

Transforming Popular Romance on the Edge of the World:

***Nítíða saga* in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on late medieval and early modern Icelandic literature and society roughly spanning the years 1400–1700, including the reception and reinterpretation of medieval Icelandic popular texts after the Icelandic Reformation in 1550. The thesis discusses in detail one late medieval Icelandic romance called *Nítíða saga*, which was very popular in post-Reformation Iceland, surviving in 65 manuscripts. The thesis is organized into two parts. Part One discusses *Nítíða saga*'s internal and external contexts, looking at the saga as a physical and cultural artefact, as well as its setting. Chapter One delves into the saga's manuscript context, including a classification of the surviving manuscript witnesses and a discussion of the medieval text's post-Reformation reception and transformation through three case studies. Chapter Two discusses the saga's intertextual relationships, through the analysis of a prominent motif and through two case studies highlighting the saga's relationships with other Icelandic romances. Chapter Three analyses the saga's setting, investigating the text's unusual depiction of world geography. Part Two considers the saga's characters and their relationships: Chapter Four discusses the depiction of the saga's hero, including perspectives on gender and power; Chapter Five looks at the characterization of other figures in the saga and how they reinforce the hero's position; and Chapter Six explores the role of the narrator. Overall this thesis shows, through material philology together with literary analysis, how *Nítíða saga* explores and negotiates the genre of Icelandic romance. The thesis also raises questions of Icelandic identity, both locally and in relation to the wider world, uncovering relationships among manuscripts and texts, which have previously gone unnoticed, and also shedding light on Icelandic attitudes towards literature and literacy in the late medieval and early modern periods.

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Abbreviations: Manuscript Collections

Add.	Additional Manuscript
AM	Den arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling
ÍB	Safn Hins íslenska bókmenntafélags
ÍBR	Handritasafn Reykjavíkurdeldar Hins íslenska bókmenntafélags
JS	Jón Sigurðsson
Lbs	Handritasafn Landsbókasafn – Háskólabókasafn Íslands
Nks	Den nye kongelige samling
Papp.	Pappers-Handschrifter
Perg.	Pergaments-Handschrifter
Rask	Rasmus Rask
SÁM	Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi

Abbreviations: Journals, Series, and Reference Works

<i>Cleasby-Vigfusson</i>	Gudbrand Vigfusson, <i>An Icelandic-English Dictionary, Based on the MS. Collections of the Late Richard Cleasby</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874)
<i>DONP</i>	<i>Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog / Dictionary of Old Norse Prose</i> < http://dataonp.hum.ku.dk >
<i>Heilagra Manna Sögur</i>	C. R. Unger, ed., <i>Heilagra Manna Sögur: Fortællinger og Legender om hellige Mænd og Kvinder</i> , 2 vols (Christiania: Bentzen, 1877)
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>KLNM</i>	<i>Kulturbistorisk leksikon för nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid</i>
<i>LMIR</i>	Agnete Loth, ed., <i>Late Medieval Icelandic Romances</i> , 5 vols, Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ, B20–24 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962–65)
<i>Mediaeval Scandinavia</i>	<i>Mediaeval Scandinavia: A Journal Devoted to the Study of Mediaeval Civilization in Scandinavia and Iceland</i>
<i>Namn och Bygd</i>	<i>Namn och Bygd: Tidskrift för Nordisk Ortnamnnsforskning</i>
<i>Neophilologus</i>	<i>Neophilologus: An International Journal of Modern and Mediaeval Language and Literature</i>
<i>Parergon</i>	<i>Parergon: Bulletin of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Renaissance Studies</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
<i>Saga-Book</i>	<i>Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research</i>
<i>Scandia</i>	<i>Scandia: Tidskrift för historisk forskning</i>
<i>Scripta Islandica</i>	<i>Scripta Islandica: Isländska sällskapets årsbok</i>
<i>Skírnir</i>	<i>Skírnir: Tímarit hins íslenska bókmenntafélags</i>
<i>Speculum</i>	<i>Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies</i>

A Note on Icelandic Names and Translation

I have alphabetized the names of Icelanders by first name, as is common practice in Iceland and Icelandic scholarship. Additionally, in the bibliography, authors' names beginning with the characters <Á> and <Þ> appear at the end of the alphabet, in line with Scandinavian and Icelandic conventions, respectively, and accented vowels follow unaccented vowels. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. When quoting from *Nítíða saga* and other works in either edited or manuscript form, I have not modified or normalized the texts.

INTRODUCTION

...er og ei audsagt med öfrodre tungu i utlegdumm veralldarinnar, so mönnum verde skemtelegt, hvor fögnudur vera munde i midiumm heimenum af sliku hoffolke samannkomnu...¹

[...it is also not easily said with an unlearned tongue in the outer regions of the world, how it might be entertaining for people, what joy may be in the middle of the world when such courtiers come together...]

In the Middle Ages Iceland might well appear to sit somewhat uneasily on the ‘outer regions of the world’. Under the control of Norway from 1262 and part of the larger Kalmar Union just over a century later, Iceland, while clearly different from its Scandinavian neighbours in history, literature, and language, was for better or worse drawn into the mainland European community with which the Nordic monarchies were keenly interacting. With its landscape of farmsteads rather than cities and its decentralized government never structured around an Icelandic monarch but rather a federation of chieftans, Iceland in some ways had even less in common with the rest of medieval Europe than did Norway or Denmark.² It is no wonder, then, that *Nítíða saga*, a text probably written sometime in the fourteenth century, would situate Iceland at the fringes of the world. But was Iceland’s culture and literature really so far removed from medieval European ideas and ideals—and was its language really such an ‘unlearned tongue’—as we might be led to believe? Certainly these are not new questions in themselves, but they have yet to be asked in light of late medieval Icelandic romance; indeed, it is only relatively recently that any serious questions have been asked of such texts at all. *Nítíða*

¹ Agnete Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, in *LMIR*, v (1965), 1–37 (p. 36).

² On the historical background see for example Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland’s 1100 Years: The History of a Marginal Society* (Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 2000); Helgi Þorláksson, ‘Historical Background: Iceland 800–1400’, in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 136–54.

saga is a romance that has been little studied, and yet is deeply concerned with such questions of Iceland's place within the world, and, even more, what it means to be a romance. In its questioning, this text also challenges some of the boundaries that come along with generic classification. While *Nítíða saga* has in the past been briefly acknowledged to be a somewhat unusual Icelandic romance, this thesis argues that the saga is a member of the Icelandic romance genre that consciously calls into question a number of that genre's norms and expectations. Through the examination of various aspects of the text, I will demonstrate how *Nítíða saga* plays with a number of romance norms and interrogates the genre with which it has been associated. Because it is still a relatively obscure saga, I will begin this introduction with a synopsis of the text that highlights some of the main areas focused on in later chapters. Following this I will discuss some of the critical terms I employ in the thesis, and also provide an overview of my methodologies in general, before ending with an outline of the organization of the thesis itself.

I. SYNOPSIS

Nítíða saga begins by describing the maiden-king Nítíða, who rules France alone. Her characterization might have led a medieval audience to expect the saga to be a typical maiden-king romance in which male suitors are violently rejected by the female sovereign, but this is the first of many expectations surrounding Icelandic romance that this saga does not fulfil. After Nítíða's introduction she travels from Paris to Apulia to visit her foster mother Egidía, and from there she ventures to the remote island Visio, from which she brings back stones, apples, and herbs with supernatural properties. In this way, in anticipation of the challenges she will face later in the story, Nítíða is equipped with objects that may prove helpful in much the same way that the male protagonists of other

Icelandic romances find or are given magical aids. Returning to Apulia, Nítíða asks for her foster brother Hléskjöldur to accompany her back to France to help defend her kingdom, and this foster-sibling partnership, in parallel with Nítíða's recent acquisition of magical objects, further solidifies her characterization as this romance's protagonist.

After these first scenes, the saga introduces the remaining principal characters, many of whom exist simply to pursue Nítíða in marriage, in the tradition of an Icelandic bridal-quest romance: Ingi of Constantinople and his sister Listalín; Soldán of Serkland and his sons Logi, Vélogi, and Heiðarlogi; and Liforinus of India and his sister Sýjalín. Ingi is the first to travel to France and ask for Nítíða's hand, and she immediately refuses, as is typical of a haughty maiden-king, but while the rejection hurts Ingi's pride, the saga here does not follow the convention whereby the unwanted suitor is abused, and he leaves without sustaining any physical wounds. Ingi next meets the mysterious figure Refsteinn, who agrees to aid him in retaliation; they return to France and Ingi abducts Nítíða and brings her back to Constantinople. Once there, Nítíða escapes with the help of one of her supernatural stones, which transports her back to France. Nítíða's escape enhances her reputation as a cunning opponent. After this second humiliation, Ingi meets another mysterious helper, Slægrefur, who also sails with him back to France. Nítíða, seeing this in her magical stones, which give her supernatural vision as well as the ability to fly or teleport, prepares to outwit Ingi again by giving a servant woman her own appearance and making herself invisible, again facilitated by the magic objects obtained from Visio. Ingi arrives, abducts the disguised woman, and returns with her to Constantinople. Ingi's sister Listalín becomes suspicious of this 'maiden-king', and confronts her, while Ingi, hidden, listens. The woman reveals the truth, and in a rage, Ingi tears off her dress, causing the magical disguise to wear off as well. This scene epitomizes another major theme that surfaces throughout the saga, that of women's agency, power, and psychologies in the

midst of the inherently masculine world of bridal-quest and maiden-king romance: it is not only that Nítíða again outwits Ingi, but that his sister is the one who considers the possibility of deceit, and that the feelings and emotions of the servant woman are highlighted as much as Nítíða's concern to outwit her suitor.

Nítíða saga next looks to two of Soldán's sons, Vélogi and Heiðarlogi, who sail to France demanding that Nítíða marry one of them. Again, Nítíða foresees their arrival in her supernatural stones, and fortifies her castle in preparation. When the brothers arrive, Hléskjöldur tricks them, one by one, into approaching the castle, where they and their armies are killed. In its violence, this episode in one sense seems to follow the conventions of an aggressive maiden-king story more closely than Ingi's previous encounters with Nítíða in that these suitors from Serkland are killed. However, the scene is not the equivalent of a failed bridal-quest because the brothers do not even manage to address Nítíða in person, but must go through her foster-brother proxy, due to their characterization as an Other threat, who must be eliminated. Significantly and potentially somewhat problematically for modern readers, in the saga these characters' deaths in no way mar Nítíða's character, but rather work to reinforce her position as the saga's hero.

After this interlude, the saga turns to Liforinus of India, who encounters a dwarf who is willing to help him on his quest to marry Nítíða—by this point in the story she is renowned for her ability to outwit her suitors. Liforinus and the dwarf sail to France and manage to bring Nítíða back to India. Once there, she again escapes with a supernatural stone and this time brings Liforinus's sister Sýjalín with her back to France in retaliation for her own abduction. While their relationship may not have begun on amicable terms, the two women become good friends, and the saga highlights the support Sýjalín shows Nítíða, developing further the theme of female concerns and perspectives touched on previously. Now Soldán, eager to avenge his sons' deaths, gathers an army and sets off for

France by sea with his remaining son Logi. Seeing their plans in her supernatural stones, Nítíða sends Hléskjöldur with her navy to meet them and fight at sea, away from France. After a two-day battle, Liforinus arrives unexpectedly and defeats Soldán in single combat. Hléskjöldur defeats Logi, and Liforinus brings him home to India to heal his wounds before sending him back to France. This point marks the beginning of Liforinus's portrayal as a positive and caring character, in contrast to the more negative, aggressive suitor of the earlier episodes.

Liforinus then travels to Småland for advice from his aunt Alduria, who suggests he return to France in disguise, stay the winter in Nítíða's household, and get to know her personally, through the exercise of courtly manners. Taking his aunt's advice, he gains Nítíða's confidence during his stay, disguised as a prince named Eskilvarður. In the spring, Nítíða asks him to look into her magical stones, where they see throughout the world, which is depicted in three parts. In this scene, the saga's presentation of world geography is comprehensive, yet also rather unconventional. The geographical descriptions are interspersed with dialogue between Eskilvarður and Nítíða, who claims to be unable to find Liforinus of India anywhere in the world. Nítíða then dramatically reveals that she saw through Liforinus's disguise as soon as he arrived, and knows he is standing there with her. Liforinus then proposes to Nítíða, who accepts, and their wedding is set for autumn.

Ingi hears of this and, still angry and humiliated, gathers an army against France. Upon arrival, Liforinus meets Ingi and offers a settlement on behalf of Nítíða. Ingi prefers to fight, and will not give up until he agrees to single combat with Liforinus, who confidently names Nítíða as the winner's prize. Ingi is seriously injured, but Liforinus graciously spares his life and asks his sister Sýjalín to heal Ingi. Sýjalín and Ingi then fall in love, and Nítíða's foster-brother Hléskjöldur is also offered as a match for Ingi's sister

Listalín. The saga ends with a lavish triple wedding, after which the couples return to their kingdoms. *Nítíða saga* ends by relating how Nítíða and Liforinus's son succeeds them as ruler of France.

As can be seen from this synopsis, *Nítíða saga* touches on a number of themes and the representation and significance of the saga's characters is particularly important in demonstrating these. The role of women is a central concern in the saga, not just because the story is named after Nítíða, but because of the numerous other female characters represented and their relationships. Characterization and the presentation of women are chief examples of the way in which this text challenges the norms of Icelandic romance, which generally revolves around a male hero, his companions, and the quest for a bride. In addition to this, however, the saga's presentation of world geography, as mentioned, is another significant example of the re-invention of expected romance conventions evident throughout *Nítíða saga*. There are also metatextual aspects of the saga that are significant, namely the physical manuscripts through which the medieval text is preserved down to the present day, including the different versions of the text, and the intertextual connections that *Nítíða saga* demonstrates with other Icelandic romances. Surviving in at least sixty-five mainly post-medieval manuscripts, this saga endured especially well over the centuries since its composition. And of course, in addition to questions of genre expectations and categorization, my thesis is also concerned with the related questions of how Iceland conceived of itself as interacting with Continental Europe, through the medium of romance literature. Romance was, of course, a popular form of entertainment on the Continent before it was on Iceland, considering that it is European romance that ultimately inspires the Icelandic romances, which adopt and adapt many foreign plots and motifs to develop a new type of romance saga that is still distinctly Icelandic. This, again, has contributed to the relative neglect of Icelandic romances, with critics seeing them as

largely derivative rather than as innovative reworkings of Continental themes, ideas, and storylines.

II. REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP AND THE SAGA'S CLASSIFICATION

While scholars have in recent years begun to pay more attention to Icelandic romances of which no small number exists,³ this type of saga has had a difficult history within the Old Norse-Icelandic academic community.⁴ Furthermore, the number of Icelandic romances translated into other languages also remains far too small, as there are many texts awaiting a proper edition, let alone a translation,⁵ and up until very recently this has been the case for *Nítíða saga* as well. Although it has been largely neglected in scholarship, there are exceptions, and in recent years the saga has, fortunately, become more frequently studied.

While some brief references to *Nítíða saga* can be found in early twentieth-century

³ Consider, for example, the many papers on native *riddarasögur* delivered at the three most recent Saga Conferences in 2012, 2009, and 2006: A. Mathias Valentin Nordvig and others, eds, *The 15th International Saga Conference: Sagas and the Use of the Past, 5th–11th August 2012, Aarhus University: Preprint of Abstracts* (Aarhus: SUN-Tryk Fællestrykkeriet for Sundhedsvidenskab og Humaniora, 2012) <<http://sagaconference.au.dk/fileadmin/sagaconference/Pre-print.pdf>>; Agnete Ney, Henrik Williams, and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist, eds, *‘Á austrvega’: Saga and East Scandinavia*, Preprint Papers of the Fourteenth International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9–15 August 2009, 2 vols (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009) <<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hig:diva-4837>>; John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, eds, *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6–12 August 2006, 2 vols (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006) <<http://www.dur.ac.uk/medieval/www/sagaconf/sagapps.htm>>.

⁴ For an overview of this see Matthew Driscoll, ‘Late Prose Fiction (*lygisögur*)’, in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 190–204 (especially pp. 196–97). See also Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður: lesið í miðaldartexta* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2009), pp. 171–72.

