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The Polar Bear Conspiracy

The Narrative Voice and Strategies of Silence in ›Brands þáttr örva‹, ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹, and ›Sneglu-Halla þáttr‹[1]

Abstract. This article focuses on the silence of the narrative voice and of silent characters, as well as the consequences this silencing has for the plot of saga narratives. By analysing three Old Norse short stories (*þættir*), it can be shown how the narrative voice uses silence to steer the audience's attention and to enhance its enjoyment of the narrative. Silence is only noticeable when the narrative voice leaves gaps unexplained or describes an episode differently than the characters do. Silence appears on different narrative levels and is employed through various voices. It is thus not a phenomenon restricted to modern works, but can also be identified in premodern texts as a way to direct the audience's attention.

1. Introduction

Picture the following scene. In the hall of a farmer at midday, an old man sits in his chair, with a woman next to him and a child playing on the ground. Suddenly, the child stumbles, and the man begins to laugh. He then tells the young boy that his parents are not who he thinks they are. Has the audience missed something?

This paper focuses on how the narrative voice uses silence, and what effect this has on the audience in selected *þættir* (›short stories‹, lit. ›threads‹; sg. *þáttr*). The above scene belongs to ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹,

and the events described here, as well as the question of what the audience has been told, are revisited below in section 3.2. To read or listen to a story leads the audience to focus on the outspoken parts, which means the audience often does not notice when something is left untold – that is, until the story no longer makes sense, and obvious gaps in the narrative give rise to interpretative questions. Explicit silence, such as when a vocal character falls silent, is noticeable, unlike the silence of the narrative voice, which is more implicit and remains unnoticed until it creates contradictions within the wider narrative. To look for this kind of silence is to look for gaps in the narrative, to see what is hidden between the lines. While some kinds of silence are obvious to detect, others are more difficult to find.

This article discusses how we can identify moments where the narrative voice is silent, and how this silence may influence both story and audience. Scholarly research suggests possible categories and reasons for narrative silence, which are adapted here to fit the analysis of Old Norse literature. I will introduce various strategies for identifying narrative silence in *þættir* and demonstrate their usefulness in three case studies: ›Brands þáttr örva‹, ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹, and the two versions of ›Sneglu-Halla þáttr‹.

2. Silence in Narration

Silence is colloquially defined as »the absence of speech« (Mayar/Schulte 2022, p. 5), but this definition captures only a fraction of what silence is.[2] Silence is a (temporary) suspension and interruption of a conversation, and even a relationship. It can be a spontaneous reaction, such as shocked silence, or result from a conscious decision, a signal to others that their statement was not met with support. A person can be silent of their own volition; they can be forced to be silent; or they can choose to break the silence. Mahshid Mayar and Marion Schulte (pp. 2–3) speak not only of ›silence‹ and the active ›silencing‹ of others, but also of ›keeping‹ and ›breaking‹ silence. Because silence is multivalent, in the sense that there are various kinds of

silence, it conveys meaning, and it can accordingly be analysed in different ways (p. 2).

As regards the depiction of silence in literary studies, it is important to note that modern literature theories and questions are only partly suitable for the analysis of medieval texts, and may need to be adapted to new contexts (Schnyder 2003, p. 21). Ruth Rosaler (2016, pp. 2–5) explores the meaning of conspicuous silence in Victorian novels, showing how silence on the intra- and extradiegetic levels is perceived by the audience as gaps in the narrative.[3] Such gaps, which require interpretation to be made sense of, can result from restrictions arising from social and textual conventions (pp. 7–8). Rosaler terms interpretation via implicit statements as ›implicatures‹ (p. 3). She subsumes the silence itself and the resulting gaps in the text under the umbrella term ›unnarratable‹, and introduces various categories to distinguish these elements (pp. 5–7).[4] ›Subnarratable‹ elements are the parts of the text that are mundane enough that they need not be narrated, such as the tasks of daily life (p. 6). When these are narrated, however, the fact that they are mentioned seems unusual to the reader. The ›supranarratable‹, conversely, is beyond the scope of narration; the narrative voice can refer to it only by highlighting how it cannot be narrated (p. 6). For example, the effect of an object of extraordinary beauty would be diminished if it is described; therefore, the narrative voice evades this by explaining why a description is impossible. Other types of silence are theoretically narratable, but there are restrictions on how they can be narrated; for instance, social norms prevent ›antinarratable‹ elements, taboos that can be addressed only indirectly, from being explicitly narrated (p. 7). In such cases, the author relies on the audience to fill in the gaps with background knowledge in order to grasp the text's meaning (p. 7). Finally, restrictions that result from formal external conventions, such as the genre or medium of the text, are referred to as ›paranarratable‹ (p. 7).[5] Describing a brutal murder in detail, for instance, is suitable for a crime novel but might seem disturbing in a romance story; similarly, a reader expects

certain conventions to be fulfilled in a letter that seem unusual for fictious texts. The elements are distinguished because they are either not typically narrated or even impossible to narrate (subnarratable, supranarratable), or because they result from external social or textual restrictions (antinarratable, paranarratable) (pp. 6–7). Sub- and supranarratable elements are sometimes commented on and by doing so, the narrative voice breaks (subnarratable) or highlights (supranarratable) an existing silence. Anti- and paranarratable elements, however, are less likely to be commented on because they depend on external restrictions. Rosaler's distinctions are important for the following case studies, as the different reasons for introducing silence into a text shapes the kinds of comments made by the narrative voice.

While Rosaler focuses on Victorian novels, Heather O'Donoghue (2021) discusses the figure of the ›silent narrator‹, in several variations, in relation to the *Íslendingasögur*.[6] The silent narrator offers no explanation or commentary on events that we would otherwise expect it to comment on (O'Donoghue 2021, p. 115). Consequently, the audience, unguided by the narrator, must engage in discussion or speculation about the possible causes or significance of these events (p. 118). In some cases, the narrative voice displaces the responsibility of narrating to other voices, such as the voice of public opinion, which can direct the audience to sympathise with certain characters while allowing the narrative voice to appear objective (pp. 123–124).[7] This displacement is especially relevant in the case of supernatural encounters, which the narrator may be hesitant to describe, because explanation or judgement of the paranormal can be outsourced to a specific character or to public opinion (pp. 124 and 127). The notion of the silent narrator, who shifts their narrative obligations to public opinion or to intradiegetic characters, thus displacing responsibility for providing explanations and judgement on events, is important for the present analysis, as it necessarily influences our perception of the story.

