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# Narrative Voices

## Options and Limitations in Saga Literature

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# Introduction

## Narrative Voices, their Effects in Saga Literature, and the Case of ›Gull-Þóris saga‹

### 1. Options and Limitations in Saga Narration

In the Old Norse-Icelandic saga ›Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss‹ (›The Saga of Bárðr, the Guardian Spirit of Snæfellsnes‹), a rough-going wedding party takes place in the cave of Kolbjörn, a type of giant (*þurs*).[1] The cave is described as *bæði fúlt ok kalt* (ÍF 13, p. 150; ›both foul and freezing‹, CSI 2, p. 256). Soon, the guests, most of them paranormal beings, begin to drink and eat without moderation. Though the bridegroom, Þórðr, is human, the saga mentions that both horse and human flesh are on offer, a clear sign to any saga audience that we are in the realm of paganism, since eating horse meat was forbidden when Iceland was Christianised (ÍF 1, p. 17), and the paranormal, since trolls and giants are known to eat people – meaning it also stands as a warning that Þórðr is not safe in their company. The party goes well, and it gets louder and louder in the cave:

> *Var nú matr borinn […] var þat bæði hrossa kjöt ok manna; tóku þá til matar ok rifu sem ernir ok etjutíkr hold af beinum. […] drykkr var par áfengr ok lítt sparaðr. […] Nú tóku menn Kolbjarnar at drekka með lítilli stillingu, ok urðu þeir skjótt allir svíndrukknir ok váru ekki lágtalaðir, en hellirinn hljóðaði mjök undir.* (ÍF 13, pp. 152–153)

> Food was brought […] There was both horse and human flesh. They began to eat, ripping the flesh from the bones like eagles and hunting bitches. […] The

> drink was strong and little spared. […] Kolbjörn's men began to drink with little moderation, and they quickly became as soused as swine and made such a row that the cave resounded. (CSI 2, p. 257)

After this gluttony, the host suggests playing a game and Gestr – one of the guests and an outsider to the group, who has offered to accompany Þórðr to protect him – quickly proposes two games: *Gestr segir, því at hann varð skjótari til andsvara: ›Hafi þat þínir menn helzt til gamans, sem þeim er skapfelldast; hafið þá hvárt þér vilið, knútukast eða glímur‹* (ÍF 13, p. 153; ›Because he was quicker to answer, Gestr said, »Let your men do for fun as they would like best. Let them have a go at joint-throwing or hold wrestling matches«‹, CSI 2, p. 257). The wedding party opts for the former option, throwing the bones from the feast at one another. As soon as the first injuries occur due to the unruliness of the game, the narrative voice mentions again how loud it is in the cave: *Þenna áverka sér Ámr, fóstbróðir hans,* [Gláms] *ok tekr þegar knútuna ok lætr fjúka at Þorvaldi. Þetta sér Þórðr ok tekr í móti ok sendir aptr. Knútan kemr á kinnbein Áms, svá kjálkinn brotnaði í stykki. Varð nú óhljóð mikit í hellinum* (ÍF 13, p. 154; ›His foster-brother Am saw this wound, took the bone, and let it fly at Thorvald. Thord saw this, grabbed it, and sent it back, the knuckle bone hit Am's cheekbone so that it broke his jaw into bits. Now there was a huge uproar in the cave‹, CSI 2, p. 258).

It is only when Gestr breaks another guest's thighs and arms during the game, however, that the other guests begin to howl with immense noise. The loudness becomes so unbearable that it is beyond verbalisation for the narrative voice: *Þursarnir gera nú miklu meira óhljóð en frá megi segja, því at svá má at kveða, at þeira hljóð væri líkari nágöll en nökkurs kykvendis látum* (ÍF 13, p. 154; ›Now the ogres made more noise than can be described because it may be said that their howls were more like the screaming of corpses than any living thing‹, CSI 2, p. 258). At this point, Kolbjörn, the host, decides to stop the game in order to protect the guests and prevent an escalation: *Kolbjörn mælti þá: ›Gefið upp þenna leik, því*

*at af Gesti munum vér allir illt hljóta; var þat ok þvert í móti mínum vilja, at hann var hingat boðinn.‹ ›Svá búit muntu þat hafa‹, segir Gestr* (ÍF 13, p. 154; ›Kolbjörn announced: »Give up this game, for at Gest's hands we will all be harmed. It was against my advice that he was invited here to the banquet.« »That's the way it goes«, said Gest‹, CSI 2, p. 258). Gestr's statement is ambiguous: it can be read either as a simple confirmation of Kolbjörn's decision, or as an underlying threat by Gestr. Kolbjörn seems to understand that Gestr suggested the bone-throwing game in order to gain an opportunity to harm as many of the *þursar* as possible. Gestr soon finds an alternative plan, beheading the drunken ogres once they fall asleep after the feast, but at this moment in the narrative, his true intentions are known only to him.

The narrative account of the festive episode illustrates the versatility of saga narration. As in any other (*Íslendinga*-)saga, the narrative of ›Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss‹ is told through multiple voices. The main narrative voice, located on the extradiegetic level, assumes a primarily organisational function: it sets the scene, introduces the characters, structures the narrative, and details the action of lively scenes, such as the bone-throwing game discussed above. What is more, the narrative voice includes less obvious information that explains the logic of the story to the audience, such as the detail that Gestr was able to determine the type of game played because he was quicker to answer than the other guests. Interestingly, the limitations of what is known and what can be told verbally are also addressed by this voice; in the above example, the narrative voice declares it impossible to describe the loud noise in the cave with words, and thus resorts to a vivid image in order to give the audience an impression of the situation. Evaluative comments are also offered, as when the wedding guests are said to eat and drink without moderation.

Yet the saga is narrated through multiple voices. In addition to the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrative voice, the events of the saga are told through further voices, such as those of the saga characters, on both the

extradiegetic and intradiegetic levels. While these voices are orchestrated within the narrative by the extradiegetic narrative voice, they are also associated with particular entities in the story, and are thus distanced from the speaking voice of the narrative voice itself.

All of these voices are crucial for shaping a complete saga narrative; they all introduce different qualities, and at times are used to provide different kinds of information. The narrative voice thus has various options at hand, but also faces some limitations regarding how the plot can be told. Since every element in the narrative can be narrated in various ways, the narrative voice needs to decide which elements are relevant for the narration, and how they are best narrated in order to create the desired effect in the audience. Only the sum or the orchestration of all these voices is ultimately able to tell the whole saga. Hence, studying the narrative voice in the sagas goes beyond technical inquiry in the process of narration. Indeed, the choices made by the narrative voice are also (self-)reflective on the process of narration, and thus invite aesthetic considerations.

This special issue results from a workshop entitled »*miklu meira óhljóð en frá megi segja:* Narratorial Potential and Boundaries in Old Norse Literature«, which took place on October 21, 2022 at Eberhard Karls University in Tübingen, Germany.[2] In the course of preparing this special issue, I decided to alter our terminology slightly: instead of discussing »potential and boundaries«, it can be more helpful to speak of »options and limitations« in saga narration (see final title of this issue). For the terms ›potential‹ and ›options‹, the former refers to a possibility, something that could be developed in a given situation, while the latter suggests that a specific way for further proceedings or development has already been established. In case of the sagas, it is more apt to talk about options, because saga writing does not develop any further, and it is possible only to study the techniques applied. The term ›boundaries‹ has been replaced with ›limitations‹, as the first term suggests that something is imposed externally, for instance, by

conventions or laws. In the case of saga narration, such boundaries are set by the Old Norse-Icelandic understanding of the genres; hence, the sagas do not include runic script or text passages in Old French. ›Limitations‹, on the other hand, may denote an internal restriction, something that cannot be achieved because it would go beyond what is acceptable for the narrative and thus also the audience. As seen in ›Bárðar saga‹, the narrative voice reaches a point where the verbalisation of the noise is limited by the saga's formal constraints, and thus it becomes necessary to leave the scene – assisted by imagery – to the audience's imagination.

This special issue thus focuses on the options and limitations of saga narration. It explores how multiple narrative voices can be identified in a saga, how these voices present the selected material, and how their choices or preferences influence the effect on the audience. The contributions show that the narrative voices of the sagas are enormously versatile in the way they structure and curate the process of saga narration. Countless features, particularities and subtleties, and surprising moves can be identified, so that it can seem as if there were plentiful options and hardly any limitations to saga narration. In our final discussion at the workshop, we referred to this observation as the ›frame of acceptability‹ of saga narration. Since the narrative voices prove rather playful and versatile in their way of curating the sagas, the frame of acceptability is flexible and adaptable, and some narratorial elements can be used for different purposes and effects. The contributions in this issue further suggest that the frame of acceptability does not apply only to the *Íslendingasögur*, but also to other saga genres such as the *samtíðarsögur* (contemporary sagas) or the *þættir* (›threads, short stories‹). This special issue aims at inviting further research on and in-depth explorations of the frame of acceptability. Considerably more research on the topic is necessary in order to fully understand the role the narrative voice plays in the sagas in curating the material, and thus creating literary artworks.

But what are sagas?[3] The term *saga* derives from the Old Norse verb *at segja* (›to say‹, ›to tell‹, ›to report‹), and refers to prose (or in some cases prosimetric) narratives that originated mainly in medieval Iceland and Norway.[4] All the sagas are written in the vernacular (i.e. Old Norse) and transmitted anonymously. There are several genres of sagas. Most prominent are the family sagas (*Íslendingasögur*), which depict events that (allegedly) took place in the context of the Icelandic settlement (870–1050).[5] Other than that, there are sagas painting a picture of prehistoric Scandinavia (*fornaldarsögur*); the *riddarasögur* (chivalric sagas), which present translated or adapted versions of continental courtly literature; sagas offering (quasi-)historical biographies of the Norwegian kings (*konungasögur*); sagas dealing in a literary fashion with events from mid-thirteenth century Iceland (*samtíðarsögur*); and sagas portraying (often Icelandic) saints (*heilagra manna sögur*) or bishops (*biskupasögur*).[6]

The sagas are products of a complex narrative tradition. Not only did saga literature develop its own idiosyncratic features, it also adapted various elements from continental European literature. Moreover, the sagas intertwine oral and written sources, and most of the extant sagas exist in several versions; consequently, no original versions (German: *Urtext*) are available, if the concept of an original version was even important to the writers and audiences of sagas. Each saga version offers an idiosyncratic presentation of the plot, to varying extents, as each anonymous scribe chose a different way to shape the narrative. In addition, the manuscript transmission of sagas continued for a long time: the earliest preserved manuscripts date to the twelfth century, while the youngest paper manuscripts were written as late as the twentieth century. Most surviving manuscripts, however, can be dated to the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.

