

LENA ROHRBACH

SUBVERSIVE INSCRIPTIONS

The Narrative Power of the Paratext in Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar

THE ICELANDIC PROSE tradition is characterized by prolonged continuity when it comes to its medial transmission in the long-lasting manuscript tradition of Iceland, its self-designations as sagas, and in terms of narrative traditions. From the middle of the thirteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century, a wide range of prose texts were designated as sagas and also identified themselves as saga. Some of these prose texts exhibit a long-lived transmission from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, with ever new copies (within the framework of an open textual culture that allowed for *mouvance* and ever new recompilations of texts in each manuscript), while others appear at a certain point during this period. These new texts take up and continue the existing narrative traditions, but at the same time, these new sagas frequently introduce new narrative trends and amalgamate them with the saga traditions. These amalgamations have already been discussed, most notably regarding the importation of the Continental romance tradition in the thirteenth century and the German chapbook tradition in the early modern period.

Another period that sees significant changes to saga traditions is the end of the eighteenth century, during the Age of Enlightenment. Scholarship has pointed out that some of the saga-productions of this period move beyond the parameters of saga traditions and ought to be qualified as proto-novels, but comprehensive studies of the literary production of this period are still needed.¹ Studies of individual texts of this time so

1 The following considerations arise from the research project *Novelizations: Scandinavian Prose Literature in the Late Premodern Period* at the University of Zürich (<https://www.ds.uzh.ch/de/projekte/romanhaftwerden.html>), which was preoccupied with developments of prose traditions in the Nordic countries in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The project was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (2020–23). I would like to thank Klaus Müller-Wille, Madita Knöpfle, Patrizia Huber, and Timon von Mentlen for

far have mainly concentrated on the adaptation of motifs and narrative settings from contemporaneous early novels from the Continent and thus referred to elements of the *histoire* to characterize these texts as narratives that go beyond saga traditions.

Two sagas under discussion in this context are *Ólandssaga* and *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar*, which are both attributed to Eiríkur Laxdal (1743–1816). His sagas have previously been characterized as texts that depart from the saga tradition, as “þjóðsagnaefni [...] fellt inn í skáldsögulega framvindu” (‘matter of the folktale embedded in a novel-like course’; Matthías V. Sæmundsson 1996a, 187),² as proto-novels which “while retaining the outward form of the *lygisaga*, seem in retrospect to strive to be more” (Driscoll 1997, 239), and Margrét Eggertsdóttir (2006, 249) stated that it is “clear that *Ólafssaga* deserves recognition as the first Icelandic novel.” However, to date, there are no extensive studies of the two sagas discussing the narrative constituents of these two texts and taking up the question of what it actually is that makes them novels rather than sagas. The few existing studies focus their discussion of the innovative status of the two narratives on their use of literary motifs from both within and outside saga traditions. It has been repeatedly noted that Laxdal’s sagas display intertextual relations to *1001 Nights* and Ludvig Holberg’s *Iter subterraneanum*, and that they borrow both from the *lygisaga* and the Icelandic folktale tradition.³

many fruitful discussions that have left their traces in this article. I also owe thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their meticulous and constructive criticism of earlier versions of this article. All remaining errors and shortcomings are mine.

2 All translations in this article are mine [LR].

3 The only monograph dedicated to Eiríkur Laxdal’s work is by María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir (1996), a thorough discussion of folktale motifs in *Ólafs saga Þórhallasonar*. Short discussions of the two sagas are presented in Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1940, 102–10; Matthías V. Sæmundsson 1996a, 179–88, and in the introductions to the editions of his two sagas by Þorsteinn Antonsson and María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir (see Eiríkur Laxdal 1987 and 2006). It was also the use of folktale motifs which made the texts interesting for the nineteenth-century Icelandic folktale collector Jón Árnason who, however, noted – after having read the manuscript of *Ólandssaga* – that the saga was useless as a source for Icelandic folktales, “því fyrst hefir Eiríkur Laxdal heitinn, sem talinn er höfundur hennar af öllum, logið ótallega inn í munnmælasögurnar í henni, spunnið út úr þeim og ranghermt” (‘because firstly Eiríkur Laxdal, who is said to be the author, has lied countless times in the oral stories contained in the [saga], padded them out and tampered with them’; Letter to Jón Borgfirðingur 10 November 1859, in *Úr fórum Jóns Árnasonar* 1950, 162).

Taking a different approach, this article will focus on the material textuality of Laxdal's sagas and argue that the two sagas inscribe themselves not only thematically but also paratextually into the saga as well as more recent literary traditions and at the same time subvert these traditions. The following analysis will reason that the paratexts form a centerpiece of the literary character of these sagas and allow for insights into the complex diachronic transtextuality of these narratives. It will become obvious that the paratexts are not merely a passive framework but an integral part of the narratives, and that the boundaries between paratext and text are blurred.

Paratexts and Transtextuality

According to Gérard Genette, paratexts are "productions that surround the text and extend it" (Genette 1997, 1). Genette further expands that these productions make the text "present, to ensure the text's presence in the world" (Genette 1997, 1). Regarding the status of these productions as part of the text, Genette remains vague to begin with: "we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text" (Genette 1997, 1). But in his following considerations, it becomes obvious that the paratext is not part of the text but rather situated between a text and the world, or the 'off-text':

It is an "undefined zone" between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text) [...] Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between a text and an off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies. (Genette 1997, 2)

The French title *Seuils* (1987), as well as the subtitle “Thresholds of Interpretation” of the English translation (1997) of Genette’s main monograph on paratexts, employs a thoroughly spatial metaphor to describe the function of paratexts in general. The paratext in Genette’s understanding is an auxiliary text that steers the perception of the main text, “a ‘vestibule’ that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back” (Genette 1997, 2).

Genette’s thoughts on the paratext are part of a comprehensive approach to different types of transtextuality, as most pronouncedly articulated in his monographs *Introduction à l’architexte* (1979, translated to English in 1992) and *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (1982), several years before the original publication of *Seuils*, his monograph solely dedicated to the paratext. In *Palimpsestes*, in a reformulation of previous work on intertextuality, Genette distinguishes five interrelated types of what he decides to denote as transtextuality, that is “everything that brings [a text] in relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts” (Genette 1992, 81). Apart from clearly demarcated intertextual relationships and metatextual comments on a text, Genette identifies the hypertext as a transformation of an existing hypotext such as pastiches or parodies in which the hypotext shines through, and finally architextuality as the relationship of a text to genre and narrative conventions. The different aspects of textuality are closely intertwined: architextuality is based on hypertextuality; hypertextual and architextual qualities of a text often rely on and manifest themselves in the paratext; and the potentiality of paratexts as such draws in turn on generic, architextual conventions, as will become obvious in the following analysis (see Genette 1982, 14–15).

Laxdal’s Sagas in the Icelandic Intellectual Context of the Late Eighteenth Century

Eiríkur Laxdal was born in 1743 as son of Eiríkur Jónsson, the pastor of Hvammur in Laxárdalur.⁴ He attended the cathedral school at Hólar, where he learned Latin and Danish. The rector at the school of Hólar during Eiríkur’s education was Hálfðan Einarsson (1732–1785), later the

4 For a general introduction to Eiríkur Laxdal’s life and *œuvre* with a focus on his prose works, see Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1940, 102–10; Þorsteinn Antonsson and María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir 1987, 375–425; Matthías V. Sæmundsson 1996a, 178–88.

author of *Sciagraphia Historiae Literariae Islandicae autorum et scriptorum tum ineditorum indicem exhibens* (1777), one of the first Icelandic literary histories. Eiríkur went to Copenhagen to study at the university in 1769. It seems that he never completed a degree, and it is uncertain what he actually studied. During his time in Copenhagen, he became a member of *Secta*, a society of young Icelandic intellectuals, but was soon expelled due to inappropriate behavior. The members of *Secta* were preoccupied with the conservation of Icelandic language and literature, and the society was formed by the Icelandic intellectual elite of the time and was also a gateway for the introduction of Enlightenment in Iceland.⁵ Two leading and competing figures in the society were Eggert Ólafsson (1726–1767) and Hannes Finnsson (1739–1796); the latter resided in Copenhagen in the same period as Eiríkur Laxdal, until he was ordained bishop of Skálholt in 1777.