Though Rosaler and O'Donoghue use different approaches, both authors show that silence has different effects. Various possibilities exist to analyse and categorise silence, both on the intra- and extradiegetic levels. Yet there is considerable work to be done in developing the silence of the narrative voice as a topic of discussion in Old Norse literary studies,[8] which may be down partly to the difficulty of identifying such silence. While it is easy to notice when a character falls silent, the same is not true for the narrative voice. To look for narrative silence means to seek out gaps, omitted information, or unexplained leaps in the narrative, rather than the more explicit elements of the text. The following case studies discuss how silence can be seen in the way the narrative voice operates in Old Norse *þættir*, linking research on the characteristics of the narrative voice in Old Norse texts to previous work on the effects of narrative silence. The analysis focuses on passages where the narrative voice does not provide comments where we might expect it to, and where its silence on the events of the narrative contradicts statements made by the characters, thus shaping the audience's response by encouraging them to consider how they might make sense of these gaps in the text.

3. The Ways of Silence: Three Case Studies

I propose that the narrative voice uses different strategies of silence to transmit underlying themes and sentiments in the *þættir*. It stays silent, works together with silent characters, or actively silences the characters in the story. The categories proposed by Rosaler and O'Donoghue are used to differentiate further between these strategies, in particular when looking at possible motivations for the appearance of silence in the narrative: Silence may result from a hesitance to report on some events, such as paranormal encounters, from a need to follow social restrictions, or from an intentional focus on certain themes, such as responsibility and truth-telling. The intention of the narrative voice, in turn, influences the effects that silence has on

the story and on the audience. The themes the narrative voice wants to put into focus are highlighted through silence, inviting the audience to enjoy the narrative on a deeper level.

To observe how silence is used as a tool in Old Norse literature, I present here case studies of three Old Norse-Icelandic short stories, *þættir*. The corpus of *þættir* contains about one hundred narratives, which are mainly preserved as embedded narratives in the kings' sagas (*konungasögur*), particularly the compilations of Flateyjarbók and Morkinskinna (Rowe 2017, p. 152; Rowe/Harris 2005, pp. 462–463 and 467).[9] The *þættir* deal with the relationship between Icelanders and Norwegian kings, with religious tensions between Christianity and pre-Christian beliefs, or with legendary heroes, and have been studied both separately and together with the sagas in which they are embedded (e.g. Rowe 2005, Würth 1991).[10] I will discuss ›Brands þáttr örva‹, ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹, and ›Sneglu-Halla þáttr‹, each of which adds a different element to the study of silence, both on the extra- and intradiegetic level. In ›Brands þáttr örva‹, we see the influence of a silent character on the narrative voice; ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹ shows how the silence of the narrative voice concerning supernatural encounters can be broken; and the analysis of ›Sneglu-Halla þáttr‹, a text transmitted in two versions, sheds light on the distinction between silence, textual variation, and active silencing.

3.1 Silent characters: ›Brands þáttr örva‹

Although Rosaler and O'Donoghue mainly focus on the extradiegetic narrative voice, the silence that is most noticeable in this *þáttr* is that of a character on the intradiegetic level. As silence in a conversation can be distinguished by whether it occurs ›before‹, ›during‹, or ›after‹ talking (Schnyder 2003, p. 35), we tend to think of silence in relation to talkative characters who become silent, or silent characters who become talkative. Yet protagonists who do not verbally express themselves at all are unusual, as is

the case for Brandr, the main character of ›Brands þáttr örva‹.[11] The short story tells of his encounter with the Norwegian King Haraldr harðráði, who tries to find out whether Brandr is as generous as his friend, the poet (*skáld*) Þjóðólfr, claims he is. The king orders Þjóðólfr to bring him valuable possessions belonging to Brandr, which Þjóðólfr reluctantly does. Each time Þjóðólfr asks his friend to hand over a desired object, Brandr silently obeys. In the end, when Þjóðólfr presents the king with a tunic from which Brandr has removed one of the sleeves, King Haraldr reflects on his own hypocrisy in not reciprocating Brandr's generosity. He interprets the modified tunic as if he himself had only one hand that always took and never gave. Haraldr thus recognises Brandr as the more generous man, since he only gave without expecting anything in return.

Brandr's silence throughout these events is ambiguous. It is unclear whether being silent reflects his own choice or whether it is somehow forced upon him. He is first introduced by Þjóðólfr, who *hafði mart sagt Haraldi konungi frá Brandi, hvé mikill mætismaðr hann var ok vel at sér* (ÍF 4, p. 189; ›had told King Harald a great deal about what a worthy and accomplished man Brand was‹, CSI 1, p. 374).[12] But Þjóðólfr does not mention that Brandr is unable to speak or that he chooses not to. The only explicit detail of Brandr's silence comes in the comments made by the narrative voice, which mentions how he acted *svaraði engu* (ÍF 4, p. 190; ›without answering‹, CSI 1, p. 374). Þjóðólfr remarks after returning from his first errand that *Brandr hafði engi orð um* (ÍF 4, p. 190; ›Brand had not said a word about it‹, CSI 1, p. 374), which leaves open the question of whether it is unusual for the friends not to exchange words outside of Þjóðólfr's messages from the king. Keeping the cause of Brandr's silence unresolved leaves an ambiguous gap in the story.

If we assume that Brandr is able to speak, we may read his silence as voluntary.[13] I will argue that his silence is not a weakness, but rather a powerful means of signification. Since Brandr does not defend or explain his actions, this task falls to another character, as well as to the extradiegetic

narrative voice. While Þjóðólfr mentions in the aforementioned indirect speech *at Brandr hafði engi orð um* (ÍF 4, p. 190; ›that Brand had not said a word about it‹, CSI 1, p. 374), the narrative voice tells the audience that Brandr *svaraði engu* and *mælti ekki* (ÍF 4, p. 190; ›[acted] without answering‹, ›[acted] without saying a word‹, CSI 1, pp. 374–375). It is thus unclear whether Brandr's silence pertains only to him answering the questions relating to the king's orders, or whether he was entirely silent in his interactions with Þjóðólfr. Either way, both Þjóðólfr's account and the narrative voice work together to present Brandr as a silent figure to both the king and the audience – in Þjóðólfr's case, perhaps because Brandr could have placed himself in danger were he to reproach the king verbally for his own lack of generosity. Being Icelandic, Brandr is an outsider with less secure ties to the court; anything he might say in response to the king's orders could be seen as an insult or as being in defiance of his demands. By following the demands without comment, yet with conspicuous silence, Brandr remains safe from retaliation, but can simultaneously present an implicit challenge to the king. His silence thus frames him not as a mere subordinate, but as a potential peer: in choosing to act, instead of talking, he displaces the responsibility to explain his actions, and leaves it up to the king to interpret them. By inverting Haraldr's test and mirroring it back to him, he inverts the power relation between them through the use of silence, forcing others to explain his responses.