The following parts of this introduction pursue four main aims. Section 2 offers a short presentation of the research aim and model of the Collaborative Research Centre ›Different Aesthetics‹, which sets the larger frame of

reference for both the workshop and this publication. In section 3, the term ›narrative voice‹ is discussed, both from a general narratological angle and in the context of Old Norse-Icelandic literary studies. In section 4, I illustrate how these ideas can be applied to analysis of the sagas, taking ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ as a case study, with a particular focus on the usefulness of annotation software in tracing the functions of the various voices encoded in the text. Section 5 introduces the contributions of this special issue.

## 2. The Different Aesthetics of Saga Literature

The larger thematic background of both the workshop and this issue is defined by the Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) 1391 ›Different Aesthetics‹, which explores notions of aesthetics in premodern European culture.[7] In premodern Europe, ideas of aesthetics were quite diverse and were not subjected to a unified view.[8] Rather, art was often produced through collaborative effort and conceptualised in terms of practical everyday aspects or utility. Consequently, premodern aesthetics require and deserve a different approach for studying them.

In order to delineate and explore a variety of premodern notions of aesthetics, the CRC works with a praxeological model. This model envisions a close relationship between the heterological aspects of social practices and the autological elements associated with aesthetics. Both dimensions are mutually influential, and thus impact the creation of art. At the intersection of these two spheres are what we term the figures of aesthetic reflection.[9] These are the particular elements of an act or artefact that reflect both its heterological and autological dimensions. Due to their intermediary position, figures of aesthetic reflection have the potential to be (self-)reflective on the processes of creation of the respective act or artefact. Since the praxeological model is fixed neither in time nor space, it proves fruitful for analysing acts and artefacts originating from various historical, cultural,

and social contexts. Consequently, this approach can also be applied to Old Norse-Icelandic saga literature (see section 4).[10]

The style of the *Íslendingasögur* is often described as objective or fairly neutral. The extradiegetic narrative voice neither strives to present itself prominently, nor does it offer lengthy digressions discussing aspects of the plot. Nonetheless, it intersperses the plot with short comments such as *nú er at taka til* (›now it will be told‹), *sumir segja* (›some [people] say‹), or *sem fyrr var sagt* (›as was told before‹).[11] Such narratorial comments assume different narrative functions: they are used to structure the plot, to evaluate characters and their actions, and to establish intertextual links. The importance of these comments goes beyond the presentation of the plot: they mark the positions where the narrative voice, through intervening in the flow of the narrative, becomes (self-)reflective on the process of narration. Hence, the narratorial comments are crucial for exploring the question of literary aesthetics of the *Íslendingasögur* in particular and saga literature in general.

## 3. Narrative Voice: Theoretical Considerations and Applications to Saga Literature

For the French structuralist Gérard Genette, the term ›narrative‹ (French: *récit*) is ambiguous, and can assume three different meanings. First, it refers to what is being narrated (*histoire*, in contrast to *discours*, which refers to how something is narrated); second, it refers to a series of real or fictional events that are being told (*récit*); and third, it refers to the act of narration, when someone tells someone else a story (*narration*) (Genette 2010, p. 1, and Antor 2004, p. 226). For Genette, the narrative voice (*voix*) mediates among these three levels of narration.[12] Genette considers the narrative voice to be part of a triad together with mood (*mode*), the grade of distance and perspective of the voice, and indications of tense (*temps*). The combination of these three aspects determines the *discours*, that is, the way

in which a story is told. While Genette considers the narrative voice to be the answer to the question ›who speaks? ‹, more recent scholarship considers voice to be more complex because of its relationship to other parts of the *discours*.[13] Rüdiger Zymner (2006, p. 322) argues that it is the multiple meanings of Genette's understanding of narrative (*récit*) that cause difficulties with the concept of narrative voice, which becomes »metaphorisch unscharf und begrifflich mehrdeutig«[14] (›metaphorically unspecific and conceptually ambiguous‹) as a result. Navigating and mediating among the three different levels of narrative, the narrative voice simultaneously fulfils several functions on each level (Zymner 2006, pp. 322–323). Due to these complexities, the concept of narrative voice is bound up with and determined by a variety of aspects, and thus more recent scholarship claims that narrative voice »cannot be simply reduced to the question of ›who speaks‹ or to the subcategory of person« (Fludernik 2001, p. 620).

Genette's understanding of voice is itself determined relationally, and results from – or rather depends on – three aspects, namely, the time of narrating, the narrative level, and the extent to which the narrating persona is involved in the narrative. While the relational character of voice has not been contested by scholarship, the third aspect of the persona has stirred many debates. Genette had already realised that this aspect would be problematic. In ›Nouveau discours du récit‹, he states: »Le chapitre de la voix est sans doute celui qui a provoqué les discussions pour moi les plus cruciales, au moins à propos de la catégorie de la p e r s o n n e« (1983, pp. 352–353; his emphasis, ›The chapter on voice is unquestionably the one that (for me) provoked the most crucial discussions, at least apropos of the category of p e r s o n‹, 1990, p. 79). It is particularly the personalisation of the narrative voice that has been criticised, first, because Genette initially strived to detach voice from psychological undertones,[15] and second, because it is not clear in Genette's works whether voice refers to an (extradiegetic) narratorial authority or to the characters within the narrative.[16]

The narrative voice remains »a complex and problematic category« (Aczel 1998, p. 467). The most fundamental criticism on the concept comes from linguistic and post-structuralist perspectives (Blödorn/Langer/Scheffel 2006, p. 3). Monika Fludernik (2001, p. 619), for instance, considers narrative voice a »metaphoric extension of the grammatical voice«, because the triad of voice, mood, and tense are reminiscent of grammatical categories for inflecting a verb. She also objects to Genette's tendency to personalise the narrative voice: »Attributions of voice are interpretative moves« (p. 636) that are nothing but »mimetic illusion« (p. 623), and thus run into danger of »treat[ing] the text as a real-life instance of narrating« (p. 623). In Fludernik's opinion, the most important task of a narrative is to convey »the optimum of information« (p. 636), which does not necessitate the identification of a particular kind of narrative voice. Consequently, she suggests the concept of nonnatural narratives (p. 624), which do not feature an (explicit) narrative voice, because »[it] does not really *matter* to a reader who is speaking« (p. 636, emphasis in the original).

Arguing from a post-structuralist perspective, Richard Aczel focuses on two aspects of narrative voice that Genette did not consider. The first of these is the qualitative properties of voice, which need to be explored before one can venture to attribute an identity to a voice (Aczel 1998, p. 468).[17] The quality of voice can be measured by such parameters as tone, idiom, diction, or speech-style (pp. 469–473).[18] In addition, Aczel maintains that the expressive potential of style produces »a voice effect« (p. 472). Second, Aczel turns to a topic ignored by Genette, namely, the question of polyphonous narratives. He approaches these two issues by defining the narrative voice not as a personalised entity, but as a textual function and effect (p. 467).

Aczel distinguishes between the ›narrator‹ as »an umbrella term for a cluster of possible functions« and the ›narrative voice‹ as an effect (p. 492).[19] Aczel's understanding of functions in a narrative are inspired by

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony.[20] While some, such as the selection and organisation of material, are necessary for every narrative, others are optional, such as commenting on the narrative or addressing the audience directly.[21] Aczel's narrative voice, on the other hand, denotes the effect the narrative functions have. Since the narrative voice depends on the existence and detectability of the functions (combined under the term ›narrator‹), the narrative voice is an »actively configured« compound (p. 483), and relative in its appearance (p. 490). It is the main task of the narrative voice to detect, describe, and identify the different functions involved in a narrative. In this way, Aczel manages to differentiate among the different functions without personifying or psychologising them. Aczel's approach ensures that the narrative voice not only addresses the question ›who speaks?‹ more extensively than Genette's voice does by allowing for a polyphonous character of a narrative, but also reveals the qualitative aspects of a narrative voice by including several functions, another extension of Genette's work. For Aczel, the narrative voice thus becomes »a heuristic metaphor«, which is »best identified contextually as an alterity effect« (p. 494).

In a later article, Aczel (2001) focuses on the metaphorical and performative aspects of narrative voice(s): »There are, to be sure, no voices in written texts; there are only ways – some more useful than others – of metaphorically conceiving texts as voiced in the act or play of reading« (p. 704).[22] Aczel's narrative voice thus becomes a »staged presence« (2001, p. 705).[23] So, unlike ›real‹ communicative situations where the place of production and the place of articulation are identical, literary narratives often embrace the possibility of telling a story from removed points of view (Roggenbuck 2020, p. 2). Moreover, it is also possible for several voices to curate the process of narration, another aspect that Genette did not consider (Roggenbuck 2020, p. 14). Multivocality in a narrative often entails that the voices involved do not contribute to one and the same ›message‹ (Roggenbuck 2020, p. 3), not least because of the diverging place of production and the place of articulation: »Grundsätzlich anders verhält sich

die Frage nach einer möglichen Mehrstimmigkeit im Medium der Schrift, da hier eben keine Identität von Produktionsort und Artikulationsort der ›Stimme‹ besteht und somit auch keine grundsätzliche Einstimmigkeit gegeben ist« (›The potential multivocality in the medium of writing is fundamentally different, because in such cases, the places of production and of the articulation of the ›voice‹ are not identical, and hence there is generally no unanimity‹). Narratives can thus offer a polyphonous construction with partly contradictory, or at least complementary, narrative voices on different levels.