⁵ Though Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Seven Viking Romances* (London: Penguin, 1985) and Ralph O’Connor, trans., *Icelandic Histories and Romances* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002) have contributed to this need, many more texts are still inaccessible to non-specialists.

scholarship,⁶ the first edition of the text was published in 1965 by Agnete Loth,⁷ and while this included an English summary, it is by no means a full translation, and lacks any accompanying commentary. After this, no work, whether literary-critical assessments of the story or investigations of other manuscripts of the text, was carried out for nearly twenty years, though the saga gets brief mention in articles or chapters about Icelandic romance, particularly by Marianne Kalinke.⁸ In 1985 the *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* was published,⁹ and *Nítíða saga*'s entry there is primarily valuable for its list of extant manuscripts.¹⁰ However, the first work to take *Nítíða saga* as its main subject was Guðbjörg Aðalbergsdóttir's Icelandic BA thesis,¹¹ which was subsequently published

⁶ Some mentions are generally dismissive, e.g. Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Copenhagen: Gad, 1920–24), III (1924), 112–13. Other mentions of the text are more favourable, but it is still only noted in passing, e.g. Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921); Margarent Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1934); Erik Wahlgren, 'The Maiden King in Iceland' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation: Chicago, 1938), pp. 10–13, *passim*.

⁷ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', pp. 1–37.

⁸ Paul Bibire, 'From *riddarasaga* to *lygisaga*: The Norse Response to Romance', in *Les Sagas des Chevaliers (Riddarasögur): Actes de la 5ième Conférence Internationale sur les Sagas (Toulon, Juillet 1982)*, ed. by Régis Boyer (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1985), pp. 55–74; Jürg Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas: Studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island*, Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie, 12 (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1983); Marianne E. Kalinke, 'The Misogamous Maiden Kings of Icelandic Romance', *Scripta Islandica*, 37 (1986), 47–71; Marianne E. Kalinke, 'The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance', *The Modern Language Review*, 88 (1983), 850–61; Marianne E. Kalinke, 'Norse Romance (Riddarasögur)', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol Clover and John Lindow (London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 316–63; Marianne E. Kalinke, 'Riddarasögur, Fornaldarsögur, and the Problem of Genre', in *Les Sagas des Chevaliers (Riddarasögur): Actes de la 5ième Conférence Internationale sur les Sagas (Toulon, Juillet 1982)*, ed. by Régis Boyer (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1985), pp. 77–91; Marianne E. Kalinke, *King Arthur North-By-North-West: The Matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, Bibliotheca Arnarnagana, 37 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1981); Astrid van Nahl, *Originale Riddarasögur als Teil altnordischer Sagaliteratur*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Germanistik und Skandinavistik, 3 (Frankfurt: Lang, 1981).

⁹ Marianne E. Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, *Islandica*, 44 (London: Cornell University Press, 1985).

¹⁰ Kalinke and Mitchell, pp. 85–86.

¹¹ Guðbjörg Aðalbergsdóttir, *Nítíða saga: Meykóngur í aðalblutverki* (Reykjavík, 1993).

as a journal article.¹² Apart from Matthew Driscoll’s short encyclopedia article on the romance¹³—as well as the saga’s brief appearance in important monographs by Kalinke and Driscoll and a couple of other articles¹⁴—it was not until over ten years later that the saga was the principal focus of another study, Geraldine Barnes’s paper at the Thirteenth International Saga Conference.¹⁵ Shortly after this, *Nítíða saga* was translated (from Loth’s edition), into English (the text’s first translation into any language),¹⁶ and was the subject of a chapter of Ármann Jakobsson’s introductory volume on Icelandic literature,¹⁷ and formed a large part of the final chapter in Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir’s doctoral thesis,¹⁸ which discusses women in Icelandic romance.¹⁹

¹² Guðbjörg Aðalbergisdóttir, ‘Nítíða og aðrir meykóngar’, *Mímir*, 32–33 (1993–94), 49–55.

¹³ Matthew Driscoll, ‘*Nitida saga*’, in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and others (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 432.

¹⁴ Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, *Islandica*, 46 (London: Cornell University Press, 1990); Matthew Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1997); Geraldine Barnes, ‘Travel and *translatio studii* in the Icelandic riddarasögur’, in *Übersetzen im skandinavischen Mittelalter*, ed. by Vera Johanterwage and Stephanie Würth, *Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia*, 14 (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2007), pp. 123–39; Matthew Driscoll, ‘Þögnin mikla: Hugleiðingar um riddarasögur og stöðu þeirra í íslenskum bókmenntum’, *Skáldskaparmál*, 1 (1990), 157–68.

¹⁵ Geraldine Barnes, ‘Margin vs. Centre: Geopolitics in *Nitida saga* (A Cosmographical Comedy?)’, in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6–12 August 2006, ed. by John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, 2 vols (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), I, pp. 104–12.

¹⁶ Sheryl McDonald, ‘*Nítíða saga*: A Normalised Icelandic Text and Translation’, *Leeds Studies in English*, 40 (2009), 119–45.

¹⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, pp. 171–79.

¹⁸ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, ‘Women, Bodies, Words and Power: Women in Old Norse Literature’ (Unpublished DPhil Thesis: Oxford, 2010), pp. 223–84. Jóhanna’s thesis has since been published as a monograph, but I have unfortunately not been able to consult it in the short period of time since its publication and submitting the final version of my own thesis; see Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹⁹ To my knowledge the most recent work on *Nítíða saga* is my own, ‘Variance Uncovered and Errors Explained: An Analysis of *Nítíða saga* in the Seventeenth-Century Icelandic Manuscript JS 166 fol’, *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures*, 1 (2012), 303–18. See also, recently, my abstract, ‘Some *Nitida saga* Manuscript Groupings’, in *The 15th International Saga Conference: Sagas and the Use of the Past, 5th–11th*

In terms of genre, *Nítíða saga* is susceptible to a number of categorizations: it has been called a native or indigenous *riddarasaga* (knights' saga), in contrast to translated *riddarasögur*, European romances (particularly French) rendered into Old Norse at the court of Hákon Hákonarson in the thirteenth century.²⁰ Agnete Loth, in her collection of sagas, calls this same sub-group of romance sagas 'late medieval Icelandic romances',²¹ positing for them a homogeneity that does not in fact exist. For example, the first three sagas published in Loth's series are so vastly dissimilar that it almost seems peculiar that they together comprise the first volume.²² *Viktors saga ok Blávus* (pp. 1–50), *Valdimars saga* (pp. 51–78), and *Ectors saga* (pp. 79–186) are each examples of three more types or sub-genres of Icelandic romance—what could conceivably be called viking adventure bridal-quest, folk-belief fairy-tale, and chivalric adventure-quest, respectively. And *Nítíða saga*, found in Loth's fifth volume, does not exactly fit into any of these sample categories either, but, again, could stand in yet two other related sub-genres, namely 'maiden-king romance' and 'bridal-quest romance', both commonly used generic descriptors,²³ although

August 2012, Aarhus University: Preprint of Abstracts, ed. by A. Mathias Valentin Nordvig and others (Aarhus: SUN-Tryk Fællestrykkeriet for Sundhedsvidenskab og Humaniora, 2012), pp. 227–28
<<http://sagaconference.au.dk/fileadmin/sagaconference/Pre-print.pdf>>.

²⁰ On the translated romances see Geraldine Barnes, 'Some Current Issues in Riddarasögur-Research', *Arkiv för nordisk Filologi*, 104 (1989), 73–88; Geraldine Barnes, 'The *Riddarasögur*: A Medieval Exercise in Translation', *Saga-Book*, 19 (1977), 403–41; Jürg Glauser, 'Romance (Translated *riddarasögur*)', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 372–87; Kalinke, *King Arthur*; Marianne E. Kalinke and Geraldine Barnes, 'Riddarasögur', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and others (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 528–33. Most recent is Sif Ríkhardsdóttir's monograph studying various aspects of translation into Old Norse, including from Middle English: *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France, and Scandinavia* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2012).

²¹ Agnete Loth, ed., *LMIR*, 5 vols (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962–65).

²² Loth, *LMIR*, I (1962).

²³ See Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, and my discussion of her definitions in Chapter Four; and Sif Ríkhardsdóttir, 'Meykóngahefðin í riddarasögum: Hugmyndafræðileg átök um kynhlutverk og þjóðfélagsstöðu', *Skírnir*, 184 (2010), 410–33. On bridal-quest in other medieval literature see Claudia Bornholdt, *Engaging Moments: The Origins of Medieval Bridal-Quest Narrative* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005).

the plot does not exactly revolve around a hero's exploits in search of a bride, but around a potential bride's exploits to keep herself from marrying. Another now less common label for *Nítíða saga* and its peers would be *lygisaga* (lie-saga) because of the inclusion of non-realistic—i.e. obviously fictional—plots and motifs.²⁴ Such a name reveals an attitude once commonly held towards these romances: they have been dismissed as worthless because they 'lie', and scholarship in the twentieth century has focused more vigorously on other types of sagas, notably the *Íslengingasögur* (sagas of Icelanders), which have been deemed accurate representations of medieval Icelandic life.²⁵

So far, I have tried to avoid referring to texts as 'indigenous Icelandic romance' and 'popular romance', as I feel these are potentially problematic terms. Traditionally, scholars of medieval Icelandic literature have distinguished between romances that are 'native' or 'indigenous' and 'translated'.²⁶ I prefer instead to call 'indigenous' romances

²⁴ A. Le Roy Andrews, 'The Lygisögur', *Scandinavian Studies*, 2 (1914–16), 255–63; Geraldine Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 266–86; Bibire, 'From *riddarasaga* to *lygisaga*'; Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction'; Matthew Driscoll, 'The Oral, the Written, and the In-Between: Textual Instability in the Post-Reformation *Lygisaga*', in *Medieval Insular Literature Between the Oral and the Written, II: Continuity of Transmission*, ed. by Hildegard L. C. Tristram, *ScriptOralia*, 97 (Tübingen: Narr, 1997), pp. 193–220; Matthew Driscoll, 'Traditionality and Antiquarianism in the Post-Reformation *Lygisaga*', in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. by Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994), pp. 84–99; Peter G. Foote, 'Sagnaskemtan: Reykjahólar 1119', in *Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies*, The Viking Collection, 2 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1984), pp. 65–83; Jakob Benediktsson, 'Lygisögur', in *KLNM*, 11 (1966), col. 18; Jürg Glauser, 'Lygisaga', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and others (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 398; Marianne E. Kalinke, 'Norse Romances (Riddarasögur)', pp. 316–63.

²⁵ See for example Theodore M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); Gwyn Jones, 'History and Fiction in the Sagas of Icelanders', *Saga-Book* 13 (1946–53), 285–306; Vésteinn Ólason, 'The Icelandic Saga as a Kind of Literature with Special Reference to its Representation of Reality', in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 27–48; Vésteinn Ólason, 'Family Sagas', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 101–18.

²⁶ Geraldine Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', pp. 266–86; Kalinke, 'Norse Romances'; Kalinke and Barnes, 'Riddarasögur', pp. 528–33.

simply Icelandic romances, even at the risk of imprecision, because they were written in Iceland, using the Icelandic (West Norse) language, for Icelanders. A re-evaluation of the terminology surrounding Icelandic romance is in order, and while the present study is not necessarily the place for it, discontinuing the dichotomy of translated/indigenous in my own work will at least be a step in the right direction to forming a sharper critical vocabulary in this field. Likewise, ‘popular’ romance is usually taken to refer to widely circulated literature, perhaps for the non-elite;²⁷ however, a case can be made for Icelandic romances being ‘popular’ among the elite—the literate, such as the clergy, and educated wealthy landowners. After the Middle Ages the audiences of Icelandic romances grew and could be described as popular in the former sense.²⁸ In this thesis I occasionally use the term ‘popular literature’, but in the sense of ‘well-known’ or ‘widely-read’, rather than ‘appealing to the masses’ or ‘non-aristocratic’, as a detailed investigation into the precise audiences of each text discussed was ultimately not feasible. My preferred terminology, however, remains ‘Icelandic romance’.

III. METHODOLOGIES AND SAGAS TO COMPARE

While the methods employed in this thesis are primarily literary-critical, there are chapters in which the analysis of material is much more literary-historical and material-philologically focused, particularly in the first of the thesis’s three sections. In my consideration of the manuscripts and different versions of *Nítíða saga*, it was important to

²⁷ For work on the increasingly established field of medieval English popular romance, see for example Nicola McDonald, ed., *Pulp Fictions of the Middle Ages: Essays in Popular Romance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert, eds, *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); Norris J. Lacy, ‘The Evolution and Legacy of French Prose Romance’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 167–82.

²⁸ Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*, pp. 1–33.

me to study the physical manuscripts in person, especially considering that only a few of the manuscripts have been digitized. I photographed and transcribed sections of the manuscripts on visits to the Arnarnáttúna Institutur in Reykjavík and Copenhagen as well as the British Library in London, to examine the majority of the surviving manuscripts; some do remain, which I have not been able to see at all. In my consideration of the saga as literature, my analyses always stemmed from close readings of the one textual version on which I decided to base my study (that of Loth, which is the one with which scholars will be familiar), and when appropriate, I compared and contrasted that version with other manuscript versions from later centuries.

Throughout the thesis I also compare and contrast *Nítíða saga* with other Icelandic romances, namely *Clári saga*,²⁹ *Dínus saga drambláta*,³⁰ *Nikulás saga leikara*,³¹ and *Sigurðar saga þogla*.³² I chose such texts primarily from manuscript evidence available in bibliographies and catalogues.³³ From analysis of the contents of fifty-nine of the sixty-

²⁹ Gustaf Cederschiöld, ed., *Clári saga*, Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek, 12 (Halle a.S.: Niemeyer, 1907).

³⁰ Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Dínus saga drambláta*, Riddarasögur, 1 (Reykjavík, Háskóli Íslands, 1960). This edition provides two redactions of the saga; I here refer to the older version (pp. 1–94), which is dated to the fifteenth century (p. lxiv).

³¹ Keren H. Wick, ed., and trans., *An Edition and Study of Nikulás saga Leikara* (Leeds: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 1996). This edition provides two redactions of the saga; I refer to the longer redaction (pp. 62–161), the oldest manuscripts of which date to the seventeenth century; the saga itself may however be much older than this.

³² Agnete Loth, ed., ‘Sigurðar saga þogla’, in *LMIR*, II (1963), 93–259. This edition is of the longer redaction of the saga, and is based on the oldest manuscript survivals, which date roughly to the end of the fourteenth century. For more on the two redactions and their relationship, see Matthew Driscoll, ed., *Sigurðar saga þogla: The Shorter Redaction*, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 34 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1992).

³³ Adolf Iwar Arwidsson, *Förteckning öfver Kongl. Bibliothekets i Stockholm isländska handskrifter* (Stockholm: Nordstedt & Söner, 1848); The British Library, *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years MDCCCLIV–MDCCCLXXV: Additional Manuscripts 24,027–29,909*, 2 vols (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1877); The British Library, *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts, 1756–1782: Additional Manuscripts 4101–5017* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1977); Vilhelm Gödel, *Katalog öfver Kongl. Bibliothekets fornisländska och fornorska handskrifter* (Stockholm: Nordstedt & Söner, 1897–1900); Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romance*; Kommissionen for

five manuscripts (about 89% of the survivals),³⁴ patterns emerged regarding both *Nítíða saga*'s position in manuscript and the sagas with which it frequently appears. While these patterns primarily reflect the saga's transmission after the Middle Ages and can therefore tell us more about how it was read later in its history than earlier, utilizing such a basis (despite potential issues) for comparing medieval Icelandic romances is more useful than ignoring it. One manuscript (Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands, ÍB 312 4to) contains *Nítíða saga* alone, but in others the text consistently appears in conjunction with certain other Icelandic romances. *Nikulás saga leikara* occurs most frequently with *Nítíða saga*: it is found in the same manuscript 16 times out of 59 (27% of the time), and nine of these sixteen co-occurrences (56% of the time) see these sagas one after the other, suggesting the possibility that they were at times transmitted as a pair. *Dínus saga drambláta* occurs in manuscript with *Nítíða saga* 13 times (22% of the time), and either immediately before or after it five times out of thirteen (about 38% of the times it is in the same manuscript). In one manuscript of four texts only, these three sagas occur as a group.³⁵ Various other sagas occur multiple times in *Nítíða saga*'s manuscripts, but the two mentioned above are

det Arnamagnæanske Legat, *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske Handskriftsamling*, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1889–94); Kommissionen for det Arnamagnæanske Legat, *Katalog over de Oldnorsk-Islandske Håndskrifter*, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1894–99); Lárus H. Blöndal, Grímur M. Helgason, and Ögmundur Helgason, *Handritasafn Landsbókasafns*, 4 vols (Reykjavík: Prentað í Félagsprentsmiðjunni, 1947–96); Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins*, 3 vols (Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, 1918–37); Stefán Einarsson, 'Safn Nikulásar Ottensons í Johns Hopkins Háskólabókasafinu í Baltimore, Md.', *Landsbókasafn Íslands Árbók 1946–47*, III–IV (1948), 157–72.

