are those which supply descriptive material. It is only in the saga that Goli-friddus is said to be "af einu ypparlegu edal slegte" (161,12) or about Jónatas that "huxade hann umm räd fodurs sýns, og gaf sig til lærdöms ydkana" (162,15). When Jónatas wishes to leave the castle after healing the king there of leprosy, only the saga gives his goal as Wal-land (170,8) and the length of the trip as 122 miles (170,20). After Jónatas' return to the city, we learn that the queen, his former girlfriend, had been sick for three years (171,11) and the hero is given the unnecessary incentive that he can earn a great deal of money by curing her (171,13–15). After the open confession of her sins and the revelation of the treasure's whereabouts, the saga adds that the queen gave him the key to the chest (172,14). One interesting change of emphasis is given upon Jónatas' receipt of the third magic object. In the *rímur* the hero says he will never see his mother again should he lose the third gift as well (II,49.3–4), but in the saga his mother tells him never to come into her sight again if he should lose the last treasure (166,2–4).

On the stylistic level there are numerous passages which invite comparison. The degree to which saga authors follow their poetic sources will probably vary in individual cases, but in *Jónatas saga* the close

verbal parallels are not exact. They do suffice to show, however, that the *rímur* and not the *ævintýri* were the source of the saga.

öl vid henni arfa þria I,11.3

vid henne öl hann þriä sonu 161,12–13

hamingian ockar beggia I,59.4

beggia Ockar hamingja 163,18–19

hun bra vid Sem huatligast ma II,13.3

hun brä skiött vid 164,4–5

enn broten j sundur kistan mijn II,15.4

kistann er brotenn 164,8

ad vid huurfum bædi snart II,55.4

ad vid hvurfumm nu bæde 166,15–16

Flyttu mig þa Sem fliotast heim II,60.1

flit mig helldur heim sem fljötast 166,26–27

Par til geck a þurre iordu III,12.1

geingur hann so leinge ad hann hafde þurra Jörd 167,15–16

kastala Sier a velli stannda III,24.3

sier eina fagra Borg, standa a velle nockrumm 168,25–26

ætla ad fara til ymsra landa III,39.2

ætludu þau ad sigla til ýmsra landa 170,14–15

FinnR hann skipin III,40.1

hann finnur strax skipenn 170,15

rann a þeim Sa byren besti III,42.2

feingu þeir hinn besta Býr 170,18–19

mier til fota III,58.1

til fóta mier 172,8–9

Læknari var hann og lifdi j fridi III,66.1

læknare var hann og lifde fridsamlega 172,28–29

The paucity of passages demonstrably indebted to the source show that the saga author was by no means a slavish copyist. There are even indications that he went out of his way to paraphrase the *rímur*, as in the following apparent circumlocutions:

og fer með þad til skola Sijns II,50.4

og fór hann enn til þeß Stadar sem adur hafde hann vered
166,5-6

vt j heimsins ysta part II,55.3

üt a odda þeß lands, sem ýtst er i verølldu 166,16-17

The fact that there was indeed a conscious attempt on the part of the author to disguise the poetic heritage of *Jónatas saga* would account for the fact that the archaic vocabulary and numerous turgid kennings so typical of the *rímur* are not carried over to the prose redaction. Likewise the plethora of alliterating phrases, which play an important part in the production of pre-Reformation poetry, is not copied in the prose paraphrase. Even such a suspect saga passage as the following:

kom mödur hans honum*m* i skoola, og fieck honum*m* hrýngenn,
hvorn hann bar daglega a synum*m* Arme, hann var hlýdenn og
högvær vid hvorn mann, og unnu honum*m* aller hugästumm, so
huor eirn þottest göðu bættur, sem mest gat lid synt honum*m*,
hafde hann þad ür huðrs manns hende 162,16-23

corresponds to stanzas which do not use initial *h* as an alliterating stave. At 167,14-15 there is a suspiciously alliterative line (hann hugde helst til bigda hörfa), but although the corresponding passage contains the same word (bygda III,11.1), the alliterating stave in the poetic line is a *v*, not *h*.