For the discussion below on the narrative voice in the sagas, the following aspects are important. Expanding on Genette's initial definition of ›narrative voice‹, more recent scholarship suggests that the narrative voice can be read as an impersonal, yet creative, narrative authority. This is helpful with regard to the sagas, since they are handed down anonymously. In this context, it becomes less a question of attributing a particular (historical) identity to the narrative voice(s) than of identifying different narrative voices with different narrative qualities. By studying the narrative voice, or rather the multivocality of the sagas, it is possible to unlock which literary means are used to tell a narrative (that is, to identify Aczel's functions), and what effect, in Aczel's terms, the narrative has on the audience.[24]

Before exploring how the concept of the narrative voice has been discussed in Old Norse-Icelandic literary studies, it is worth revisiting the previous scholarly endeavours in Old Norse scholarship to attribute particular sagas to historically attested persons from the upper class of medieval Iceland, even though the texts in question were handed down anonymously. Most prominent in this attempt were the members of the so-called ›Icelandic School‹ in the early twentieth century, who showed a strong interest in aspects such as an »individual saga's literary sources […], use of skaldic stanzas, manuscript transmission, dating, authorship and provenance« (Clover 1985 [2005], p. 241). Though often referred to as a ›school‹, the

Icelandic School elaborated their approach neither systematically nor theoretically. Their most programmatic publications are the introductions to their linguistically standardised editions of the sagas (Íslenzk fornrit). These often feature a chapter titled »höfundur« (modern Icelandic for ›author‹), which reflect the importance of authorship to the Icelandic School (Glauser 2021, pp. 35–36).[25] The Icelandic School worked from the premise that the sagas are mainly written products, and thus can be read and analysed in a similar way to modern novels (Clover 1985 [2005], p. 242). Consequently, they reproduced the modern concept of the independent, creative genius, which is reliant on the identification of saga authors.[26]

This »game of authoring«, as Glauser (2021, p. 36), calls it is problematic not only because it is inherently anachronistic (Clover 1985 [2005], p. 246), but because in most cases, we lack extended biographical information about potential medieval authors in Iceland and know little more than their names. Despite these circumstances, scholars have pursued different approaches in the »game of authoring«. Some investigate how the content of a saga might connect to potential authors;[27] others scrutinise linguistic features and hypothesise that shared features between different texts may be attributed to a particular author;[28] still others analyse and compare the handwriting in manuscripts. Even though all these sagas are transmitted anonymously, and in many cases are preserved in various versions across several manuscripts, scholars have not been deterred from finding the author of a potential *Urtext*, an original version to which medieval Icelanders may not have assigned as much importance as we often tend to do.

Old Norse did not have a term or concept for either author or authorship in the modern sense, which is itself influenced by an aesthetics of autonomy. Although the term *höfund(u)r* (see above) already existed in medieval times, its modern meaning of ›author‹ emerged only in the mid-nineteenth century (Glauser 2021, p. 23). The only term of medieval provenance denoting a type of narratorial authority is *sagnamaður* (literally ›saga-man‹), but this refers not to the person who composes or writes a

saga, but to one who recites a saga orally (Glauser 2021, p. 32).[29] Because of the different notion of authorship in saga literature, Clunies Ross (2010, p. 18) suggests that »the role of the [saga] author was considered less creative, more compilatory«. It is thus more apt to speak of a saga ›creator‹ in order to emphasise the aspects of retelling and rewriting, since we are not necessarily dealing with the aspiration or expectation to invent something completely new.[30] Hence, the focus of saga narration is less a celebration of individual narrative invention and achievement than of the ability to select and reuse well-known saga elements, fashioning them into a new version of the saga by bringing out »the best of its aesthetic and artistic potential« (Gropper 2021, p. 93). If we consider the process of literary creation and narration from this perspective, the need to identify an author disappears, but without reducing the potential literary value or artistry of the sagas.

Nonetheless, scholars were eager to extract more information about the persons behind a saga. In the course of their search, they soon turned to the narrator – here, in the popular understanding of a person or personified agency telling a story: »From our modern perspective, the ›narrator‹ is as close as we can get to the author of an anonymous text« (Gropper 2021, p. 87). In the 1970s, the first few scholars pondered the difference between saga author and saga narrator, though the term ›narrative voice‹ did not enter the discussion. Dietrich Hofmann (1972), for instance, differentiates between the *Erzähler* (›narrator‹) and the *Verfasser* (›writer‹). With the former term he refers to the oral transmission of the sagas: with the latter, to the written tradition. His usage of the terms is tied to medial aspects, and does not consider different narrative levels. Hofmann does not explore the possibility of a narrative authority on the intradiegetic level, but is mainly interested in the *Verfasser*, whom he tries to identify on the basis of how geographical knowledge is presented in the sagas. Similar observations can be made in Anne Heinrichs' article (1976), in which she uses the terms ›author‹ and ›narrator‹ synonymously, without discussing the different narrative levels to which the terms pertain. On the aspect of intertexture in

the sagas, she writes: »It may give us information about the question of how far the author or narrator was conscious of the technique of intertexture« (p. 141, emphasis added).

Some scholars still tend to conceive of the narrator as a personified agency that may, at times, also reveal personal impressions or thoughts on the saga narrative. Vésteinn Ólason (1998a, p. 101; 1998b, p. 78) speaks of the ›narrator‹ or the modern Icelandic equivalent *sögumaður*.[31] In general, Vésteinn (1998a, p. 101) ascribes to the narrators of the family sagas a distinct impersonal style of narration, »marked by its formal objectivity and discretion«. He identifies »more personal« utterances by the narrator only in dramatic scenes, such as when Arnkell, an important character in ›Eyrbyggja saga‹, is killed and the narrator underlines how esteemed and distinguished Arnkell was. Despite these seemingly personal sentiments, Vésteinn Ólason (1998a, p. 101) is aware that the way the narrator tells the saga is not as a »coincidence but is rather a function of how the story is told«. This statement is reminiscent of Aczel's understanding of narrator as a narrative function.

Nowadays, investigating the question of authorship is no longer as strongly bound up with this »search of the culprit«, in the sense of a personified author, as it was a few decades ago.[32] In more recent times, the term ›narrative voice‹ has been introduced into narratological saga studies. While some scholars use ›narrative voice‹ synonymously to ›narrator‹, others prefer to use it to refer to an impersonal narratorial authority. Heather O'Donoghue (2021, p. 3), for instance, writes: »By narrator – or more impersonally, narrative voice – I mean what Paul Ricœur sees as an abstract unity of consciousness which we as audience apprehend, allowing us to experience the narrative.« Though she does not differentiate between function and effect as Aczel does, O'Donoghue sees the narrator/narrative voice as being responsible for the creative curation of a saga narrative. In contrast to Vésteinn Ólason, O'Donoghue identifies several functions that the narrator/narrative voice employs in order to create a variety of effects,

and thus engage the audience in the creation of a saga narrative. What is more, O'Donoghue is one of the first to differentiate between narratorial functions on the extradiegetic and the intradiegetic level. She shows that on both levels, the narrative voices can be ›heard‹ in various contexts, for example, when it comments on events and characters, contextualises single elements, or when it withholds information for dramatic effect (pp. 132ff.). While O'Donoghue does not distinguish so strictly between ›narrator‹ and ›narrative voice‹, her understanding of the terms is reminiscent of Aczel's work.

Because of the anonymity of the *Íslendingasögur* and the strong focus on the narrator/narrative voice as the creative functions, »[t]he role of a creative author is squeezed out« (p. 3).[33] What is more, the narrative voice is not equally prominent throughout a saga, and can seem absent – or non-detectable – in some parts of the text. O'Donoghue speaks of the self-effacing narrative voice, which refers to the repeated moments in the sagas where the narrative voice chooses to be silent in situations that may be considered disturbing, both by saga society and the audience (pp. 115ff.).[34] O'Donoghue's study shows it is neither possible nor necessary to deduce a particular personality behind the narrative voice, because the sagas are told through a variety of narratorial functions with different narrative qualities.

Only rarely have scholars looked into the polyphonous and qualitative aspects of the narrative voice(s) in the sagas. Gropper (2023, p. 278) and Rösli/Gropper (2021, p. 10) have observed that, despite the publication of several studies on the manner in which the sagas are narrated, some of these studies ultimately return to the identification of single historical persons as authors (e.g. see Ranković 2016 and 2019). Nonetheless, a few studies have been published that are interested in the multivocality – or, to use Aczel's terms, the narrative functions clustered around the ›narrator‹ – and their narrative qualities. Rebecca Merkelbach (2017), for instance, differentiates between three narrative functions and their effect in the sagas. She suggests that the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator (*Erzähler*) is the

main narrative authority in a saga, which quotes other kinds of voices when appropriate. Interestingly, the quoted voices do not necessarily need to confirm the opinion of the main narrator (Merkelbach 2017, p. 253).

The notion of ›plural voices‹ or ›polyphony‹ has also been taken up by Stefanie Gropper (2023). Similarly to Merkelbach, Gropper (2023, p. 279) not only argues for the multivocality of saga narration, but also connects this feature to the anonymity of the sagas. Gropper identifies three co-narrating voices situated both on the extradiegetic and intradiegetic levels. First, the main narrative voice, located on the extradiegetic level, orchestrates the multiple voices in the text by organising and structuring the whole narrative (pp. 283–284). Second, the extradiegetic voice of the narrative tradition comments on the plot. Third, statements of public opinion are spoken on the intradiegetic level. Again, these three voices do not necessarily represent the same perspectives on events or characters; hence, the voices are complementary, offering alternative information.

This section has shown that even though most theoretical discussions of the narrative voice were developed based on modern literature, the concept nonetheless proves fruitful for narratological studies in medieval literature, and thus also in Old Norse-Icelandic literature. Particularly intriguing are Aczel's expansions of Genette's understanding of the narrative voice by exploring its qualitative and polyphonous aspects. Furthermore, Aczel's distinction between narrative functions and effects appear promising for narratological analysis of saga literature. The case study of ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ in the following section is partly influenced by Aczel's work, and demonstrates the validity and applicability of his concepts to Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

Sagas are essentially polyphonous: in addition to the voices of the characters, there are various non-personified voices on both the extradiegetic and intradiegetic levels that co-create the narrative (see Gropper, Merkelbach, and O'Donoghue above). It is, however, the extradiegetic narrative

voice that features as the main voice orchestrating the polyphonous narrative. In sum, these voices are responsible for the narrative effect, which is as distinct as each individual version of a saga. The literary artistry of a saga results from the effect these voices create with their different expressive qualities. Studying the narrative voice, along with the other voices in a text, thus allows us to look, first, into questions of authorship without searching for a particular author, and second, into questions of literary creativity in the context of saga narration.