After his return to Iceland in the 1770s, Eiríkur began producing and reproducing texts of different kinds. He is known as author of several *rímur* and poems (*kvæði*), including praise poems on prominent members of the Icelandic elite (see Þorsteinn Antonsson and María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir (1987, 392 and 394–6)). Several of his poems have been handed down in a number of manuscripts containing collections of poems dating from the nineteenth century. There are some autographs in his hand of both his *rímur* and *kvæði* (JS 52 4to, JS 585 4to, Lbs 540 8vo), as well as *rímur* and poems attributed to other men, among them Eggert Ólafsson, written in his hand (Lbs 246 IV 8vo, Lbs 247 8vo). Thus, Eiríkur was actively participating in the intellectual and textual culture of his time and both produced and reproduced texts.

He also wrote two prose narratives, *Ólandssaga* and *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar*. Laxdal's two sagas are handed down in only a few manuscripts, *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar* in an autograph (Lbs 152 fol.) and a nineteenth century copy (Lbs 151 fol.), and *Ólandssaga* in a copy from around 1820 (Lbs 554 4to). *Ólandssaga* is traditionally dated to 1777, while *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar*, based on the paper used for his autograph, is dated to after 1788.⁶ The dating of the latter will be revisited and scrutinized below.

5 The first known statute of the society dates from 1760; see Sigríður Kristín Þorgrímsdóttir 1987, 30; Matthías V. Sæmundsson 1996b, 74–9.

6 A stamp on f. 2r and 3r is dated to 1788, see Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1940, 107.

As only *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar* is transmitted in an autograph, the following analysis will focus on this saga but also briefly touch upon *Ólandssaga* in the contextualizing considerations.

Svo byrjar saga þessi – Textual-Material Saga Framings

Ólafs saga Þórhallasonar is temporally vaguely placed in late-premodern Iceland. The main character of the saga is Ólafur Þórhallason, a sentimentalist and dreamer, and the saga tells his life story in traditional saga style with a heterodiegetic narrator, although with a clear internal focalization that allows for extensive insights into Ólafur's inner thoughts and feelings.⁷ Ólafur is a hopeless case of a son to start with, one of the many *kolbítar* – which can be translated roughly as an idle youth – we know of from Icelandic literature. Jolted by the life-story of his father, he pulls himself together and goes out looking for a number of his father's lost sheep. He ends up in a subterranean cave of enormous dimensions in which he meets a woman called Þórhildur, who introduces herself as underground dweller (*jarðbúi*). Ólafur's first encounter with a subterranean woman leads to many others, and in the course of these encounters he gets deeply entangled, through a number of more or less libidinous relationships, with several subterranean women. Ólafur travels between the world of subterranean and terranean men for the coming years, participates in both worlds, and is instructed in (terranean) theological knowledge, as well as in (subterranean) natural sciences.⁸ In the world of the terraneans, he becomes assistant to the greedy, corrupt, and ignorant bishop Guðandus and has to follow him on his travels through Iceland. The main villain of the major part of the saga is, however, a subterranean woman called Álfgerður, whose malice is presented to Ólafur and the reader at an early stage – a preconception that is, however, deconstructed towards the end of the saga. As pointed out by previous scholarship, the descriptions of the elves and their subterranean world recur in folktale traditions that talk about the elv-

7 The notions of focalization, different types of narrative voices, and diegetic levels used in this article are based on Gérard Genette's narratological vocabulary as developed in his two major narratological monographs *Discours du récit* (1972, English translation *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* (1980)) and *Nouveau Discours du récit* (1983, English translation *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988)).

8 For an in-depth study of the reconciliation of these two worlds in the saga, see María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir (1996).

ish society as a noble and progressive counterpart to human society, while at the same time also heavily drawing on Ludvig Holberg's *Iter subterraneanum* or *Klims Reise under Jordan* (published in 1741 and 1743, respectively).⁹

The autograph of *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar* in Lbs 152 fol. is preserved in a poor state. The paper is worn, the corners and margins as well as the first and last pages are eroded so that a comprehensive material–textual analysis will inevitably experience some limitations due to the ravages of time. The materiality of both the autograph and the copy allows nonetheless several relevant findings that reveal multiple inscriptions into different literary traditions. In the copy of the saga in Lbs 151 fol., the narrative begins with the following opening, written in clear and bold letters in Fraktur, whereas the following text is written in a more cursive script (see Figure 1): “Sva byrjar saga þessi að maður er nefndur Þórhalli er bjó á bæ þeim” (‘Thus begins this saga that a man is called Þórhalli who lived on that farm’; Lbs 151 fol., f. 1r) These first words are followed by a detailed description of the location of the farm in the remainder of the sentence.

This introductory sentence employs the typical opening formula of a saga, followed by an exposition of the characters by means of mentioning their dwelling place. Similar openings can be found in many sagas of different types.¹⁰ Eiríkur's other prose work *Ólandssaga* begins in the very same manner and with the same wording, and furthermore expands the introduction to the ubiquitous reference to the genealogical lines of the character introduced.¹¹ Even without the preceding paratextual declaration and self-designation as saga, this opening clause architextually places the following narrative firmly into the saga tradition.¹²

9 Ludvig Holberg's *Nicolai Klimii iter subterraneanum* or *Niels Klims Reise under Jordan* was translated into Icelandic in 1745 by Jón Ólafsson úr Grunnavík, four years after the Latin edition and the German translation and two years after the Danish edition of the work. The translation is handed down in an autograph from 1750 in Lbs 728 4to; see Jón Helgason 1948, x–xvi; Margrét Eggertsdóttir 2006, 222; Huber, Knöpfle, and von Mentlen 2022.

10 The opening formula “Svá byrjar þessi saga” is in the medieval tradition to be found in, for example, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (e.g., AM 152 I fol., f. 98r) and *Parcevals saga* (e.g., Holm perg 6 4to, f. 39r).

11 “Svö birar sögu þessa að maður er nefndur Raudur, hann var Hergryms son, Hunbogasonar, Arnar sonar, Álfs sonar, Ginnungs, er bjó á Hálogalandi á bæ þeim er á Torgum heitir” (‘Thus begins this saga that a man is called Raudur, he was the son of Hergrimur, the son of Húnbogi, the son of Örn, the son of Álfur, the juggler who lived in Hálogaland on the farm called Torg’; Lbs 554 4to, f. 2r).

12 On generic self-designations in the Old Norse-Icelandic tradition, see Rösli 2020.

Vil ég því segja þér þáttinn –
Enhancements of the Amplified Saga

This inscription is consolidated by further paratextual designations of several chapters within the saga as *þættir* (see Figure 2). The vast majority of the 243 chapters in the saga are introduced by chapter headings stating only the number of the chapter, as visible on f. 19v. Ten chapters do, however, have a second heading that identifies what follows as a *þáttur* (see Table 1). These chapters are introduced with initials in Fraktur that are considerably larger and more decorated than the other chapter initials, and most of the time the headings are also written in a larger Fraktur script.

Table 1: Þættir in Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar

Folio in Lbs 152 fol.	Part/Chapter	Heading ¹³	Narrator
Lbs 151 fol. f. 2r ¹⁴	I, 3	Þórhalla þáttur	Þórhalli
9r	I, 14	Þorhilldar þáttur	Þórhilldur
18v	I, 28	Alvgerþar þátt	Álfhildur
23v	I, 37	Ingivarar þátt sem Filgir	Ingivör
40r	II, 6	Alvbiargar þátt	Álfbjörg
50v	II, 26	þáttinn af Kiartane og Guþrune Bónða dottur	Góðhjálp
62r	II, 49	þáttinn af Olafe Hrolfssyne og Dvalinn syne hans	Sólrún
67v	II, 59	Hromundar þætte	Hrómundur
100r	IV, 5	Kolku þætte	Kólka
114v	IV, 37	Alfgerdar þátt þann sidare	Álfgerður

The designations of chapters as *þættir* link to textual and material conventions in the medieval narrative tradition. Some of the major compilations of *konungasögur* in particular, notably *Morkinskinna* (GKS 1009 fol., c. 1270) and *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol., 1387–1394) are characterized by the interlaced insertion of a multitude of short narrative units, by what Ármann Jakobsson, with reference to Carol Clover, has called digressive

¹³ The headings are presented as they appear in the manuscript.

¹⁴ Lbs 152 fol. is defective at the beginning.

