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Tom Morcom

Dreams, Slander, Gossip, and Rumour

Sturla Þórðarson and Challenges to Narratorial Authority in ›Íslendinga saga‹

Abstract. This article studies instances in which the conventionally unassailable narrative voice of the saga form has its authority undercut by subordinate narrative modes offering alternative epistemologies in relationship to narrated action. The selected text is ›Íslendinga saga‹ due to the particularly fraught relationship between narrative authority, narratorial identity, and the narration of contemporary events in this *samtíðarsaga*. The subordinate modes relevant to the present study are dreams, slander, gossip, and rumour, all of which have different discursive functions. They are united, however, in providing a mechanism for perspectives not aligned with that of the narrative voice to appear within the narrative, without the saga ceding its construction of a seemingly objective narrative history.

1. Introduction

At a foundational level, who speaks, where they speak from, and what they know or see are core issues of narratology (Stinchecum 1980). The matters of narrative and narrator have, therefore, long been considered as closely interrelated and interdependent. In Gérard Genette's classic narratological distinction, the issue of narration is most fully discussed as a component of the discursive category of voice, which concerns the relationship, in terms of distance of removal, between the narrative voice and the matter which it

narrates. Genette (1972, pp. 231–238) initially distinguishes voice according to narrative level: when the narrative voice operates from within the storyworld of the text, the narrative is intradiegetic; when the narrative voice is distinct from the tale it narrates, it is extradiegetic. Genette (1972, pp. 245–253) further distinguishes the heterodiegetic narrative, in which the narrative voice is not assigned to a particular character, from the homodiegetic, where the narrative voice is associated with a figure active within the plot. When these two axes are combined and applied to the issue of saga literature, the text is analogous to the formulation Genette employs to describe the narrative voice of Homer, in following a »extradiegetic-heterodiegetic paradigm: [...] a narrator in the first degree who tells a story from which he is absent« (Genette 1972, p. 248).

In a narrative where the narrative voice is associated with a character within the storyworld, or where it operates from outside it yet is clearly identified or invested with personality, it is unavoidable that the narrator is ascribed with specific person-like qualities during the act of reading (Walsh 1997). Tied to this process are important issues such as the reliability and the authority of the narrator in relation to a specific narrative. This is due to the credentials of a personalised narrative voice to recount the events in question being evaluated in relation to their status, character, perspective, and tone (Pinar 1997). More interesting, for the purposes of discussing narration in relationship to the sagas, is the degree to which this process of the assessment of narratorial authority occurs when the narration is instead in the impersonal mode, as is overwhelmingly the case in saga prose. The consistency of this impersonal narration is maintained on multiple grounds, the first being the persistent anonymity of saga narrators and their lack of distinguishing features from which a fuller persona could be constructed, thereby providing narratorial information against which elements of the saga could be read (McTurk 1990).[1] From this anonymity, there extends a stylised detachment from the matters at hand, as narrators of this sort »generally seem disinterested in the events they describe« (Ordower 1991,

p. 41).[2] This feature is often exacerbated by the implied diachronic relationship between narrative voice and saga action. Generally, the narrative voice's non-participation in saga events is ensured by a large span of intervening time and/or distance between the saga's major chronotope and the implied point in time and location from which narration occurs (Bahktin 1990, pp. 84 and 252). This spatiotemporal separation of diegetic levels is by no means exact, as the precise location and time from which the narrator is taken to speak is unclear. The axiom is generally demonstrated, however, by the broad compartmentalisation of material to distinct eras and regions, reflected in modern genre categories – *fornaldarsögur* (legendary sagas) occurring in the legendary past, *Íslendingasögur* (family sagas) occurring from the Icelandic settlement era (c. 870–930) through into the late eleventh century (otherwise referred to as the Saga Age), or *riddarasögur* (chivalric sagas) occurring outside the bounds of Scandinavia (Orning 2020, p. 119).

The narratorial distance from narrative action operates in conjunction with other aspects of the narrative discourse when building up a portrait of the narrative voice in saga literature, particularly with regard to its tone, which must convey a complete mastery of content that allows it to narrate events with an implacable objectivity. Taken together, these features produce a form of narrative voice foundational to the saga style. Judith Jesch (1992, p. 339) characterises it as »an anonymous and omniscient persona who narrates in the third person,« while McKinnell (1987, p. 36) more evocatively typifies this mode of narration as »the fiction that what is being said is objective history – narrated fact dominates to the almost total exclusion of such comment as we legitimately expect in a real historian«.[3] The topic of this article will be a set of examples drawn from ›Íslendinga saga‹, in which this authoritative narrative voice is destabilised or challenged in the prose. This article discusses four discursive methods by which said challenges are regularly introduced: dreams, slander, gossip, and rumour. Each has a different effect on the authority of the narrative voice and a different

function within the saga and they will, consequently, be treated separately from one another. Overall, this article demonstrates that these four discursive modes, in offering perspectives and accounts unavailable in the standard narrative mode, have the power to briefly undermine the epistemological authority otherwise enjoyed by the narrative voice.

2. Narrative Voice and Constructions and Challenges to Narratorial Authority

The form of narrative voice outlined above is so consistent across the saga corpus that it is rare to find such sustained exceptions to this mode of narration. When they do occur, they tend to be enacted through shifts in focalisation, that is, the implied point of perspective from which the narrator operates.[4] This temporary limiting or shifting of perspective is notable for its contrast with the more robust omniscient mode that the sagas typically exhibit. Examples include characters entering dark or unknown spaces and the narrator simulating their restricted vision, or narrators ›playing along‹ with characters' disguises by referring to them in terms of the persona they have adopted (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2020, p. 82). Such narrowing of perspective tends to be brief and rather self-conscious, however, as the effect is clearly for the narrator's limited field of vision to render the discourse compatible with a character's incomprehension in a matter relating specifically to subterfuge or uncertainty. This sort of ›sympathetic‹ focalisation is not a true ceding of narratorial authority, particularly when the narrative voice swiftly and repeatedly returns to a state of practical omniscience, reasserting its mastery of narrative material and the extreme congruence between narratorial representation and the storyworld's reality (Jesch 1992, pp. 339–345).