Being silent strengthens Brandr's position, but Þjóðólfr weakens his own standing by talking, as his praise of Brandr places him in a precarious situation. Only by becoming silent and refusing to interpret his friend's actions can he save himself from the predicament of falling into disfavour with the king. It is Þjóðólfr's fault that Brandr must undergo the test in the first place, as the skald boasts of his friend's generosity in front of the king (*hafði mart sagt Haraldi konungi frá Brandi*, ÍF 4, p. 189; ›he had told King Harald a great deal about […] Brand‹, CSI 1, p. 374). He regrets this when he is sent to retrieve the items, however, and when Haraldr orders him to fetch

more items from Brandr, he pleads with the king not to ask more of him: *›Ekki er mér mikit um, herra, at fara optar‹* (ÍF 4, p. 190; »I am not keen, my lord, on going to see him again«, CSI 1, p. 374). The poet fears for his friendship with Brandr: *›Veit ek eigi, hversu hann vill þat virða, ef ek kref vápns ór hendi honum‹* (ÍF 4, p. 190; »I don't know how he'll take it [if I demand the weapon out of his hands]«, CSI 1, p. 374). Once it is made clear that Þjóðólfr must continue retrieving the items, he no longer tries to explain Brandr's silence. While Brandr strengthens his position by becoming silent, Þjóðólfr invalidates his own by talking, perhaps losing respect as a court poet whose position is contingent on his verbal skill. In addition, Þjóðólfr's response to Brandr's silence weakens their friendship. Where a character is unable to defend himself, the role of protector should fall to a friend, as in chapter 59 of ›Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar‹, where Arinbjörn helps his friend Egill by mediating between him and King Eiríkr blóðöx, and by protecting Egill while he composes a poem for the king (ÍF 2, pp. 181 and 183). This does not happen here: punished for talking, Þjóðólfr stops commenting or expressing his opinion, falling silent and being reduced from an active character to a passive bystander. It is thus the king who must take over in interpreting the significance of these events.

At the same time, King Haraldr transforms from an active leader to a passive figure controlled by Brandr's silence. Giving the order to confiscate Brandr's belongings, the king expects him to refuse, or at least to respond: *›Mun vera mikils háttar maðr, er honum þótti eigi þurfa orð um at hafa‹* (ÍF 4, p. 190; »This man [...] must be very distinguished if he felt no need to say anything about it«, CSI 1, p. 374). When the Icelander does not resist the demands, Haraldr himself falls silent. Only at the beginning of the *þáttr* (*›Víst er sjá maðr skapstórr‹*, ÍF 4, p. 190; »This man certainly is magnanimous«, CSI 1, p. 374) and towards the ending (*›Auðsét er mér, hví hann hefir erminni af sprett; honum þykkir sem ek eiga eina höndina, ok þá þó at þiggja ávallt, en veita aldrigi‹*, ÍF 4, p. 191; »It is obvious to me why he tore off the sleeve. He thinks that I have only one arm that always

takes and never gives«, CSI 1, p. 375) does he try to make sense of Brandr's actions. Interestingly, the king does not comment further on Brandr's silence.

Because the story is brief and the cast restricted to three characters, a tight network of relations and power is first established, then inverted, through the course of the narrative. At the beginning, there is a clear hierarchy with King Haraldr at the top, the court poet Þjóðólfr in the middle, and the Icelander Brandr at the bottom. Over the course of the *þáttr*, through Brandr's silent cooperation, this structure shifts. As long as Brandr does not talk, only his actions are available for interaction and interpretation. His silence thus offers the king the opportunity to reflect on his demands, and later to withdraw from the situation without severe consequences. In interpreting the events, Haraldr is forced by Brandr's wordless compliance to play along, to confront and reflect on his own shortcomings. This is the best outcome: Brandr earns himself honour (*ok þá af honum góða virðing ok fégjafar; ok var þetta gört til raunar við hann*, ÍF 4, p. 191; ›and [he] received honour and fine gifts from him. This was done in order to test him‹, CSI 1, p. 375), while Haraldr does not lose face, but still learns a valuable moral lesson. In the end, with Haraldr comparing his generosity with Brandr's, the social hierarchy between the characters is levelled out, with each one becoming more closely connect to the others. Both the king and Þjóðólfr are influenced by Brandr's silence, and the strict hierarchy between them is momentarily destabilised.

Furthermore, the story suggests that in some cases, it is best to keep silent. Brandr's silence does not destroy the close-knit relationships between the men, unlike similar silences found elsewhere in the sagas, but encourages Haraldr and Þjóðólfr to re-evaluate their connections with him and each other.[14] Þjóðólfr's thoughtless boasting places both Icelanders in a potentially dangerous situation, but they are ultimately saved by Brandr's silence. Not only that, when Haraldr realises that his ploy has backfired, it is the king who must make amends, rather than forcing Brandr to concede.

While each figure struggles with the dilemma placed on them by unnecessary talk, silence emerges as the solution. Brandr not only protects himself by not talking, but also offers Þjóðólfr a way out of his predicament. Haraldr, meanwhile, is able to interpret Brandr's silence as a form of obedience, and thus to read it according to his own wishes. The silence therefore acts as a means for the characters to overcome the distance between them created by the social hierarchy of the Norwegian court.

The role of the narrative voice in this case is of a supporting nature, in that it offers a solution to the dilemma of the characters by reversing their active and passive involvement in events. It foregrounds Brandr's silence to the audience by not explaining or excusing his behaviour, which leaves room for the audience, like the characters, to make sense of the silence. Brandr presents himself as in some sense equal, if not superior, to the king. Conversely, the king does not receive the flowery praise he expects, but instead asks for approval by the conclusion of the text. Through his self-assured silence, Brandr forces the king to read the ›correct‹ meaning out of his gifts, which leads Haraldr in turn to reflect on his own shortcomings.[15] While the king explains the significance of this silence, the narrative voice, along with Brandr himself, stays silent. The narrative voice and Brandr work together to achieve the same goal: to invert the conventional expectations of gift-giving between a monarch and their subject without ultimately destroying the social order. Thus, Brandr's silence is not broken by the narrative voice through explanation or by resolving the silence. Instead, it is left to the other characters, primarily Haraldr, and to the audience to interpret the meaning of the silence.

3.2 The Silence of Gaps and Changes: ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹

Silence can result in abrupt changes that create unexplained gaps in time or plot. This can be seen especially in narratives that progress through different stages of the protagonist's life. In such cases, it is interesting to see

how the transition is explained by the characters, through direct and indirect speech, and by the narrative voice, through comment or reaction.