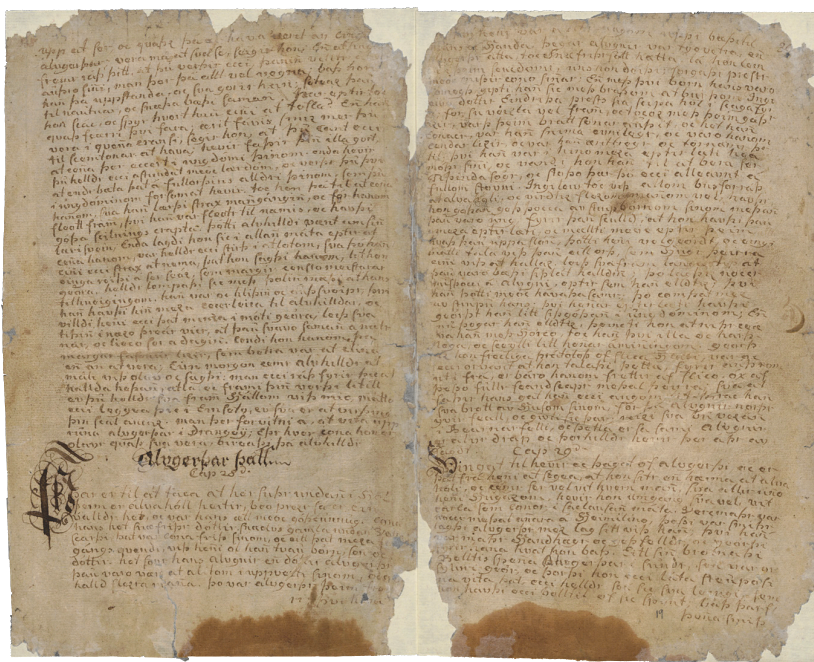


Figure 2: Beginning of Álfgerðar þáttur with decorated initial. Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Lbs 152 fol., f. 18v/19r.

amplifications (see Clover 1982; Ármann Jakobsson 2001). These narrative digressions introduce new characters and add strands to the main narrative. The beginnings of these inserted narratives in both *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* are demarcated with medium-sized initials that are larger than the other chapter rubrics but considerably smaller than the initials introducing new sagas in these compilations (see Figure 3; Ashman Rowe 2005, 359–60). Many of these insertions are labelled as *þáttur* in the rubrics.¹⁵

While the beginning of a *þáttur* is thus paratextually marked in the medieval compilations, the end of an interlacement usually remains unmarked,

15 The designation of a chapter as *þáttur* and the use of medium-sized initials in *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* often, but not always, coincide; see Ármann Jakobsson and Þórunn Ingi Guðjónsson 2011, xl. For a brief consideration of the *þáttur* from a genre-theoretical, terminological perspective, see most recently Röslí 2020, 53–4. For a detailed discussion of the semantic history of *þáttur*, see Lindow 1978. For comprehensive introductions to *þáttir* in the Old Norse literary tradition, see Würth 1991, Ashman Rowe 2005, and Ashman Rowe and Harris 2005.



Figure 3: þattr Rognvalldz capitulum in Flateyjarbók (1387–1394). Reykjavík, Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, GKS 1005 fol., f. 38r.

textually, as well as materially. In her comprehensive study of the insertion of *þættir* in Flateyjarbók, Stefanie Gropper (formerly Würth) has convincingly explained this finding with recourse to a statement in *Þorvalds þáttur tasalda* in Flateyjarbók: the *þættir* are added and interlaced into the main narrative and subsequently merge with it completely and become part of the main strand (Würth 1991, 47). The *þættir* in *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar* are materially integrated in the saga in the very same manner, with a clearly demarcated beginning and an ending that in most cases remains unmarked; the material demarcation of the beginning shows close resemblance to the *mise en page* of seventeenth-century copies of Flateyjarbók, such as AM 57 fol. in the hand of Jón Eirlandsson úr Villingaholti (Figure 4).

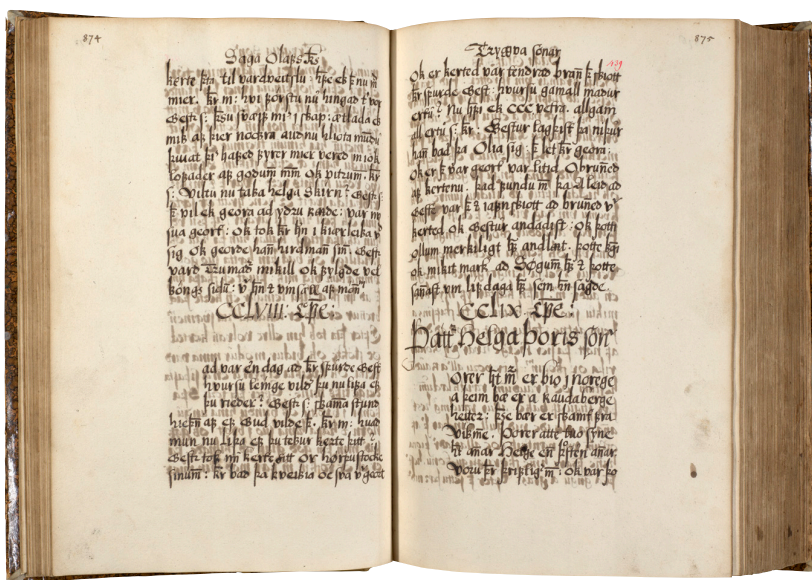


Figure 4: Beginning of *Þættur Helga Þóris sonar* in a copy of *Flateyjarbók* in the hand of Jón Eirlandsson úr Villingaholti (c. 1650). Copenhagen, Arnarnagnæan Collection, AM 57 fol., f. 438v/439r.

Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar thus follows the medieval tradition of narrative stranding and interlacing, but does not leave it at that.¹⁶ In the

16 The interlacing narrative technique has already been pointed out in opposition to and as a deviation from the traditional *þjóðsögur* by Matthías V. Sæmundsson (1996a, 187) and María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir (1996, 241).

compilations of *konungasögur*, the *þættir* are embedded on the same diegetic level as the main narrative with the same reticent heterodiegetic narrative voice. In contrast, the embedded *þættir* in *Ólafssaga* are metadiegetic insertions of a marked homodiegetic and sometimes even autodiegetic metadiegetic narrator. This is to say that while in traditional saga narratives the narrators of both the main narrative strand and the inserted *þættir* are impersonal narrative voices that are external to the narrative (i.e. heterodiegetic), in *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar*, the embedded narratives are narrated by characters in the main narrative that appear in the embedded narratives (i.e. homodiegetic) and sometimes even by the main characters of the stories themselves (i.e. autodiegetic). The *þættir* in traditional sagas are digressive interpolations of the narrative on the same narrative level, whereas the *þættir* in Laxdal's saga are stories told within stories, or metadiegeses. The *þættir* thus introduce new diegetic levels and narrative voices into the narrative.¹⁷ In a further twist of the medieval tradition, these new voices are in most cases female voices whose narrative focuses on female characters.¹⁸ The *þættir* in *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar* are thus gateways to a female perspective, in contrast to the medieval tradition, where the *þættir* exhibit a distinctly male focus (see Harris 1991).

In all but one case, the metadiegetic (female) narrators recount their own genealogy and biography (*ævi*),¹⁹ but it repeatedly only becomes clear at the end of the *þáttur* that this is the case. The *þættir* all stretch over several chapters. For some of them, the end of the *þáttur* coincides with the end of a chapter, and in these instances, the end of the metadiegetic narrative is also indicated with a concluding sentence.²⁰ More often, however,

17 *Ólandssaga* is characterized by a similar narrative structure with insertions of *þættir* into the main narrative but in an even more complex manner, in that additional *þættir* are introduced within a *þáttur*, so that the narrative is a multilayered metadiegetic narrative based on the principle of Chinese boxes.

18 The prominence of female perspectives has also been highlighted by María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir (1996, 123–34) and Lena Rohrbach (2022).

19 In *Ólandssaga*, the longest first-order metadiegetic *þáttur* is even called *Langfeðgaþáttur*, which again architecturally draws on the medieval tradition of genealogies that repeatedly are referred to as *Langfeðgatal* throughout the medieval transmission (see Lbs 554 4to, f. 33r).

20 This is the case for *Álfgerðar þáttur* (“Og þan minn endaði alvhilldr ræþo sina.”) (“And in this way Álfhildur ended her account”; Lbs 152 fol., f. 20v) and *Þáttur af Kjartani og Guðrínu bóndadóttur* (“og hætte nu Godhialp ræðu sinne, og bar ecke fleyra til Tidinda þenna dag.”) (“and Góðhjálpr ended her account now and nothing more happened on this day”; Lbs 152 fol., f. 56r).

the metadiegetic passages end in the middle of a chapter. The metadiegetic narrator exits the metadiegesis between one sentence to another and changes back into a character within the main narrative, which is taken up in a fluent transition and without notice.²¹ Due to these often unmarked endings of the *þattir*, the saga leaves some uncertainty as to the current diegetic status of the narration. The transition from one diegetic sphere to another is often hardly indicated, either materially or in the narrative, which produces a high degree of indeterminacy.