If there were one set of Old Norse texts in which we might expect this narratorial façade of anonymity, omniscience, and objectivity to be most fully challenged, however, it would be in the *samtíðarsögur* (contemporary

sagas), due to their composition and compilation by witnesses to, if not participants in, the events these texts narrate, which are set in Iceland in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries (see Rohrbach 2017). The primary subject of this article, ›Íslendinga saga‹, forms the central sections of the ›Sturlunga saga‹ compilation, completed shortly after 1300, possibly by Þórðr Narfason (Úlfar Bragason 2017, p. 168). The compilation offers a complex rearrangement of thirteenth-century texts, which together narrate events in Iceland from the 1100s up to the 1260s, particularly in relation to the protracted, escalating series of conflicts between powerful elite Icelandic families, the clergy, and the Norwegian crown, commonly referred to as the Sturlung Age (*Sturlungaöld*). ›Sturlunga saga‹ is thus best understood as a work of narrative history, converting recent events into a work of literature and necessarily intermingling fictive elements with attempts to represent contemporary memories.

A number of the constituent sagas in the compilation of ›Sturlunga saga‹ were written by witnesses and participants to the events they narrate, and with regard to ›Íslendinga saga‹, we have a reasonably reliable claim (or at least one with an extensive pedigree) to its authorship by Sturla Þórðarson. This is evidenced by Sturla's composition of the text being referenced in the earliest extant manuscripts, Króksfjarðarbók and Reykjarfjarðarbók, both from the mid to late fourteenth century (Úlfar Bragason 2004, p. 440). Sturla Þórðarson was not merely a witness to the key events of this period, but, as a member of the Sturlung family, was himself an active political participant in the escalating instability that typified the era; consequently, he is also portrayed as a character in the saga (see Úlfar Bragason 1994). If the account of events in ›Íslendinga saga‹ is taken as broadly accurate, Sturla participated in an extremely protracted and complex period of feuding and a number of his close family members were violently killed. As such, he can be assumed to have held strong opinions on both the participants and events of the Sturlung Age. Nor can Sturla as an author have any claim to omniscience, as he is only described as being present for a limited number

of events in the narrative and must have sourced the majority of his information regarding other key matters from a range of other contemporary sources with equally partisan positions on this tempestuous age.

It seems natural, given the persistent claims of Sturla's authorship and the corroborative value of his participation in the events of the Sturlung Age, to unite the statuses of author and narrator and to assign Sturla Þórðarson the latter role if the former is taken as a given. This is certainly how W. P. Ker (1896, p. 10) understood Sturla's relationship to ›Sturlunga saga‹ in his classic treatment of the text:

> The Icelandic narrators give the succession of events, either as they might appear to an impartial spectator, or (on occasion) as they are viewed by someone in the story, but never as they merely affect the writer himself, though he may be as important a personage as Sturla was in the events of which he wrote the Chronicle.

Úlfar Bragason (1986, p. 86) has described the text in similar, if more emphatic terms: »The author, Sturla Þórðarson, is also the narrator in the saga, one of the sources of the story and an actor in it«. It is important to note, however, that the ›Íslendinga saga‹ narrator must be considered as ontologically distinct from Sturla Þórðarson, the historical figure and author of the original text. This is partly a narratological issue, in that voice as a feature of narrative discourse is synthetic and textual, and thus cannot be fully mapped onto the values or biography of a given individual – particularly in discussions of the saga form, where said narratorial voice remains largely impersonal, and the medieval period, in which biographical information is often vague. Furthermore, on a practical level, it is worth bearing in mind Guðrún Nordal's warning that we do not have access to Sturla's authorial text of ›Íslendinga saga‹, as it has been altered through the process of its incorporation into the larger ›Sturlunga saga‹ compilation, and repeatedly so, given the two substantially diverging manuscript traditions that must predate our two earliest extant versions of the text (Guðrún

Nordal 2010 and 2006). In this case, the narrative voice is thus perhaps most accurately thought of as a collaborative construct that has been developed and revised by a series of redactors and scribes, rather than an authentic preservation of Sturla's own ›voice‹.

While it might be assumed from the above argument that it is, therefore, unnecessary to maintain the traditional association of Sturla with the narrator of ›Íslendinga saga‹, the issue of narratorial authenticity is not the same as that of narratorial authority, and it is with regard to authority that Sturla can still be meaningfully discussed in relation to narrative voice. In his excellent work on omniscient narrators, Paul Dawson (2012, p. 105) writes that »narrative authority is not a purely immanent feature of a text, to be recuperated from a formalist study of narrative conventions such as privilege or level. The authority of these conventions is historically contingent and must be granted by readers«. From the fourteenth century to the present, Sturla's status as an accomplished historian and first-hand witness has been central to a sequence of audiences' reception and treatment of ›Sturlunga saga‹, irrespective of shifting interpretative norms and their relationship to the compilation itself. This is evidenced by the preface to ›Íslendinga saga‹, in which Sturla's reliability is emphatically centred as demonstrating the testimonial quality of the narrative itself: ›*Ok treystum vér honum bæði vel til vits ok einurðar at segja frá, því at hann vissa ek alvitrastan ok hófsamastan*‹ (ÍF 20, pp. 139–140; ›And we can well trust both to his wisdom and his assessment of what to speak of, because I know him to be the very wisest and most moderate of people‹).[5] Indeed, his ability to convert highly dramatic and assumedly distressing moments from his own life into the detached narratorial mode typical of the saga form has been cited as a testament to both his skill as an author and his diligent commitment to historical impartiality, as noted by Helgi Þorláksson (2017, p. 200):

> Scholars have found Sturla Þórðarson to be an exceptional politician. They usually see him as wise, moderate and peace loving. There is also a general consensus that as an author Sturla shows these same qualities. It is quite common that scholars when expressing their opinions about Sturla use words like ›factual, accurate, unbiased, impartial, objective‹.

›Íslendinga saga‹ is more recognisable both as a saga and as a historical source if Sturla is maintained as the narrator, and this tradition has, consequently, been upheld consistently among later generations of readers.

Narratorial authority over the hyper-complex, high-stakes, and extremely partisan events of the Sturlung Age is not, however, solely established in ›Íslendinga saga‹ by an association with Sturla. Instead, the effect of authority is produced by the combination of this implied historical authority with many markers of a pseudo-omniscient narrative mode within the text. Such markers include: access to information concerning private or secret events; the narration of events that occur from impossible perspectives (such as viewing geographically disparate locations with near-simultaneity); the utilisation of extreme detail in the narration of chaotic and rapid events like battle, which not even a participating individual could be expected to have observed.[6] Authority in this case might therefore be said to be generated at the interface between (1.) the narrative voice capitalising on an association with a uniquely privileged personal perspective, associated with a participating elite figure, and (2.) the detached assertion of the events in question, as is typical of the saga style. While this authority has a clear utility in ›Íslendinga saga‹ as a mechanism for asserting credibility, however, I will argue that a secondary effect is produced by constructing the narrative voice in this manner, which specifically relates to the text's status as a *samtíðarsaga*.