³⁴ I have also noted the contents of NKS 1144 fol, but disregard it, as it is a collection of fragments copied from AM 576a–c 4to (one of which, AM 576c, contains *Nítíða saga*). The six manuscripts whose contents I have not yet analysed are Reykjavík, Þjóðminjasafn Íslands: Ásbúðarsafn, 'Fornar riddara og æfintyra sögur skrifaðar af Þorsteini M. Jónssyni'; Sauðárkrókur, Héraðsskjalasafn Skagfirðinga: Hsk 63, 8vo; Skafti Pétursson frá Rannveigarstöðum, Höfn, Hornafjörður, MS II; Böðvar Kvaran, MS II, 3.b. 'Fornmannasögur Norðurlanda'; Birgir Bjarnason, Bolungarvík; Fiske Icelandic Collection, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Ic F75 A125.

³⁵ Stockholm, Royal Library, Papp. 4:o nr 31.

the most significant.³⁶ In addition to high co-occurrence in manuscript, the number of parallels in plot and motif shared with *Nítíða saga* were also factors to suggest a strong relationship among texts and the usefulness of comparing them. In this way may be added both the long redaction of *Sigurðar saga þogla*—which despite only co-occurring in manuscript with *Nítíða saga* a couple of times, shares more motifs with it than any other text according to Inger Boberg’s index³⁷—and *Clári saga*, which also shares certain motifs and may very likely have inspired *Nítíða saga*’s author.

IV. THESIS ORGANIZATION

This thesis is in two parts. In the first, comprising three chapters, I discuss *Nítíða saga*’s internal and external contexts. Chapter One delves into the saga’s manuscript context, including a classification of the surviving manuscript witnesses into groups and a discussion of the medieval text’s post-Reformation reception and transformation through three case studies. Chapter Two discusses the saga’s intertextual relationships through the analysis of the prominent ‘supernatural stones’ motif and through two case studies that highlight the saga’s relationships with *Clári saga* and *Nikulás saga leikara*. Chapter Three analyses aspects of the saga’s setting through investigation of *Nítíða saga*’s unusual depiction of world geography and consideration of the way in which the text situates Iceland in relation to Europe and the rest of the known world. In the second part of the thesis I analyse the saga’s characters and their relationships. Chapter Four discusses the depiction of the saga’s hero, including perspectives on gender and power, and Chapter

³⁶ While it is true that these groupings are to a large extent based on post-medieval manuscript compilations, this does not exclude the possibility of a medieval precedent for the later compilations. As will be evident in the chapters that follow, this group of texts play well against each other, and to consider them in intertextual dialogue does not seem anachronistic.

³⁷ See Inger M. Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*, Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana, 27 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966), as well as my discussion of this text in Chapter Two.

Five considers the roles of the saga's supporting characters and how their depiction reinforces the position of the hero. Chapter Six explores the role of the narrator in the saga as another character who guides the audience through the story. In sum, this thesis sets out to show, through literary analysis complemented by material philology and consideration of variant versions of this medieval text, how *Nítíða saga* explores and negotiates the genre of Icelandic romance, and raises questions of Icelandic identity both locally and in relation to the wider world. In the process, the thesis uncovers previously unnoticed relationships among manuscripts and texts, and illuminates Icelandic attitudes towards literature and literacy in the late medieval and early modern periods. In all of this I aim to demonstrate how *Nítíða saga*, as a late medieval Icelandic romance, engages with and questions the norms of the genre and the nature of the society in which it was produced. I turn first to the organization and discussion of the manuscripts and the many different versions of the text, particularly in its post-medieval manifestations.

PART ONE

External and Internal Contexts

Chapter 1

THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION: THE TEXT AS A PHYSICAL ARTEFACT

Nítíða saga survives in at least sixty-five known manuscripts dating from the end of the Middle Ages to the beginning of the twentieth century, making it arguably one of the most popular late medieval Icelandic romances. This number comes from Kalinke and Mitchell's *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*,³⁸ but the saga's transmission history is more complex than the bibliography suggests. For example, one of the manuscripts in the *Bibliography*'s list actually contains a poetic *rímur*, rather than a prose version of the saga.³⁹ Additionally, at least one further manuscript, with a number of leaves missing from the middle, has been posited to have contained *Nítíða saga*: Keren Wick, in her thesis on *Nikulás saga leikara*, states that in the nineteenth-century manuscript Lbs 3625 4to 'Nit[ida saga] may have appeared after Þjal[ar]-J[óns saga], but is now missing'.⁴⁰ It is certainly possible that the saga once appeared in many more manuscripts, now lost or fragmentary. As well as these versions of a prose *Nítíða saga*, there are also many more extant *rímur* manuscripts, which are very rarely taken into consideration in scholarship dealing with romances in general, let alone *Nítíða saga* in particular,⁴¹ but these are just as important to the text's transmission history as its prose

³⁸ Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, pp. 85–86.

³⁹ This is London, British Library Add. 24,973 8vo (nineteenth century).

⁴⁰ Wick, p. 261. In 2011 the thesis was digitized and is now more easily accessible online at <<http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/1632/>> [Accessed 3 November 2011]. While Wick provides no rationale for this claim, inspection of the manuscript reveals that *Nítíða saga* is listed in its table of contents.

⁴¹ The only mentions of *Nítíða rímur* are in Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*, p. 11, which is only a passing reference; Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 2 vols (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1966), I, 360, which does not analyse any *Nítíða rímur* but is a bibliographic reference work; and Sean Hughes, 'The Re-emergence of Women's Voices in Icelandic Literature, 1500–1800', in *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, ed. by Sarah M. Anderson (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 93–128 (p. 123), which, following Finnur Sigmundsson, notes the one possibly female author of a set of *Nítíða rímur*, again,

versions. There are at least twenty-four additional manuscript witnesses of verse *Nítíða rímur* cycles, of which no fewer than eight different sets exist.⁴² Combining the known saga and *rímur* manuscripts, then, there are today at least ninety separate witnesses of the *Nítíða* story in verse and prose, spanning over five hundred years. Unfortunately, it is impossible to discuss all of these, given the scope of the thesis and the sheer number of extant texts. This thesis will, therefore, as a whole and in this chapter, continue in the tradition of focusing on the prose saga rather than the *rímur*, so as to keep the corpus under investigation manageable. This chapter will not only draw attention to the great amount of textual variation in *Nítíða saga*'s manuscript tradition, which is hitherto unstudied,⁴³ but it will also serve as a background on which to anchor my analysis of the story in later chapters, which will focus on the one version that is readily accessible to other researchers, while still taking into account the variation discussed here. While to study the *rímur* in detail would involve a different type of investigation than the present study of saga prose permits, I do make reference to them because they are important not merely for their own sake as further examples of variations of the *Nítíða* story, but also because they prove important to understanding manuscripts of prose versions. While the *rímur* are based on early prose versions of *Nítíða saga*, since as far as is known the saga survives earlier than any *rímur* and it is quite common for *rímur* to rewrite sagas,⁴⁴ it is also likely that at least some of the many post-medieval prose versions derive not from

only in passing. Nobody has ventured to comment critically on any set of *rímur* about *Nítíða*, and studies of *rímur* in general especially in English are relatively few.

⁴² Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*, p. 11; Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, I, 356–60.

⁴³ The version of the *Nítíða* story known today in the academic world is the prose text starting with AM 529 4to and ending with AM 537 4to, published in Loth's *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*. My recent translation of the saga into English also reinforces the prominence of this version, as it was based on Loth's edition (McDonald, '*Nítíða saga*', pp. 119–44).

⁴⁴ Peter A. Jorgensen, 'Rímur', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and others (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 536–37.

earlier prose versions, but are adapted from *rímur*.⁴⁵ I will discuss this later in this chapter.

Although only one version of *Nítíða saga* is well known among scholars, in Iceland during and after the Middle Ages there were many versions, as each time the story was written down it took on a new form, however slight the differences from its exemplar. As Bernard Cerquiglini puts it in his influential work *In Praise of the Variant*: ‘variance is the main characteristic of a work in the medieval vernacular [...]. This variance is so widespread and constitutive that [...] one could say that every manuscript is a revision, a version’.⁴⁶ While Cerquiglini’s examples are generally taken from medieval French texts, his assertions are especially applicable to Icelandic literature, as such a rich manuscript culture survives, both medieval and post-medieval. Stephen Nichols, in a special issue of the journal *Speculum* devoted to New (or Material) Philology, reinforces this further in his assertion that ‘If we accept the multiple forms in which our artefacts have been transmitted, we may recognize that medieval culture did not simply live with diversity, it cultivated it’,⁴⁷ and this will be evident in the general discussions carried out in this chapter detailing Iceland’s wide variety of *Nítíða* texts. While, again, I cannot feasibly discuss every version of the *Nítíða* story, I will outline the different versions apparent from analysis of the manuscripts, and present three case studies to demonstrate this variation in further detail. Classification of *Nítíða saga* manuscripts has not been attempted before, and so will greatly facilitate a better understanding of this popular text’s reception and

⁴⁵ Sean Hughes, ‘Late Secular Poetry’, in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 205–22; Peter Jorgensen, ‘The Neglected Genre of Rímur-Derived Prose and Post-Reformation Jónatas Saga’, *Gripla*, 7 (1990), 187–201.

⁴⁶ Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 37–38.

⁴⁷ Stephen G. Nichols, ‘Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture’, *Speculum*, 65 (1990), 1–10 (pp. 8–9).

transmission history. In so doing, this chapter will show how through the active engagement with the saga text that is required in the act of not merely copying but revising and rewriting a text, Icelanders valued and enjoyed this popular saga, and made this shared piece of literary heritage their own.⁴⁸

More than sixty saga manuscripts preserve *Nítíða saga*, making it the third most popular out of thirty-four late medieval Icelandic romances in terms of manuscript survivals, coming behind only *Mágus saga jarls* (75 manuscripts) and *Hermanns saga ok Jarlmanns* (71 manuscripts). While the number of manuscripts surviving from Iceland is

⁴⁸ For an overview of the significance of analysing manuscripts and the value of recognizing the presence of different versions through material philological methodologies and from a specifically Old Norse-Icelandic perspective, see Matthew Driscoll, ‘The Words on the Page: Thoughts on Philology, Old and New’, in *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability, and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*, ed. by Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2010), pp. 85–102; Odd Einar Haugen, ‘The Spirit of Lachmann, the Spirit of Bédier: Old Norse Textual Editing in the Electronic Age’, Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of The Viking Society, University College London, 8 November 2002 <<http://www.ub.uib.no/elpub/2003/a/522001>> [Accessed 18 May 2011]; Kirsten Wolf, ‘Old Norse—New Philology’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 65 (1993), 338–48; and Anna Mette Hansen, ‘The Icelandic *Lucidarius*, Traditional and New Philology’, in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference 2–7 July 2000, University of Sydney, ed. by Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, 2000), pp. 118–25. An earlier call for the consideration of post-medieval alongside medieval manuscripts is in Foster W. Blaisdell Jr., ‘The Value of the Valueless: A Problem in Editing Medieval Texts’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 39 (1967), 40–46. In addition to Cerquiglini and Nichols, for further consideration of material philology in a more general medieval sense, see Stephen G. Nichols, ‘Why Material Philology? Some Thoughts’, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 116 (1997), 10–30; Stephen G. Nichols, ‘Philology and its Discontents’, in *The Future of the Middle Ages: Medieval Literature in the 1990s*, ed. by William D. Paden (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), pp. 113–41; and the other articles in the 1990 issue of *Speculum*, especially Suzanne Fleischman, ‘Philology, Linguistics, and the Discourse of the Medieval Text’, *Speculum*, 65 (1990), 19–37; and Siegfried Wenzel, ‘Reflections on (New) Philology’, *Speculum*, 65 (1990), 11–18. The Canterbury Tales Project also provides an interesting parallel in which the entire manuscript tradition of Chaucer’s *Tales* is taken into account and analysed—for an overview of the project, see Peter Robinson, ‘The History, Discoveries, and Aims of the Canterbury Tales Project’, *The Chaucer Review*, 38 (2003), 126–39. Two relatively early studies of medieval Icelandic romances also refer to the manuscript tradition of some of the romances they study: Astrid van Nahl includes a brief chapter at the end of her *Originale Riddarasögur als Teil altnordischer Sagaliteratur*, pp. 197–200; and Jürg Glauser discusses manuscript evidence and variety in *Isländische Märchensagas*, pp. 78–100; both works mention *Nítíða saga* from time to time, but only Glauser discusses its variation in manuscript, however briefly (pp. 82–84).

quite high overall, it is still possible that even these numbers are only a fraction of what may actually have been produced, disseminated, read, and enjoyed in medieval and modern Scandinavia, as well as later perhaps in Europe and North America, where Icelandic immigrants settled from the nineteenth century onwards, often bringing their books with them.⁴⁹ At least two manuscripts containing *Nítíða saga* reached North America,⁵⁰ but it is certainly possible that others, as yet undocumented, also made it to Canada and the United States.⁵¹ It has been suggested that what manuscripts survive today account for roughly 7–8% of what may have actually once existed, with the figure at likely no more than ten per cent.⁵² With this in mind, *Nítíða saga*'s popularity and

⁴⁹ Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*, pp. 71–73; Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years*.

⁵⁰ Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Library, Nikulás Ottenson Collection, MS. Nr 17 (1853) and Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Library, Fiske Icelandic Collection, Ic F75 A125 (1824). The latter manuscript arrived in America after being purchased from a London, England second-hand bookseller in 1915, and how it came to be in London is uncertain (Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Manuscript Material, Correspondence and Graphic Material in the Fiske Icelandic Collection: A Descriptive Catalogue*, Islandica, 48 (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 37).

⁵¹ A relatively recent and well-known example is that of the eighteenth-century manuscript known as *Melsted's Edda*, which was brought from Iceland to, ultimately, an Icelandic settlement in Saskatchewan, Canada in the nineteenth century and was donated back to Iceland in 2000. See Gísli Sigurðsson, 'Melsted's Edda: The Last Manuscript Sent Home?', in *The Manuscripts of Iceland*, ed. by Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland, 2004), pp. 179–84. Even more recently, Katelin Parsons has discovered a number of Icelandic manuscripts in Manitoba, Canada, which were previously unknown to the academic community and many of which contain Icelandic romances (Katelin Marit Parsons, 'The Great Manuscript Exodus?', paper presented at the Fifteenth International Saga Conference Aarhus, Denmark, 10 August 2012).

⁵² Odd Einar Haugen, 'On the Birth and Death of Medieval Manuscripts', paper presented at the Fifteenth International Saga Conference, Aarhus, Denmark, 10 August 2012; Åslaug Ommundsen, 'Books, Scribes, and Sequences in Medieval Norway', 2 vols (Unpublished PhD dissertation: University of Bergen, 2007); Uwe Neddermeyer, 'Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer quantitativen Bestimmung der Buchproduktion im späten Mittelalter', *Gazette du livre médiévale*, 28 (1996), 23–31; Britta Olrik Frederiksen, 'Dansksprogede bøger fra middelalderen – i tørre og mindre tørre tal', in *Levende or dog lysende billeder: Den middelalderlige bogkultur i Danmark. Essays*, ed. by Erik Petersen (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Bibliotek, 1999), pp. 154–62; Patrik Åström, 'Manuscripts and Bookprinting in Late Medieval Scandinavian and in Early Modern Times', in *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, ed. by Oskar Bandle, et al., 2 vols, Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft, 22 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), II, 1067–1075; John Luther Cisne, 'How Science Survived: Medieval Manuscripts'

ongoing significance in Icelandic culture should by no means be ignored. There has been some work on post-medieval saga popularity and reception in Iceland and abroad,⁵³ but *Nítíða saga* in particular has not been studied at all, neither its reception nor its variations—a stemma has not yet been attempted, nor even a rough grouping of the manuscripts according to the different recensions of the saga, until now.