This indeterminacy is also constituted by a blurring of lines between text and paratext. Repeatedly, the chapter heading indicating the beginning of a *þáttur* is at the same time part of the narrative voice, such as at the beginning of *Ingivarar þáttur*:

hon qvaþ sva vera scilldi, oc greindi honom siþann all[an]
Ingivarar þatt sem Filgir (Lbs 152 fol., f. 23v, see fig. 5)

(She said that this is how it should be and told him subsequently
 the complete **Ingivarar þáttur that follows**)

Finally, in yet another expansion of medieval narrative traditions, *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar* makes use of the technique of multiple focalization, this is to say renderings of the same event from multiple perspectives and with diverging knowledge, which is otherwise hardly known from medieval and premodern sagas.²² This technique in fact forms a key element of the whole narrative and is again closely connected to the integration of *þattir* into the saga: the malice of the alleged villain Álfgerður is introduced to her then-lover Ólafur and the reader at an early stage at the beginning of the saga in the metadiegetic account of *Álfgerðar þáttur*, told by Álfhildur, who subsequently becomes Ólafur's subterranean wife. This *þáttur* at the outset of the saga is the only one of the metadiegetic insertions in which the narrator remains heterodiegetic and tells us about the life of somebody else. Álfhildur's narrative remains

21 This is, for instance, the case in *Þórhildar þáttur*, which ends in the middle of chapter I, 19 (see Lbs 152 fol., f. 12v).

22 One rare example for a case of multiple focalization is to be found in *Sálus saga ok Nikanórs*, handed down in a multitude of manuscripts from the fifteenth century onwards.

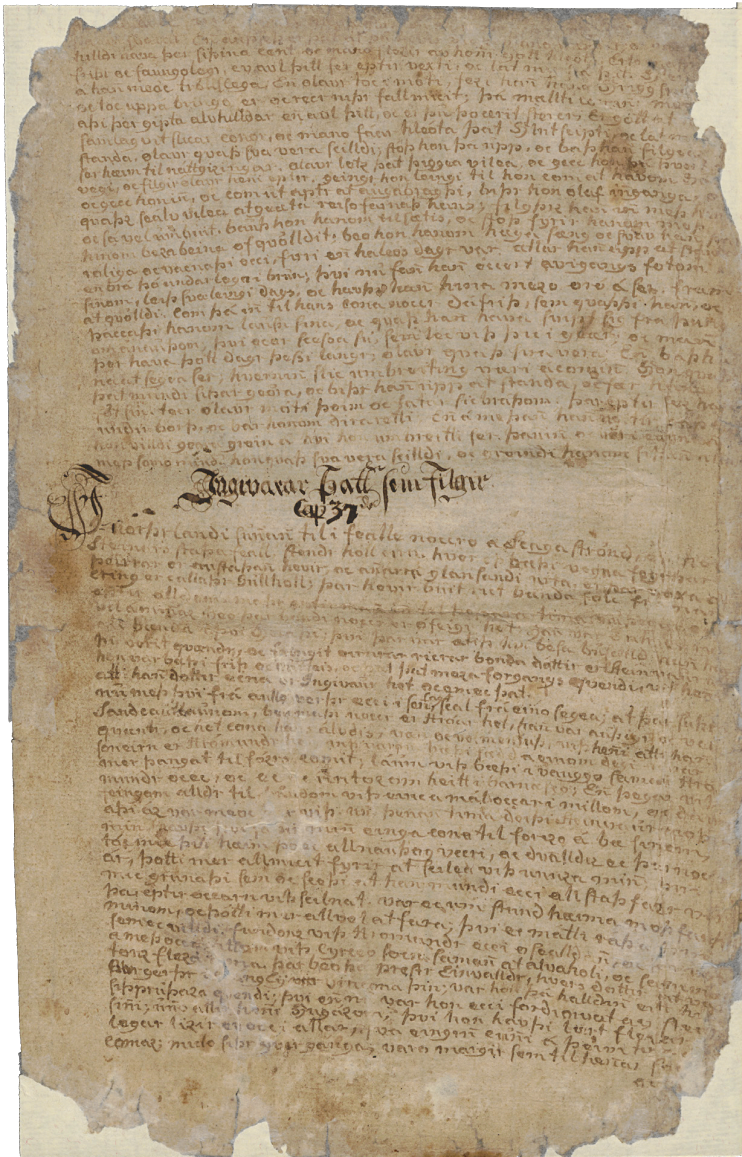


Figure 5: Beginning of Ingvarar þáttur with fluent transition between textual diegesis and paratextual heading. Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Lbs 152 fol., f. 23v.

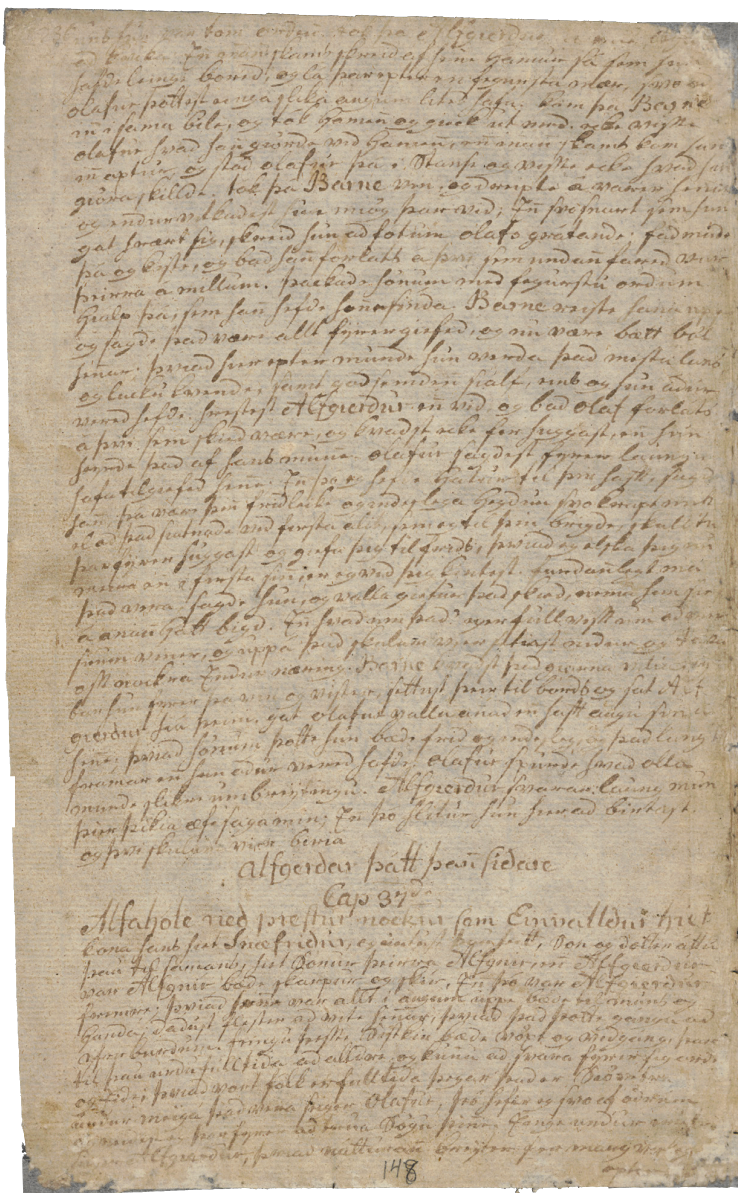


Figure 6: Beginning of Álfgerðar þáttur sá síðari. Reykjavík, Landsbókaskafn Íslands – Háskólabókaskafn, Lbs 152 fol., f. 114v.

uncontested throughout the whole saga. In the last inserted *þáttur*, towards the end of the saga, this preconception is, however, turned upside down, when Álfgerður is allowed to tell that very same story from her own perspective; she relativizes and corrects Álfhildur's portrayal and Ólafur's perceptions in a second *Álfgerðar þáttur* (see Figure 6). This latter *Álfgerðar þáttur*, approximately 200 pages after the first *Álfgerðar þáttur*, leads to a fundamental reevaluation of the whole narrative. When Ólafur complains about this deception, Álfgerður answers with a reply that can also be read as a commentary to the narratee as to the effects of the textual-narrative strategies at work:

Vid það mattu búa sagde Alfgierdur, og er þetta eingum ad k[enna] utan Talhlidne þinne og lauslinde. Þviad þó aller útmáludu mig illa, visser þú sjálfur af eigin Reind, hver og hvilik eg var og var þvi illa gjórdt ad svikia siálfann þig fyrer annara munnmæle. (Lbs 152 fol., f. 117v)

(You have to live with that, Álfgerður said, and nobody is to blame but your credulity towards gossip and your instability; because although they all depicted me as evil, you knew from your own experience who and of what kind I was, and it was badly done to betray yourself for the talk of other people.)