## 4. Narratorial Comments in the *Íslendingasögur*: A Case Study of ›Gull-Þóris saga‹

This section demonstrates the usefulness of applying some of the concepts discussed in the previous section to saga literature. Its foundations lie in my current research project on the use of narratorial comments in the *Íslendingasögur*; I illustrate my approach by drawing on ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ as a case study.[35] Following the praxeological model developed by CRC 1391 (see section 2), I argue that the narratorial comments function as figures of aesthetic reflections: in creating a momentary distance between the narrative and the narration, these comments both reflect formal literary conventions (the autological dimension) and engage with the expectations the audience has about the *Íslendingasögur* (the heterological dimension). Hence, the comments assume a mediating function and open up a space of (self-)reflection (Heiniger et al. 2022, p. 289). My research shows that the importance and potential of the narrative voice and its comments thus goes beyond formal and narratological aspects.[36] The comments allow us to study the aesthetic norms and expectations of the sagas, not least because there is no extant medieval Old Norse-Icelandic poetics that could inform us about the literary ideas and concepts behind saga narration.[37]

So far, my analyses have revealed that narratorial comments can be divided into five main categories, with various subcategories to capture more

subtle narratorial features. Though partly deduced from the content of the sagas, all five categories have been primarily developed from theoretical/narratological considerations, as the sagas neither mention nor specify these categories as literary tools. While earlier studies have described and discussed some of these (sub-)categories (see e.g. O'Donoghue (2021), Merkelbach (2017), Jakobsen (1983), Heinrichs (1976)), and Andersson (1966), this study constitutes the first systematic analysis of narratorial comments in the sagas. The five categories of narratorial comments I work with are the following:[38]

- Intratextual comments: These organise the plot and create coherence by, for example, referring backwards or forwards in the narrative, marking the beginning and ending of episodes, offering indications of time, and introducing new characters. In ›Reykdœla saga‹, we read: *Þá konu átti Steingrímr Ǫrnólfsson, er fyrr var nefndr* (ÍF 10, p. 163; ›Steingrímr Örnólfsson, who was mentioned before, was married to this woman‹).
- Intertextual comments: This category marks both covert and explicit references to other narratives. In the case of the former, the narrative voice refers to a named or a non-specified textual or personal source, as happens in ›Eyrbyggja saga‹: *Ari Þorgilsson inn fróði telr hana eigi með hans börnum* (ÍF 4, p. 12; ›Ari Þorgilsson the learned does not count her among his children‹). An explicit reference to a specified source can be found in ›Fóstbrœðra saga‹: *Þessa víga getr Þormóðr í Þorgeirsdrápu* (ÍF 6, p. 156; ›Þormóðr mentions this killing in [the poem] ›Þorgeirsdrápa‹‹).
- Evaluative comments: The narrative voice often evaluates both single characters and actions. In ›Njáls saga‹, a woman called Unnr is described and evaluated as follows: *Hon var væn kona ok kurteis ok vel at sér* (ÍF 12, p. 5; ›She was a beautiful woman, courteous, and gifted‹). In ›Laxdœla saga‹, when Bolli attacks Án and stabs him between the shoulders, which causes Án's death, the narrator comments on the

likelihood of the killing: *Fékk hann þegar bana sem ván var* (ÍF 5, p. 167; ›He [Án] died from this, as was to be expected‹).

- Statements of public opinion: These types of comments appear frequently, both on the intradiegetic and extradiegetic level. On the intradiegetic level, statements of public opinion mostly concern events and individuals; on the extradiegetic level, however, statements of public opinion should rather be considered expressions of the narrative tradition.[39] An instance of an intradiegetic statement of public opinion can be found in ›Reykdœla saga‹: *Ok þótti mönnum þetta illa orðit* (ÍF 10, p. 208; ›It seemed to people that this [the interaction of two characters] had ended badly‹). An instance of the extradiegetic narrative tradition reads as follows: *Ok er þat sumra manna sögn, at þessi Þorgils hafi komit til Íslands fyrir Fróðárundr um sumarit* (ÍF 4, p. 210; ›And some people say that this Þorgils had come to Iceland in the summer before the wonders of Fróðá [happened]‹).
- Extratextual references: The narrative voice repeatedly refers to extratextual aspects and objects, such as (predominantly Icelandic) toponyms, historical rulers, and contemporary mindsets and traditions. For instance, this is the case when Skalla-Grímr builds and names his farm Borg, an established location within Iceland: [Hann] *flutti um várit eptir skipit suðr* […] *ok setti þar bæ ok kallaði at Borg*, (ÍF 2, p. 73; ›In spring, [he] sailed to the south […] and built a farm and called it at Borg‹). In ›Eyrbyggja saga‹, the narrative voice details the architecture of a house, and specifies that its more unusual features are due to past customs: *At Fróðá var eldaskáli mikill ok lokrekkja innar af eldaskálanum, sem þá var siðr* (ÍF 4, p. 145; ›At Fróðá, the firehouse was spacious, and at the far end of the room were the bed-closets, as was the custom back then‹).

This list shows that each category has a distinct narrative quality, with the combination of these implicit and explicit voices contributing to the polyphony of the sagas. What is more, all five categories can be found in all

the *Íslendingasögur*, albeit in different proportions. The extradiegetic narrative voice is the most prominent, and orchestrates and shapes the whole process of narration. Intradiegetic statements of public opinion and the extradiegetic narrative tradition are impersonal voices that complement the overarching narrative voice.

While the categories of narratorial comments – some of the functions that make up the narrator, as Aczel would have it – are the same throughout the *Íslendingasögur*, the effect that the comments create – to adopt Aczel's term again – is distinct for each saga. The (artistic) imprint that the comments leave on the process of narration varies depending on how frequently and in what contexts each of the categories appears. By creating such a variety of effects, the narratorial comments thus contribute to the literary aesthetics of the sagas.

Methodologically, my research is informed by the Digital Humanities (DH), and I employ a software-based annotation.[40] Although the DH have become increasingly prominent over the past few decades, the application of DH-informed methods other than online editions and databases are still underrepresented in (medieval) literary studies. Especially quantitative analyses are often met with scepticism, as numerical and statistical data may appear difficult to combine with traditional qualitative literary analysis. Indeed, quantitative analysis requires a different approach to the main research interest, since quantifiable elements need to be defined and then processed with the help of a digital tool. In my project, the narratorial comments are studied in both a quantitative and a qualitative capacity in order to explore their role and importance in saga narratives.

In addition to pre-defined, enumerable entities, a software-based annotation requires a machine-readable corpus.[41] In order to collect and analyse the selected data, so-called annotation guidelines need to be pre-defined.[42] Annotation guidelines list and specify the aspects or elements that are crucial for the study. In my case, the definitions of the (sub-)categories of the

narratorial comments are the annotation guidelines. In the ensuing annotation process, which entails a careful reading of the narratives, only words, phrases, or sentences that meet one or more categories of the pre-defined guidelines are annotated (i.e. marked). The process of annotation is an iterative one, and can be conceptualised as a hermeneutic circle: following each round of annotating a text, it is essential to evaluate the resulting annotations and the guidelines with regard to the research aim. Are the annotations collected adequate and sufficiently specific in order to pursue the overall research question? Depending on the evaluation, annotations guidelines can be modified, for example, by refining, adding, or deleting categories. The next round of annotation then begins, targeting the same corpus. Each round of annotation covers the same steps as in the first instance. The annotation process ends when the resulting annotations are considered refined and precise enough to answer the research question. The quantified annotations are not the final answer to the research question, though, as the annotations still need to be examined qualitatively. All the same, the quantifiable results often serve to direct us towards interesting interpretative analyses.

To illustrate how narratorial comments can be analysed with the help of software-based annotation, I turn here to ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ as a brief case study. ›Gull-Þóris saga‹, also known as ›Þorskfirðinga saga‹, is an *Íslendingasaga* that tells the story of the Icelander Þórir Oddsson. As a young man, he travels to Norway where he experiences adventures together with his companions. Later on, having won fame and fortune, the group returns to Iceland. Þórir settles down, marries, and, mostly through no fault of his own, becomes involved in a series of hostilities with three main antagonists. It is assumed that the extant version of the saga was written based on an older, now-lost version that is referred to in some versions of ›Landnámabók‹ (›The Book of [the Icelandic] Settlements‹) (ÍF 13, pp. CXIII–CXIV). It was most likely during the reworking phase that paranormal elements, such as the presence of dragons, were added to the text.

These elements are otherwise mainly known from legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*) and chivalric sagas (*riddarasögur*). Because of the vicinity to these two subgenres, ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ is sometimes considered to be an atypical *Íslendingasaga*. Nowadays, only one version of the saga is preserved in the vellum AM 561 4to, which is dated to roughly 1400; all later paper manuscripts derive from this single copy.[43]

The basic quantitative analysis of the narratorial comments shows that all five categories introduced above can be found in ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ (see Table 1 below, column on the far right): Intratextual comments account for 44 %, immediately followed by evaluative comments at 43 %. Much rarer are the extratextual references at 7 %, statements of public opinion at 6 %, and the intertextual references at 1 %. The distribution of the five categories shows that the narrative voice in the saga is configured both to present a well-structured narrative and to offer the audience pointers on how to evaluate and understand single episodes. By and large, the saga narrative is thus dependent on the account given by the extradiegetic narrative voice, rather than extensive intertextual and extratextual connections. The other two voices – the statements of public opinion and by the narrative tradition – are fairly infrequent by comparison.

These basic quantitative results from ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ mirror the findings for the *Íslendingasögur* regarding the distribution, the ranking and the frequency of the five categories.[44] The overall figures for my reference corpus of *Íslendingasögur* show that the intratextual comments are used most frequently (ca. 46 %), followed by the evaluative comments (ca. 39 %), statements of public opinion (ca. 10 %), extratextual references (ca. 3 %) and last, intertextual comments (ca. 2 %). Even though ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ does not feature the exact same percentages, the numbers are comparable all the same and show that the main pattern employed by the (narrative) voices is the same. Hence, ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ moves within the range of expected results – or the frame of acceptability – of the *Íslendingasögur*.