The *þáttr* of Þorsteinn uxafótr, preserved in Flateyjarbók (see Ármann Jakobsson et al. 2020, p. 451), serves as a case study for how the narrative voice constructs silence by declining to comment on these shifts in the life course of its protagonist. The *þáttr* narrates the life of Þorsteinn, the illegitimate son of Ívarr ljómi,[16] who grows up with his grandfather in Iceland, travels to Norway, fights trolls, and dies beside King Óláfr Tryggvason in the Battle of Svöldr. Scholars have mostly focused on the *þáttr*'s depiction of conversion and its supernatural elements,[17] but my focus lies on the narrative voice and its dealings with an overlooked part of Þorsteinn's life: his childhood and the start of his heroic journey.

At the beginning of the *þáttr*, Þorsteinn is not yet a hero, and not even part of his biological family's household; he is fostered by the couple Krummr and Þórgunna. The audience are informed how this came to be: after the retainer Ívarr ljómi rapes the Icelander Oddný, who is unable to speak,[18] he refuses to acknowledge the conceived Þorsteinn as his child. Oddný's brother Þorkell then orders that the child be abandoned against her will (ÍF 13, p. 348). The slave Freysteinn makes sure the baby survives by giving him a piece of meat before he leaves Þorsteinn in the forest (ÍF 13, p. 348). The farmer Krummr, Þorkell's friend, finds the child and takes it in as his own. But this poses a problem: for Þorsteinn to be acknowledged by his father, and thus become legitimate, he must first be recognised by his mother's family. This is difficult to achieve; at this point only the narrative voice, the audience and presumably the speech-impaired Oddný know of Þorsteinn's actual parentage. The story needs to resolve the problem, in that the knowledge of his parentage must be transferred from the extradiegetic level to the intradiegetic level of the characters. The following scene, in which the narrative voice describes Þorsteinn's visit to Krossavík, the home of his biological family, achieves this:

> *Þat var einn dag sem optar, at Þorsteinn kom til Krossavíkr; hann gekk til stofu. Þá sat Geitir, faðir bónda, á palli ok þuldi í feld sinn. En er piltrinn kom í stofuna, þá fór hann mjök geystr, sem börnum er títt; fellr hann á stofugólfinu. Ok (er) Geitir sér þetta, skellir hann upp ok hlær. En er Oddný sér piltinn, setr at henni grát mikinn.* (ÍF 13, p. 350)

> One day Þorsteinn went to Krossavík as he had often done before. He went to the main room. The farmer's father Geitir, was sitting on the cross-bench and murmuring into his cloak. And when the boy came into the main room, he was rushing as is usual with children. He fell onto the floor and when Geitir saw that, he burst into resounding laughter. But when Oddný saw the child, she burst into tears. (CSI 4, p. 344)

As the narrative voice comments, it is not unusual for children to rush about (*sem börnum er títt*, ÍF 13, p. 350; ›as is usual with children‹, CSI 4, p. 344), implying it is also not unusual for them to trip. Yet Þorsteinn is confused by Geitir's reaction, and he questions the old man:

> *Piltrinn gengr innar at Geiti ok mælti: ›Hvárt þótti þér þetta allbrosligt, er ek féll áðan?‹ Geitir svarar: ›Þat er satt, því at ek sá þat, er þú sátt eigi.‹ ›Hvat var þat?‹ sagði Þorsteinn. ›Þat má ek segja þér. Þá er þú komt í stofuna, fylgði þér einn hvítabjarnarhúnn, ok rann fyrir innar á gólfit. En er hann sá mik, nam hann staðar, en þú fórt heldr geystr, ok féll þú um húninn, ok þat er ætlan mín, at þú sér eigi son Krumms né Þórgunnar, heldr mantu stærri ættar.‹* (ÍF 13, p. 350)

> The boy went on into the room and asked Geitir: »What seemed so laughable to you when I fell just now?« Geitir answered: »In truth because I saw what you did not see.« »What was that?« said Þorsteinn. »I can tell you. When you came into the main room, a polar bear cub followed you and ran on ahead into the room. But when he saw me, he stopped and you were going along in a rush and fell over the cub and it's my belief that you are not the son of Krummr or of Þórgunna, but instead are of a greater family.« (CSI 4, p. 344)

At first, Geitir's explanation seems to align with what the narrative voice already mentioned: the child came into the hall and fell. Yet one aspect dif-

fers from the first description, namely the polar bear cub. While the narrative voice describes Þorsteinn's behaviour as ordinary – he is still a child, after all – Geitir conversely claims not only that a bear cub is to blame, but that only he witnessed this bear entering the hall behind Þorsteinn. For Geitir and the rest of the household, this is a perfectly reasonable explanation as to why Þorsteinn cannot be the son of Krummr and Þórgunna. Still, various things do not line up for the audience. No one else can see the animal, but Geitir's statement is accepted without question by the other characters, and the narrative voice does not comment on his version of events, staying silent on the matter. As the story goes on to describe Þorsteinn being acknowledged by his uncle, there is no mention of a bear; instead, Þorkell asks Krummr, Þórgunna, and Freysteinn to disclose what they know about Þorsteinn's origins. As the title of this article implies, there seems to be a common goal between the different voices, a silent conspiracy that the audience has to solve.

Regarding the nature of the polar bear, it is more likely to be a paranormal element rather than an actual animal. Since Oddný and Þorsteinn do not react to the presence of the cub, it cannot be corporeal. Furthermore, Geitir explicitly says that he laughed *›því at ek sá þat, er þú sátt eigi‹* (ÍF 13, p. 350; »because I saw, what you [Þorsteinn] did not see«, CSI 4, p. 344). In his doctoral thesis, Thomas Morcom (2020, p. 181) remarks on the use of ›punctum‹ – an element that disturbs the flow of the narration, but which is not necessarily relevant for the plot itself – in the *þættir* of Morkinskinna. The polar bear cub may be read as a similarly charged element, in that it forces the audience to pause momentarily, but in contrast to the optional element of punctum, the cub's appearance significantly influences the plot. An alternative answer to the question may lie in the phrase ›[hann] *fylgði þér*‹ (ÍF 13, p. 350; »[it] followed you«, CSI 4, p. 344), which alludes to a different kind of paranormal entity, the *fylgja*. These spirits often appear in dreams and visions, where they symbolise a person and represent their imminent, often deadly, future (Röhn 2010,

p. 289). The interpretation of the polar bear cub as a *fylgja* has generally been accepted.[19] This then leads to the question of why the narrative voice does not comment on the unusual appearance of the cub, as well as why it provides an alternative explanation by implying that the fall is a consequence of childish behaviour.