The textual embedding of *þættir* in *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar* firmly situates the narrative in the medieval tradition of saga literature, but at the same time it is precisely this that forms the material backbone of the subversion of this generic tradition: the medieval male *þáttur* is turned into a medium for female voices, which, furthermore, by means of multiple focalizations, illustrates the unreliability of narration. And this subversive narrative enterprise is supported and also evoked by means of the blurred material demarcation lines between different diegetic levels as well as text and paratext.

Kvöldvökulestur – Calling Out Oral Architexts and Written Hypotexts

Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar is furthermore paratextually divided up into four major parts. The beginning of the first part is only handed down in the copy in Lbs 151 fol. and there denoted as “fyrsti hluti” (‘first part’) in the heading on f. 1r (see Figure 1),²³ while the following three parts are paratextually introduced as “Annar Qvølld vau[cu] lestr” (‘Second Evening-Wake reading’; see Figure 7; cf. Lbs 151 fol., f. 45v), “Þridie kvølld vauco lestur” (‘Third Evening-Wake reading’; Lbs 152 fol., f. 70v, cf. Lbs 151 fol., f. 97v), and “Fjorde vauku lestur” (‘Fourth Wake reading’; Figure 8, cf. Lbs 151 fol., f. 130r) in the autograph as well as the copy. The chapters within these four parts are numbered independently and always begin anew.

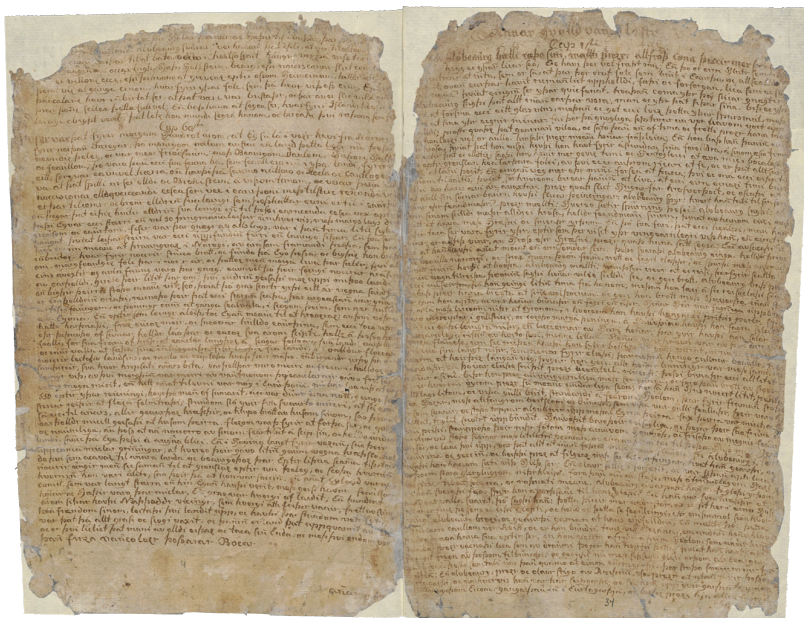


Figure 7: Annar Qvølld vau[cu] lestr. Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Lbs 152 fol., f. 33r/34r.

- 23 The end of the first part in Lbs 152 fol., however, refers to the preceding text as *fyrsti vökulestur*: “oc með því endum ver þann firza vaucolez þessarar Bócar” (‘and herewith we end the first wake-reading of this book’; Lbs 152 fol., f. 33v).

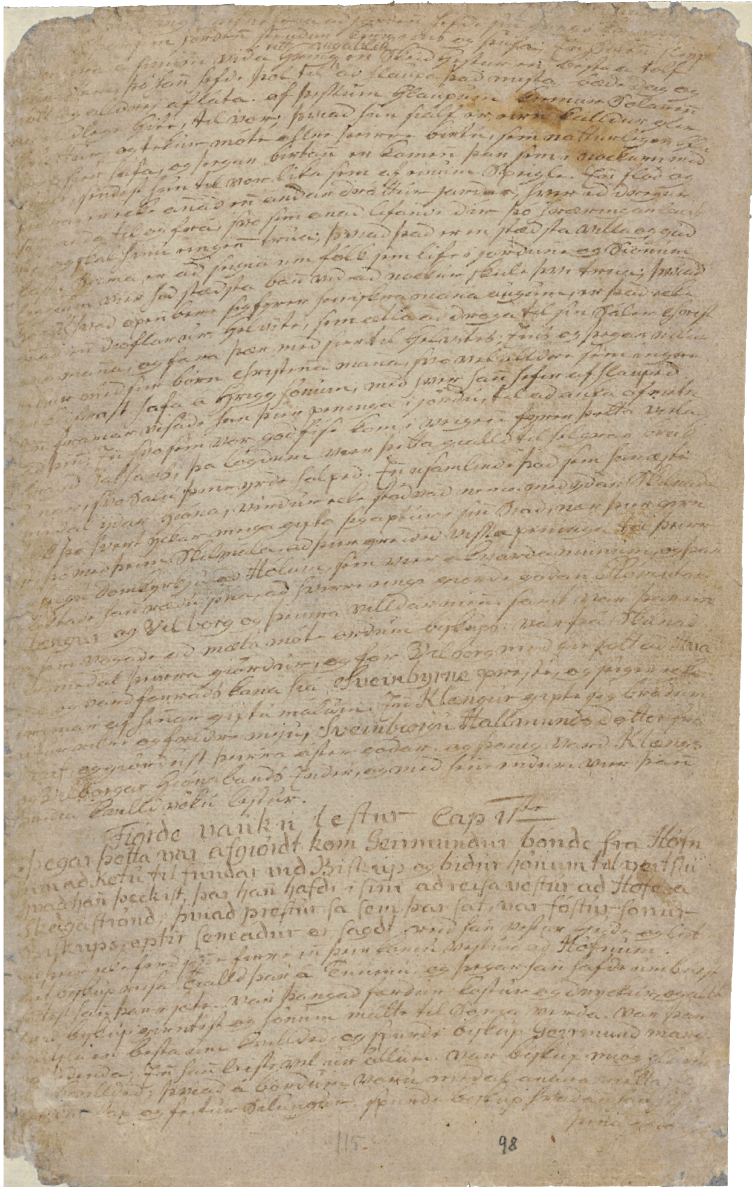


Figure 8: Fjórde vauku lestur. Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Lbs 152 fol., f. 98r.

The denotation of the major parts of the saga as wake readings and evening-wake readings refers to the premodern Icelandic tradition of recitals and readings of literature during the long evening hours in wintertime as it was first described in Eggert Ólafsson's travelogue *Vice-Lavmand Eggert Olafsens og Land-Physici Biarne Povelsens Reise igiennem Island*, a work in the spirit of the Enlightenment that was published in Sorø in 1772.²⁴ The section titles thus paratextually inscribe the written saga into the architext of the semi-oral literary tradition. But there seems to be a more concrete hypotext at work as well. In his travelogue, Eggert Ólafsson does not explicitly denote the oral tradition as *kvöldvaka* or *kvöldvökulestur* (see Figure 9).²⁵ The oldest evidence of this compound in the Icelandic written transmission in the context of literary performance can be traced back to yet another previous member of *Secta* and advocate of the Enlightenment, Eiríkur's Copenhagen acquaintance Hannes Finnsson. After having been installed as bishop of Skálholt in 1777, Hannes became actively involved in the making of texts of different kinds. He produced a new translation of the Bible and authored theological writings and hymns as well as natural-historical works and descriptions of Iceland.²⁶

In 1796 and 1797, two volumes of a reading book for the common people compiled by Hannes Finnsson went into print under the commission of Magnús Stephensen (1762–1833) at Leirárgarðar, where the former printing press of Hrappsey had been moved to in 1795, only to be moved again after a mere twenty years to Beitistaðir (see Jón Helgason 1928, 23; Einar Sigurðsson 1968, 29–31). Magnús Stephensen, a former student and brother-in-law of Hannes Finnsson, was another of the protagonists of the Enlightenment in Iceland and one of the founders of the *Landsuppfræðingarfélag* (Society for National Education), founded in 1794, who Hannes Finnsson also mentions in his foreword to the reading book. Magnús Stephensen not only bought the former printing press of Hrappsey but subsequently also bought and moved the printing press from Hólar to Leirárgarðar in 1799.