The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of the different groups into which the manuscripts of *Nítíða saga* can be placed, based mainly on textual variation, but also touching on geographical origins, information about scribes, and manuscripts' physical properties. After classifying the manuscripts into groups, I discuss three manuscript versions as case studies from three different post-medieval periods (the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries), considering in particular the end of the saga and the portrayal of geography nearer the middle, as these are prime places in which some of the differences between the versions are evident. Summing up, this chapter will show why it is important to remember the inherent mutability of any given version of a medieval text, as it is inevitably reworked and rewritten many times over. As Judy Quinn

“Demography” and Classic Texts’ Extinction’, *Science*, 307 (2005), 1305–1307. See R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (London: Methuen, 1970) for discussion of English texts’ survivals.

⁵³ Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*; Jürg Glauser, ‘The End of the Saga: Text, Tradition and Transmission in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Iceland’, in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. by Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994), pp. 101–41; Jón Karl Helgason, ‘Continuity? The Icelandic Sagas in Post-Medieval Times’, in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 64–81; Mats Malm, ‘The Nordic Demand for Medieval Icelandic Manuscripts’, in *The Manuscripts of Iceland*, ed. by Gisli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Árni Magnússon Institute, 2004), pp. 101–07; Heather O’Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 106–48; Peter Springborg, ‘Antiqvæ historiae lepores—om renæssancen i den islandske håndskriftproduktion i 1600-tallet’, *Gardar: Årsbok för Samfundet Sverige-Island i Lund-Malmö*, 8 (1977), 53–89; Andrew Wawn, ‘The Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse and Old Icelandic Literature’, in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 320–37. For a study of a text’s post-medieval manuscripts see Sture Hast, *Pappershandskrifterna till Harðar saga*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 23 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960).

states in her introduction to *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability, and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*:

To a significant degree, for those producing manuscripts in Iceland [...], retelling and recasting seem to have been the mainstay of tradition: it is only when the text becomes an artefact, for whatever religious, cultural or commercial reasons, that verbatim copying becomes the dominant mode of transmission, albeit that is the mode most familiar to us, having prevailed across the centuries since the widespread use of the printing press.⁵⁴

Of course this is the case not only for literature in medieval Iceland, but also for medieval literature elsewhere in Europe, but it is worth stressing nonetheless. Because ‘medieval writing does not produce variants; it *is* variance’,⁵⁵ it is worthwhile to consider *Nítíða saga* within its complex manuscript context, even if that cannot be fully understood at present, and to interrogate the very notion of a text and its (in)stability. Considering *Nítíða saga*’s wider manuscript context will only further enrich our understanding of the story and its implications for medieval Icelandic society and literature, such as the role of literature in familial and other social contexts.

I. MANUSCRIPT GROUPS

The manuscripts in which *Nítíða saga* survives can be categorized in different ways, to highlight different aspects of plot, characters, structure, scribes, location of origin, or physical properties.⁵⁶ What follows is based on my investigations into fifty-seven

⁵⁴ Judy Quinn, ‘Introduction’, in *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability, and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*, ed. by Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2010), pp. 13–37 (pp. 16–17).

⁵⁵ Cerquiglini, pp. 77–78.

⁵⁶ Some recent doctoral theses on saga transmission and reception have employed similar approaches: Silvia Hufnagel, ‘*Sörla saga sterka*: Studies in the Transmission of a Fornaldarsaga’ (Unpublished PhD thesis:

manuscripts and fragments (88% of the surviving prose copies), the majority of which I have studied in person, while some have only been available as electronic or photographic images. I have not yet been able to examine every extant *Nítíða saga* manuscript, and I do not aim to make definitive claims about which manuscripts were copied from which. Rather, I aim, in the discussion that follows, to propose broader trends. While I do not favour rooted stemmata to demonstrate manuscript relationships and instead prefer to present different groupings or clouds into which those manuscripts I have studied might be placed,⁵⁷ in organizing each group of manuscripts I have nevertheless found it convenient to draw very tentative stemmata.⁵⁸ The remaining manuscripts will not be taken into account at all in terms of groupings. Three of these are, however, mentioned briefly in the final case study: AM 576c 4to, Nks 1144 fol.,⁵⁹ and Lbs 3128 4to⁶⁰ are all summaries of *Nítíða saga* and so are difficult to place within any one group because the absence of certain names, phrases, or whole episodes is not necessarily indicative of group affiliation and may instead be evidence of the extreme condensing required to produce a summary of only a few hundred words. Additionally, the three manuscripts in private collections will not be included in this chapter as I have not had access to them,⁶¹ and I

University of Copenhagen, 2012); Tereza Lansing, 'Post-Medieval Production, Dissemination and Reception of *Hrólfs saga kraka*' (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Copenhagen, 2011).

⁵⁷ This approach has been taken by, for example, Janet Ardis Spaulding, '*Sigurðar saga turnara*: A Literary Edition' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation: University of Michigan, 1982), pp. 93–110.

⁵⁸ These diagrams, it should be stressed, do not show explicit relationships, but rather degrees of similarity and difference.

⁵⁹ Nks 1144 fol. was copied from AM 576c 4to, according to a note on the manuscript's title page.

⁶⁰ *Nítíða saga* in Lbs 3128 4to was copied from AM 567, 537, and 529 4to, according to a note following the title on f. 135v.

⁶¹ Birgir Bjarnarson, *Bolungarvík* (1865); Böðvar Kvaran, MS. II, 3.b., 'Fornmannasögur Norðurlanda' (1912); and Skafti Pétursson frá Rannveigarstöðum, Höfn, Hornafjörður, MS. II (unknown date).

have, unfortunately, not been able to consult the two manuscripts in American collections,⁶² two in Sweden,⁶³ and two in small Icelandic collections.⁶⁴

I analysed the remaining manuscripts by transcribing selected passages (the beginning, end, and a section showcasing geography) and comparing the variants. In addition to these longer passages, I also recorded all manuscript variants of personal and place names, and made groupings according to those variations. I then compared the two sets of groups based on prose excerpts and names, to arrive at the six groups that I discuss below. I chose to compare these passages and all names because of their great diagnostic potential. A variation on a name, for example, seems to provide evidence of the relatedness (or unrelatedness) of the manuscripts that do or do not include that variation. Whereas with nouns, scribes can rely on both their exemplars and context clues to establish their readings, for names, and especially unfamiliar non-Icelandic names, scribes would need to rely most heavily on their exemplars, increasing their chances of misunderstanding these names. Groups A, B, and C are earlier groups, which might be considered closer to an ‘original’ version, while Groups D, E, and F are younger and might be further removed from a medieval *Nítíða saga*. Furthermore, I considered those groupings within broader groupings, such as the basic structure of the story, and the physical size of the manuscripts. In terms of the way the saga is structured, on the broadest level, the manuscripts can be divided into two groups: those that introduce all of the most important characters successively and then jump back and forth among them to present their adventures (Structure 1), and those that introduce the main characters as the

⁶² Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Fiske Icelandic Collection Ic F75 A125 (1824) and Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Nikulás Ottenson Collection MS. Nr 17 (1853).

⁶³ Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket – Sveriges nationalbiblioteket Perg. 4o nr 20 (1500s) and Papp. 8o nr 6 (1674).

⁶⁴ Reykjavík, Þjóðminjasafn Íslands: Ásbúðarsafn, ‘Fornar riddara og æfintyra sögur skrifaðar af Þorsteini M. Jónssyni’ (1902) and Sauðárkrókur, Héraðsskjalasafn Skagfirðinga HSk 63 8vo (1911).

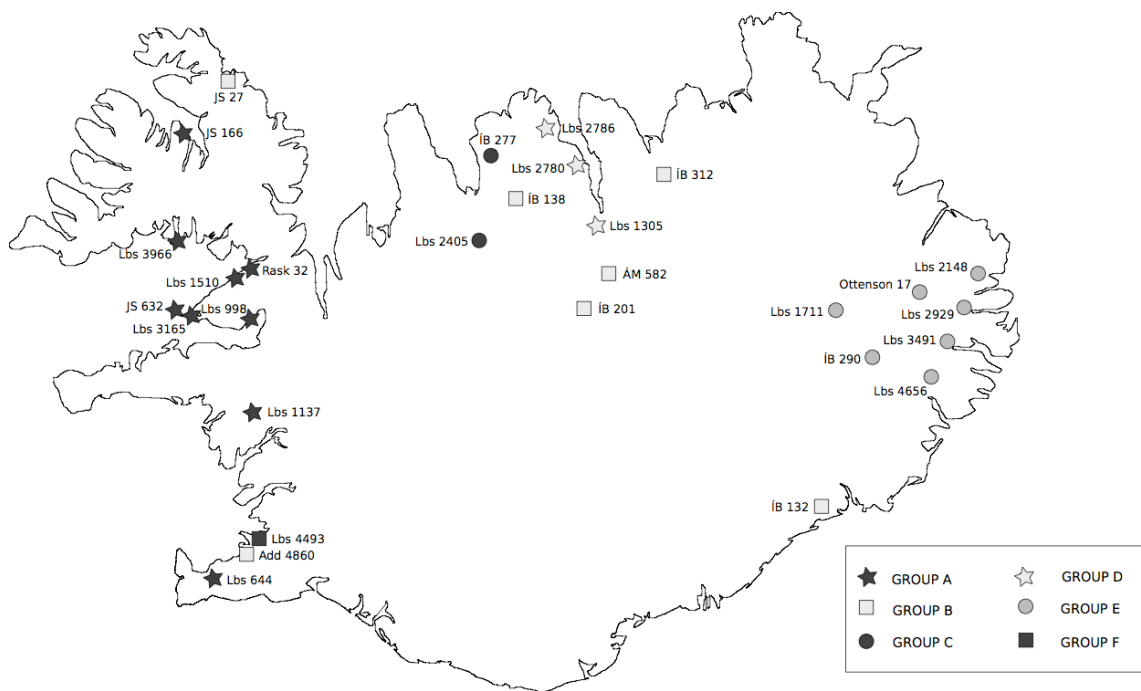
story progresses, so that, for example, Livorinus, although he is a crucial character, is not mentioned at all until the major adventures concerning Ingi and Soldan's sons have already taken place (Structure 2). From the dating of those manuscripts falling into each category it appears that Structure 1 is the older of the two, with Structure 2 reaching back only as far as the eighteenth century. The frequency of structures also favours Structure 1, which appears in my sample of manuscripts 62% of the time, and Structure 2 only 38% of the time; it is not just older manuscripts that favour Structure 1, the youngest dating from the latter half of the nineteenth century. Groups A, C, F, and part of Group B use Structure 1, while Groups D, E, and the other part of Group B use Structure 2.

Considering the physical size of manuscripts, only five are folio, while thirty-five are quarto, and eighteen octavo. The folio manuscripts are all from the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, while the quartos span the sixteenth century to the twentieth, and the octavos range from the fifteenth century to the twentieth, but, not surprisingly, more of the octavos are from later. The folios are relatively early, from a time when Icelandic sagas were being rediscovered and appreciated in Scandinavia, and copied accordingly for show and as high-status texts, which, while not very portable, are very legible as their size allowed a large, clear script to be used.⁶⁵ *Add. 4860 fol.*, for example, is very likely an example of a presentation copy—related to JS 27 fol.⁶⁶—that was taken to England, as will be discussed further in the second of three case studies in the latter half of this chapter.

⁶⁵ Springborg, pp. 53–89. See also Alaric Hall, 'Making Stemmas with Small Samples: Testing the Stemma of *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*, and New Media Approaches to Publishing Stemmas', unpublished working paper available at <http://www.alarichall.org.uk/working_paper_on_stemmas_from_small_samples/> [Accessed 12 October 2011], fig. 15.

⁶⁶ Jónas Kristjánsson says that '*Add. 4860* mun skrifað nálægt 1800. Það virðist vera komið frá glötuðu handriti sem verið hefur náskylt A² [= JS 27 fol.]' ('*Add. 4860* was written close to 1800. It seems to come from a lost manuscript that was closely related to A² [= JS 27 fol.]') (*Dínus saga drambláta*, p. xxxii).

Manuscript scribes and locations of origin are often difficult to pin down with certainty, as many scribes did not leave colophons, and even when some did it is not always possible to match names, dates, and locations with precision, especially place-names from earlier times. Nevertheless, of the manuscripts I have studied, scribal and/or geographical information has been obtainable for thirty-five manuscripts (roughly 61% of the sample).⁶⁷ Some patterns have emerged from plotting known locations on a map, and these correspond to the textual groupings my other methods have established. As already noted, I arrived at the decision to divide the manuscripts into six distinct groups, which I have designated A, B, C, D, E, and F. The most strikingly obvious pattern in geographical origin shows that Group E manuscripts were produced in eastern Iceland, as is illustrated by the grey circles on Map 1.1, and which will be discussed in greater detail below.



Map 1.1: Groups A–F Manuscript Locations

⁶⁷ I have relied on information provided in library catalogues, text editions, and scribal colophons to localize these manuscripts. More manuscripts might be localized through further study of the manuscripts themselves, including their codicology, palaeography, and marginalia, though such an exhaustive analysis of the manuscripts is outside the scope of this thesis and thus the findings presented here must remain limited.

The tables that follow contain all known *Nítíða saga* manuscripts, whether or not they will be classified and included in the following discussions.⁶⁸ For the purposes of the discussions in part two of this chapter and to help further classify the manuscripts, I have set a dividing line between earlier and later manuscripts at roughly 1700: I consider manuscripts from the medieval period up until the end of the seventeenth century ‘earlier’ (comprising the traditional Icelandic periodization of pre-Reformation and post-Reformation humanist renaissance), and manuscripts from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the twentieth I consider ‘later’ (comprising the period of popular dissemination that took place after the humanist renaissance). Of course this is an arbitrary decision, but one motivated by two factors—the earliest *Nítíða saga* manuscript is only from the very end of the ‘traditional’ medieval period,⁶⁹ and Loth has previously examined most of the earliest manuscripts in her edition of *Nítíða saga*. This echoes the fact that published versions of medieval texts, especially sagas, are usually arbitrary to some extent and may not even be based on single manuscript attestations in every case.⁷⁰ Even among the earliest manuscripts, there is evidence of different groups: Groups A, B, and C are all represented, though more of the early manuscripts belong to Group B than Group A, and only one is from Group C. The earlier *Nítíða saga* manuscripts are listed in Table 1.1.

⁶⁸ I have indicated to which group those manuscripts I will discuss belongs, and the few groups noted in parentheses indicate potential or likely group affiliation based on factors other than previous textual analysis, such as manuscript location.

⁶⁹ Also an arbitrary cut-off point, the Middle Ages are generally considered over around 1500. Margrét Eggertsdóttir begins her chapter on reformation and enlightenment literature in *A History of Icelandic Literature* by saying that ‘The period covered by the present chapter begins with the Lutheran Reformation, complete in Iceland by 1550’, indicating that the Middle Ages can also be considered to extend until at least the mid-sixteenth century in Iceland (‘From Reformation to Enlightenment’, trans. by Joe Allard, in *A History of Icelandic Literature*, ed. by Daisy L. Neijmann (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), pp. 174–250 (p. 174)).

⁷⁰ McDonald, ‘*Nítíða saga*’, p. 121.