By staying silent, the narrative voice showcases a selection process that positions the audience on the level of the protagonists. According to O'Donoghue (2021, p. 124), when confronted with paranormal elements, the narrative voice is hesitant to comment on them.[20] This can be observed only partially for ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹. While the narrative voice itself does not mention the polar bear, it still describes and evaluates other creatures, such as trolls or mound-dwellers.[21] Instead, Þorsteinn's fall is linked by the narrative voice to the usual behaviour of children, which frames the action as one of Rosaler's subnarratable elements, in that it is notable only because it would otherwise be too ordinary to describe. In not mentioning the polar bear, the narrative voice actively selects which knowledge is shared with the audience. The audience is told of the circumstances around Þorsteinn's birth, but the narrative voice then withholds information concerning the incident at Krossavík, with the introduction of an unknown, paranormal element posing questions left unanswered. Though the narrative voice is imbued with a sense of narratorial authority, it displaces the responsibility to explain what happened to Geitir, a character in the story. But in this way, the narrative voice maintains its authority: rather than verifying Geitir's account or contradicting him, which would undermine the claims about Þorsteinn's parentage, the narrative voice's refusal to comment leaves the audience without guidance in how they are to interpret the scene. The audience is placed in a state of uncertainty, and consequently finds itself with the same degree of knowledge as the characters have.

Geitir's statement also serves as an important plot point. As long as the characters in the story do not know who Þorsteinn really is, he cannot begin

his journey toward becoming a hero. It can be argued that Oddný's emotional reaction upon seeing her child (*henni grát mikinn*, ÍF 13, p. 350; ›she burst into tears‹, CSI 4, p. 344) is an indication that she recognises him, there is still a need for someone to acknowledge Þorsteinn verbally, for this visual to be confirmed through language. Geitir, Oddný's father, steps into this role, and becomes an authority figure on the intradiegetic level, substituting for the narratorial authority of the narrative voice. Since none of the other characters contradict his account, it is given plausibility, and it later leads to a formal inquisition by Þorkell into Þorsteinn's parentage (*Þorkell kveðst eigi kunna at synja, – ›skulum vér hér fá sannar fréttir af.‹*, ÍF 13, p. 351; ›Thorkel said that he did not know how to deny it – »We must get reliable information on this«‹, CSI 4, p. 345). Not to trust Geitir's account would mean the end of the story, with Þorsteinn continuing to be the son of destitute farmers rather than developing as a heroic figure. In a sense, then, the description of the polar bear cub is the impulse for the main plot, a catalyst for reuniting the family that ultimately leads Þorsteinn to travel to Norway to meet with his father.

For the narrative voice, the silence serves two functions: first, it displaces the responsibility to narrate certain events, and second, it encourages the audience to rethink and reflect on how the events are narrated. As a result, the audience is able to enjoy the story on a different level. While Oddný's silence is explained by her not being able to speak, the silence of the narrative voice is made visible only when Geitir breaks it. The audience notices the silence only when they stumble over the previously uncommented gap of the polar bear and its importance for the plot, which may motivate them to reflect not only on the story, but also on a metanarrative level about how truth is communicated and their dependence on narratorial authorities. Even though the audience have witnessed the events of Þorsteinn's birth, the silence of the narrative voice, where one might expect it to at least comment on Geitir's observation of the polar bear, creates ambiguities in the text. In this instance, the narrative voice fulfils the categories described by

both Rosaler and O'Donoghue: it is notably silent, outsources the explanation, and shows hesitation towards paranormal events. Yet, it does not lose its authority. Instead, the narrative voice retains its position of authority by apparently giving it up to a character, which has the consequence of inviting the audience into a further layer of interpretative engagement when they notice the silence (O'Donoghue 2021, p. 118).

The silence and its subsequent breaking functions as self-protection for both the characters and the narrative voice, albeit in different ways. The episode concerns not only a paranormal entity – an antinarratable aspect for the narrative voice, which is hesitant to address it – but also the topic of an exposed child, itself antinarratable for the characters involved. Exposure is framed in the text as having been looked down upon at the time of its setting (*En þat var þá lög í þann tíma, at út skyldi bera óríkra manna börn* […] *ok þótti þó eigi vel gert*, ÍF 13, p. 348; ›It was legal at that time for poor people to expose children […] but it was thought to be a bad thing to do‹, CSI 4, p. 343), which makes it difficult for Þorsteinn's relatives to recognise him without acknowledging the social taboo. Still, the audience and the characters desire an explanation for the polar bear. Thus, both sides have opposite goals: the narrative voice chooses to stay silent, while other voices in the text choose to break the silence. The narrative voice cannot validate nor confirm the paranormal element, while the characters would struggle to acknowledge the social taboo of exposure if they voice their suspicions about Þorsteinn unprompted, no matter how much they want to. As the characters and the narrative voice stand in opposition to each other, the solution presents itself by each side becoming silent about certain things. While the silence forces itself on everyone involved through external restriction, the combination of distinct silences, and the displacement of narratorial duties for certain kinds of events to either the narrative voice or the voices of the characters, at the same time protects each side. The narrative voice does not need to provide all the information in the story, and the characters can remain silent about the circumstances of Þorsteinn's exposure

when Geitir breaks the silence to focus instead on the paranormal aspects of the situation. Consequently, the account of the polar bear becomes a kind of narratorial conspiracy, in which silence connects the characters and the narrative voice in both communicating and keeping the secret.

3.3 The Double Silence: The Two Versions of ›Sneglu-Halla þáttr‹

While the previous case studies focused on silence found in the behaviour of the characters or the comments made by the narrative voice, the final case study concerns differences between versions of the same story and the question of how we define silence. When confronted with two or more versions of a narrative, new opportunities present themselves for the study of the narrative voice, especially when we focus on episodes where different versions align with or differ from one another. In more extreme cases, parts of one version may be absent from or expanded on in another.

It can be tempting to read a comment present in one version of the story, but absent in another, as representing silence on the part of the narrative voice in the second version. But first, we must ask ourselves: when is it accurate to speak of silence instead of difference? Even though versions of a story may diverge because they focus on different aspects of the narrative, this does not necessarily mean that the resulting absences must indicate silence about the missing elements. When these differences result in the interruption or removal of a character's speech, however, it is still possible to read this as silence on the part of the narrative voice, if not as an active silencing of the character. While Rosaler and O'Donoghue primarily speak of silence in the sense of ›being silent‹, referring to those who let others speak, or to that which is not narrated, we may also consider the act of ›silencing‹, where silence is forced by one subject upon another. This can be achieved through different means, some of which are more readily visible than others. For instance, while interruption is usually marked out clearly

in a text, the removal of speech emerges only when comparing two or more versions of the same story.