24 For a detailed discussion of the premodern tradition of the *kvöldvaka* and the description in Eggert Ólafsson's travelogue, see Driscoll 1997, 38–46. See also Loftur Guttormsson 2003, 198–204.

25 The tradition is described in § 68 of the travelogue under the heading “Saugu-Lestur” (‘Saga Reading’; Eggert Ólafsson 1772, 47–8).

26 On Hannes Finnsson's life and work, see Jón Helgason 1936.

§. 68.

Den allerfornuftigste og nyttigste Tidsfordriv bliver vel uden ^{Saugu-Lestur} Modsigelse, den i Island, fra de første Tider, vedtagne Maade, at læse offentlig de gamle Sagar, eller de i det Islandiske Sprog forfattede Historier. Forend Islanderne begyndte for Alvor at skrive, (hvilken Tid kan regnes at tage sin Begyndelse 200 Aar efter Landets første Beboelse), bleve saadanne Historier udi alle Samkvem mundtlig fortaalte af dem, der vare meest kyndige, veltalende og ovede i Kunsten, saasom der giærne vare nogle tilstede, især af Skaldene og de Fornemste, der med Flid lagde sig efter sigt. Var nogen i Etskab, som vidste at fortælle den eller den Tidraagelse rigtigere eller med flere Omstændigheder, da blev det bifaldet og behødet i Hufommelsen, tit hvilken Ende saadanne Hændelser ogsaa bleve udfaarne og malede paa Dørre, Sengesteder og Panelværket i Stuen. Forst i det 13de Hundrede Aar begyndte Islanderne ret for Alvor at forfatte skriftligen saavel de indlandiske som andre nordiske Historier, og dog var endda den Sæf brugelig, at fortælle Historier mundtligen, hvilket kan sees af *Sturlunga-Saga* og *Kong Saagen den Gamles Historie*. Ja end i Dag fortælles de mundtligen i Island, især i Lutsmørket; men naar Lyset er tændt, beskaffes giærne en Dreng, som godt kan læse, eller en anden af Gæsterne, dertil; og hvis Huusbonden er en Etsker af Historier, laaner han hos Naboerne eller andre gode Venner, saa mange Sagar, som han kan være forsynet med for heele Vinteren; og herved bliver den Arbeidende munter og vaagen. For at gjøre denne Tidsfordriv endnu behageligere, have Poeterne fra det 14de Hundrede Aars Begyndelse, gjort dem Umage for at oversætte Sagar paa Vers, hvilke almindeligen kaldes

Figure 9: § 68 on Saugu-Lestur (Saga Reading) in Vice-Lavmand Eggert Olafsens og Land-Physici Bjarne Povelsens Reise igiennem Island. Sorø 1772, 47.

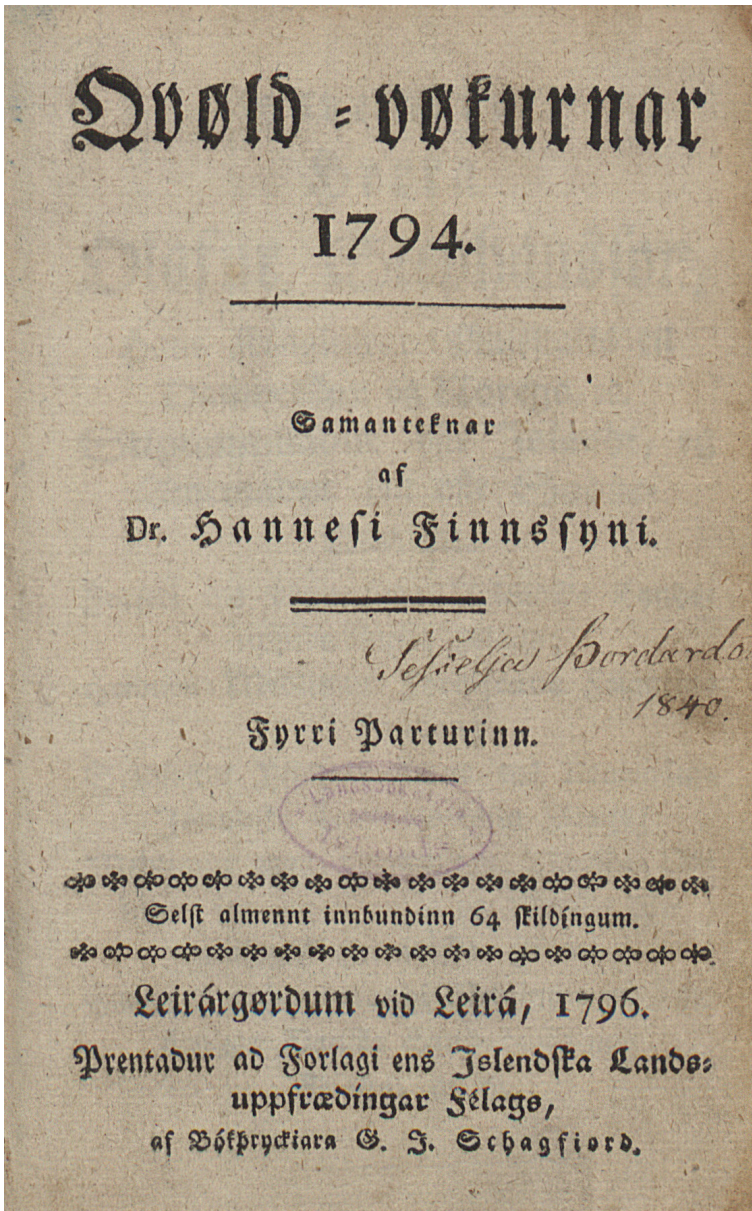


Figure 10: Title page of Hannes Finnsson's *Qvöld = vøfurnar 1794*, vol. 1. *Leirárgarðar á Leirá 1796*.

The title of the two volumes was *Qvöld-vøkurnar 1794* ('The Evening Wakes 1794'; see Figure 10), and the prologue in the first volume refers to this title repeatedly. The reading book contains excerpts from the Bible, riddles, drama for children, fables, and parables, as well as parts on the natural sciences, for example, a didactic dialogue about the climate in Iceland between a pastor and a man called Sigurður (see Figure 11). It was the first book of its kind in Iceland and was well received by the population.²⁷

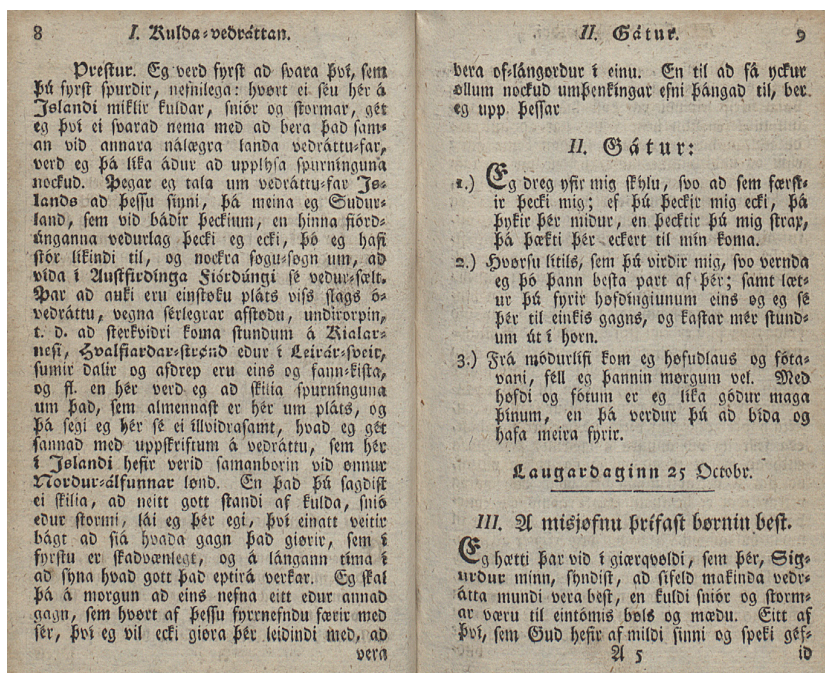


Figure 11: Didactic dialogue and riddles in Hannes Finnsson's *Qvöld-vøkurnar 1794*, vol. 1. *Leirárgarðar á Leirá* 1796, 8–9.

27 Jón Helgason even states that it was the most-read book of its time in Iceland: “Sérstaklega þótti hún velfallin til að selja hana stálpuðum unglingum í hendur, en fullorðna fólkíð var ekki síður sólgíð í *Kvöldvøkurnar*, og er vafasamt, hvort önnur bók hefir öllu meira verið lesin hér á landi á fyrri hluta 19. aldar” (‘It seemed particularly apt for adolescents, but adults were also absorbed by the *Kvöldvökur*, and it is questionable whether another book was more read in this country in the first half of the nineteenth century’; Jón Helgason 1936, 219–20). See also Matthías V. Sæmundsson 1996b, 106–7 and Ingi Sigurðsson 2003, 130.