The only aspect that could be considered slightly unusual is the high percentage of evaluative comments, which is almost as high as the intratextual comments. My preparatory work for the project has revealed that a high number of evaluative comments are found mostly in the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*. In the case of ›Gull-Þóris saga‹, this could be interpreted as the saga being within the literary vicinity of these two saga subgenres; as mentioned above, the saga features paranormal elements primarily known from these subgenres. We may thus ask to what extent a shift in genre can be identified here.[45]

For this purpose, I divided the saga into three parts depending on the main setting. While the first (ch. 1–2) and third (ch. 6–20) parts are located in Iceland, and thus pertain to the *Íslendingasögur*, the second part (ch. 3–5) is mainly set in the legendary geography of the far north of Norway, and is reminiscent of the *fornaldarsögur* or *riddarasögur*. It is therefore interesting to explore whether the second part also shows narratological features that point to one of the other subgenres, for instance, by prioritising evaluative over intratextual comments. The distribution of the five categories in these three parts reads as follows:

| | ch. 1–2 ›*Íslendinga-saga*‹ | ch. 3–5 ›*fornaldar-saga*‹ | ch. 6–20 ›*Íslendinga-saga*‹ | ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ (complete) ›*Íslendinga saga*‹ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| intratextual references | 57 % | 50 % | 39 % | 44 % |
| intertextual references | 0 % | 0 % | 1 % | 1 % |
| evaluative comments | 39 % | 39 % | 44 % | 43 % |
| statements of public opinion | 1 % | 9 % | 7 % | 6 % |
| extratextual references | 3 % | 2 % | 9 % | 7 % |

Tab. 1: Three sections of ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ as well as a computation of the narratorial comments over the complete saga.[46] The generic affiliations are kept in quotations marks as the affiliations are under consideration here. All figures are relative.

The distribution of the narratorial comments in the first part of the saga (ch. 1–2) adheres to the pattern typical of the *Íslendingasögur*. The high percentage of the intratextual comments also results from the fact that the first chapter introduces a number of new saga characters and adds their genealogy, as is often the case in the *Íslendingasögur*. Some of the newly introduced characters are also provided with a short (evaluative) description regarding their physical appearance, their character, and/or their social status. After this introductory chapter, the focus shifts to a group of young men headed by Þórir. They become sworn brothers, and soon have the opportunity to travel to Norway. So far, the saga moves within the generic realm of the *Íslendingasögur*.

The second part (ch. 3–5) begins when the young men are sent to northern Norway to fish. From then on, the narrative transitions step by step into the realm of the *fornaldarsögur* as the band travels further north. Yet none of these transitions is accompanied by narratorial comments that indicate some kind of caesura. The young men experience their first adventures in Þrándheimr, before travelling to Dumbshafr, where they complete heroic deeds and win fame and fortune.

Although the setting and events – travelling to Dumbshafr, the mysterious far north of Norway and fighting dragons – in the second part is reminiscent of the *fornaldarsögur*, the narrative voice prefers intratextual over evaluative comments (see Table 1, third column on the left). This is both an expected and unexpected finding. On the one hand, it is expected because by and large ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ reproduces the key elements of an *Íslendingasaga* (e.g. the settlement of Iceland, young men traveling to Norway to win fame and fortune, dream foreshadowing future events, fights and feuds including legal proceedings among Icelandic upper-class families); on the other, the finding is unexpected, since the second part (ch. 3–5) features some elements in its content mainly known from the *fornaldarsögur* (i.e. magic potion, Dumbshafr, dragons).

At the beginning of the third part (ch. 6–20), the narrative transitions back to the realm of the *Íslendingasögur*. Again, this change is not marked with narratorial comments. Þórir and his companions are back in Iceland. Through no fault of his own, Þórir repeatedly becomes involved in conflicts. Featuring »local disputes, feud, armed conflict and revenge« (Cardew 2004, p. 23), this section is typical for *Íslendingasögur*. Nonetheless, a few elements typically found in the *fornaldarsögur* can still be spotted; there are two shapeshifters, powerful weapons, and even a dragon in Iceland, which is highly unusual for the *Íslendingasögur*. Despite the setting in Iceland, this part features more evaluative comments than intratextual comments (see Table 1), and thus leans more towards the *fornaldarsögur* in the way it presents the plot.

So, considering the distribution of the five categories of narratorial comments, in combination with other narrative elements, the saga appears to be a hybrid text, featuring characteristics of both the *Íslendingasögur* and the *fornaldarsögur*. While the slightly higher number of intratextual comments can be read as being more similar to the *Íslendingasögur*, the difference between the intratextual and evaluative comments is negligible, and the prominence of the evaluative comments can be read as more reminiscent of the *fornaldarsögur*. The ›truth‹ about what genre the saga belongs to probably lies somewhere in-between, and we may read ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ as having what Clunies Ross (2010, p. 96) calls a »mixed modality«. She (p. 28) defines sagas as a »modally mixed literary form« because »individual sagas cannot always be cleanly slotted into this or that sub-group, but may display characteristics of more than one«. Assumedly, all the post-classical *Íslendingasögur*, which generally show some affinity with the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, feature mixed modalities on the level of narration. Proving this assumption, however, goes beyond the scope of this introduction.

Having considered some quantitative findings, we turn to the qualitative analysis, with a focus on the category of evaluative comments made by the

extradiegetic narrative voice. Three out of the seven sub-categories of evaluative comments appear especially frequently in the context of Þórir and contribute mainly to his depiction. These are evaluative comments relating to his personality, his social interactions, and his thoughts and feelings, these. In chapter 1, Þórir is introduced among numerous other characters. When first mentioned, neither Þórir nor his family are singled out or described in a particularly extensive way. Þórir is described simply as *manna mestr ok fríðastr* (ÍF 13, p. 178; ›the greatest of men and the most handsome‹). It is only in chapter 2 that Þórir assumes a more prominent position, when he is elected leader of a group of sworn brothers due to his exceptional accomplishments: *Þeir fyrir sunnan Þorskafjörð gerðu Þóri at fyrirmanni fyrir örleiks sakir ok allrar atgervi* (ÍF 13, p. 181; ›Those from the south of Þorskafjörðr made Þórir their leader due to his generosity and all his accomplishments‹). While Þórir's heroic deeds (*atgervi*) are emphasised at the beginning of the saga,[47] his generosity (*örleikr*) towards his companions bears out throughout the narrative. Þórir's election by the young men testifies that his social advancement is, in large part, determined by public evaluation, an aspect quite common in the *Íslendingasögur* (see Merkelbach 2017, p. 252).

The first crucial moment in Þórir's life to be accompanied by evaluative comments is his dream, which he experiences while staying in Þrándheimr with his companions. Although it is Þórir who is dreaming, the dream is related by the extradiegetic narrative voice: *Þá dreymdi Þóri, at maðr kom at honum, mikill* (ÍF 13, p. 184; ›Then Þórir dreamed that there came towards him a large man‹). The dream and what follows is crucial for the rest of the saga and for Þórir's life, as the man he encounters in his dream is his uncle Agnarr, now an undead mound-dweller. Þórir agrees not to loot the burial mound if Agnarr helps him find greater treasure. Agnarr points him to the cave of Valr and his sons, explaining that they have transformed into dragons and guard an enormous treasure.

This dream determines Þórir's next adventure and has a crucial impact on his whole life. Apparently in preparation for the trip to Valr's cave, Agnarr offers Þórir a potion and cautions him not to drink all of it: ›*Nú er hér kalkr, er þú skalt drekka af tvá drykki, en förunautr þinn einn drykk, en þá verðr eftir þat sem má*‹ (ÍF 13, p. 185; »Now, here is a goblet, from which you shall drink two sips, but your companion one sip, and some [of the potion] will be left as intended«). This scene is remarkable for several aspects. Not only does the extradiegetic narrative voice relate the dream and the dialogues held in the dreams, but Agnarr, though appearing in the dream only, is also aware of the world outside the dream. His statement reveals what the narrative voice has not yet disclosed at this point, namely that Þórir's companion Ketilbjörn partakes passively in Þórir's dream, as he hears the conversation between Þórir and Agnarr. Only when Þórir wakes up after Agnarr's instruction does the narrative voice mention Ketilbjörn: *Ketilbjörn vaknar ok hafði heyrt allt þeira viðrmæli ok svá sét, hvar Agnar fór* (ÍF 13, p. 185; ›Ketilbjörn wakes up and has heard all of their conversation and thus seen where Agnarr went‹). What is more, while both Agnarr and the narrative voice seem aware that drinking too much of the potion will have fatal consequences for Þórir later in his life, neither shares this knowledge with Þórir or the audience. Since what will happen to Þórir if or when he drinks the last sip is not specified, it is up to the audience to connect the events at the end of the saga, where Þórir's personality changes and he most likely transforms into a dragon, to the effects of the potion.

The first explicit statement about how Þórir feels occurs after his heroic deed of killing the dragons in the cave and robbing their treasure. Þórir is overjoyed by his deed and, even more so, by the fact that he receives the largest share of the dragons' treasure. Despite several attempts to divide the loot equally, Þórir seems incapable – not necessarily unwilling – of doing so, with one part always greater than the others. Since Þórir's companions are so impressed by his bravery, they not only assign him the largest share, but also forfeit their own portions. He is delighted by these gifts, and the

narrative voice comments on his feelings: *Þórir varð allléttbrúnn við þetta ok varðveitir nú féit* (ÍF 13, p. 189; ›Þórir was very content with this [outcome], and now keeps the money‹).[48] These events are immediately contrasted with the division of the money that Agnarr gave Þórir, which he easily divides into equal portions: *En skipt var gullinu Agnarsnaut með félögum Þóris, ok hefir hverr þeira mörk gulls; hann gaf ok sinn grip hverjum þeira* (ÍF 13, p. 189; ›And Agnarr's gold was divided among Þórir's companions, and each of them got a mark of gold; in addition, he [Þórir] also gave each of them a precious object‹). By contrasting these two divisions, the narrative voice makes it clear that the two treasures are connoted differently: while Agnarr's gold is unproblematic, the problem with dividing up Valr's gold points to it probably being cursed, even though the saga does not state this explicitly.

Þórir demonstrates his social side by showing empathy to his companions and expressing emotions, as can be seen in various episodes that mostly contain evaluative comments. The evaluation of Þórir's actions is often expressed implicitly by offering explanations or justifications for his motivation. In chapter 8, he assists his companion Hyrningr when he leaves his father because of an argument over manliness and money. As Hyrningr does not possess adequate financial means, Þórir proves his *örleikr* (›generosity‹) by stepping in to provide ample money to make a living: *En síðan gerði hann bú á Hyrningsstöðum ok bjó þar til elli. Hann helt jafnan vingan við Þóri, ok þat fé hafði hann mest, er Þórir gaf honum, því at hann náði engu af Halli feðr sínum* (ÍF 13, pp. 195–196; ›And then he [Hyrningr] lives at Hyrningsstaðr, and he lived there until an old age. He and Þórir remained friends, and most of the money he had was from Þórir, because he did not receive any money from his father Hallr‹).