Table 1.1: Earlier *Nítíða saga* Manuscripts

Name	<i>Nítíða saga</i> date	Group	Notes	Current location	<i>Nítíða saga</i> Scribe	Location of origin
Perg. 8:o nr 10 VII	1475×1499	B	vellum; 1 leaf	Stockholm		
Perg. 4:o nr 20	1500s		vellum; 1 leaf	Stockholm		
AM 529 4to	1500s	B	vellum; ends defective; Loth ⁷¹	Reykjavík		
AM 567 4to XVIII	1500s	A	vellum; 2 leaves; Loth	Reykjavík		
Papp. fol. nr 1	1600×1625	C		Stockholm	Guðmundur Guðmundsson	
AM 537 4to	1600×1650	B	Loth	Reykjavík		
AM 568 I–II 6–7 4to	1600×1650	A	Loth	Reykjavík	Páll Jónsson	Snæúlfstaður
Papp. 4:o nr 31	1650×89	B	Loth	Stockholm	Jón Eggertsson (1643–89) ⁷²	
ÍB 201 8vo	ca. 1661	B	1 leaf	Reykjavík	Halldór Hallsson	Núpufell, Saurbæjarhreppur, Eyjafjarðarsýsla
JS 27 fol.	1670	B		Reykjavík	Hannes Gunnlaugsson (1640–86)	Reykjarfirði í Vatnsfjarðarsveit, Ísafjarðarsýsla
Lbs 715 4to	1670–80	A	defective	Reykjavík	Þórður Jónsson	Strandseljar, Ögurssveit, Ísafjarðarsýsla
Papp. 8:o nr 6 II	1674			Stockholm	Teitur Arngrímsson	
JS 166 fol.	1679	A		Reykjavík	Þórður Jónsson	Strandseljar, Ögurssveit,

⁷¹ Agnete Loth has previously examined these *Nítíða saga* manuscripts, as noted in her preface to volume 5 of *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, p. vii.

⁷² Jón himself brought this manuscript to Sweden (Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenskar æviskrár: Frá landnámstímum til ársloka 1940*, 6 vols (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag, 1948–76), III (1950), 85–87).

Name	<i>Nítíða</i> saga date	Group	Notes	Current location	<i>Nítíða saga</i> Scribe	Location of origin
						Ísafjarðarsýsla
Nks 1804 4to	1681		1 leaf	Copenhagen		
AM 582 4to	1692	B	2 leaves	Reykjavík	Grímur Árnason (1674–1704)	Möðruvellir, Saurbæjarhreppur, Eyjafjarðarsýsla

The oldest surviving manuscript evidence for *Nítíða saga* is a single-leaf vellum fragment from the end of the fifteenth century (Perg. 8:o nr 10 VII). There are three more vellums, all from the sixteenth century: Perg. 4:o nr 20, also a single-leaf fragment of the same part of the saga as the previous fragment; AM 529 4to, which ends defective but is the primary manuscript used by Agnete Loth in her diplomatic edition of *Nítíða saga*; and AM 567 4to XVIII, which only consists of two leaves and Loth uses to note variants in the edition. Thus these earliest manuscripts, all vellum and all fragmentary, will not be studied in any further detail in this chapter. Rather, I will focus on a manuscript in which the saga is preserved in full, in order to consider a single, continuous narrative. Of the other ten earlier manuscripts, from the seventeenth century, Loth also used two to note variants in her edition (Papp. 4:o nr 31; and AM 568 4to (single leaf)), and one (AM 537 4to) as the edition's secondary manuscript to continue the text where AM 529 4to ends. These seventeenth-century manuscripts are all paper, and of those not used by Loth, two more are only single-leaf fragments (Nks 1804 4to and ÍB 201 8vo). I will thus examine JS 166 fol., a representative of Group A from 1679, as an example of an earlier *Nítíða saga* attestation that has not been studied before in any detail. This manuscript will comprise the first case study, in the second part of this chapter.

As noted above, it is among the later manuscripts that Groups D, E, and F emerge, with more later manuscripts falling into these groups than the earlier Groups A, B, and C. These later *Nítíða saga* manuscripts are listed in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Later *Nítíða saga* Manuscripts

Name	<i>Nítíða saga</i> date	Group	Notes	Current location	<i>Nítíða saga</i> Scribe	Location of origin
AM 576c 4to	1690×1710		summary; exemplar for Nks 1144 fol.	Reykjavík	Árni Magnússon (1663–1730)	
AM 226a 8vo	1700×1724		excerpts	Copenhagen	Árni Magnússon (1663–1730)	
Lbs 1172 4to	1700s	B		Reykjavík		
JS 625 4to	1700s	C		Reykjavík		
ÍB 312 4to	1726	B		Reykjavík	Benedikt lögmann Þorsteinsson (1688–1733)	Skríða (Rauðaskríða), Helgastaða- hreppur, Þingeyjarsýsla
Lbs 644 4to	ca. 1730– 31	A		Reykjavík		Suðurnes
ÍB 132 8vo	1746	B		Reykjavík	Sigurður Magnússon (1720– 1805?)	Holt í Hornafirði
JS 56 4to	1760	D		Reykjavík		
Nks 1144 fol.	ca. 1760– 81		summary; copied from AM 576a–c 4to	Copenhagen	Þorlákur Ísfjörð Magnússon (1748–81) ⁷³	
Add. 4860 fol.	ca. 1750– 81 (before 1781)	B		London		
ÍB 116 4to	1786–94	A		Reykjavík		
JS 628 4to	1787	C		Reykjavík		

⁷³ ‘Th. M. Isfiord’ is written in the manuscript.

Name	<i>Nítíða</i> saga date	Group	Notes	Current location	<i>Nítíða saga</i> Scribe	Location of origin
Lbs 2406 8vo	1791	C		Reykjavík		
Lbs 2405 8vo	1791–99	C		Reykjavík	Gottskálf Egilsson (1780–1834)	Vellir, Skagafjörður
Rask 32	1756–67	A		Copenhagen	Ólafur Gíslason (1727–1801)	Saurbærjarþing
ÍB 138 4to	1750×1799	B		Reykjavík		Hólar í Hjaltadal
ÍBR 59 4to ⁷⁴	ca. 1798– 99	D		Reykjavík		
JS 632 4to	1799–1800	A		Reykjavík	Ólafur Jónsson (1722–1800)	Arney, Skarðshreppur, Dalasýsla
ÍBR 47 4to	1800s	B		Reykjavík		
Lbs 1137 8vo	ca. 1819/20	A		Reykjavík	Jón Sigurðsson	Háihóll, Álftártungusókn, Mýrasýsla
Lbs 1305 8vo	1820	F		Reykjavík	Þorsteinn Gíslason	Stokkahlaðir, Eyjafjarðarsýsla
Fiske Ic F75 A125	1824		defective	Ithaca, NY		
ÍB 277 4to	1833–34	C		Reykjavík	Gunnlaugur Jónsson	Skuggabjörg, Skagafjarðarsýsla
Lbs 1711 8vo	1848	E		Reykjavík	Pétur Pétursson	Hákonarstað í Jökudal
Lbs 2152 4to	1850×1899	E		Reykjavík		
ÍB 290 8vo	1851	E		Reykjavík	Sigfús Sigfússon	Langhús í Fljótsdal
SÁM 13	1851	F		Reykjavík		
Lbs 1319 8vo	1852	F		Reykjavík		
Ottenson MS. Nr 17	1853	(E?)		Baltimore, MD	Sigmundur Sigfússon	Ekkjufell, Norður- Múlasýsla

⁷⁴ Wick names Álöf Magnúsdóttir of Skarð, Austrahreppur as this manuscript's scribe (p. 275). However, this does not seem certain at all, as Álöf's name appears in the manuscript, but not as a colophon.

Name	<i>Nítíða</i> <i>saga date</i>	Group	Notes	Current location	<i>Nítíða saga</i> Scribe	Location of origin
ÍB 233 8vo	1855–56	C		Reykjavík		
Lbs 4656 4to	1855–60	E		Reykjavík	Stígur Þorvaldsson	Ásunnarstaður í Breiðdal
Lbs 998 4to	ca. 1860	A		Reykjavík		Knarrarhöfn, Hvammssveit, Dalasýsla
Lbs 3510 8vo	1861–99	E	defective	Reykjavík		
Lbs 2148 4to	1863	E		Reykjavík	Sigmundur Mattíasson long (1841– 1924)	Úlfsstaðir í Löðmundarfirði
Birgir Bjarnason	1865			Bolungarvík		
Lbs 2786 8vo	1869	D		Reykjavík	Finnur Gíslason	Bustarbrekka, Kvíabekkjarsókn, Eyjafjarðarsýsla
Lbs 2780 8vo	ca. 1870	F		Reykjavík	Halldór Stefánsson	Hlaðir, Hörgarsveit, Eyjafjarðarsýsla
Lbs 3966 4to	1870–71	A		Reykjavík	Ólafur Þorgeirsson	Skáleyjar, Dalasýsla
Lbs 3165 4to	1870–71	A		Reykjavík	Ólafur Þorgeirsson (for Jón Jónsson)	Purkey, Dalasýsla
Lbs 3675 8vo	1880		defective	Reykjavík	Guðmundur Davíðsson	Hof
Lbs 3128 4to	1885	(B)	summary; from AM 567, 537, 529 4to	Reykjavík	Jónas Jónsson háskólaverði (1850–1917)	
Lbs 2929 4to	1888	E		Reykjavík	Gísli trésmiður Árnason (b. 1821)	Fjarðaralda í Seyðisfirði
Lbs 4492 4to	1892	D		Reykjavík		

Name	<i>Nítíða</i> saga date	Group	Notes	Current location	<i>Nítíða saga</i> Scribe	Location of origin
Lbs 1510 4to	1900	n/a ⁷⁵		Reykjavík	Magnús Jónsson (1835–1922)	Tjaldanes, Saubæjarhreppur, Dalasýsla
Lbs 3941 8vo	1900×1950	E		Reykjavík		Reyðarfjörður
Ásbúðar- safn: 'Fornar [...] sögur'	1902			Reykjavík	Þórsteinn M. Jónsson (1885–1976)	Akureyri?
Lbs 4493 4to	1902	D		Reykjavík	Tobías Tobíasson	Reykjavík
Hsk 63 8vo	1911			Sauðárkrókur		
Böðvar Kvaran, MS. II 3.b.	1912			Reykjavík	Magnús Jónsson (1835–1922)	Tjaldanes, Saubæjarhreppur, Dalasýsla
Lbs 2918 4to	1900s	D		Reykjavík		
Skafti Pétursson, MS. II	date unknown			Höfn		

By far the greatest number of prose *Nítíða saga* manuscripts has survived from the nineteenth century. Thirty of the total sixty-five were written sometime in the 1800s, which is not surprising considering the proximity of that century to our own (fewer manuscripts may have been lost), along with rising access to literacy, falling costs of materials in some cases, and population growth, to name a handful of factors.

⁷⁵ The version of the saga in this manuscript is unclassifiable, as large parts of it bear no resemblance to any of the other manuscripts. For example, *Nítíða* is said to be the daughter of Vilhjálmr of France and Elidá of Hungary, and the saga includes a lengthy back-story to the more familiar plot. The manuscript's scribe, Magnús Jónsson í Tjaldanesi, is known to have rewritten sagas from memory, often changing them deliberately in the process. This seems to be the case for *Nítíða saga* in Lbs 1510 4to. See Matthew Driscoll, "Um gildi gamalla bóka": Magnús Jónsson í Tjaldanesi und das Ende der isländischen Handschriftenkultur', in *Text—Reibe—Transmission: Unfestigkeit als Phänomen skandinavischer Erzählprosa 1500-1800*, Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie, 42 (Tübingen: Francke, 2012), pp. 255–82; Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*, pp. 55–64.

Additionally, the composing and reciting of sagas had not yet begun to decline as rapidly as happened in the twentieth century, from which only seven manuscripts survive, all dating from the first part of the 1900s. From the eighteenth century fourteen manuscripts survive, which, again, is not to say that *Nítíða saga* was less popular then than in the nineteenth century, but that more eighteenth-century manuscripts may have been lost. I now turn to a discussion of each of the six groups, incorporating, where possible, further comment on the relationship between text and manuscript location.

1. Group A⁷⁶

This group comprises twelve manuscripts: AM 567 4to XVIII (1500s), *AM 568 4to (1600×1650), Lbs 715 4to (1670–80), *JS 166 fol. (1679), *Lbs 644 4to (1730–31), *Rask 32 (1750×1799), ÍB 116 4to (1786–94), *JS 632 4to (1799–1800), *Lbs 1137 8vo (1800s), *Lbs 998 4to (1860), *Lbs 3966 4to (1870–71), *Lbs 3165 4to (1870–71). Each of these texts is written according to Structure 1, and, significantly, all of them make explicit reference to the romance *Nikulás saga leikara* at the end, which will be discussed in detail in the first case study below.⁷⁷ This intertextual reference has not been recognized by previous scholars, and I consider it to be one of the defining features of this group. The texts in Group A all begin with the phrase ‘Hier mega unger menn heyra hystoriu og fagra fräsøgu’ [Here young people can hear a history and beautiful narrative],⁷⁸ with minor variations in some texts such as the addition of an adjective or switching of the word order, as in ‘agiæta fräsøgu & fagra hystoriu’ [excellent narrative and beautiful history].⁷⁹

⁷⁶ In the following discussions of the groups, which all begin with a list of the manuscripts belonging there, all those localizable manuscripts are preceded by an asterisk.

⁷⁷ In Lbs 715 4to the ending has not survived, but based on other similarities to this group it seems safe to consider that had the ending survived, reference to *Nikulás saga leikara* would be present there as well.

⁷⁸ JS 166 fol, f. 181v.

⁷⁹ ÍB 116 4to, f. 93r.

The most important parts of this phrase are the words *hér* and *historia*, which only ever appear in this context in Group A. Within the group, AM 568 (one of the oldest) and ÍB 116 seem to form their own branch apart from the others. Textual differences that separate these two manuscripts include the fact that while at the end Fástus is named as a son of Nítíða and Livorius and the father of Nikulás leikari, no further mention of *Nikulás saga leikara* is made, leaving out reference to other characters (Dorma and Valdemar). AM 568 and ÍB 116 are also united by naming Nítíða's smith and introducing him near the beginning (which other manuscripts do not do), by calling the mysterious island Visia instead of Visio, and making Eskilvardur from Numidia (in ÍB 116; AM 568 is badly tattered in places) instead of Mundia.

All of the other Group A manuscripts can be placed together into another branch, showing a similar beginning and ending naming not only Nikulás leikari as a grandson of Nítíða and Liforius, but also detailing his bridal-quest exploits, as discussed below. Other demonstrable relationships in this sub-group include Lbs 715 and JS 166, which, having the same scribe and being almost completely identical copies, are clearly rather closely related. JS 166 appears also to be related to Rask 32 due to a number of shared variants, the latter possibly being copied from the former, or perhaps with an intermediary manuscript between them. JS 632, Lbs 1137, and Lbs 998 also appear to form a sub-group, and Lbs 3966 and Lbs 3165 make another rather late grouping, both having the same scribe and containing virtually identical texts. It is not clear at present whether one is copied from the other, or whether, instead, they both share an exemplar. Where Lbs 644 and Rask 32 fit in relation to JS 632 and the later manuscripts remains uncertain, and would require further detailed collation of larger text samples to unravel the intricacies of these relationships. Overall, these groupings are generally consistent with previous

considerations of some of these manuscript relationships that focused on different sagas.⁸⁰

I have visualized the relationships evident in Group A in Figure 1.1.

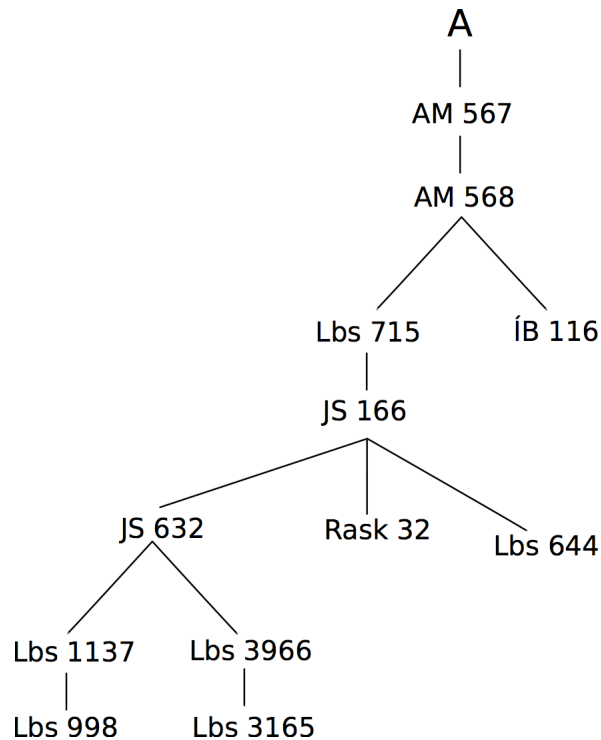


Figure 1.1: Group A Manuscripts

The location of origin is known for nine of the Group A manuscripts; nearly all of these come from the north-western region of Iceland, both the Westfjords and Dales areas.