When the matters being narrated are positioned as nearly contemporary to the construction of the saga narrative itself, the façade of implacable objectivity is less secure and more open to readerly scrutiny. This is because the association of the narrative voice with Sturla has other implications for

narratorial authority beyond the establishment of historical credibility, as it necessarily aligns the perspective of the narrative voice with a single partisan actor in a political crisis. This has the potential to increase scepticism in an audience, particularly one sensitive to the fractiousness of the Sturlung Age, as to whether the events as depicted in the text represent only one of many possible perspectives. A conventional response would be to state that the flat objectivity of the narrative voice is intended to quash such scrutiny, but I will argue that, in addition to this, ›Íslendinga saga‹ also exhibits other, more self-conscious narrative techniques that express the limits of narrative authority when presenting the recent past. Through these techniques, alternative responses and conflicting reports on events are placed within the saga as a means of caveating the report provided by the narrative voice, yet without fully delegitimising it.

Challenges to the impersonal objectivity of the narrative voice are not uniform throughout the saga, but occur in response to scenarios that more overtly call into question how a narrator aligned with the persona of Sturla has access to the information in question or the authority to narrate it as a ›historical fact‹ (see O'Connor 2005; Kalinke 1984). Examples where this scepticism is most pronounced include: (1.) The narration of unknowable events and states, particularly secret actions or a character's initial motivation for a significant course of action; (2.) Cases where substantially conflicting reports exist concerning a given event; (3.) Cases where there is difficulty in providing conclusive moral evaluation, or doing justice to a multiplicity of contemporary moral opinions, as to what constitutes approbated and contemptible conduct in complex disputes; (4.) The recounting of particularly scandalous actions perpetrated by elite figures.

In instances within the narrative that feature one or more of the issues above, the text regularly makes use of embedded narrative or unreliable second-level narrators to impart the controversial or contested information in question (see Pier 2014). Practically, this involves the insertion of instances of dreams, slander, gossip, and rumour into the saga narrative.

Dreams are often described upon waking by the dreamer as direct dialogue or reproduced as an embedded narrative, in which they function as a distinct storyworld (see Merkelbach 2022). Slander, gossip, and rumour are represented by both direct and indirect dialogue and may be attributed to named or anonymous individuals or expressed as the consensus opinion of a non-specific collective. Through these means, the narrative material present in dreams, slander, gossip, and rumour is held in at least partial, if not complete separation from the account of events provided by the first-level narrative voice in operating on a distinct diegetic level.

This separation is accentuated by the information provided in dreams, slander, gossip, and rumour being generally tonally distinct from other means of recounting events: more overtly uncanny, scandalous, and humorous material tends to be sequestered in these mediums. Material with these tonal qualities, which more readily calls attention to its own dubious or subjective quality, is less compatible with the authority of the narrative voice as utilised elsewhere in the text. The compartmentalisation of such contested discourses avoids their inclusion in the text having a direct impact on the credibility of the narrative voice. Through the sectioning of material into these four necessarily contested or subjective modes of discourse, ›Íslendinga saga‹ is able to simulate the presence of a range of competing and conflicting perspectives in response to fraught events in the storyworld. In doing so, the text demonstrates the impossibility of a narrator's actual omniscience in relation to contested recent history, but without superseding or invalidating the objectivity of the narrative voice so central to the saga style. The presence of dreams, slander, gossip, and rumour in ›Íslendinga saga‹ also allows for the intrusion of non-normative perspectives on Sturlung Age action, which are crucial in representing and contextualising the fraught and fragmentary quality of the era. This article will now proceed to discuss each of these four categories in turn.

3. Dreams

The category of dreams, while perhaps the most ontologically difficult of the categories considered here, particularly in the relationship of action occurring in the dreamworld and the world of the first-level narrative, is also both the best studied and arguably the least impactful on narrative authority. Dreams operate on a distinct diegetic level, often with their own altered ontologies (Wilson 2025), but their semiotic force is granted by their relationship to the first-level storyworld – in this case, significant political affairs in thirteenth-century Iceland. Guðrún Nordal (2006, p. 305) was largely correct when she argued in relation to ›Sturlunga saga‹ that

> dreams are vehicles of moral assessment of events and key persons on the scene, and provide the author with an opportunity, in the guise of the dream person, to present the audience with an ethical evaluation of the unfolding action. A stanza spoken in a dream articulates a different point of view on the action which is difficult to convey in the prose narrative.

This possibility of alternative perspective and the capability for moral evaluation comes from the capability for dreams to insert figures disruptively into the storyworld whose presences would otherwise be precluded, via their alternative, frequently supernatural logic. This is because dreams often introduce mythic, legendary, or simply anachronistic characters who are not depicted as actual participants in the social network of thirteenth-century Icelandic society. If such figures were presented by the narrative voice as actually engaging in the real-world events of the Sturlung Age, the authority of its report of thirteenth-century events would understandably be diminished through the overt presence of anachronism or overt supernatural intrusion (McCreesh 2006; McTurk 1990).

Literary dreams, especially those depicted in the sagas, are necessarily ominous, either in acting as a symbolic analogue to future events or imparting significant information that would otherwise be inaccessible to characters. They therefore take a key role in the narrative patterning of the saga

in foreshadowing moments of narrative and historical significance. In the highly symbolic ontological bounds of the dream, key figures and events can be foregrounded in the narrative without disrupting the strict chronology of the saga. This capability is not otherwise available to the saga narrator, as one of the foundations for their authority is that they do not generally offer proleptic judgements on matters that are still in the process of unfolding. Evaluation of the morality or political significance of an event by the saga narrator is rare, and when it does occur, it is largely provided in retrospect, in accordance with the facsimile of historical testimonial that the sagas often generate. Ominous dreams, alternatively, allow for the prior establishment of important figures and deeds, without the narrator having to offer a qualitative opinion on their significance that would seem unsupported until a later point in the diegesis. In this manner, estimations of characters and the foregrounding of key events can be deployed at opportune literary moments without substantial impact on the authority of the narrative voice. An excellent example of this phenomenon is the inclusion of dreams that feature preeminent figures from Iceland's past with distinct ideals, such as Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir and Egill Skalla-Grímsson, who pass disparaging judgement on the later generations embroiled in the Sturlung Age. In the case of Egill Skalla-Grímsson, he appears in a dream to Egill Halldórsson of the Mýramenn (the family who traditionally owned the farmstead), frowning and pronouncing an ominous warning about the ambition of their kinsman Snorri Sturluson, who goes on to vie for complete overlordship of Iceland, either for himself or for Hákon Hákonarson, the Norwegian king:

> *Egill dreymði at Egill Skalla-Grímsson kæmi at honum ok var mjök ófrýnligr. Hann mælti: ›Ætlar Snorri, frændi várr, í brott heðan?‹ ›Þat er satt,‹ segir Egill. ›Þat gerir hann illa,‹ segir darummaðrinn, ›því at lítt hafa menn setit yfir hlut várum Mýramanna þá er oss tímgaðist, ok þurfti hann eigi ofsjónum yfir þessu landi at sjá‹ Egill kvað vísu:*

Seggr sparir sverði at höggva,
snjóhvítt er blóð líta,
skæruöld getum skýra,
skarpr brandr fekk mér landa,
skarpr brandr fekk mér landa.

Ok sneri þá í brott. En Egill vaknar. (ÍF 21, p. 78)

Egill dreamed that Egill Skalla-Grímsson appeared in front of him and was frowning deeply. He said: »Does Snorri, our kinsman, wish to go away from here?« »That is what's said,« says Egill. »He does ill in doing that, « says the dream man, »because men have rarely been able to set themselves above us Mýramenn when we thrived, and he needn't look down upon this land«. Egill spoke a verse:

A man spares the sword to strike,
Blood is snow-white to behold,
A strife-age can explain this,
A bitter flame won the land for me,
A bitter flame won the land for me.

And then he turned away. Then Egill awoke.

The episode is instructive in revealing the alternative forms of narrative information that can be imparted within the saga form via dreams and the uncanny connections they can foster. The familial relationship between the two Egills is accentuated by their shared name, which acts as a symbolic bridge between two distant kinsmen. Their temporally impossible conversation allows the elder Egill to pass judgement on a crisis gathering momentum long after his death, and in which the younger Egill is embroiled. He offers an authority and insight distinct from both the narrator and the characters from thirteenth-century Iceland, in a manner that neither the ostensibly impartial narrative voice nor the characters of the first-level storyworld would be capable of as ›contemporary‹ witnesses. Egill Skalla-Grímsson's perspective is that of a valorised Icelandic past with different values, which allows for a detached, pointed, and authoritative judgement

on Snorri's conduct; as a result, Egill need not fear any repercussions for his candour. The elder Egill's verse also utilises the evocative and obscurant qualities of skaldic verse to impart forms of information that saga prose is ill-suited to conveying (Nordal 2001, pp. 117–144). The verse conveys thematic information regarding the nature of the Sturlung Age, evoking imagery of apocalyptic violence and destruction (Hultgård 1990). In one sense, the poem could serve as invective against the kind of cowardice that Egill Skalla-Grímsson scorned in his own life and which is conveyed by the sword that fails to strike and the snow-white blood potentially denoting the cowardice of thirteenth-century men. Furthermore, Egill may be punning on the dual meaning of *brandr* as both a flame and a sword; implicitly contrasting, therefore, the role of fire in land-claiming ceremonies by Egill's contemporary's during Iceland's settlement versus the use of the sword to seize land through violence in the Sturlung Age (for land-claims involving carrying a flame around the area's perimeter, see Phelpstead 2014, p. 1). But the violent imagery can also be read as depicting natural laws being turned on their head (for other uses of eschatological imagery in Norse literature, see Abram 2019, pp. 148–170) to demonstrate the degree of social upheaval that the Sturlung Age occasions. This is achieved using riddling forms of inversion and paradox to emblematise cultural expectation being upended, such as striking a blow without a weapon or someone possessing snow-white blood. The dream sequence thus suggests that from the perspective of even the notoriously hyper-violent Egill Skalla-Grímsson, the violence of the Sturlung Age appears truly senseless, and also strikingly introduces moral and social commentary on the qualitative difference between the Saga Age and the Sturlung Age.

In a similar manner, dreams allow for the association of characters living in the Sturlung Age with supernatural entities, forming a system of allegiances and parallels within the paranormal sphere that embellishes the broader political crisis.[7] Take the example of Þorgrímr Hauksson, who, while preparing to lead a large-scale raid against his enemies in Dalr,

recounts a dream of him riding with his host in the same area, where he meets a large, broad-faced, foul-smelling woman who speaks the following verse:

> *Mál er at minnast*
> *Mörnar hlakkar.*
> *Vit tvau vitum þat,*
> *viltu enn lengra?*
> (ÍF 21, p. 179)
>
> It is time to recall
> the shriek of Mörn [= battle].
> We two know that,
> will you know more?

This dream, like the one featuring Egill Skalla-Grímsson, utilises its prosimetric form to impart information in verse that prose would be ill-suited to conveying (Quinn 1987, pp. 65–68). In this case, the dream adds a new member to Þorgrímr's band: an ogress or troll woman, a sort of figure regularly associated with impermissible violence (Motz 1987). This is compounded in the verse itself where the kenning used for the forthcoming battle, *Mörnar hlakkar*, makes use of the proper name of the giantess Mörn, also mentioned in ›Grímnismál‹ (*Eddukvæði* I, p. 64). In a sense, the dream-ogress casts the upcoming battle as her own vocalisation and renders herself Þorgrímr's violent collaborator, accentuated later in the verse by her use of the first-person dual pronoun *vit*. In the final line, the ogress echoes the repeated question of the *völva* (seeress) to Óðinn in ›Völuspá‹, linking the forthcoming events to both eddic and eschatological traditions (*Eddukvæði* I, p. 14).[8] In this manner, the ruinous, even doomed quality of Þorgrímr's sortie is rendered emphatic by mythological allusions that the narrative voice could not offer, and which heighten the stakes and significance of this particular endeavour within the wider tapestry of violent encounters.