Þórir is not only considerate towards his friends, but also endeavours to entertain good and fair relationships with other people, and he repeatedly strives to find good compromises. In chapter 16, Þórir avoids a dispute when his sheep graze on meadows of the farmer Hrómundr by arranging it

with his neighbour so that the sheep can graze on Hrómundr's meadows, which Þórir compensates him for with two lambs every year: *Kvikfé hans gekk mjök í landi Hrómundar í Gröf, en þar fyrir var Þórir því vanr, at hann gaf Hrómundi gelding hvert haust, en lamb á várum* (ÍF 13, p. 214; ›His [Þórir's] cattle grazed extensively on the property of Hrómundr of Gröf, and because of that Þórir used to give Hrómundr a gelding every autumn and a lamb every spring‹).

Evaluative comments also express Þórir's feelings towards his wife Ingibjörg and his best friend Ketilbjörn respectively. On returning to Iceland after his adventures in Scandinavia, Þórir intends to marry Ingibjörg Gilsdóttir, whom he has fallen in love with at an earlier opportunity: *fannst honum mikit um hana* (ÍF 13, p. 192; ›he was quite taken by her‹). When married, they soon develop deep feelings for each other (*tókust þar ástir góðar*, ÍF 13, p. 197; ›a strong love developed‹). The saga does not reveal more about this relationship, but leaves the audience with this implicitly positive evaluative comment on their marriage.

Throughout the saga, Ketilbjörn is Þórir's closest and most loyal companion and friend. Towards the end of the saga, Þórir's enemies kill Ketilbjörn in a battle. After this battle, Þórir is not seen mourning and weeping; rather, his grief is reflected in his determination to find his enemy Steinólfr and take revenge for Ketilbjörn: *Þórir sat nú um kyrrt, ok var honum allmikill hugr á at finna Steinólf* (ÍF 13, pp. 221–222; ›Þórir sat now quietly, and it was his greatest intention to find Steinólfr‹). As with the usage of *alllétbrúnn* (›to be overjoyed ‹) above, the narrative voice uses the intensifying particle *all-* (*allmikill hugr*) to emphasise his determination. Eventually, Þórir finds an opportunity to attack Steinólfr and deals him a lethal wound, thus both taking revenge for Ketilbjörn and eliminating his main adversary.[49]

With the help of evaluative comments, the extradiegetic narrative voice thus portrays Þórir as a respected and prudent leader, who is considerate about the wellbeing of his companions, and who is interested in and able to

cultivate sustainable and emotional relationships. Although he becomes involved in various arguments in Iceland, it is notable that Þórir does not initiate these conflicts, but only reacts to animosities and hostilities. While he does not express his feelings in direct speech, the narrative voice implicitly communicates how he feels in (highly) emotional situations. Despite the numerous evaluative comments used to describe him, Þórir is not quite comparable to the much more sensitive and changeable characters of the *riddarasögur*, as his portrayal by the extradiegetic narrative voice remains stable and favourable throughout the saga. Þórir thus lives the life of an ›average‹ *Íslendingasaga* protagonist: not only does he do what is expected of an Íslendingasaga protagonist – go abroad as a young man, return to Iceland wealthy and set up a farm, get involved in feuds and fights – but he is also a considerate leader without being portrayed as particularly sensitive.

Yet ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ would not be the same without its plot twist. We recall the ominous third sip that Þórir took from the potion and the warning that Agnarr spoke: that Þórir will pay for this extra sip later in life. The saga does not explicitly revisit the foreshadowing from the dream at the beginning of the saga, but instead provides a few pointers to initially only subtle changes in Þórir's character. The extradiegetic narrative voice is mostly silent in these situations and provides only few and rather descriptive hints. It is the intradiegetic voice of public opinion and the extradiegetic voice of narrative tradition that comment explicitly on the changes. The comments made by these voices are not always assertive or specific, as the following examples demonstrate, but the collaboration of the three voices underlines how each has a different function or task that it contributes to the process of narration. In ›Gull-Þóris saga‹, the extradiegetic narrative voice presents the innocuous version of the saga narrative, while the more problematic aspect of Þórir's transformation and its public perception are left to the other voices.

The collaboration of voices commenting on the change Þórir undergoes can be identified several times in the saga. The first example is in chapter 4, when the band of young men arrive at Valr's cave. Having cut down a tree in order to bridge a cliff and reach the entrance of the cave, Þórir invites, or rather urges, the men to enter the cave and collect as many valuables as possible. To most of the men, however, this seems too risky, and Þórir announces that he will go alone: *hafa ek fé skuldlaust, slíkt er fæst* (ÍF 13, p. 187; »I (will) rightfully get the money that is to be had«). The focus then shifts to his companions, with a mixture of evaluative comments and the voice of public opinion expressing their perspectives and thoughts, as they already notice a change in Þórir's demeanour: *Þeir fundu, at Þórir var allr maðr annarr en hann hafði verit* (ÍF 13, p. 187; ›They thought that Þórir was an entirely different man than he had been before‹). This observation is not explored further at this stage, with no other mention of Þórir's (temporary) behavioural change.

Þórir's transformation is next noted towards the end of the saga in chapter 18, when the last battle between Þórir and his adversaries takes place and Ketilbjörn is killed. The narrative voice uses two evaluative comments, each with the intensifying particle *all-*, in recounting how Þórir becomes *allreiðr* (ÍF 13, pp. 219 and 220; ›very angry‹) on hearing about Ketilbjörn's death, and so attacks his opponents more fiercely. On the third occasion that the saga mentions Þórir's temperament in the battle, it is the voice of the extradiegetic narrative tradition that takes over, as it mentions that Þórir physically transforms: *Þórir hljóp þá af baki, ok er svá sagt, at hann hamaðist þá it fyrsta sinn* (ÍF 13, p. 221; ›Þórir leaped then from the [horse's] back, and it is said that he shapeshifted for the first time‹). Again, however, this transformation is not evaluated by the narrative voice.

After Ketilbjörn's death and the last battle against Steinólfr, the narrative voice uses evaluative comments to highlight a change in Þórir's disposition: [*e*]*n eftir þenna fund tók Þórir skapskipti. Gerðist hann þá mjög illur viðfangs* (ÍF 13, p. 223; ›And after this meeting [the battle], Þórir

undergoes a change in his nature. He became very difficult to deal with‹). The saga then mentions that the treasure chests containing the dragon-gold had mysteriously disappeared, but it is the voice of public opinion that comments on the aftermath of this event: *Þat haust hurfu kistur þær, er hann hafði gera látit at Valshellisgulli, ok vissi engi síðan hvat af þeim var orðit* (ÍF 13, p. 224; ›This autumn those chests disappeared that he [Þórir] had had made for the Valshellisgold, and nobody has known since then what had become of them‹).[50] This statement suggests that the transformation undergone by Þórir is linked to, or even triggered by, Valr's gold.

The last example of the collaboration between these voices occurs at the very end of the saga. Þórir has become an old man, and the extradiegetic narrative voice repeats that he became increasingly difficult in social interactions: *Hann gerðist illr ok ódæll viðskiptis æ því meir er hann eldist meir* (ÍF 13, p. 226; ›He became increasingly vicious and hard to deal with the older he got‹). The intradiegetic voice of public opinion (underlined with a perforated line) and the extradiegetic voice of narrative tradition (underlined with a block line) take over at this juncture to relate the rather enigmatic end to Þórir's life:

> *Þat var sagt eitthvert sumar, at Guðmundr, son hans, hafði fallit í bardaga, en þat hafði þó logit verit. Þóri brá svá við þessi tíðindi, er hann frétti, at hann hvarf á brott frá búi sínu, ok vissi engi maðr, hvat af honum væri orðit eðr hann kom niðr, en þat hafa menn fyrir satt, at hann hafi at dreka orðit ok hafi lagizt á gullkistur sínar. Helzt þat ok lengi síðan, at menn sá dreka fljúga ofan um þeim megin frá Þórisstöðum* […]. (ÍF 13, p. 226, emphasis added)

> One summer, it was said that his [Þórir's] son Guðmundr has fallen in battle, but this was a lie. When he heard the news, Þórir reacted so strongly that he disappeared from his homestead, and nobody knew what had become of him and where he had ended up. And people consider it true that he had become a dragon and was lying on his gold chests. For a long time afterwards, it also

> happened that people saw dragons flying over the mountains of Þórisstaðir [...]. (emphasis added)

This passage suggests that some of the events mentioned here are related to Þórir's dream. It is interesting, though, that the two alternative voices are more active and vocal about Þórir's fate later in life, even though neither was involved in the narration of the dream; the extradiegetic narrative voice related Þórir's dream, and thus seemed to have more access to information about the fate that awaits Þórir. We may suppose that this knowledge has somehow been invested also into the voices of public opinion and the narrative tradition, which now seem to be well-informed about Þórir's backstory and the bad omen.

At the same time, the narrative voice remains in charge of what is recounted, since it corrects the extradiegetic narrative tradition when the death of Þórir's son Guðmundr is wrongly reported by emphasising the falseness of the information (*en þat hafði þó logit verit*; ›but this was a lie‹). This evaluative comment calls the veracity and reliability of the other two voices into question, thus reinforcing the extradiegetic narrative voice as the main narratorial function in the saga. On the level of content, the ›fake news‹ of Guðmundr's putative death makes Þórir's end of life even more tragic: had he been better informed, he would presumably not have left his farm, and might have escaped his transformative fate.[51]

The quotation above also demonstrates the frame of acceptability for ›Gull-Þóris saga‹, and hence for the *Íslendingasögur* more broadly. While the narrative voice corrects one of the statements made by another voice, it neither objects to other voices partaking in the process of narration, nor comments on, or even rectifies, all the statements by the other voices. The narrative voice corrects the statement of the intradiegetic public voice about Guðmundr's death, a comparatively ›factual‹ claim, but the rumours of Þórir allegedly transforming into a dragon, thereby succeeding Valr, and guarding the same treasure he previously claimed are left uncommented, even though the presence of dragons in Iceland is rather improbable in the

more naturalistic *Íslendingasögur*. Despite the dragon's appearance and several other narrative elements mostly known from the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ does not fully disrupt generic expectations (see also Cardew 2004, p. 22). The same holds true for the ways in which these voices shape the process of narration. None of the voices highlights narrative caesuras or transitions, nor do they mark the introduction of elements associated with other saga subgenres in any particular way. What is more, the high number of evaluative comments throughout the narrative, and particularly in the context of Þórir's depiction, does not automatically imply a *discours* reminiscent of the *fornaldarsögur* or *riddarasögur*. Hence, ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ remains firmly rooted in the *Íslendingasögur*, both on the level of *discours* and *histoire*.