Looking at the saga from a larger, compositional perspective, it can be established that the saga writer devoted more effort and space to the final *ríma* than to the others. The same amount of text is devoted to the third *ríma* alone as to the first two *rímur* combined. Several possible reasons for this come to mind, including increased proficiency at translating the poetic text, but the most plausible explanation, at least in this instance, is that the final *ríma*, with its eventful trek through the woods, the visit to the castle, and the reacquisition of the magic objects, provided more interesting narrative material on which to concentrate.

It is hoped the preceding discussion has demonstrated that it is possible to study the art of the post-Reformation saga writers, not only with regard to structure, themes and emphasis, but also on a stylistic

level as well, especially since the poetic source provides a less tempting model for slavish imitation. If it ever does become fashionable to study the *rímur*-derived sagas, the application of criteria such as those used above should allow a meaningful comparison between individual authors as well as between members of the genre.

ÁGRIP

Á 14. öld komst í tísku að snúa sögum frá fyrri öldum í bundið mál, hinar svo kölluðu rímur; en síðar breyttist tískan aftur og voru þá ritaðar frásagnir í óbundnu máli eftir kveðskap fyrri tíma. Þessum „rímna-sögum“ frá síðari öldum hefur til þessa verið lítill gaumur gefinn, þótt slíkar endursagnir virðist vera nógu margar til þess að tala megi um heila bókmenntagein. Hér og hvar í útgáfum eru lauslega nefndar ýmsar slíkar frásögur, svo sem *Hrings saga ok Tryggva*, sem runnin er frá rímunum *Gedraunum*, endursögn *Krossrímna í Lbs. 714, 8vo* og *Hemings þátur* gerður eftir *Hemings rímum* Benedikts Sigurðssonar sem ortar voru 1729. Auk þess eru 22 slíkar endursagnir rímna taldar og flokkaðar í ritgerðinni.

Til þessa hefur ekki verið gerð nein skrá um slíkar „rímna-sögur“, en þær skipta líklega tugum. Í *JS 46, 8vo* er t.a.m. sérstök gerð af *Samsons sögu fagra* sem að nokkru er runnin frá óprentuðum rímum eftir Guðmund Bergþórsson ortum 1683. Rímurnar eru nokkuð langar, 16 alls, og hafa notið talsverðra vinsælda því að þær eru til í 8 handritum. Fyrri hluti sögunnar er gerður eftir 8 fyrstu rímunum með þeim hætti að mansöngvarnir eru teknir upp en sagan síðan sögð í lausu máli. En síðan er horfið frá rímunum, og er síðari hluti hinnar nýju sögu nokkuð nákvæm uppskrift gömlu sögunnar (frá og með 11. kap.). Stundum getur reynst torvelt að greina slíkar endursagnir rímna frá öðrum sem gerðar voru eftir eldri frásögnum í lausu máli eða frá sögum þýddum úr erlendum málum.

Ágætt dæmi um slíkt verk er *Jónatas saga* sem varðveitt er í einu pappírshandriti frá 18. öld, *JS 408, 8vo*. Skrifari er Sigurður Magnússon í Holtum í Hornafirði, og er uppskriftin dagsett 15. febrúar 1772. Sagan er gerð eftir *Jónatas rímum* sem eru þrjár að tölu og munu ortar á seinna hluta 16. aldar, en heimild þeirra er aftur á móti svonefnt *Jónatas ævintýri* frá 15. öld.

Ljóst er að sagan getur ekki verið samin beint eftir ævintýrinu, því að með þeim eru engar beinar líkingar í orðalagi. Í sögunni eru ýmis frávik frá ævintýrinu, en þau má öll rekja til rímnanna. Í ritgerðinni er sýnt hvernig höfundur sögunnar snýr ljóðunum í óbundið mál. Hann fer að ýmsu leyti sjálfstætt með heimild sína, fellir nokkuð úr en eykur öðru við, og þó fremur í lýsingum en í

efni. Orðalagslíkingar eru talsverðar sem vænta má, en þó er athyglisvert að í sögunni verður naumast vart endurhljóms frá ljóðformi rímnanna, hvorki frá stuðlasetningu né fornyrðum eða flóknum kenningum sem nóg er af í rímum. Virðist svo sem höfundur hafi vísvitandi reynt að dylja hinn skáldlega uppruna sögunnar. Hann eyðir jafnmiklu rúmi til að endursegja síðustu rímununa sem hinar fyrri tvær. Líklegasta skýringin er sú að í lokarímum er meira af skemmtilegu efni sem vert var að endursegja.