There is a strong cluster of manuscripts along the coast of Dalasýsla and Austur-Dalasýsla, as seen on Map 1.2. Considering that this group is one of the oldest *Nítíða saga* manuscript groups, Stefán Einarsson's hypothesis that *Nítíða saga*, along with three other romances and more legendary sagas, originated in Reykhólar in Breiðafjörður in the Westfjords, is not surprising.⁸¹

⁸⁰ See Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Dínus saga drambláta*, pp. vii–xlvi; Spaulding, pp. 93–110; Hall, 'Making Stemmas with Small Samples' and Otto J. Zitzelsberger, 'The Filiation of the Manuscripts of *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*', *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*, 16 (1981), 145–76 for *Konráðs saga*.

⁸¹ Stefán Einarsson, 'Heimili (skólar) fornaldarsaga og riddarasaga', *Skírnir*, 140 (1966), 272.



Map 1.2: Group A Manuscripts

2. Group B

Group B includes twelve manuscripts: Perg. 8:o nr 10 VII (1450×1499), AM 529 4to (1500s), AM 537 4to (1600×1650), Papp. 4:o nr 31 (1650×1689), *ÍB 201 8vo (1650×1699), *JS 27 fol. (1670), *Add 4860 fol. (1700s), Lbs 1172 4to (1700s), *ÍB 312 4to (1726), *ÍB 132 8vo (1746), *ÍB 138 4to (1750×1799), ÍBR 47 4to (1800s). None makes any connection to *Nikulás saga leikara*, but the opening phrases are similar to those of Group A: '<H>EYRet vnger menn eitt æfintyr & fagra frasaugn' [Young people heard an adventure and beautiful tale].⁸² This group can be divided into two main sub-groups, as illustrated in Figure 1.2.

⁸² AM 529 4to, f. 30v.

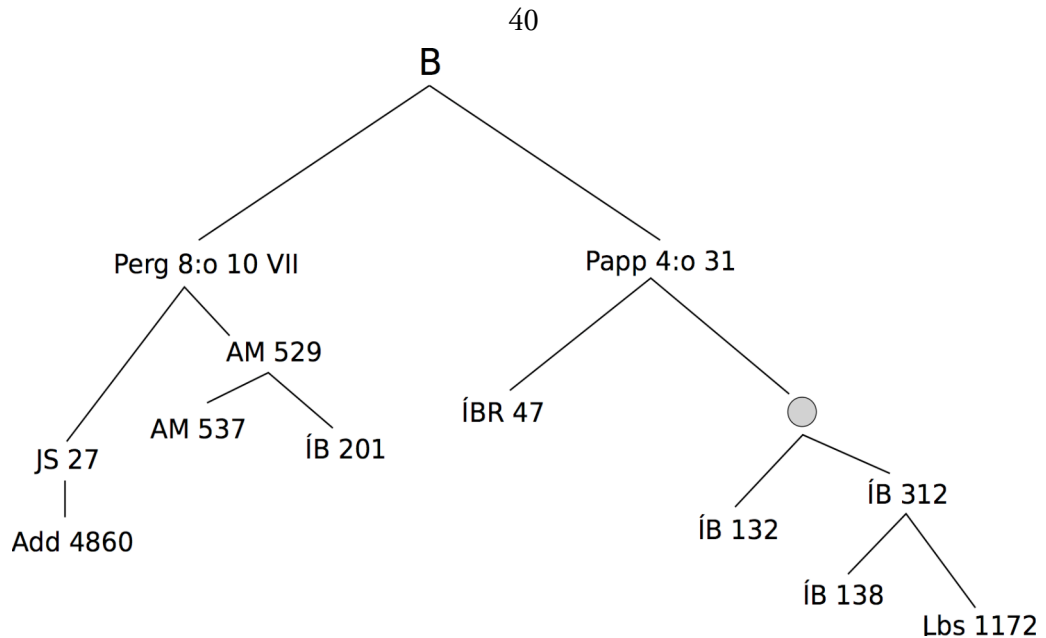


Figure 1.2: Group B Manuscripts

The oldest manuscripts fall together into one subgroup. While Perg. 8:o nr 10 VII, the very oldest manuscript (from the latter half of the fifteenth century), is unfortunately only fragmentary, comparison with other Group B manuscripts indicates that it may be the parent of this sub-group, which could be further divided, as in Figure 1.2. AM 529, AM 537, ÍB 201 end briefly, mentioning Nítíða and Livorius's son only: 'Liv(orius) og m(ey)k(ongur) styrdu Fracklande, attú þau agiæt börn, son er Rikon hiet epter *sinum* mödúr födúr er sidann stirde Fracklande med heidur og soma efter þeirra dag. og lykur so þessú æfentyre af hinne frægú Nitida og Livorio konge' [Livorius and the maiden-king ruled France. They had excellent children, [including] a son who was called Rikon after his mother's father, [and] who afterward ruled France with honour after their day. And thus ends this adventure of the famous Nitida and king Livorius].⁸³ These manuscripts employ Structure 1 and include names that distinguish them from others such as Hippolitus, Egidia, Hugon of Miklagarður, and Nítíða's servant-woman Íversa (who is not named in *any* of the other manuscripts). JS 27 and Add 4860, alternatively, end slightly

⁸³ AM 537 4to, f. 8v.

differently, with more emphasis on Livorius than Nítíða: ‘Livorjús *kongur ok Nit<eda>* hin fræga únntúst leinge *ok vel*, þótti Livorjús kongr hinn mesti hofdinge, *ok var vinsæll huar sem hann kom fram*, *ok lükúmm vier þar súo saúghúnne af Nitedu frægu*’ [King Livorius and Nitida the famous loved each other long and well. King Livorius was thought the best chieftain, and was victorious wherever he went. And so there we end the saga of Nitida the famous].⁸⁴ Additionally, this sub-group lists the various countries seen in Nítíða’s magic stones, and the places listed are a bit different from those in Group A, for example with the inclusion of Egypt. The second case study later in this chapter will show more fully the defining characteristics of this sub-group.

In the other Group B sub-group, possibly deriving from the late seventeenth-century Papp. 4:0 nr 31, the texts are written with Structure 2, and none of them name countries when looking in the seeing-stones. Instead of the more common *three stones–three looks* pattern exhibited in Group A and some other groups, there are four separate looks in four separate stones, covering all four cardinal directions:

M(ey)K(ongur) *teckur þä upp eirn steinn, & lýta þau i hann, & siä þaug þä alla nördur älfu heimsenns [...]* *hun tok þä upp annan steinn & sau þaug um älla vestur älfu heimsenns, [...]* *hun tok þä upp 3^a steinen, & sau þaug nu um sudur alfuna alla, [...]* *hun tekur þa fiörda steinen & sau þaug þä um älla austur älfu heimsenns.*⁸⁵

[the maiden-king then took up one stone, and they looked in it, and they then saw all the northern region of the world [...] she then took up a second stone and they saw throughout all the western region of the world. [...] she then took up a third stone, and they saw now throughout all the southern region. [...] she then took a fourth stone and they then saw throughout all the eastern region of the world.]

⁸⁴ JS 27 fol., f. 314r.

⁸⁵ ÍB 312 4to, pp. 23–24.

The majority of manuscripts in this sub-group also include significant differences in names, such as the absence of a named smith, no father named for Liforius or Ingi (who is here from *Miklagarður í Grikklandi*), Idia (instead of Egidia), Aldryfa (instead of Alduria), and Eskilvardur of *Mundialand*. This sub-group also ends much more abruptly, eliminating any mention of children: ‘enn ad veitslunne endadre [voru] aller burt leister med godum giófum og feingú gott heimfarar leife, og ender so þessa sógu af Nitida hinne frægu’ [and when the feast ended everyone was sent away with good gifts and parted well for home; and so ends this saga of Nitida the famous];⁸⁶ however, it still begins in the same way as the rest of Group B. As demonstrated in Figures 1.2 and 1.3, I have posited a lost *B from which both subgroups descend instead of considering the fragmentary Perg. 8:o nr 10 VII as the group’s original text because it seems impossible to demonstrate it to be the original without a much closer examination of the Group B manuscripts.

While ÍBR 47 seems to be related to the other manuscripts in this sub-group, considering in its structure and the form of certain passages of text like the seeing-stones scene, there are also a number of significant differences, which seem both to separate it from Group B as a whole and also connect it to at least one of the later groups, Group D. ÍBR 47 shares with the oldest Group D manuscript, JS 56, a significant variation of the name Liforius, which here becomes Liprius/Lifrius, and an unusual variation on the ending of the text where Nítíða’s son is sent to rule India and so manage the parents’ two separate kingdoms in that way (‘son er Rigardur het, hann sendi hann til Indialands og vard þar kongur yfir síðann’ [a son who was called Rigardur; he sent him to India and there became king afterwards]⁸⁷). The four regions structure of the seeing-stones scene is

⁸⁶ Lbs 1172 4to, f. 144v. The verb *voru* is here supplied from ÍB 138 4to, f. 115v.

⁸⁷ ÍBR 47 4to, p. 223.

also shared, though this is of course common to the wider Group B as well. These similarities suggest that at least part of Group B, in Papp 4:o 31 and ÍBR 47 is related to Group D, as shown in Figure 1.3.

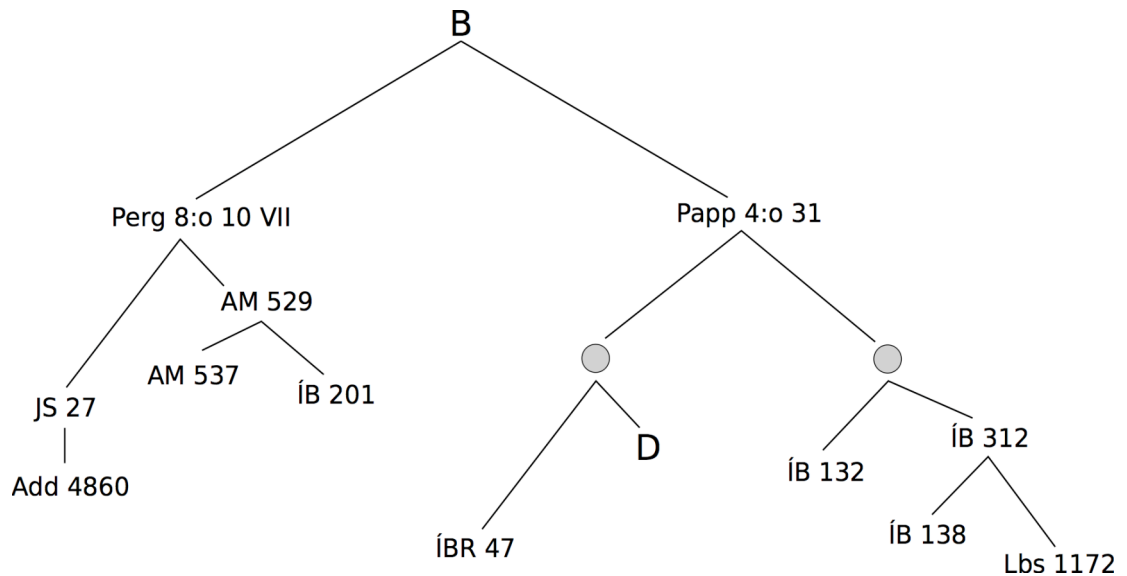


Figure 1.3: Groups B and D Manuscripts

Unfortunately, few of the Group B manuscripts are localizable, meaning that no large patterns or clusters are yet evident (see Map 1.1 above). The five known locations cover four separate areas (including the Westfjords and the north of Iceland relatively near to the episcopal seat of Hólar), and this appears to be more or less typical of early modern Icelandic manuscript distribution.⁸⁸ Further study is needed, however, to make any conclusive arguments about the geography and origins of Group B.

3. Group C

Group C includes seven manuscripts: Papp fol. nr 1 (1600×1650), JS 625 4to (1600×1900), JS 628 4to (1787), *Lbs 2405 8vo (1790), Lbs 2406 8vo (1791), *ÍB 277 4to

⁸⁸ Springborg identifies these (and other) areas as early modern Icelandic scribal centres (pp. 57–81). See also Hall, ‘Making Stemmas with Small Samples’, fig. 14.2 (‘The distribution of pre-1700 *Konráðs saga* manuscripts’).

(1833), ÍB 233 8vo (1855–56). This group is the most heterogenous and more research needs to be carried out to understand fully the relationships among the manuscripts, but these texts are united in their use of Structure 1 and, except for Lbs 2406 8vo and ÍB 277 4to, by their use of the verb *byrja* [start, begin] to open the saga. Papp fol. nr 1, JS 625 4to, and JS 628 4to all begin ‘Þesse saga Byriast af Einum *Agætum* Meþkonge er Nitida hiet, huor ed [*sic*] stýrde Fracklande hinú Göða hon var vitur og væn kiæn & kúrteis. hon hafde ä hófde sier gúll coronú’ [This saga begins, of an excellent maiden-king who is called Nitida, who had ruled France the Good. She was wise and promising, clever and courteous. She had on her head a gold crown].⁸⁹ For this reason these three surely form a sub-grouping. They also share the same list of countries in the seeing-stones scene (*Frackland, Gaskavan, Galetiam, Flandren; Danmørk, Noreg, Island, Færeyar, Orknejar, Svþþiöd, Eingland, Irland; Asiam, Indiam, Serkland*).⁹⁰ Lbs 2405 8vo, however, begins, ‘Þetta æfennþýre Þýriast af Einumm meþkónge er Nitida hét, hún styrde Fracklannde. hún var bæde vitur og væn, hún bar á höfde sinu gull kórónú’ [This adventure begins, of a maiden-king who is called Nitida. She ruled France. She was both wise and promising].⁹¹ This manuscript lists the same place names as the other three, but adds Rome and *Judeam* to the list of countries, and does not call Nítiða’s kingdom France *the Good*. All four of these versions call Livorius’s father Fabrutius, do not mention Nítiða’s father at the beginning, and do not name the smith.

Lbs 2406 begins quite differently: ‘Fordumm daga, riede eirn agiætur meþkongur fyrer Fracklande hinu gooda er Nitida hiet, hun var bædi væn & vitur kiæn & kurteis, hun hafdi gull coronu ä hófdi’ [In days long ago, ruled an excellent maiden-king over France the Good, who is called Nitida. She was both promising and wise, clever and

⁸⁹ JS 625 4to, f. 61r.

⁹⁰ JS 625 4to, ff. 64v–65r.

⁹¹ Lbs 2405 8vo.

couteous. She had a gold crown on her head].⁹² However, it does show similarities to the first sub-group and to JS 628 in particular. Lbs 2406's description of Nítíða as 'bædi væn & vitur kiæn & kurteis' is identical to that in JS 628, and the very end of each text is also nearly identical. All of the countries listed in JS 628 are present in Lbs 2406 as well, but there are a number of additions not found in any of the other groups. To the northern countries, this manuscript's anonymous scribe adds *Gautland*, *Biarmaland*, *Halogaland*, and *Grændland*, and adds them more or less according to their corresponding locations in terms of actual geography:⁹³ the first three come after Sweden, and Greenland is added just before Iceland. No other manuscript in any group includes these additional northern place names. ÍB 277 also does not open with *byrja*: 'Einn Meýkóngur styrde Frakklande enu góða, er Niteda hjet. hún var bædi vitur og kurteýs. og bar á höfde sér eina gull kórónu' [A maiden-king ruled France the Good, who was called Nitida. She was both wise and courteous, and wore on her head a gold crown].⁹⁴ Nevertheless, this manuscript shows influences from older Group C manuscripts such as Lbs 2405. The ending is similar in these texts, and the phrase 'þeirra son hiet Rikon, eftter keisaranum födur hennar' [their son was called Rikon, after the emperor her father],⁹⁵ which does not appear in other manuscripts. ÍB 277's enumeration of place names is also identical to that of Lbs 2405, except for the latter's inclusion of *Judeam*.

The relationships among the manuscripts discussed so far could tentatively be visualized as in Figure 1.4.

⁹² Lbs 2406 8vo, f. 103r.

⁹³ See Rudolf Simek, 'Elusive Elysia, or, Which Way to Glæsisvellir? On the Geography of the North in Icelandic Legendary Fiction', in *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson on his 65th Birthday, 26th May 1986*, ed. by Rudolf Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen (Vienna: Böhlau Nachf., 1986), pp. 247–75.