The disposition of *Qvöld-vökurnar* is firmly rooted in Lutheran doctrine, while at the same time also exhibiting inclinations towards the paradigms of the Enlightenment. Hannes Finnsson expounds that the composition of a reading book needs to take into account the state of erudition and enlightenment in a population:

heldur þarf sá, sem tekur sér það fyrir höndur, að vita hvað langt upplýsingin í því landi er komin, hvað lesendum hans sé mest umhugad um, hvada rángar innbirlingar þeir hafi, [...] svo uppfædarinn eptir þessu viti í hvada horf á að stefna. Allt þetta játa eg satt að vera, og þecki þess vegna þá kostgæfni, varúd, stillingu og greind, sem slíkur uppfædari þarf að brúka, en mínar Qvöldvökur ætla ei að taka sér nærri svo mikid í fang, þær láta sér nægia (svo eg brúki áður téda samlíkingu), að bráka eitt eða annad ógresi, og hreyta út aptur einstaka göðu fræ-korni. (Hannes Finnsson 1796, xv–xvi)

(rather, where an enterprise like this is taken up, one has to know how far the Enlightenment has progressed in that country, what one's readers are most occupied with, what wrong conceits they hold, [...] so that the instructor may know what needs to be taken up. I consent that all of this is true, and acknowledge the conscientiousness, wariness, sobriety, and intelligence that such an instructor needs to use, but my Evening Wakes do not intend to achieve so much; rather they are content with (to use again this comparison) dragging out one or the other weed, and casting out again a single good seed.)

Hannes Finnsson further particularizes that the wrong perceptions in the population derive from the reading of “*Tröllasögur og Æfintýri full af ósidum og hiátrú*” (‘troll sagas and folktales, full of bad customs and superstition’; Hannes Finnsson 1796, xxi). However, he does not intend to lead the population, and in particular the children, away from these wrong beliefs by forcing them to read the Bible or theological writings, but rather takes a different approach:

þá er mitt ráð, að kenna börnum ei hinn fyrsta bóklestur á Gudfrædisbækur, heldur smásögur, audskilin heilræði og þvítíkt t.d. Sumar-gjöf handa börnum, sem er yfrid góð og þægileg bók til barna uppfræðingar. Þegar börn eru búin með hana, þá kynnu sumar frásagnir og dæmisögur úr *Qvöldvökum* þessum vera betri til æfingar í lestri, enn ein og önnur ósidsamleg æfintíri, riddara- og trølla-sögur, um hnútukøst og knífíl-yrdi jøtna, með ødrum sómalitlum eda aldeilis ótrúlegum athøfnum þeirra. (Hannes Finnsson 1796, xxiii)

(It is my advice to teach the children to read not with theological writing, but rather with short stories, easily understandable advice, and similar, such as *Sumar-gjöf handa börnum* [A Summergift for Children],²⁸ which is a particularly good and pleasant book for the instruction of children. When children are done reading that, some stories and parables in these *Qvöldvökur* are better suited for reading exercises than some immoral folktale, *riddarasögur*, or troll sagas, about wrangling and quarrels of giants, with their dishonorable or completely improbable events.)

Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar reads like a parodic and at the same time supportive hypertext to Hannes Finnsson's enterprise, and this reading is strongly confirmed by the paratextual macrostructure of the saga as a series of (*kvöld*)*vökur*. Eiríkur Laxdal's (evening) wake readings in *Ólafssaga* present narrative negotiations of immoral as well as improbable events, interspersed with instructions in theological and scientific knowledge. The story is set in the story world of the folktale, but within this setting, the deconstruction of *ránger innbirlingar* (wrong conceits) is the issue at stake. If one follows these considerations and assumes *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar* to be a reaction to Hannes Finnsson's request, the *terminus post quem* for *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar* would need to be slightly adjusted and dated to after 1796. At any rate, the saga comes into being in an idea-historical and discursive context in close proximity to the educational writings of the bishop, but with a more playful and literary shape.

28 *Sumar-gjöf handa börnum* is a translation of the German *Zeitvertreib und Unterricht für Kinder* by Guðmundur Jónsson and the first book that was printed in Leirárgarðar, in the year 1795 (Einar Sigurðsson 1968, 29; Matthías V. Sæmundsson 1996, 109).

Paratexts, Blurred Boundaries, and Novelizations of Saga Traditions

A paratextual study of *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar* reveals intricate inscriptions both into the long-lasting textual tradition of saga literature and into recent textual novelties. The paratexts in the saga are hypertextual and architextual gateways – or thresholds – to the Icelandic literary tradition, but they are at the same time also much more than that, as they are actively employed in the construction of the core concern of the narrative. The paratextual reference to the literary tradition is subverted by the way both *þættir* and *kvöldvökur* are set into contexts that deviate considerably from their original textual settings, with new narrative voices, levels, and modes at work. Finally, the saga challenges not only the evoked architexts and hypotexts, but also the demarcations between text and paratext as well as the inside and outside of the narrative. The paratexts merge with the text and become integral parts of the narrative, and these blurred boundaries form yet another central element of the narrative enterprise.

The reconfigurations of narrative traditions at work in *Ólafssaga* correspond with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of novelization as he explicates it in his essay "Epic and the Novel":

The novelization of literature does not imply attaching to already completed genres a generic canon that is alien to them, not theirs. The novel, after all, has no canon of its own. It is, by its very nature, not canonic. It is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review. Therefore, the novelization of other genres does not imply their subjection to an alien generic canon; on the contrary, novelization implies their liberation from all that serves as a brake on their unique development[.] (Bakhtin 1981, 39)

Ólafssaga is a perfect example of the continuous process of novelization: it is deeply rooted in the literary tradition, liberates itself from it, and develops something utterly new, with the paratext at the heart of this endeavor.²⁹

29 An application of Bakhtin's processual notion of the novel to eighteenth-century saga literature has already been suggested by Matthías V. Sæmundsson, but again with regard to matter and discursive characteristics, rather than based on narratological and textual considerations; see Matthías V. Sæmundsson 1996a, 145.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MANUSCRIPTS

Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Reykjavík

AM 57 fol.

GKS 1005 fol.

AM 152 I fol.

Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen

GKS 1009 fol.

Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm

Holm perg 6 4to

Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Reykjavík

JS 52 4to

Lbs 728 4to

JS 585 4to

Lbs 246 IV 8vo

Lbs 151 fol.

Lbs 247 8vo

Lbs 152 fol.

Lbs 540 8vo

Lbs 554 4to

WORKS CITED

- Ashman Rowe, Elizabeth. 2005. *The Development of Flateyjarbók. Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389*. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Ashman Rowe, Elizabeth, and Joseph Harris. 2005. "Short Prose Narrative (þáttur)." *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, edited by Rory McTurk, 462–78. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ármann Jakobsson. 2001. "The Amplified Saga. Structural Disunity in Morkinskinna." *Medium Aevum* 70 (1):29–46.
- Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson. 2011. "Formáli." *Morkinskinna*, edited by Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, v–lxviii. 2 vols. Íslenzk fornrit 23 (I). Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. "Epic and the Novel. Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, 3–40. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Clover, Carol. 1982. *The Medieval Saga*. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press.
- Driscoll, Matthew. 1997. *The Unwashed Children of Eve. The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland*. Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press.