The case of ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ shows that the frame of acceptability of *Íslendingasaga* narration is flexible enough to include and adapt narrative elements and narratorial features that are usually attributed to different genres. The intratextual community accepts what we might see as unusual elements for the *Íslendingasögur*, such as the appearance of dragons in Iceland, and this seems to be reflected in the extradiegetic level by the voice of the narrative tradition. While the extratextual audience would have been aware that ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ draws on other subgenres of saga, its content nevertheless fulfils the implicit narrative norms of an *Íslendingasaga* sufficiently for it to remain within this subgenre. As the term *Íslendingasaga* originated only in post-medieval times, however, it is safer to say that in fulfilling the expectations of its audiences, ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ became embedded in the wider nexus of saga narration. Consequently, the scribe(s) had some liberties as to how they could shape the plot. The frame of acceptability of ›Gull-Þóris saga‹, and indeed any *Íslendingasaga*, is flexible as it allows for a variety of literary means from various generic sources.

Moreover, this case study illustrates that the initial quantitative assessment of the results from the software-based annotation can offer interesting pointers for qualitative analysis, but it is still crucial also to scrutinise

these results qualitatively. The relatively high number of evaluative comments, for instance, need not inherently represent generic hybridity. The qualitative analysis of the evaluative comments used to describe Þórir, for instance, reveals that this portrayal, on the level of *discours*, is the collaboration of three qualitatively different voices. On the level of *histoire*, Þórir's depiction in the plot fulfils the typical expectations of a *Íslendingasaga* protagonist: he assumes a leading position early on; like many other young men, he goes on an *útanferð*, a journey ›out‹ to Norway or mainland Europe; he earns fame and fortune through heroic deeds; and on returning to Iceland, he settles down, establishes a farm, marries, and has children, while remaining involved in various disputes that emerge at home.

As many other protagonists in the *Íslendingasögur*, Þórir does not generally change in a substantial way, at least not according to how he is portrayed by the evaluative comments.[52] The only change in character, which is mentioned when he is young, but which remains diffuse and nondescript at first, seems to be triggered by his encounter with Valr's gold. It is with this change that the two additional voices of public opinion and narrative tradition come into play to nuance the depiction of Þórir. Despite being framed as potentially unreliable in the passage quoted above, the statements of these two voices are nonetheless necessary, because they provide new and otherwise inaccessible information to the audience. Hence, the collaboration of three narrative voices demonstrates the polyphony of voices with different qualities, and thus bears witness to a multifaceted and complex process of narration.

## 5. Introducing the Contributions

The approach I have selected for my project, as demonstrated in the previous case study, is, as so often the case in scholarship, only one possible approach to Old Norse-Icelandic saga literature. The following contribu-

tions illustrate that there are various ways for exploring the process of narration and its literary effects.[53] Common tendencies in the following contributions are that saga narration is essentially polyphonic, and that all the voices involved feature different narrative qualities. This is true not only of the *Íslendingasögur*, but also (at least) for the saga subgenre of the *samtíðarsögur* and for the short prose narratives known as *þættir* (›threads, short stories‹). In view of the fact that systematic modern narratological studies on saga narration are still lacking, this special issue aims to spur on interest in narratological questions by showing how multifaceted this branch of research can be, and for its findings to develop our understanding of saga narratives. The contributions thus offer a variety of stepping-stones for exploring the frame of acceptability in saga narration. What is more, the range of contributors to this special issue reflects the fact that the topic of saga narration is an enticing one for people at all stages of a scholarly career, from professors, to postdoctoral researchers, to doctoral students.

The first two articles in this issue are interested in the aspects of omniscience and silence, or rather the withholding of information. Heather O'Donoghue focuses on the extradiegetic narrative voice and the *totum simul* (›everything at once‹) perspective it assumes in the saga narratives. On the basis of three short episodes from *Íslendingasögur*, she discusses what effect the narrative voice creates by withholding vital information while narrating an episode. This narrative silence invites, or rather forces, the saga audience to engage more actively with the text, in order to work out how to deal with gaps in the narrative. Hilkea Blomeyer's contribution also focuses on silence and looks into the nature, significance, and effect of silence and silencing on various narratorial levels in a selection of prose *þættir*. There are different kinds of silences that are situated both on the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic levels and thus create a variety of effects. While the narrative voice may fall silent in an episode, characters' voices at times take over and provide the required information and thus fill the gap.

Regardless of the type of silence, the narrative level and the inclusion of other voices, all silences require the audience to engage more intensively with the text.

The articles by Alexander Wilson and Stefanie Gropper both centre on the prosimetric form, which is quite prominent in the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur*. Wilson introduces a new paradigm for categorising and analysing the single stanzas (*lausavísur*) that are frequently interspersed in the prose narration of sagas. He dismisses the long-standing dichotomy of these stanzas as being either provided as (pseudo-)objective evidence for an event (authenticating stanzas) or as a spontaneous comment on a situation (situational stanzas). Instead, he suggests it is more useful to focus on what diegetic level the stanzas are embedded, and shows that several stanzas in the corpus mix diegetic reference and extradiegetic quotation, which complicates our understanding of saga prosimetrum. Stefanie Gropper focuses on two versions of a dialogue in ›Njáls saga‹ between a father and daughter about her marital issues. In one of the versions, both characters formulate their statements in prose; in the other version, the daughter, Unnr, communicates her replies as stanzas. These different presentations emphasise distinct narrative aspects. When Unnr formulates her answers in stanzas, she appears much more sensitive than when replying in prose. While the identity of the speaker stays the same, the quality of the voice changes, and thus creates a different narrative effect.

Finally, the topic of multivocality is also important to Thomas Morcom's article on dreams, slander, gossip, and rumour. In view of his main source ›Íslendinga saga‹, which belongs to the subgenre of the contemporary sagas (*samtíðarsögur*), he is mainly interested in the saga's intricate relationship of narrative authority and narratorial identity, because these two functions must navigate between historical and literary aspects in creating the literary product of ›Íslendinga saga‹. This is because, unlike most sagas, ›Íslendinga saga‹ is accepted to be the work of a named author, Sturla Þórðarson, who is also a character in the text and associated strongly with

the extradiegetic narrative voice. In light of the complications that this causes for the text – a supposedly objective political history of the internecine conflicts in thirteenth-century Iceland, but in which Sturla himself participated – Morcom investigates how dreams, slander, gossip, and rumour are used in the saga to introduce alternative narratorial perspective that provide a counterpoint to the main narrative voice, which allows the saga to be framed as an apparently objective narrative history.

Before turning to the articles, I want to thank a number of people whose support has contributed greatly to the success of the workshop and to the making of this special issue. My thanks go to Mia Meike and Yvonne Meixner, who made sure that there was always ample coffee and snacks at the workshop; Marion Darilek, Stefanie Gropper, and Rebecca Merkelbach, for dedicating their time to the peer-review process of the issue; and my greatest thanks are due to Alexander Wilson for his very comprehensive commentary and proofreading of the entire issue, with great dedication and attention to detail. *Kærar þakkir*!

## Notes

1 The terms saga and ›saga literature‹ will be explained further below. – The workshop, which lead to this publication, was organised in the framework of the Collaborative Research Centre 1391 ›Different Aesthetics‹ (= Sonderforschungsbereich 1391, ›Andere Ästhetik‹), located at the University of Tübingen and funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – SFB 1391 – Project-ID 405662736. The CRC's website can be found online (last accessed 12 February 2024).

2 This quotation is taken from ›Bárðar saga‹, and translates to ›more noise than can be described‹ (CSI 2, p. 258).

3 What follows here is a cursory outline of saga literature. For an introductory reading to Old Norse-Icelandic literature and the sagas, see e.g. Bampi (2020), Ármann Jakobsson/Sverrir Jakobsson (2017), Clunies Ross (2010), Glauser

(2006), McTurk (2005), Vésteinn Ólason (1998a, 1998b), and Clover (1985 [2005]).

4 In the context of saga literature, the prosimetric form means that poetic stanzas are embedded in the prose narrative. The stanzas are introduced for several purposes and can be spoken by various voices in the text. In this issue, prosimetrum is explored by Alexander Wilson and Stefanie Gropper.

5 Note that the term ›Icelandic saga(s)‹ is non-specific, and merely denotes sagas generally produced in Iceland. The (Icelandic) term *Íslendingasögur* refers to the genre of the ›family sagas‹, as described above. ›Íslendinga saga‹, on the other hand, is the title of a specific saga narrative that belongs to the genre of the *samtíðarsögu*r, and which is discussed by Thomas Morcom in this issue.

6 Although it is a longstanding convention in the field to refer to these saga genres, their definitions and terminology are not uncontested (see e.g. Rösli 2019).

7 For a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework of the CRC, see Gerok-Reiter/Robert (2022).

8 Since roughly 1800, the concept of an aesthetics of autonomy has dominated the European notion of aesthetics and significantly influenced ideas about and the reception of art. Introduced by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartner, the aesthetics of autonomy considers the sole creator of art to be the independent, and often divinely inspired, genius figure.

9 For a concise description of figures of aesthetic reflection, see Gerok-Reiter/Robert (2019, esp. pp. 19–23), and Gerok-Reiter/Robert (2022, esp. pp. 29–32).

10 The webpage of the CRC project »Narrative (Self-)Reflection in the Icelandic Family Sagas«, which focuses on Old Norse texts, is accessible online (last accessed 7 December 2023).

11 Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations are my own.

12 Genette introduced the term ›narrative voice‹ in the 1970s and 1980s. The most influential work is ›Narrative Discourse‹ (originally ›Discours du récit‹). In translation, the book often includes two works by Genette, namely ›Figures III‹ (= ›Discours du récit‹), first published in 1972, and ›Nouveau discours du récit‹, first published in 1983.

13 The question of ›who speaks?‹ is not coterminous with ›who sees?‹. While the former aims at the identification of the voice, the latter belongs to the aspect of focalisation; see e.g. Blödorn/Langer/Scheffel (2006, p. 1); Fludernik (2001, p. 620).