In this section, I focus on ›Sneglu-Halla þáttr‹, which details the life of the Icelandic poet (*skáld*) Sneglu-Halli at the court of King Haraldr Sigurðsson of Norway. The story features Sneglu-Halli's adventures, including his ongoing dispute with another Icelander, Haraldr's court poet Þjóðólfr. The narrative is transmitted in the compilations Flateyjarbók (F) and Morkinskinna (M), but the two versions differ substantially in length, with the final chapters of F missing in M. The differences in the narrative voice between the two versions have been discussed, among others, by Stefanie Gropper (2021) and Anna Katharina Heiniger (2022). Gropper (2021, pp. 90–92) concludes that F focuses on displaying Sneglu-Halli's cunning wit and mischievous nature, foregrounding his place in the court's social hierarchy, while M emphasises his poetic skills in an intellectual hierarchy involving Haraldr and Þjóðólfr. Conversely, Heiniger (2022, p. 119) analyses the quantity and categories of the narrative comments in each version of the story. She concludes that each version shows a different focus in its narration: F structures the story like a saga, with the narrative voice more active in using comments and evaluations to orientate the audience, while M incorporates more scenic detail in ways that represent the story's themes more dynamically (Heiniger 2022, p. 125).

This indicates a difference across versions in how comments are used by the narrative voice, and raises the question of whether this points to a potential form of silence observable only through comparison. In terms of the numbers, there are more comments in later chapters and in F in general (Heiniger 2022, pp. 121 and 124). In addition, there are differences in style; the narrative voices may fall or stay silent at different points in the story. Some of these instances are best read simply as differences between versions, rather than silencing, but others are more ambiguous. Finally, it is notable that the narrative voice in each version does not stay silent, but actively silences Sneglu-Halli's main opponent, Þjóðólfr.

Differences between versions often involve the omission of information, which is common in references to characters or timeframes. But this does not necessarily entail a form of narrative silence, and can instead be understood as a restructuring of the story's focus. For example, the varying descriptions of the character Túta and the king's armour, named ›Emma‹, in ›Sneglu-Halla þáttr‹ show the different interests pursued in each case by the narrative voice. When one of Haraldr's servants, Túta, is fitted into the king's armour, M introduces the armour as *brynjuna Emmu* (ÍF 9, p. 269, M; ›the armour Emma‹, my translation), while F adds more background information, giving not only the armour's name, but also its origins (*er hann* [konungr] *kallaði Emmu; hann hafði látit gera hana í Miklagarði*, ÍF 9, p. 269–270, F; ›which he [the king] called Emma. He had had it made in Byzantium‹, CSI 1, p. 345). Similarly, the description of the dwarf Túta is structured differently in each version. F begins with his appearance (*dvergr einn er Túta hét, hann var frískr at ætt,* ÍF 9, p. 269, F; ›a dwarf called Túta, he was Frisian by descent‹, CSI 1, p. 345), while M mentions his origin first (*frískr maðr* […] *lágr sem dvergr ok digr,* ÍF 9, p. 269, M; ›a Frisian man […] short as a dwarf and fat‹, my translation). Additionally, the dating of events is changed from one version to the other. The main escalation between the two poets, which I return to later, occurs on *jólaaptann* in M (ÍF 9, p. 275, M; ›the eve of Yule‹, my translation), but in F, it is simply said to take place *einn dag* (ÍF 9, p. 275, F; ›one day‹, CSI 1, p. 347). In M, the staging of competing poetic abilities is more central to how the story is told, so it makes sense that the poets' competition is set on a specific date; in F, where this element of the text is foregrounded less strongly, it becomes one event among others. Interestingly, a different adventure, Halli's confrontation with the character Einarr, is dated to Yule in F (*Einarr kemr at jólunum*, ÍF 9, p. 282, F; ›Einarr came that Yule‹, CSI 1, p. 350), but not in M. It is not especially productive to consider these differences in the timeframe of the story, as well as the variation in the descriptions of objects and servants, as a form of narrative silence. They can

be more easily attributed to structural decisions that make sense in the context of each version, reflecting the interest in poetic ability in M and the more adventurous storyline narrated in F.

In some cases, however, differences between versions can be seen both as structural decisions and as potential silences. A notable example is the introduction of the protagonist, Halli, and his opponent, Þjóðólfr. In each version, Halli is described similarly, though the description in M focuses on his poetic skill and directness (*hann var skáld ok foryfldisk heldr fás í orðum sínum*, ÍF 9, p. 263, M; ›he was a poet and rather refrained from decorating his words‹, my translation), and that in F focuses on his appearance and family ties (*skáld gott ok orðgreppr mikill. Halli var hár maðr ok hálslangr herðilítill ok handsíðr ok ljótlimaðr; hann var ættaðr ór Fljótum*, ÍF 9, p. 264, F; ›good poet and a very impudent person. He was a tall man, long-necked, with narrow shoulders and long arms and was rather ill-proportioned. His family was from Fljót‹, CSI 1, p. 342). As Halli is the protagonist, it is to be expected that more narrative attention is devoted to him. Yet the introduction of Þjóðólfr differs substantially across versions. While M mentions him only in passing as part of the *hirð*, the king's retinue (*þar var ok Þjóðólfr skáld með konungi ok þotti vera nökkvat öfundsjúkr við þá menn er kvamu til hirðarinnar*, ÍF 9, p. 266, M; ›the poet Þjóðólfr, too, was with the king and he seemed to be somewhat jealous of those men who came to the court‹, my translation), F introduces Þjóðólfr first, and in more detail (*hann var íslenzkr og ættaðr ór Svarfaðardal, kurteiss maðr ok skáld mikit* […] *kallaði konungr hann höfuðskáld sitt ok virði hann mest allra skálda*, ÍF 9, p. 263, F; ›He was an Icelander whose family came from Svarfaðardal. He was a well-mannered man and a great poet […] The king called him his chief poet and honoured him above all his other poets‹, CSI 1, p. 342).[22] The variation of Þjóðólfr's introduction changes the audience's perception of him. His cursory introduction in M, in contrast to the lengthy description of F, signals to the audience that he is not as important as Halli. This is surprising in light of M's focus on poetic ability, as Gropper (2021,

pp. 90–92) has shown. Consequently, Þjóðólfr does not seem like a significant threat or opponent for Halli, which reinforces Halli's standing as the protagonist.

In another episode, both poets are saved from public embarrassment when confronted with past mistakes, namely the composition of their first poems ›Kolluvísur‹ and ›Soðtrogsvísur‹, by the silence of the narrative voice. King Haraldr orders them to recite the verses, but in each case, the narrative voice only mentions the performance instead of quoting the poetry (*svá var nú gört at þeir kveða kvæðin*, ÍF 9, p. 277, M; ›it was then done so, that they performed the poems‹, my translation; *kvað þá hvárr sitt kvæði*, ÍF 9, p. 277, F; ›then each of them performed his poem‹, CSI 1, p. 348). As the king proclaims afterwards, the poems are not of particularly high quality, meaning that the narrative silence serves to preserve their reputations. Esteemed poets being shown reciting bad poems would not only do damage to their image, but would also weaken the story's capacity to showcase their poetic abilities. The silence in regard to the poems could be read as paranarratable, in the sense that the poetry has been deemed unfit for a narrative of this type.