Dreams are also used to convey information at a juncture where it would not otherwise be available to characters within the narrative. Take, for instance, Guðný Böðvarsdóttir's dream of her daughter-in-law Halldora's complicated labour with Sturla Sighvatsson (ÍF 21, p. 90). She dreams that a man comes to tell her that a baby has been born and that his name is Vígsterkr (meaning strong in slaying or in battle). The next morning, the same scene repeats almost exactly in the waking world, with a man coming to tell Guðný of the birth, but in this case, the name is given as Sturla. The dream and the reality are placed parallel to one another and offer complementary accounts of Guðný first learning of her grandson's birth. The only difference, of course, is his two different sobriquets, which reveal different elements of his character at the earliest moment of his introduction into the narrative: what he will be known as (Sturla), and what he will be known for (being *vígsterkr*). Marlene Ciklamini (1983, p. 210) puts it well when she writes:

> The imagined name, Vígsterkr, prefigured the boy's character and fate. In the brief, sharply drawn vision, she foresaw Sturla Sighvatsson's violent arrogation of power and the fulfilment of the Biblical dictum that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Religious-minded contemporaries would be reminded of this when, in 1238, Sturla encountered a savage death rendered even more brutal by the violation and despoilation of his corpse.

As Sturla goes on to be one of the most ambitious and violent chieftains of the Sturlung Age, his symbolic name, revealed only in the dreamworld, aptly prefigures his violent potential, and indicates an aspect of his character crucial to the narrative that will not be apparent in the first-level storyworld for many years. Given Sturla's importance to the overall narrative of ›Íslendinga saga‹, however, establishing his association with bloodshed at this juncture has clear literary utility, with the dream offering a rubric for reading his subsequent growth to his full violent potential.

4. Slander

Slander and insult are commonplace throughout saga literature, wherein they act as a means of catalysing violence and provide the logic as to why disputes escalate, despite the best efforts of intervening parties or even the rational interests of the belligerents (Falk 2021, p. 28; Morcom 2020). In ›Íslendinga saga‹ specifically, insults convey the escalating degree of tension between rival parties and, most interestingly, provide a space for subjective assessments of the characters' qualities by their enemies within the narrative. Extremely negative alternatives to respected characters' legacies can therefore be inserted into the narrative as insults without impinging on the narrator's credibility and ostensive impartiality.

The manners in which minor squabbles can erupt inexplicably into full-scale feuds is crucial to the wider themes of ›Íslendinga saga‹ as an exploration of how ruinous elite infighting, which comes to encompass the whole of Iceland, may arise from even the smallest disputes. When Kálfr Guttormsson gets into a contest over rights for a beached whale with Hallr Kleppjárnsson, the narrator provides a broadly neutral discussion of their mutual dislike and the irresolvable complexity of the case between two equally matched and highly eloquent individuals: *Þeir deildu ok um hvalmál nökkut ok færðu þat til alþingis, ok var hvárr tveggi inn mesti fulltingsmaðr síns máls. Þótti þat æ sannara er sá talaði er þá flutti sitt eyrindi* (ÍF 21, p. 72; ›They also disagreed on a claim to a particular beached whale and prosecuted that at the *alþingi*, and each of the two was the greatest proponent of their own cause. It always seemed more truthful, when whichever one of them who was speaking related his account‹). From the two men's initial interaction, there seems to be little ground for the explosive violence that ensues, with the exception of a group of anonymous supporters of Hallr offering a sequence of insulting verses that provides a competing layer of ridicule alongside the otherwise dignified conduct of Kálfr and Hallr. Kálfr's previous status as the most powerful farmer in Eyjafjörðr

is inverted in the last of these verses, in which he is accused of petty greed when he is represented as an avaricious beggar claiming more than his fair share of food-alms:

> *Hefir um hrepp inn efra,*
> *hann er gerr at þrotsmanni,*
> *þat er kotmanna kynni,*
> *Kálfr matgjafir hálfar.*
> (ÍF 21, p. 74)
>
> Kálfr carries off half the food-donation
> across the upper part of the district.
> That is the cottager's habit;
> he is accomplished as a beggar.

Both sides are reduced in stature by the insertion of insults into the episode: not only in their rash and undignified utilisation by Hallr's camp, but also in the uncertainty that the slander introduces over the reality of Kálfr's previously established valour and nobility. In the case of Kálfr, an alternative ontology is briefly but evocatively generated through the logic of the outrage of Hallr's supporters at his conduct, in which he dramatically falls from a preeminent position in the social hierarchy to the extremely precarious one of a vagrant. Even in his new ignominious status as a beggar, however, Kálfr is implied to contravene social expectations, as he takes more than his fair share of the allotted food for the poor. The three insulting verses do not, however, offer precise moral commentary of the dispute. Their purpose is instead to reveal the interpersonal tensions and raw emotions that the genteel account offered by the narrator initially conceals: we are given a glimpse of the affective turmoil that is revealed to lie beneath the prose account. Kálfr eventually kills Hallr, and following his death, Sighvatr Sturluson composes a counter-poem redressing the insults in a triumphalist tone. Here, mockery of Sighvatr and Kálfr's opponent is achieved in an inverse manner to the rhetorical impoverishment of Kálfr in the above stanza; Hallr is described, with a hyperbolic skaldic bombast that appears

to serve as irony, as *inn forsnjalli guðhraustr gunnmáva grennir* (ÍF 21, p. 77; ›the exceedingly wise one, valiant feeder of the battle-gull [= carrion-bird, i.e. a raven; its feeder = warrior]‹) upon his defeat. The verses can therefore communicate affective information that subtly contravenes the established reputations of high-status figures.

This use of slander is extended further, however, when it is used to demonstrate the volatility of different near-contemporary accounts of events and figures from thirteenth-century Iceland. ›Íslendinga saga‹ codifies and promulgates a particular perspective on Sturlung Age affairs by investing it with narrative authority. Simultaneously, Sturla was likely aware of a large number of dissenting perspectives on events that offered if not different accounts of how matters transpired, then at least radically different affective responses to them. Take, for instance, the moment in which Snorri Sturluson composes a verse praising Jarl Skúli, his Norwegian patron who has recently bestowed on him the rank of *lendr maðr*, with the *klofastef* quoted as follows:

> *Harðmúlaðr var Skúli*
> *rambliks framast miklu*
> *gnaphjarls skapaðr jarla.*
> (ÍF 21, pp. 122–123)

Skuli was hard-mouthed to the bright glint of the high-rising land [= mountain; its glint = gold; one who is hard-mouthed (i.e. intractable) towards gold = a generous man], the foremost in form among jarls.