⁹⁴ ÍB 277 4to, p. 46.

⁹⁵ Lbs 2405 8vo.

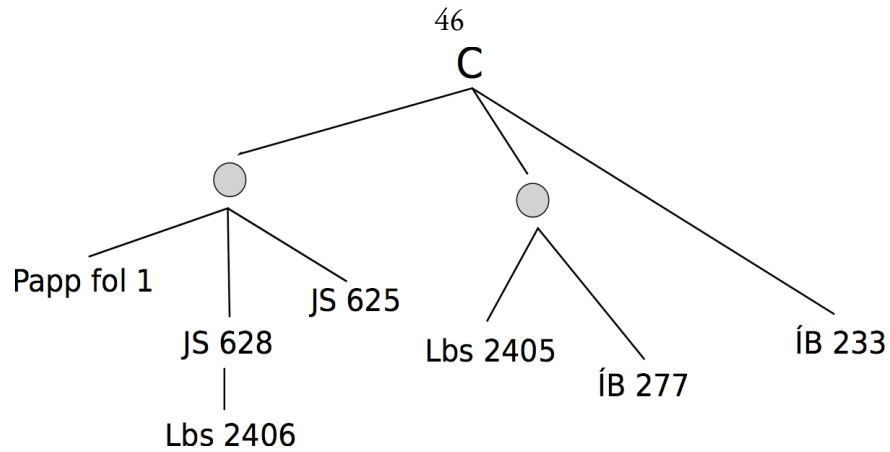


Figure 1.4: Group C Manuscripts

The remaining text in ÍB 233 is perhaps the most different, though it still begins with *byrja*: ‘Svo byrjar þessa Sögu að fyrir Frakklandi réði einn ágjætur meykóngur sem hét Nitidá, dóttir Rigards Keysara er þar red fyrir fordum. Hún sat í borg þeirri er París heitir höfuð borg Frakklands’ [So begins this saga, that over France ruled an excellent maiden-king who was called Nitida, daughter of Emperor Rigard who ruled there long ago. She sat in the city that is called Paris, [the] capital city of France].⁹⁶ In Nítíða’s description, however, there is mention neither of a *gullkoronu* (she instead has a *gullegann sal*) nor of her being *vitur*, *væn*, *kurteis*, or *kæn*; she is instead ‘hin fríðasta og veglegasta mey’ [the prettiest and most splendid maiden].⁹⁷ A number of personal names also take a slightly different form in this manuscript: Ægidia (Egidia), Húgi (Hugon), and Februs (Fabrutius), along with additions not present in other Group C manuscripts: the smith Probus (seen in some Group A manuscripts) and the *Nikulás saga leikara* characters, although here, interestingly, Fastus and Nikulás leikari are both sons of Nítíða and Livorius (as is also seen later in Group E), and two more sons, completely absent in all other versions, which at most name two sons, are also named: Þorgrímur mikill kappi and

⁹⁶ ÍB 233 8vo, p. 3.

⁹⁷ ÍB 233 8vo, p. 3.

Hringur.⁹⁸ ÍB 233 thus shows an interesting mixture of characteristics of both the A and C groups, with innovations of its own on top of that, such as the addition of *Bretland* and *Frísland*, and an odd grouping of ‘Hispaníu Indíalanð og Flandern’ in the list of countries.⁹⁹ Overall, it still seems to fit better in Group C than Group A, especially considering its opening phrases. It seems possible that this manuscript, while primarily influenced by Group C manuscripts, was also influenced by one from Group A, though considering ÍB 233’s late date (it is the group’s youngest), it is impossible for it to be the primary link between these two groups, as so many other Group C manuscripts date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It could of course also be a copy of an older lost manuscript that more clearly links these two groups. Finally, concerning the geographic origin of Group C manuscripts, unfortunately only two locations are known, but they are both in Skagafjörður, in northern Iceland.

4. Group D

There are six manuscripts in Group D, which is the first of the three later groups, appearing only after the turn of the eighteenth century: JS 56 4to (1760), ÍBR 59 4to (1798/99), Lbs 2786 8vo (1869), Lbs 4492 4to (1892), *Lbs 4493 4to (1902), Lbs 2918 4to (1900s). Each manuscript version in the group is written using Structure 2, and in the seeing-stones episode all but one (Lbs 4493) name four world regions only (North, West, South, East, in that order) instead of three regions with specific countries, as in the second branch of Group B. Each text also begins with ‘Sá meykongur’ [That maiden-king]. Group D can be organized roughly as illustrated in Figure 1.5.

⁹⁸ ÍB 233 8vo, pp. 57–58.

⁹⁹ ÍB 233 8vo, pp. 45–46.

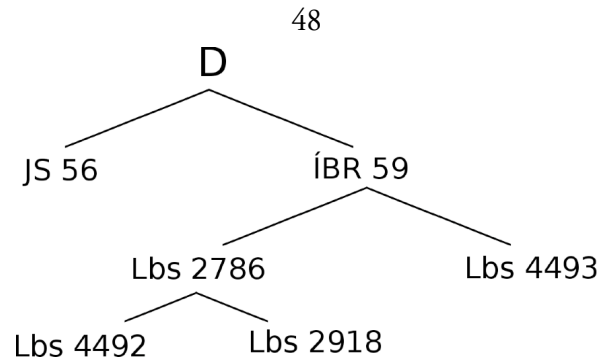


Figure 1.5: Group D Manuscripts

The oldest Group D manuscripts, JS 56 and ÍBR 59, can be considered closest to the original text that branched off from Group B to form the new Group D, and JS 56 seems closer to that group than some of the other Group D manuscripts. ÍBR 59 can be considered that from which the remaining Group D manuscripts may have been copied, either directly or indirectly. The dates of these manuscripts certainly allow for this possibility. Both of these older manuscripts, however, share a similar opening: ‘Sá Meikóngur Réde fyrir Nordur álfu heimsins er Nitida hét’ [That maiden-king ruled over the northern region of the world, who is called Nitida].¹⁰⁰ However, these two texts have significantly different endings, and JS 56’s is, as mentioned above, similar to that of Group B’s ÍBR in its mention of a son being sent to India: ‘Lifrius kongur sat epttir i Frankarýke, hann atti son er Rýgardur hiet hann sende hann til Indialands og var þar kongur sydann og Liukumm vier so Sogu af Nitidä hinne fræknu’ [King Lifrius ruled afterwards in France. He had a son who was called Rygardur. He sent him to India, and there was king afterwards. And thus we end the saga of Nitida the famous].¹⁰¹

From ÍBR 59, Lbs 2786, Lbs 2918, and Lbs 4492 form one sub-group, as they share the opening ‘Sá meikóngr Riedi fyrir norðr löndum, edr norðr álfu heimsins, er Nitida hiet. hún var hin fridasta frægasta og kurteisasta mæri þann tima’ [That maiden-

¹⁰⁰ JS 56 4to, f. 68v.

¹⁰¹ JS 56 4to, ff. 74v–75r.

king ruled over northern lands, or the northern region of the world, who is called Nitida. She was the prettiest, most famous, and most courteous maiden in that time],¹⁰² the ending phrases, and unique versions of names like Visído for Visio and Snjálin for Syjalín, sister of Liforius. The final manuscript Lbs 4493 is set apart because the text shows considerable differences, such as the naming of specific countries in the seeing-stones (and this scene actually very much resembles that in Group A texts),¹⁰³ along with the addition of a reference to *Nikulás saga leikara* at the end.¹⁰⁴ The opening also differs slightly from that of the other sub-groups: ‘Sá Meykongur réði fyrir Frakklandi og fleiri löndum Norðurlafunnar er Nitída fræga var kölluð hún var hin fríðasta og kurteisasta jómfú’ [That maiden-king ruled over France and many northern lands who was called Nitida the famous. She was the prettiest and most courteous maid].¹⁰⁵ In terms of location of origin, among Group D manuscripts only Lbs 4493 is known for certain, based on the Tóbias Tóbiasson’s ending colophon, indicating that he wrote it in Reykjavík.

5. Group E

Group E has at least eight manuscripts,¹⁰⁶ the oldest of which dates from only just before the mid-nineteenth century: *Lbs 1711 8vo (1848), Lbs 2152 4to (1850×1899), *ÍB 290 8vo (1851), Lbs 3510 8vo (1851×1899), *Lbs 4656 4to (1855–60), *Lbs 2148 4to (1863), *Lbs 2929 4to (1888), *Lbs 3941 8vo (1900–50). It is quite likely that this group derives from a verse *rímur* version of *Nítíða saga*, based primarily on the fact that it begins entirely differently from all of the other groups—even radically differently from the oldest

¹⁰² Lbs 2786 8vo, p. 14.

¹⁰³ Lbs 4493 4to, ff. 24r–24v.

¹⁰⁴ Lbs 4493 4to, f. 25v.

¹⁰⁵ Lbs 4493 4to, f. 21r.

¹⁰⁶ A ninth might also belong in this group; see below.

groups A and B—but also because the Group E manuscripts are all so young. All texts in Group E open with the phrase *æruverðugir sagna skrifarar* [venerable saga writers], which further might be interpreted as suggesting a *rímur* origin: the idea of composition is brought to the forefront immediately, rather than the subject of the story itself, which is being composed. Additionally, each text follows Structure 2. The group can be divided into two sub-groups, as in Figure 1.6.

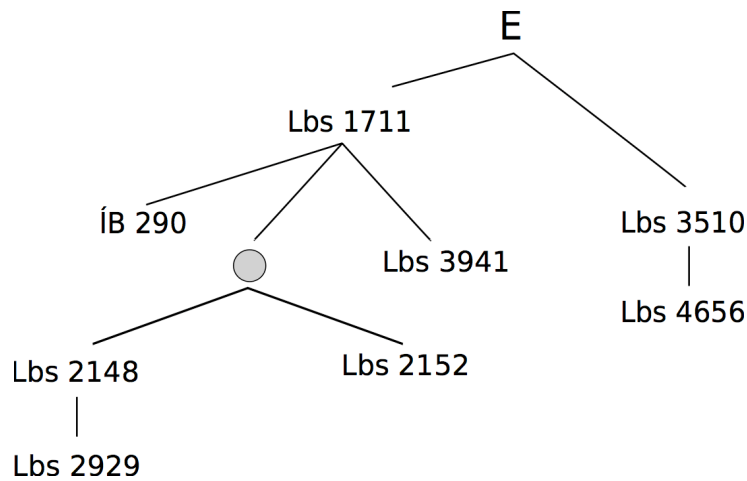


Figure 1.6: Group E Manuscripts

What distinguishes the first sub-group, comprising all but Lbs 3510 and Lbs 4656, is the use of the names Bonius the smith instead of Hippolytus or an unnamed figure, Viktoria for Visio, Februarius of Grikkland rather than Miklagarður (father of Ingi), and Soldan of Miklagarður rather than Serkland. In the episode with the seeing-stones, these texts do not name any countries, but the regions South, West, and East (in that order) are highlighted, with the North conspicuously absent, considering its regular occurrence in other groups. A further pair can be seen in Lbs 2148 and 2929, which share a number of readings. The other sub-group, of just Lbs 3510 and Lbs 4656, does not name any countries when the regions of the world are noted, but the South, North, and East, respectively, are mentioned, with the West excluded, which is a more predictable regional description. Significant names shared in this sub-group are Eskilvardur of Macedonia

(instead of Mundia), and the inclusion of Fástus and Nikulás leikari (but not Dorma and Valdimar) at the end. As in one Group C sub-branch, the intertextual reference here is not as in Group A where Fástus is a grandson of Nítíða and Liforius, but he is another of their sons: ‘4a Synne og 2. Dætur og hiet firste Sonur þeirra Rýgardur Sem styrde Frakklande eptir fodur sinum. Annar son þeirra hiet Fástus, vard hann kongur í Ungarýa’ [four sons and two daughters and called their first son Rygard, who ruled France after his father. Another son of theirs was called Fástus; he became king in Hungary].¹⁰⁷ While Lbs 3510 is defective, without either an ending or the very beginning, we cannot be certain that the *Nikulás saga leikara* reference is present here as well, but based on the other strong similarities with Lbs 4656, it seems highly likely that it would be. The inclusion of this reference suggests the possibility that Group A influenced this branch of Group E, if not the whole group, though how exactly is not possible to say at present.

Finally, in terms of geography, as mentioned briefly already, the six manuscripts in this group (from both sub-groups) for which scribal information is known all originate in Eastern Iceland, as shown on Map 1.3.

¹⁰⁷ Lbs 4656 4to, p. 78.



Map 1.3: Group E Manuscripts

It is plausible that the other manuscripts of the group also come from this region, considering how tightly knit Group E seems to be, textually. It is also remarkable that such a clear picture can be painted of the origins of this group and the manuscript relationships within it, considering that such little information about provenance is known for most of the manuscripts in other groups; arguably the scribes within this network had an established convention of signing and localizing their manuscripts. Additionally, one of the manuscripts I have not been able to consult (Baltimore, MD, Ottenson Collection MS. Nr 17) is known to have originated in Ekkjufell in the Eastfjords, so it would not be surprising to discover that this manuscript also belongs in Group E; in fact, it would be highly improbable for it to belong to any other group, as no manuscripts from other groups come from anywhere near to Group E's eastern Iceland cluster.¹⁰⁸ There are, in general, relatively few manuscripts surviving today that come from

¹⁰⁸ Of course, without knowing the location of origin of so many other manuscripts in other groups, it is difficult to argue this with certainty; however, I feel that the likelihood of all or even a majority of the unlocalized manuscripts coming from the east is very low.

the eastern region of Iceland, making this group potentially very important for the history of post-medieval Icelandic literature and manuscripts in terms of scribal and reading communities.¹⁰⁹

6. Group F

Group F contains five manuscripts, again all rather young: *Lbs 1305 8vo (1820), SÁM 13 (1851), Lbs 1319 8vo (1852), *Lbs 2780 8vo (ca. 1870), Lbs 3675 8vo (1880). Each text uses Structure 1 and contains the names Víbus/Vibuls/Vípilíus for the smith, Víkio for Visio, Fabrius (as father of Livorius), Aldaria (aunt of Livorius), and the clear scribal errors *Vasconiam* (for *Gasconiam*, which appears in Group A and is a bit garbled in Group C) and *Pistiliam* (for *Palestinam*, which appears in Groups A and B) in the seeing-stones scene. Further sub-divisions are also possible in this group. SÁM 13, Lbs 1319, and Lbs 1305 have the same beginning and ending, while Lbs 2780 and Lbs 3675 show clear divergences. At the beginning, the first sub-group describes Nítiða as ‘bædi vitr og væn, ljós og riód í andliti’ [both wise and promising, light and rosy in face],¹¹⁰ while the second sub-group makes an addition to say Nítiða is ‘bædi vitur væn og vel að sér um flesta hluti, hún var yfir máta fögur, ljós rjóð í andliti’ [both wise [and] promising, and for the most part fine. She was exceedingly beautiful, light and rosy in face].¹¹¹ The sub-divisions within Group F can be seen in Figure 1.7.

¹⁰⁹ See also Davíð Ólafsson, ‘Wordmongers: Post-Medieval Scribal Culture and the Case of Sighvatur Grímsson’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of St Andrews, 2009) <<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/770>>, pp. 115–16, for evidence of a ‘vivid scribal community’ (p. 116) in nineteenth-century Breiðdalur, eastern Iceland, where some of these Group E manuscripts originate. See also Parsons.

¹¹⁰ Lbs 1305 4to, f. 234v.

¹¹¹ Lbs 2780 8vo, p. 1.

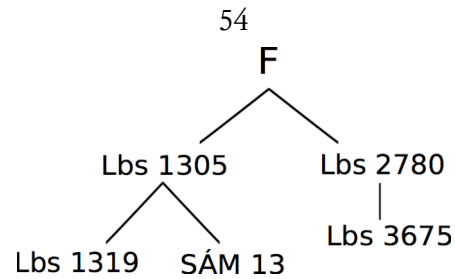


Figure 1.7: Group F Manuscripts

Information about the geographical origins of Group F is very limited, with only two locations known, in northern Iceland. Finally, as a means of summarizing visually what has been described in this chapter so far, Figure 1.8 shows a full stemma, which, it should be remembered, is only meant to be a rough approximation of various relationships among the manuscripts. The stemma, in addition to mapping out possible relationships between and among manuscripts, also shows that both Groups A and B, and indeed all of the extant groups represented in the manuscripts I have studied, can be said to descend from a lost medieval ‘original’ **Nítíða saga* represented in the diagram by X, and that were someone to attempt to reconstruct this (which is not something I aim to do), both branches of the stemma would be valuable in representing that medieval **Nítíða saga*.