Comparing the versions of the *þáttr* thus highlights differences that may be read as creating certain kinds of narrative silence, but it is also important to consider the more active silencing of Þjóðólfr in each version. While both versions downplay Þjóðólfr's voice and his presence at court, they do so in different ways, which showcase a variety of narrative strategies being used to highlight Halli's superiority in comparison with his principal antagonist. One episode, in particular, stands out. After Halli gets into a disagreement with the king about porridge, he throws down his cutlery in annoyance. In F, the narrative voice describes Þjóðólfr's reaction, which is to compose a verse (*Þjóðólfr kvað þá þetta*, ÍF 9, p. 273, F; ›Then Þjóðólfr recited this‹, CSI 1, p. 346). As the narrative does not contain many verses by Þjóðólfr, this instance is notable for being a rare showcase of his skaldic abilities. Yet the scene is treated differently in M, where the verse is attributed not to

Þjóðólfr, but to Halli himself (*þá kvað Halli þetta,* ÍF 9, p. 273, M; ›then Halli recited this‹, my translation). Þjóðólfr is downgraded in a narrative sense from a skilled *skáld*, reflecting his role as the court poet, to a passive witness, whose reaction to the poem is recorded only indirectly by the narrative voice (*ok þykkir Þjóðólfi þetta hlœgligt er Halli hefir til tekit*, ÍF 9, p. 273, M; ›and Þjóðólfr found this ridiculous what Halli had done‹, my translation). Similarly, in another scene, Halli composes a verse for the king about his servant Túta. While it is implied in F that the rest of the *hirð* are present while Halli talks with Haraldr, Þjóðólfr's presence is silenced in that he is not mentioned by name, and thus is not distinguished from the anonymous crowd of the *hirð*, despite the discussion involving poetry. In M, however, his opinion on Halli's verse is mentioned (*Þjóðólfi fannsk fátt um*, ÍF 9, p. 271, M; ›Þjóðólfr did not think much of it‹, my translation), though here Þjóðólfr is still reduced to the role of spectator. At the start of the previously mentioned skaldic contest, where Halli and Þjóðólfr recite the poems they composed in Iceland, the narrative voice of F comments that *þar var þá Þjóðólfr ok mart annarra manna* (ÍF 9, p. 275, F; ›Þjóðólfr and many other people were there‹, CSI 1, p. 347). In M, however, it is the king who reveals the court poet's presence to the audience, as he turns to Þjóðólfr and asks him *›eða hvat sýnisk þér ráð, Þjóðólfr?‹* (ÍF 9, p. 276, M; »or what do you advise, Þjóðólfr?«, my translation).[23] Even though Þjóðólfr plays an important role in both versions in the poetic contest that follows, his presence is more of an afterthought in M, where it is left to the king to address him, in contrast to F, where the narrative voice mentions him first. Though the direction of silencing is not consistent across versions, with each downplaying Þjóðólfr's presence more at different times, the comparison between the versions foregrounds how he is silenced by the narrative voice in each case, with his status and role incrementally diminished in contrast to Halli's prominence at the centre of the narrative.

The silencing of characters goes a step further than other forms of silence. In each version, the narrative voice's focus on showcasing Halli and

his qualities leads to other characters actively being diminished or sidelined, but the reduction of Þjóðólfr's role in the text by the narrative voice, albeit in different ways, becomes clear only when the two versions are compared. The silencing of Þjóðólfr by the narrative voice does not fit the categories suggested by Rosaler and O'Donoghue, presumably because these two scholars focus on silence as passive reaction rather than an active intention. When a character chooses to fall silent, as Brandr does, this can open up new interpretative possibilities, both within and outside the story. By contrast, the active silencing of a character puts them at the mercy of the narrative voice, as the diminution of Þjóðólfr indicates. Despite his status as court poet, his narrative presence is downplayed in favour of the protagonist Halli, to the extent that even the poetry attributed to Þjóðólfr in one version of the text is assigned to Halli in the other.

4. Conclusion: The effect of silence on the recipient

›Silence‹ and ›silencing‹ are found on all levels of narration. The narrative voice can become silent when it apparently withholds an interpretation or evaluation of a certain event, instead inviting the audience to draw their own conclusions. A character falling silent can function as a marker for the audience to listen closely for additional nuances. On the other hand, silencing is characterised by the narrative voice downplaying the action or speech of a character, which is particularly apparent when multiple versions of a text exist.

This paper presented three case studies to showcase the versatility of how silence is used by the narrative voice in Old Norse texts, specifically the *þættir*. The analysis shows that silence appears in various ways on different narrative levels. There is a more evident form of silence when characters or the narrative voice do not comment on the plot; there is implicit silence when the narrative voice does not provide information itself, but allows

characters to speak instead; and there is the possibility of an active silencing of character voices when a narrative exists in two or more versions. The resulting effects are different: implicit silence leads to a highlighting of the omitted information, while active silencing attempts to direct and structure the audience's perception. The use of different silences also influences the audience in various ways. As O'Donoghue argues, the construction of silence can lead to heightened engagement with the narration and its context, prompting the audience to discussion and debate, and it also opens up another level of enjoyment for the narrative, as the audience's focus is shifted from the events of the story itself to the values and themes it incorporates. For instance, in the case of ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹, the question becomes not whether the polar bear actually exists, as Geitir claims, but rather whom the audience can trust.

The findings of the analysis suggests that the categories put forth by Rosaler and O'Donoghue are only partially adaptable to the *þættir*. While we can see in the *þættir* the hesitation of the narrative voice to report on paranormal encounters, as O'Donoghue observes, in the case of ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹, how paranormal events are narrated is dependent on their context in the story. In addition, the narrative voice sometimes keeps silent to displace responsibility. In terms of the different types of narratability suggested by Rosaler, it can be difficult to classify moments of silence in the *þættir* as categorised as supranarratable. It is not always possible to decide whether the gaps that indicate silence occur as a result of the normalness of the omitted events, and while we would expect the supranarratable to be indicated by comments on its unnarratability, such comments do not appear in the texts. Nor is there a common pattern indicating that these instances of silence are of a paranarratable nature. But the term antinarratable may be useful when looking at these examples in terms of certain social or narrative taboos. The appearance of the *fylgjur*, the discussion of exposure, or open criticism of a king's behaviour all have the potential to

activate one of these taboos, a tension that can be resolved only through narrative silence, which creates gaps to be filled by the audience.