The verse features a somewhat tortuous initial kenning relating to Skúli's generosity, wherein the first line can readily and ironically be understood as a criticism of Skúli's unrelenting nature (Grove 2007, p. 15). In light of both Snorri and Skúli's unpopularity among other Icelandic factions, the verse is subject to direct parody, with ›Íslendinga saga‹ going on to depict how, immediately afterwards, Þóroddr of Selvag paid an unnamed man a sheep to compose an insulting rejoinder:

Oss lízk illr at kyssa
jarl, sás ræðr fyr hjarli,
vörr er til hvǫss á harra,
harðmúlaðr er Skúli
Hefir fyrir horska jöfra
hrægamms komit sævar,
þjóð finnr löst á ljóðum,
leir aldregi meira.
(ÍF 21, p. 123)

We little like to kiss the jarl,
that one who rules over this land,
the lord's lip is too sharp,
hard-mouthed is Skúli.
Never before has more
mud of the vulture of the carrion-sea [= battle; its
vulture = eagle; its mud = bad poetry]
been brought before wise rulers;
people find fault with the verse.

The historical compositional relationship between these two verses is intriguing, albeit difficult to reconstruct, but in terms of their position in the text, the placing of a sharp insult after lionising praise, in relation to a key political moment, provides a deft means of demonstrating the range and strength of opinion on controversial issues such as Skúli's increasing influence in Iceland. The insulting verse's counter-narrative may contradict Snorri's account, but it is complementary to the project of the narrative voice in providing balance to the panegyric praise of Skúli and maintaining authority through a pointed demonstration of its ›evenness‹ of perspective. The verse demonstrates open Icelandic suspicion of increased intimacy and political alignment with Skúli via the metaphor of the jarl delivering a sharp and wounding kiss to Icelanders, thus literally, violently, and humorously justifying his ›hard-mouthed‹ status. Snorri's verse is similarly reconstrued, being revealed to be eagle's dung, a reference to the myth of the mead of poetry, wherein Óðinn in eagle form carries the mead of poetry in

his mouth – being pursued by the giant Suttungr, from whom he has reclaimed the stolen mead – and defecates all defective and ill-crafted verse in the course of his journey (Quinn 1994a and 1994b). The relationship between noble lord and virtuoso poet has been upended into one between tyrant and hack, a stinging insult that reveals how far the dissatisfied people (*þjóð*) differ from the intellectual elite in their assessment of contemporary matters. Insulting verse of this sort may not be a medium with much in the way of cultural capital, but its capability to offer radical dissent from an anonymous collective allows it to fulfil a vital role in ›Íslendinga saga‹ in ensuring a place, however subordinate, for non-elite perspectives within the narrative (Wanner 2008, pp. 30–52).

The reporting of an anonymous insult, therefore, provides a means for scandalous material to be included into the narrative without the narrator having to imply that the insulting claims constitute an objective feature of the storyworld. This maintenance of something akin to plausible deniability on the part of the narrator regarding particularly venomous insults serves as a method of maintaining narrative authority, specifically on a tonal level. This is due to the equivocation of the narrative voice with Sturla as a member of the contemporary Icelandic intellectual elite, which necessitates a degree of distancing from cruder material. One such instance is a piece of mockery attributed to the inhabitants of Víðdælir and directed at the powerful men of Miðfjörðr, who are described as making up all the most shameful areas of a mare together – Þorbjörn Bergsson is the back, his brother Gísl the belly, Gísl's sons the feet, Óláfr Magnússon the thigh, and Tannr Bjarnason the arse (ÍF 21, p. 123). Tannr is singled out for the most shameful role with humorous logic: *Hann sögðu þeir skíta á alla, þá er við hann áttu af hrópi sínu* (ÍF 21, p. 101; ›They said he shit on everyone who dealt with him through his slander‹). While crude, this insult conveys a range of important sociopolitical information in a rich format: the strength of the enmity between Víðidalr and Miðfjörðr; not only the shaming of preeminent men, but the comparative strength of insult each man deserves;

and, in recapping a set of political allies, the construction of a rough symbolic hierarchy of their relationships. While such scurrilous insult of powerful men would undercut the studied dispassion of the narrative voice, the problem can be avoided by the attribution of the mockery to the collective inhabitants of a region or district, both to avoid individual culpability and to preclude investigations of the authority or reliability of the insult's source.

5. Gossip

Gossip generally operates in a similar manner to insult, as described above, wherein it provides a lower-status discursive mode by which incendiary or controversial opinions can feature within the narrative while a degree of distance is maintained from the narrator. Counter-narrative can thus take a subordinate yet striking position within ›Íslendinga saga‹, while simultaneously avoiding any implication that such views are upheld as objective features of the saga's action. This is particularly the case when providing ambivalent presentations of the affective sub-currents within households, families, and communities that act as the motivations for conflict and bloodshed, which gossip has the capability to communicate (Sayers 1990). Gossip has been traditionally classed as a mode of discourse exclusively associated with women,[9] but it is also employed by male characters in ›Íslendinga saga‹, although the wider point that gossip is »as much a weapon for the powerless as for the powerful – indeed, more so, as the powerful had more to lose in a society with such an emphasis upon honour« remains true (Cochrane 2012, p. 55, see also Kress 1991). In this vein, and unlike insult, gossip is therefore also a vital component of consensus-forming within the saga, through its operation as a subtle background mechanism by which groups of characters slowly turn against a powerful or arrogant individual and begin to plot their downfall. Gossip is thus often presented

as indirect speech used to punctuate, formalise, and express a rising negative sentiment within a community, and in a more muted manner than dreams, to foreshadow an individual's eventual fall from grace. One such example occurs when the notoriously fractious Bishop Guðmundr Arason employs outlaws or petty miscreants to levy fines against opposing farmers during his conflict with Kolbeinn Tumason (see Walgenbach 2021, pp. 99–126). The farmers' response is described as follows:

> *En þeir er fyrir voru þorðu eigi annat en gjalda slíkt er þeir kröfðu ok kölluðu rán. Nú var illr kurr í bóndum, þóttust hafa látit höfðingjann ok farit sjálfir sneypu, látit frændr sína ok vini, en sumir limu, ok gjalda fé á þat ofan. Kalla þeir þetta allt hernað ok rán.* (ÍF 21, p. 61)
>
> But they did not dare do anything except pay up what was demanded of them, and [yet] they called it robbery. Now there was ill-tempered grumbling among the farmers, as it seemed to them that they had lost their chieftain and fallen into disgrace themselves, lost their family and friends – and some their limbs – and had to pay fines on top of that. They said it was altogether looting and robbery.