14 Zymner refers to the German term ›Text‹, but this does not completely reflect the word choices in the French original (*récit*, 1983) or the German (*Erzählung*, 2010) and English translations (›narrative‹, 1980) of ›Discours du récit‹.

15 Blödorn/Langer/Scheffel (2006, p. 2). The psychological aspects were the reasons why Genette (1983, p. 31) preferred the term ›voice‹ over ›person‹, because the former implies a larger conceptual extension.

16 See e.g. Zymner (2006, p. 322). To some extent, Zymner reproduces Genette's slightly blurred terminology when employing the German ›Person‹.

17 Aczel (2001, p. 703) objects to Fludernik's opinion that non-identifiable voices can be ignored.

18 Aczel (2005, p. 635) specifies, however, that »[d]istinctive idiomatic traits – from readily identifiable sociolects to highly ornate narrative styles – are not seen as indicators of voice«.

19 Indeed, Aczel (1998 p. 492 and 2005, p. 634) understands both ›narrator‹ and ›narrative voice‹ as umbrella terms: the former for all narratorial functions, the latter for narrative effects.

20 The concept of polyphony is best known from Bakhtin's ›Discourse in the Novel‹ (1981). Bakhtin (1981, p. 261) states that »[t]he novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice«. The various narrative voices are not introduced in a haphazard way, but are actively configured and »artistically organized«, and thus result from craftmanship (pp. 262 and 259).

21 Zymner (2006, pp. 322–323; his emphasis), on the other hand, considers the voice of the narrator to be muted, since it is mainly »Text-*Struktur*« that is responsible for selecting and structuring the narrative. The voices of characters, however, are clearly audible in a narrative.

22 Aczel (2001, p. 704–705) invokes the image of a ventriloquist to illustrate that narrative voices do not necessarily need to be connected to a particular identity, but can be understood metaphorically in a more abstract sense. The ventriloquist projects the illusion of the dummy speaking; at the same time, the audience is aware of the artifice behind this illusion. The speaking voice is thus between the ventriloquist and the dummy, rather than associated only with one of these entities. Irrespective of their identity, the ventriloquist's voices only come into existence when they are staged, and hence can be heard and interpreted by the audience.

23 Due to the nexus of voice and a dialogic communicative system, questions of orality and of the sensory aspects of voice are evoked. Scholars thus discuss

whether voice, a term originally firmly rooted in the realm of orality, can actually be used in a written context; see Blödorn/Langer/Scheffel (2006), and Zymner (2001).

24 While Aczel's terms of function and effect are helpful in the saga context, I refrain from adopting his usage of ›narrator‹ in favour of the term ›narrative voice‹; however, I understand this to refer in a more neutral sense to an impersonal narratorial authority.

25 One of the earliest and most famous attributions is the case of ›Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar‹, a so-called classical *Íslendingasaga*. Based on several factors, it was suggested that Snorri Sturluson – the most prominent medieval Icelandic author, poet, and politician – wrote this saga, not least because Egill is allegedly one of Snorri's forefathers. The importance of this authorship is also reflected in the introduction to the Íslenzk fornrit edition of this saga (ÍF 2, pp. LXX–XCV), where, under the heading »Höfundur« (›author‹) and guided by twelve assumptions on how the saga author is potentially connected to the saga, the introduction devotes twenty-five pages to the question of the potential author of *Egils saga*. The two most recent studies on this topic were published by Torfi H. Tulinius in 2004 and 2014.

26 This position is still partly reproduced by some Icelandic scholars to this day. Sverrir Tómasson (2012, p. 250), for example, refers to »Old Norse writers«, not to an impersonal narrator or narrative voices, and states that »they [Old Norse writers] regarded their own role as a creative one«.

27 It was, for instance, argued that the author of a saga should ideally stem from the same region as the saga is set in, or that the author may have explored genealogical connections when writing about their forefathers; see e.g. ÍF 2, p. LXXI.

28 Peter Hallberg (e.g. 1962 and 1968) was among the first to analyse the sagas stylometrically to identify phrases and formulations that could point to individual authors. Useful stylometric analyses continue to be published (see e.g. McPherson/Tirosh 2020 and Sigurður Ingibergur Björnsson/Steingrímur Páll Kárason/Jón Karl Helgason 2021), but these modern analyses often focus primarily on the relationship between several versions and/or manuscripts of a saga.

29 For discussions of the Old Norse terminology for authorship and for writing or composing a saga, see Glauser (2021) and Gropper (2023 and 2021).

30 Jakobsen (1983, p. 4) speaks of the *forfatter* (Norwegian for ›author‹), a term he implicitly understands as the narrative authority that first composes a saga, in contrast to the *avskriver* (›copyist‹), who has only very limited liberties that they can take in curating the text when copying it.

31 In 1998, Vésteinn Ólason published an introductory book on the *Íslendingasögur* in both Icelandic and English. In both versions, he speaks of a personified narrator, and in the Icelandic version, he refers to the narrative authorities with the masculine pronouns.

32 This quotation refers to the title of one of the most recent publications on medieval authorship: ›In Search of the Culprit‹, edited by Rösli/Gropper (2021).

33 O'Donoghue (2021, p. 3) employs the term ›saga author‹ only when referring to »more distantly compositional issues«.

34 Clunies Ross (2010, p. 26) maintains that the »self-effacing impersonal stance [...] is by far the most common« in saga literature, and strongly contrasts with often found »highly personalised stance of a large number of medieval European historians writing in Latin«.

35 The initial results of my project are published in Heiniger (2023) and Heiniger et al. (2022).

36 These narratorial comments have often been ignored by scholarship. In the early twentieth century, and later in the 1960s and 1970s, some scholars looked into some types of narratorial comments and were mostly interested in aspects of literacy and orality, especially formulations such as *sem var sagt* (›as was told before‹) and *sem var ritat* (›as was written ealier‹) (e.g. Anderson 1966), and, as already explored above, whether the comments are helpful in identifying specific authors (e.g. Ranković 2019 and 2016).

37 Indeed, there is no extant poetics on saga narration. In general, there are very few Old Norse-Icelandic sources that can be categorised as literary textbooks. Discussing Old Norse phonology, and how to write Old Norse with the Latin alphabet, the four ›Grammatical Treatises‹ touch only briefly on the composition of poetry, while the section ›Skáldskaparmál‹ in ›Snorra Edda‹ offers a guideline of how to compose skaldic poetry.

38 The subcategories are not listed at this juncture, but a selection of the relevant subcategories will be introduced below when they become relevant for the case study.

39 Despite their different functions and points of reference, these two types of narratorial comments are subsumed under the heading of ›public opinion‹ because they both express knowledge that is shared and imparted in a public space. For a discussion of how the two types of statements of public opinion interact and shape the process of narration, see Gropper (2023).

40 The paragraph on the methodology is adapted from Heiniger (2023).

41 I use the software Atlas.ti (online)(last accessed 14 February 2023) and the machine-readable saga texts from the open source Snerpa (online)( last accessed 15 March 2024).

42 For an elaborate introductory reading on the annotation process, see e.g. Reiter (2020), Gius/Reiter/Willard (2019), Rapp (2017).

43 Margrét Eggertsdóttir (1993), ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ (s.v.). The vellum of ›Gull-Þóris saga‹ features two lacunae. The first, larger lacuna spans from the middle of chapter 10 to almost the end of chapter 12; the second comprises one leaf in the middle of chapter 20. Since all paper manuscripts are based on the same vellum manuscript, the lacunae cannot be reconstructed. For the estimates on how many lines or leaves are missing in the saga, see ÍF 13 (p. CX).

44 The following quantitative results on how frequently the five categories are employed in the *Íslendingasögur* are based on analyses conducted in the context of my project on narratorial comments in the *Íslendingasögur* (see also note 35). The analysis is based on eleven sagas that represent the main aspect of the variety of this genre.

45 For a discussion of genre in ›Gull-Þóris saga‹, see Cardew (2004).

46 Both chapters 2 and 6 are transition chapters, that is, in each chapter, the band of Icelanders travels out from or back to Iceland. For the time being, both chapters are considered part of the *Íslendingasaga* section.

47 Þórir's physical capabilities are mentioned at the very beginning of chapter 2: *Þórir Oddsson var sterkastr jafngamall, ok allar íþróttir hafði hann umfram sína jafnaldra* (ÍF 13, p. 181; ›Þórir Oddsson was the strongest of all his peers and he excelled in all sports‹).

48 The term *allléttbrúnn* (›to be overjoyed‹), is a rare finding in saga literature: Only two instances of *allléttbrúnn* and four occurrences of *léttbrúnn* (›cheerful‹) without the intensifying particle *all-* can be found in the saga corpus across all subgenres. It is also unusual for the sagas to express such strong positive feelings.

49 It is notable that the origin of the central conflict in the saga, the strife between Steinólfr and Þórir, remains unexplained. Neither the saga characters nor the narrative voice discloses why Steinólfr despises Þórir. Þórhallr Vilmundarson (ÍF 13, p. CXXXI) reckons that the explanation for this hostility was lost in the process of rewriting, and that previous versions of the saga were probably conflated into the version we have today.

50 The disappearance of the chests is comparable to ›Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar‹, where the elderly protagonist rides into the mountains and hides two chests of silver, because he does not want to give them to anybody else. When

Egill does so, the narrative voice also describes him as an old man who is increasingly difficult to deal with.

51 The element of a father withdrawing from human settlement after assuming that his child is dead can also be found in ›Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss‹, where the protagonist Bárðr moves into the mountains because he is convinced that he has lost his beloved daughter Helga. While he later discovers that Helga is still alive, he does not change his whereabouts.

52 That some people become more difficult to deal with in old age can also be seen in other sagas (e.g. ›Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar‹).

53 Not all of the contributors were part of the workshop; conversely, not all of the workshop participants are represented in this special issue. Massimiliano Bampi and Elena Brandenburg were unfortunately unable to contribute to this issue, but at the workshop itself, they offered rich analyses of works like ›Parcevals saga‹ and ›Eufemiavisor‹. Both scholars explored how these narratives were translated and the adaptation strategies that guided the transmission process. In addition, they also addressed media-theoretical aspects, and considered how oral and written versions of the texts refer to and influence each other.

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*Atlas.ti* = Software for Qualitative Data Analysis (accessible online)

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