In terms of future research, the analysis presented in this article suggests that there is more to do in terms of investigating the use of active silencing by the narrative voice in the Old Norse sagas and *þættir*. These ideas should prompt us to look more closely into instances where we seem to have narratorial gaps or abrupt changes, where we appear to receive too little or too much explanation, which in turn creates ambiguities around what has just been narrated. The difficulty for us, as modern readers, lies in locating the passages where the narrative voice can be said to use silence intentionally for creating specific literary effects.

Notes

1 This paper was originally presented under the title »Fylgði þér einn hvítabjarnarhúnn: The Mystery behind the Polar Bear in ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹«, at the 14th International Postgraduate Symposium in Old Norse Studies, Bergen, 17–20 April 2023. My thanks go to Stefanie Gropper, Anna Katharina Heiniger, Rebecca Merkelbach and Alexander Wilson for their feedback on earlier versions of this article.

2 Silence has been studied in various fields, see Bao (2023), Santos (2023), Magnusson et al. (2023), Dingli/Cooke (2019). It is part of all aspects of human interaction and its culture (Schnyder 2003, p. 32).

3 Wolfgang Iser (1984, pp. 284–285) also mentions the idea of gaps in the narrative, which the reader closes with their imagination.

4 Rosaler (2016, pp. 7–8) bases her categorization on Warhol (2006), but takes a critical stance.

5 Rosaler (2016, p. 8) sees this critically since it partly invalidates the other categories: if something is seen as sub- or antinarratable in one text, it may simply be paranarratable in other contexts.

6 Other studies of silence and silent characters in Old Norse studies include Goeres (2014) and Jakobsson et al. (2020). O'Donoghue (2021, pp. 120, 130, 154) distinguishes more types of silent narrator than presented here, such as the impas-

sive narrator, who describes violent events without judgement, and the conspicuously silent narrator, who discloses information only after a certain amount of time.

7 This distinction of narrative voice and other voices has been supported by others, e.g. Merkelbach (2017).

8 For a discussion of the characters' silence in courtly literature, see Schnyder (2003).

9 On the transmission and compilation of the *þættir*, see Rowe (2017, p. 158).

10 While early research focused on defining and interpreting the corpus of *þættir* (Rowe 2005, Würth 1991), more recent research discusses the question of genre in relation to the term *þáttr* (e.g. Rowe 2020, p. 260). Other studies, such as Thomas Morcom's (2020) doctoral dissertation, look into the connections between the *þættir* and their interweaving into the sagas with which they are transmitted.

11 See for a more thorough analysis of Brand's silence, Morcom 2020, p. 55.

12 The following translations are taken from the edition ›The Complete Sagas of Icelanders‹ (= CSI). Translations, emendations, or additions in square brackets, as well as the translation of the Morkinskinna version of ›Sneglu-Halla þáttr‹, are my own.

13 Brandr is not the only silent character in saga literature or the *þættir*; Melkorka in ›Laxdœla saga‹ (ÍF 5) and Oddný in ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹ are also silent, though for different reasons. An interesting analysis of Oddný's inability to speak and her character is found in Ármann Jakobsson et al. (2020, p. 451), which also comments on Melkorka who, in contrast to Oddný, is not unable to speak since birth, but explicitly chooses not to talk or to speak a different language than her captors (p. 452).

14 In ›Gísla saga Súrssonar‹, for instance, the silence of the extradiegetic narrative voice and the intradiegetic characters concerning Vésteinn's death leads to the killings of Þorgrímr Freysgoði and others. The narrative voice describes the murder of Vésteinn without disclosing the identity of the murderer: *Nú er gengit inn nökkut fyrir lýsing, hljóðliga, ok þangat at, sem Vésteinn hvílir. Hann var þá vaknaðr.* […] *Ok því næst gekk maðrinn út. En Vésteinn vildi upp standa. Í því fellr hann niðr fyrir stokkinn dauðr* (ÍF 6, pp. 43–44; ›Then someone comes in a little before dawn, quietly, and goes over to where Vestein is lying. He had woken up then. […] And then the man went out. Vestein tried to stand up; but he fell beside the bed, dead‹, OS, p. 22). The narrative voice may not know who killed Vésteinn because it was dark, but this should have no influence on an

extradiegetic function, or it might know what happened and choose not to disclose this information. The latter kind of silence can be seen as explicit, since the narrative voice does actively not tell the audience the answer. In the aftermath, the silence of the characters merges with that of the narrative voice: neither discloses who they think the killer is. The only sign the audience receives of the characters' suspicions are their actions, which culminate in Þorgrímr's death and Gísli's outlawry. O'Donoghue (2021, p. 167) analyses this scene and its consequences, as well as its relation to ›Eyrbyggja saga‹, which names Þorgrímr as the culprit. She argues that the narrative voice withholds this information to allow the audience to experience »living in a tightly knit [...] community in which theft or murder is such a dangerous threat to the stability of society« (p. 171).

15 Thomas Morcom (2020, p. 58) offers another explanation for the tension and the conflict's resolution through the king's interpretation, suggesting that »the conventional social hierarchy is disrupted, with Brandr and Haraldr facing off as rival figures of regal authority«. This hierarchy is then reinstated with Haraldr's judgment of Brandr's gesture (p. 60).

16 Ívarr plays a prominent role in another short story, ›Sörla þáttr‹ (Flat 1, pp. 275–283).

17 See e.g. Rowe/Harris (2005, p. 475), Rowe (2004). The trolls of ›Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts‹ are mentioned in Sävborg (2018, esp. p. 199).

18 Ármann Jakobsson et al. (2020, p. 453; citing Waugh 2017, p. 239) agree on this reading.

19 For example, by Else Mundal (1974, p. 55), who describes it as »det mest morsame av dyrefylgjemotiva i sagalitteraturen« (›the funniest of the animal *fylgja* motifs in saga literature‹; my translation).

20 The discussion about what exactly the paranormal in sagas is and how it can be defined, extends the scope of this article. Instead, I refer to Sävborg/Bek-Pedersen 2018 and Ármann Jakobsson 2017.

21 Concerning the description of the trolls, see ÍF 13, p. 359; for the first appearance of the bull, see ÍF 13, p. 367.

22 Similarly, it can be observed with King Haraldr. M introduces him in a closing sentence (*þar var Haraldr konungr er orðum skipti við Halla*, ÍF 9, p. 266, M; ›there was King Haraldr who exchanged words with Halli‹, my translation). In F he is described in the first chapter, which is not transmitted in M, as *allra manna vitrastr ok ráðgastr* [...] *Hann var skáld gott. Jafnan kastaði hann háðyrðum at þeim mönnum, er honum sýndisk* (ÍF 9, p. 263, F; ›a very wise and very

shrewd man [...] He was a good poet and always mocked whoever he pleased‹, CSI 1, p. 342).

23 The king also addresses Þjóðólfr in this way in F, but his presence there has already been acknowledged by the narrative voice.

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