Clearly this overt opposition to an ecclesiastical authority such as a bishop (and one with a tentative claim to sainthood) is not a position that can be fully adopted by the narrative voice (see Skórzewska 2011, pp. 165–205). Nonetheless, Guðmundr's actions are, at the very least, highly acquisitive, and the presence of gossip provides a way of priming an audience to consider alternative perspectives to the hegemonic norm. The use of the word *kurr* (›murmur‹, ›grumbling‹, but also ›a rumour‹) in the passage is of particular note, as its precise meaning blurs together senses of complaint and dissatisfaction with that of an unsubstantiated report, underscoring the close relationship between gossip and counter-narrative in ›Íslendinga saga‹. The farmers' gossip has a transformative function in reconstruing the results of a legal settlement as a violent crime and the bishop himself as gang-leader. Furthermore, the gossip qualifies the previous legal arbitration, at which the farmers feel they have not been satisfactorily represented,

by providing an informal avenue to advance their own perspective on their dealings with Guðmundr in bombastic terms. This counter-narrative is hyperbolic and portrays Guðmundr in a manner that could never be fully endorsed by the narrator himself. It does, however, both foreshadow Guðmundr's escalating political machinations and, crucially, provide the narrator with some justification for the later ambivalent portrayal of the bishop as he becomes increasingly embroiled in violent, secular power struggles, in contrast to his hagiographic portrayal in the *biskupasögur* (sagas of bishops) (Stefán Karlsson 1985). The narrative voice is thus able to position itself in an enlightened middle ground between critical gossip and panegyric, accentuating its authority.

Another form of gossip present in the saga is closely entwined with the saga style itself. Saga literature often makes use of litotes; when combined with hearsay, this produces a particular form of obfuscating understatement by which the loose and vague report of important events via anonymous gossip leads to them being misconstrued or sensationalised, often resulting in further violence. One such case is this brief episode at an assembly, centering on a follower of Snorri Sturluson called Herburt (likely a German):

> *En er hann kom út hafði hann Herburt brugðit sverði ok vildi höggva Hjaltinn. Magnús tók berum höndum sverðit ok stöðvaði höggit. Hann skeindist mjök á höndunum. Þá var sagt Sæmundi at unnit væri á Magnúsi.* (ÍF 21, p. 107)
>
> And when he had come out, Herburt had drawn his sword and wanted to cut down Hjalti. Magnús grabbed the sword with his bare hands and stayed the blow. He was badly scratched on his hands. Sæmundr was then told that Magnús had been injured.

Here, the narrative voice has access to comprehensive information about an unusual encounter, which it conveys to the audience. The report that reaches Sæmundr, however, is stripped of much of the important detail,

focusing simply on the injury dealt to Magnús Guðmundarson. I believe this constitutes gossip, as it represents the imperfect or loose transmission of information about an event, in which the looseness of the communication itself has consequences for how a third party understands the event in question. The gossip communicates an unspecified injury to Magnús Guðmundarson, a respected member of a powerful family, without the qualifying details of him intercepting the blow himself or the relative superficiality of his injuries. The brief and vague form of the account given in gossip justifies subsequent violent escalation in a manner that full details of the encounter might preclude. Gossip, therefore, provides a mechanism to introduce misapprehension and the conveyance of limited information into the narrative, without contravening the simulated omniscience of the narrative voice.

6. Rumour

Rumour is the most unusual of the four discursive modes discussed in this article, as it has the unique function of directly challenging the authority of the narrative voice and introducing to the text the possibility of an actuality of events different to those which the narrator reports. This feature is what most markedly distinguishes rumour from gossip; a central element of the present article's understanding of rumour is that of the contested veracity and multiplicity of accounts about a single action. Gossip has an altogether subordinate status to the account provided by the narrative voice, while rumour often intrudes into the narrative in sections where the narrative voice forfeits a degree of its authority in admitting that objective report is impossible, due to a secret or concealed event occurring or incompatible reports of a matter being circulated. It is of note that this low-status mode of communication is invested with such status in ›Íslendinga saga‹; after all, it is most prominently associated with »women and lower-class people, the kind who are represented often enough in saga literature

as conveying tittle-tattle, rumour, and superstition« (Clunies Ross 2010, p. 29). Dreams and slander, although not approbated discourses, are utilised by higher-status individuals in certain circumstances; conversely, gossip and rumour are united in their association with the more marginal members of Icelandic society or, most typically, with anonymous collectives.

In some cases, the admission of the limitations of narrative authority is only partial, as in the following example:

> *Sá maðr var kominn til Sauðafells er Sveinn hét, ísfirzkr. Hann hafði tekit lokur frá hurðum ok gengit út, ok segja Dalamenn at hann væri njósnarmaðr, en hann duldi þess, ok hyggjum vér sannara vera, því at hann ver kominn at útan af Snæfellsnesi.* (ÍF 21, p. 186)
>
> A certain man named Sveinn from Ísafjorðr had come to Sauðafell. He had taken the locks off the doors and left again; the men of Dalr said he was a spy, but he denied this, and yet we think it to be more likely to be true, because he had come from Snæfellsness.

The intermingling of that which can be reported as ›objective‹ and that which cannot is instructive in this example. Sveinn's actions, which are key in allowing for an upcoming assault on the farmstead to succeed, are presented objectively, but the possibility of his malicious intention, which would confirm his status as a hostile agent, is contested. The sagas delve obliquely into issues of psychological interiority and are particularly opaque in relation to character motivations (Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 2017, p. 38). Consequently, Sveinn's physical behaviour within the storyworld can be presented as a concrete fact, but the reasons for his conduct are presented as a matter of rumour. This is particularly the case here because Sveinn and the men of Dalr disagree about his motivations; as a result, the matter can initially be presented only as two sets of competing rumours, both possibly accurate. Ultimately, in this case, the narrator swiftly reclaims authority by arbitrating between the two conflicting rumours, siding with the men of

Dalr, and providing additional locational information to corroborate their claim. The use of the first-person plural by the narrator is also interesting, and perhaps gestures to a conception of the narrator as a collaborative or iterative construct at some points within the text, or as a feature that gains its authority via communal consensus, which is reflected here at a moment of contested action. At some junctures, however, the relationship between rumour and narrative voice is even more discordant. Sighvatr Sturluson and Hafr, the brother of Einarr skemmingr, are in an ongoing dispute when a new character is introduced – a lower-status farmhand called Gunnarr kumbi, who was rumoured to have been poorly treated by Hafr (ÍF 21, pp. 136–137). The narrator then states that Gunnarr goes to Sighvatr for counsel. Shortly afterwards, Hafr's guard dog disappears and the next night Hafr is found dead, killed with his own axe. The action of Hafr's slaying is itself absent from the narration, but at the ensuing assembly organised to arbitrate the killing, Gunnarr kumbi confesses to the crime and is taken captive by Sighvatr, after which he mysteriously dies during the winter (ÍF 21, pp. 137–138).