- Eggert Ólafsson. 1772. *Vice-Lavmand Eggert Olafsens og Land-Physici Bjarne Povelsens Reise igiennem Island*. Sorø: Jonas Lindgrens Enke.
- Einar Ól. Sveinsson. 1940. *Um íslenzkar þjóðsögur*. Reykjavík: Sjóður Margrétar Lehmann-Filhés.
- Einar Sigurðsson. 1968. *Ágrip af íslenzkri prentsmiðjusögu*. Reykjavík: [no publisher].
- Eiríkur Laxdal. 1987. *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar. Álfasagan mikla. Skáldsaga frá 18. öld*. Edited by Þorsteinn Antonsson and María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir. Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga.
- . 2006. *Ólandssaga*. Edited by Þorsteinn Antonsson and María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir. Reykjavík: Háskólaprent.
- Genette, Gérard. 1972. “Discours du récit: Essai de méthode.” In *Figures III*, 67–267. Paris: Le Seuil.
- . 1979. *Introduction à l'architecte*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- . 1980. *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Foreword by Jonathan Culler. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 1982. *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- . 1983. *Nouveau discours du récit*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- . 1987. *Seuils*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- . 1988. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 1992. *The Architect. An Introduction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1997. *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hannes Finnsson. 1796–1797. *Qvøld-vøkurnar 1794*. 2 vols. Leirárgarðar við Leirá: Ed Íslenska Lands-Uppfræðingar-Félag.
- Harris, Joseph. 1991. “Gender and Genre. Short and Long Forms in the Saga Literature.” *The Making of the Couple. The Social Function of Short-Form Medieval Narrative*, edited by Flemming Gotthelf Andersen, and Morten Nøjgaard, 43–66. Odense: Odense University Press.
- Huber, Patrizia, Knöpfle, Madita, and von Mentlen, Timon. 2022. “Medialität des Erzählens in der skandinavischen Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit.” *Medioscope. Blog des Zentrums für Historische Mediologie Zürich*. 31 August 2022. <https://dlf.uzh.ch/sites/medioscope/2022/08/31/> (last accessed September 1, 2024).
- Ingi Sigurðsson. 2003. “Útbreiðsla og viðtökur alþýðlegra fræðslurita.” *Alþýðumenning á Íslandi 1830–1930. Ritað mál, menntun og félagsbreyfingar*, edited by Ingi Sigurðsson and Loftur Guttormsson, 11647. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.
- Jón Helgason [professor]. 1928. *Hrappseyjarprentsmiðja 1773–1794*. Copenhagen: S. L. Möller.

- . 1948. “Inngangur.” Ludvig Holberg: *Nikulás Klím. Íslenzk þýðing eftir Jón Ólafsson úr Grunnavík*, ed by Jón Helgason, v–xviii. Íslenzk rit síðari alda 3. Copenhagen: S. L. Möller.
- Jón Helgason [bishop]. 1936. *Hannes Finnsson biskup í Skálholti*. Reykjavík: Ísafold.
- Lindow, John. 1978. “Old Icelandic þátr. Early Usage and Semantic History.” *Scripta Islandica* 29:3–44.
- Loftur Guttormsson. 2003. “Lestrarhættir og bókmennning.” *Alþýðumenning á Íslandi 1830–1930. Ritað mál, menntun og félagsshreyfingar*, edited by Ingi Sigurðsson and Loftur Guttormsson, 195–214. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.
- Margrét Eggertsdóttir. 2006. “From Reformation to Enlightenment.” *A History of Icelandic Literature*, edited by Daisy Neijmann, 174–250. *Histories of Scandinavian Literatures* 5. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir. 1996. *Tveggja heima sýn. Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar og Þjóðsögurnar*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.
- Matthías V. Sæmundsson. 1996a. “Sagnaskáldskapur 18. aldar.” *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* III, edited by Halldór Guðmundsson, 144–88. Reykjavík: Mál og menning.
- Matthías V. Sæmundsson. 1996b. “Upplýsing að íslenskum hætti.” *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* III, edited by Halldór Guðmundsson, 71–111. Reykjavík: Mál og menning.
- Rohrbach, Lena. 2022. “Weibliche Stimmen – männliche Sicht. Rekalibrierungen von Gender und Genre in der Ólafs saga Þórhallasonar.” *Þáttasýrpa. Studien zu Literatur, Kultur und Sprache in Nordeuropa*, edited by Anna Katharina Heiniger, Rebecca Merkelbach, and Alexander Wilson, 257–65. *Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie* 72. Tübingen: Francke 2022.
- Rösli, Lukas. 2020. “Terminology.” *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, edited by Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington, and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, 47–59. *Studies in Old Norse Literature* 5. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.
- Sigríður Kristín Þorgrímsdóttir. 1987. “Hannes Finnsson og Eggert Ólafsson, andstæðingar eða skoðanabræður?” *Sagnir* 8:28–33.
- Úr fórum Jóns Árnasonar. *Sendibréf*. 1950–51. 2 vols. Edited by Finnur Sigmundsson. Reykjavík: Hlaðbúð.
- Würth, Stefanie. 1991. *Elemente des Erzählens. Die þættir der Flateyjarbók*. *Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie* 20. Basel; Frankfurt am Main: Helbing & Lichtenhahn.
- Þorsteinn Antonsson and María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir. 1987. “Höfundurinn og sagan.” *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar. Álfasagan mikla. Skáldsaga frá 18. öld*, edited by Þorsteinn Antonsson and María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir, 375–427. Reykjavík: Bókautgáfan Þjóðsaga.

SUMMARY

Subversive Inscriptions. The Narrative Power of the Paratext in *Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar*

Keywords: Enlightenment, genre traditions, *kvöldvaka*, narrative techniques, paratexts, *þættir*

Eiríkur Laxdal's *Ólafs saga Þórhallasonar* has repeatedly been addressed as an early proto-novel or novel in the Icelandic tradition. The argumentation in previous research has mainly been based on elements of the *histoire*. This article takes a different approach and focusses on the material textuality of Laxdal's saga. It argues that the saga inscribes itself not only thematically, but also in terms of its material and narrative features into both saga and contemporaneous literary traditions, while at the same time subverting these traditions. With a departure point in Gérard Genette's approach to different types of transtextuality, the article discusses the central role of paratexts, namely headings of different kind, in this inscription into and subversion of genre traditions. By designating individual chapters as *þáttur* and the four main parts of the saga as (*kvöld*-)*vökulestur*, the saga evokes medieval and premodern narrative traditions, but at the same time, these traditions are subverted by advanced narrative techniques that lead to narrative uncertainty and unreliability, such as multiple focalizations, embedded narratives with changing (female) narrators, several diegetic levels, and blurred lines between text and paratext. These techniques are used to deconstruct false perceptions of readers as well as characters in the narrative. This deconstructive effort is at the heart of *Ólafs saga Þórhallasonar*. It can be read as a literary take in line with contemporary requests of main agents of the Enlightenment, and the article argues that it might even be understood as a direct, literary response to bishop Hannes Finnsson's reading book *Qvöld-vøkurnar* that were printed in 1796/97.

ÁGRIP

Innskráning og afbygging. Frásagnarkraftur í hliðartextum í *Sögu Ólafs Þórhallasonar*

Efnisorð: upplýsing, hefðir bókmenntagreina, kvöldvaka, hliðartextar, frásagnarlist, þættir

Saga Ólafs Þórhallasonar eftir Eirík Laxdal hefur ítrekað verið kölluð frumskáldsaga eða skáldsaga í íslenski bókmenntahefð. Rökstuðningur fyrri rannsókna hefur aðallega byggst á *histoire* eða efni sögunnar. Þessi grein er annars konar nálgun og fjallar um efnislega textagerð sögu Laxdals. Hér er því haldið fram að sagan falli ekki aðeins þematískt inn í bæði fornsagnahefðina og samtímabókmenntahefðina heldur einnig hvað varðar efnislega eiginleika og frásagnareinkenni, en sýni um leið sérstöðu gagnvart þessum þáttum. Með því að nota greiningu Gérard Genettes á mismunandi gerðum af *transtextuality*, eða transtextagerð, fjallar greinin um meginhlutverk *paratexta*, eða hliðartexta, einkum fyrirsgagna af ólíkum toga þar sem sagan bæði sver sig í ætt við og brýtur niður hinar hefðbundnu bókmenntagreinar. Með því að kalla einstaka kafla *þætti* og fjóra meginhluta sögunnar (*kvöld*)*vökulestur* kallar sagan fram miðalda- og síðari alda frásagnarhefð en um leið er grafið undan þessum hefðum með háþróaðri frásagnartækni sem leiðir til frásagnaróvissu og óáreiðanleika, svo sem með því að nota fjölda sjónarhorna, frásagnir með breytilegum (kvenkyns) sögumönnum sem felldar eru inn í söguna, fleiri gerðir frásagna og óskýr skil milli texta og hliðartexta. Þessar aðferðir eru notaðar til að afbyggja ranga skynjun lesenda, sem og persóna í frásögninni. Þessi afbygging er kjarninn í *Ólafs sögu Þórhallasonar*. Hægt er að lesa hana sem bókmenntalegt framlag í samræmi við kröfur helstu umboðsmanna upplýsingarinnar og í greininni er því haldið fram að jafnvel megi skilja hana sem bein bókmenntaleg viðbrögð við lestrarbókinni *Qvöld-vökurnar* eftir Hannes Finnsson biskup sem prentuð var árið 1796/97.

Lena Rohrbach
Universität Zürich
Deutsches Seminar
Schönberggasse 9
CH-8001 Zurich
Switzerland
lena.rohrbach@uzh.ch