Up to this point, the above might seem to be a swiftly resolved mystery of the sort the sagas sometimes engage in, with the narrator withholding some information momentarily for the sake of tension, before resolving the matter conclusively for the audience (Burrows 2009, p. 41; Harris 1993, p. 84). The final lines of the episode, however, read as follows:

> *En um sumarit eptir kom Jón Birnuson í Stafaholt til Snorra og sagði Sighvat hafa sent sik […] Lagðist sá orðrómr á at han hafði vegið Hafr, ok helzt sá orðrómr lengi síðan.* (ÍF 21, p. 138)
>
> But during the next summer, Jón Birnuson came to see Snorri in Stafaholt and said Sighvatr had sent him. […] A certain rumour circulated that he had killed Hafr, and that rumour persisted for a long time afterwards.

The information provided here is stressed as being communicated via anonymous rumour, and strikingly undercuts the narrative offered up to this

point by the narrative voice. Rather than a concealed killing by the poor and disgruntled shepherd, the rumour instead suggests an elaborate conspiracy on the part of the Sturlungs, and Sighvatr in particular, who have set up Gunnarr as an expendable scapegoat to conceal their assassination of Hafr via an agent whom they go on to support and protect (see North 2009, pp. 259–260; Nordal 1998, pp. 59–60 and 224–227). Furthermore, the position of this information at the conclusion of the narrative sequence elevates it from being simply a competing, but not seriously entertained, theory concerning the events in question, to something more akin to a twist ending in overturning all previously established information (Ryan 2009, p. 57). For this narrative effect to work, however, the narrative voice must itself simulate conviction concerning the credibility of Gunnarr's guilt. It may even be possible to extend this so far as to say that at this juncture, ›Íslendinga saga‹ exhibits play in relation to the concept of narratorial authority. By this, I mean that the audience's trust in the narrator's otherwise consistent commitment to objective report is here utilised to foster an uncritical acceptance of Gunnarr as the murderer. The narrative voice achieves this by presenting a range of circumstantial evidence aligning around his culpability, while omitting anything that might even suggest another course of events had transpired. The success of the Sturlung's stratagem is therefore also extrapolated onto the audience as well, as they are similarly hoodwinked through the manipulation of narrative authority.

Given the association of the narrative voice with Sturla Þórðarson, himself a member of the Sturlung family, this narrative device is particularly fitting, as he too participates in his family's scheme, albeit on a different diegetic level. What is more interesting, perhaps, is the clash between Sturla the narrator's association with a particular family and his simultaneous reputation as a reliable historian, with the latter role seeming to cause his inability to fully excise the scandalous actuality from the narrative altogether. Rumour, with its unverified and low-status connotations, thus becomes the mechanism by which this information re-enters the discourse –

that is to say, the fact that Sighvatr did not simply condone Hafr's murder, but actively commissioned it, operates in a form of epistemological limbo as a persistent rumour, neither fully accepted nor dismissed.

7. Conclusion

The authority of the narrative voice in ›Íslendinga saga‹ is a consistent artifice and a feature of the narrative discourse that has clear utility in concealing the fraught epistemological issues of constructing a cohesive, coherent narrative from the hotly contested recent political crisis of the Sturlung Age. To achieve this, the narrative voice is closely entwined with the persona of Sturla Þórðarson, to capitalise on his personal connection to the events in question and his enduring reputation as an authoritative mediator of thirteenth-century Icelandic events. At certain occasions, however, the façade of flatly objective report that the narrative voice offers is acknowledged to have limitations to the forms and quality of narrative it can recount. The presence of dreams, insults, gossip, and rumour, distinguished from the general narrative voice in being delivered by partisan inhabitants of the storyworld, provides a productive but generally subordinate narrative mechanism by which alternative renditions of, and perspectives on, the events and figures of the Sturlung Age can briefly intrude into the narrative. At their most forceful, these narrative modes reveal information and radically alter the tone or mood of the narrative, in a manner not permitted by the heavy authority demanded of the narrative voice.

Notes

1 Saga narrators occasionally address an implied audience for various reasons, be it moral instruction, clarifying the source of information, or defending some particularly improbable sequence: see O'Connor (2005). Even in such cases, however, little personalising information about the narrators in question is revealed.

2 It should be noted that Ordower (1991) follows the wider consensus in saga studies in noting this disinterest as simulated, rather than real. Saga narrators may more subtly demonstrate strong moral, political, or familial alignment with various figures and factions within their narratives.

3 As to what McKinnell means by a ›real historian‹, I take him to be referring to the degree of epistemological uncertainty that underpins the modern discipline of history, where one must maintain a degree of scepticism as to what can be known or said about the past. Even realist historians must caveat their claims about the past to a degree to make clear that there are limits to what can be reconstructed of past events (see Kinloch 2018) – an admission that the sagas do not demonstrate a comparable need to make.

4 For the most thorough conceptualisation of focalisation, see Jahn (1996).

5 All English translations are my own.

6 The meaningfulness of omniscience as a category of narration has been both critiqued and defended, but its relationship to the generation of authority is clear (see Culler 2004).

7 For a fuller discussion of the intrusion of the mythic into ›Íslendinga saga‹, see Clunies Ross (1994).

8 In ›Völuspá‹, Óðinn's repeated requests for knowledge about Ragnarök, the Old Norse apocalypse, from the *völva*, a supernatural seeress, trigger a similar refrain from the seeress as both a rebuke for and a warning against probing for further knowledge of the future.

9 For general discussions of gossip and its relationship to medieval women, see Phillips (2010); Lochrie (2003); and Wickham (1998).

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