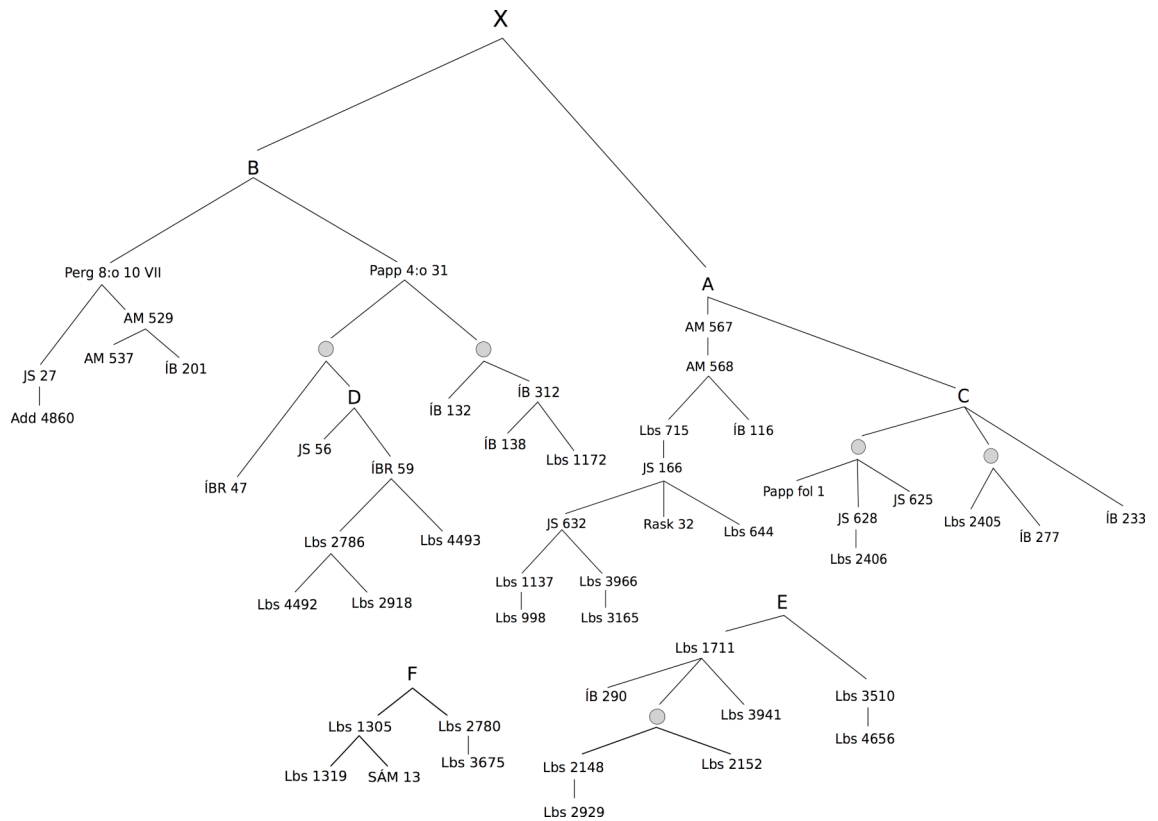


Figure 1.8: Rough Stemma of *Nitíða saga* Manuscripts

In the case studies that now follow, after discussing the seventeenth-century Group A JS 166 fol., I turn to the large selection of later manuscripts, to examine first the eighteenth-century Add. 4860 fol., a Group B manuscript with a connection to Britain, and which represents the branch of Group B not previously studied. In the third case study I will consider Lbs 3941 8vo, a Group E manuscript from the early twentieth century, which I chose primarily because the manuscript is so young, but also because its E-version of *Nitíða saga* shows important variations in the text that are very different to those of other versions.

II: THREE CASE STUDIES

The case studies here may be seen as representative examples of what happened to *Nitíða saga* after the medieval period from which the story originates. While the three cases are

all different and show a variety of changes and modifications to the text that separate these versions into different groups, and while they are not necessarily representative of all the manuscripts of their groups, the case studies have value as three specific examples among many, from which a larger textual and cultural history surrounding *Nítíða saga* may be imagined. In each case my comparisons will be with the best known version of the saga,¹¹² which happens to be a Group B text. These studies provide a taste of the rich variation not only in the medieval story, but also in the people who caused this variation to occur—the scribes, listeners, readers, and other members of the reading communities within which post-medieval manuscript culture thrived. Davíð Ólafsson’s recent doctoral thesis includes a case study of the nineteenth-century scribe Sighvatur Grímsson as an example of one man who became a prolific copyist by taking advantage of his circumstances in order to educate himself and supplement his livelihood through commissioned scribal projects. Davíð’s detailed case study has as its foundation microhistorical methodology,¹¹³ which is usually employed in the study of individual figures in history, as in Davíð’s thesis, with the understanding that one detailed example is potentially more valuable than a more conventional broader approach to writing history. As Giovanni Levi states in an essay about microhistory, ‘The unifying principle of all microhistorical research is the belief that microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved’.¹¹⁴ However, this principle can also be applied to the study of concrete and even abstract objects, such as physical manuscript books and individual texts.

¹¹² Loth, ed., ‘Nítíða saga’. This published version is not only the most familiar to scholars but also the one always referred to and studied hitherto. Consequently, it is also the version on which the other chapters of this thesis focus, as mentioned in the Introduction.

¹¹³ Davíð Ólafsson, pp. 17, 36. See also Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Microhistory: Two or Three Things I Know About It’, trans. by John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), 10–35; Giovanni Levi, ‘On Microhistory’, in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. by Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 97–119.

¹¹⁴ Levi, p. 101.

I call texts abstract objects because of the simple fact that texts written in manuscripts are such fluid and unstable entities, yet they exist, solidly, in the minds of those who write and rewrite them. The following case studies will not only demonstrate *Nítíða saga*'s textual variation and manuscript context from a material philological perspective, but will also combine with that a microhistorical approach that sees the audiences of these three texts through the saga's adaptability and the text as a figure in history appearing and reappearing at each instance of copying and recopying.

1) JS 166 fol. (181v–190r)¹¹⁵

The manuscript JS 166 fol. belongs to Group A. *Nítíða saga* is the fifth of eight sagas in the manuscript, which was written during the winter of 1678–79 by a single scribe named Þórður Jónsson of Strandseljar,¹¹⁶ a farm that was probably located in the district Ögurhreppur in the south of Norður-Ísafjarðarsýsla, which is itself in the Westfjords of Iceland. While very little is known about Þórður at present, he seems potentially to be an important member of the scribal community surrounding the farmer, scholar, and manuscript patron Magnús Jónsson í Vigur in the late seventeenth century.¹¹⁷ Many of the manuscript's leaves (including a significant number of those in which *Nítíða saga* is copied) have been damaged, both from wear and tear and trimming, and in a number of places missing text has been added by a later hand, identified as that of Páll Pállsson (1806–77) from Reykjavík, who is also associated with over 250 other manuscripts.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ See also McDonald, 'Variance Uncovered', which is based on the present case study.

¹¹⁶ Handrit.is, 'Biography: Þórður Jónsson', *Handrit.is*. <<http://handrit.is/en/biography/view/ThoJon029>> [accessed 30 May 2011].

¹¹⁷ Further research into Þórður Jónsson and his connections would be a fruitful avenue of research; however, there is not room here to do so.

¹¹⁸ Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenskar æviskrár*, IV (1951), pp. 136–37; Handrit.is, 'Biography: Páll Pállsson stúdent' <<http://handrit.is/en/biography/view/PalPal003>> [accessed 30 May 2011].

Þórður Jónsson was also the scribe of other late seventeenth-century manuscripts, including JS 6 4to (a copy of *Jónsbók*), JS 12 fol. (*Florilegium Historicum, það er einn fagur aldingarður ýmislegra frásagna [...]*), which includes *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*), JS 148 4to (*Visitasiubækur*), JS 641 4to (*Sögubók* of seven romances and an eighth written by a different scribe), and Lbs 715 4to (which also contains a defective copy of *Nítíða saga* from the same group, among other *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*), as well as at least one manuscript in the British Library, mainly containing romances.¹¹⁹

The other texts in JS 166 besides *Nítíða saga* are *Trójumanna saga*, *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar*, *Hálfðanar saga Brönufóstra*, and *Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar*; these two *fornaldarsögur*, three *riddarasögur* (both translated and Icelandic), and one *Íslendingaþáttur* are more or less typical company for *Nítíða saga*. The text is divided into thirteen chapters in this manuscript.

Abbreviations are employed throughout very regularly, and there are a number of simple sketches of faces enclosed within the first letter of some of the chapters, occurring throughout the entire manuscript. The faces are sometimes found, for example, within the initial <N> of 'Nú'.¹²⁰ A colophon following *Nítíða saga* gives the date Þórður completed it: 'þann 7. febrúarii anno 1679'.¹²¹ Nearly all the other texts in the manuscript contain similar colophons. The presence of these dates with the texts in this manuscript concretely attests to the Icelandic winter writing process within farmhouse communities, which allowed for *sagnaskemmtun* [saga-diversion], the reading aloud of sagas from manuscripts, to be a part of the entertainment and activities engaged in during the *kvöldvaka* [evening-wake].¹²²

¹¹⁹ Add. 4857 (1669–90).

¹²⁰ JS 166 fol., ff. 182r, 183r, 186r, 187r, 189r.

¹²¹ JS 166 fol., f. 190r.

¹²² Davíð Ólafsson, pp. 118–22, 154–58; Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*, pp. 38–46, 73.

As seems typical for a Group A version, in JS 166 *Nítíða saga* is longer than in the more familiar Group B version in AM 529/537, with a number of longer episodes that are otherwise quite similar to the corresponding sections of the other text. In JS 166 the saga is roughly 6600 words, whereas in AM 529/537 it is roughly 5700 words. In general, much of the saga is the same in both versions, sometimes even verbatim, pointing to a close relationship among the different versions in Groups A and B. Though, as outlined briefly above, what differentiates these groups best are the episodes and descriptions present in the Group A versions, which flesh out the story as a whole. As I noted above in discussing the stemmata, it is difficult to say with certainty exactly how Groups A and B are related and which is the older, more conservative version of the medieval text; however, I am inclined to think that Group B is a shortened version, rather than Group A being a lengthened version.

One part of the story where some more detailed episodes are readily apparent is the end of the saga, from the wedding celebrations onwards. Whereas in Group B there are a number of details provided,¹²³ in JS 166 the triple wedding festivities are much lengthier, fully fleshed out with even more details of both the celebration and the narrator's perception of it. The scene first describes the elaborate celebrations themselves:

Hefiast nu upp þesse þriu brullaup, j upp hafe Augusti mänadar, og stödu yfer allann þann manud, med miklum prýs og veralldar blöma, þar var fagurlega eted & drucked, allz konar wýn og beste dryckur, sem kiender voru hier ä nordur løndumm, & önnur djör mäet fæda, med huørskinz bestu kräsumm & friddum til reýdd. þar voru allra handa leýkur framdur þar var burttreýd & turniment.

¹²³ The episode in AM 537 4to reads: 'hefiast nu þesse þriu brudkaup i upphafe augusti manadar og yfir stendur allan þann manud med miklum veralldarpris og blöma, þar var fallega eted og fagurlega drucked med allskins matbunade og dírustu drickiumm, þar var allskins skemtun framinn i burtreidumm og hliodfærslætte, enn þar sem kongarner geingu var nidurbreidt pell og purpure og heidurleg klæde' (Loth, ed., 'Nítida saga', pp. 35–36).

Riddarar og Jungkiærar ridu vt fyrir sýnar vnnustur, þar voru framdar allra handa hliöd færa lystir, sumer skiemta sier med fräsögumm, sumer med Annallumm og vísinda bökumm, enn þar sem kongarner geingu, var breýdtt nidur pell og purpure, og kostuleg klæde.¹²⁴

[These three weddings now begin at the start of the month of August, and they lasted the whole month with great ceremony and worldly glory. There was lovely eating and drinking, all sorts of wine and the best drinks, as were known here in northern lands, and other costly foods provided, with each of the best delicacies and lovely things carried out. There were all sorts of games performed, there was bohourt¹²⁵ and tournament; knights and young men rode out for their lovers. There were performed musical arts of all sorts. Some were amused with stories, some with annals and learned books. And there where the kings walked was lain velvet and purple, and costly fabric.]

Here, all aspects of the wedding celebrations and entertainment are noted, and the variety of entertainment in particular, is far greater here than in the other version. Enhancements of the basic wedding outline from AM 529/537 include for example the more specific descriptions of the food and drink available, the types of people participating in tournaments, and, especially noteworthy, that some people sought entertainment from different types of books. The distinction between *frásögn*, *annál*, and *vísinda-bók* is especially noteworthy as an explicit comment on literature itself, indicating that these are the types of texts appropriate for entertainment at the most important and extravagant of royal celebrations, and that stories, annals, and learned books go hand in hand with tournaments, feasting, and other courtly pastimes. This contrasts, for example, with an

¹²⁴ JS 166 fol., ff. 189v–190r.

¹²⁵ The term *burtreið* is translated here not as ‘joust’ but as ‘bohourt’, the now generally obsolete English descendant of the medieval French term *béhourd*, *bobort* from which the Old Norse *burtreið* ultimately derives (perhaps via medieval German), even though it is doubtful whether the distinction between bohourt (mass tourney among teams of knights with blunted weapons) and joust (combat between individual knights) was understood in Scandinavia and Iceland. I must thank Alan V. Murray for drawing this to my attention.

earlier mention of Livorius, disguised as *Eskelvarður*, having entertained *Nítíða* and *Syjalín* with ‘*morgumm dæmesögumm*’ [many fables/parables/tales/exempla],¹²⁶ which suggests that this other type of literature or entertainment—the *dæmisaga*—while suitable for important, high-status consumers like *Nítíða*, belongs primarily in homely and familiar settings, at the hearth during winter, rather than at high court during official ceremonies in summer. All of these references to literature and learning combined, however, show its overall importance in the romance world in which the saga takes place, which complements *Nítíða*’s presentation early on as ‘*vel vite borinn sem hinn lærdaste klerkur, þui hün kunne þar 10. tungur sem adrir kunnu ei nema eina*’ [as knowledgeable as the most learned scholar, that she knew ten languages when others knew only one],¹²⁷ and other romances’ general preoccupation with learning.¹²⁸ In AM 529, *Nítíða*’s introduction is similar: ‘*suo buen at viti sem hinn frodasti klerkur. og hinn sterkasti borgarveggur matti hun giora med sinu viti yfer annara manna vit og byrgia suo vti annara rad. og þar kunni hun .x. rad er adrer kunnu eitt*’ [as endowed with knowledge as the wisest scholar, and she could make the strongest castle-wall through an intellect above other people’s, and she could also outwit the counsel of others, so much that she knew ten answers when others knew one].¹²⁹ However, the differences, especially the seeming confusion of ‘ten languages’ with ‘ten answers’, demonstrate further that these manuscripts represent two distinct versions of the saga, as the differences are too complex to be simply scribal error. The subtle distinctions seen in JS 166 between different types of written material, as well as the sense that linguistic skill, literature, and literacy are

¹²⁶ JS 166 fol., f. 188r.

¹²⁷ JS 166 fol., f. 181v.

¹²⁸ Alenka Divjak, *Studies in the Traditions of Kirialax Saga* (Ljubljana: Inštitut Nove revije, zavod za humanistiko, 2009); Kalinke, ‘The Foreign Language Requirement’.

¹²⁹ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 4.

important themes in the text are not present in the Group B version, which instead here highlights cleverness as a more prominent theme. Whether these differences reflect different medieval versions or whether they can be attributed to the changing tastes of Icelanders in the intervening years is uncertain.

In addition to these elaborations on the wedding scene, the narrator's voice appears briefly when mention is made of expensive and possibly exotic food ('*sem kiender voru hier ä nordur löndumm*'). The mention is off-hand, but acknowledges, importantly, that the narrator is a member of a different geographical, if not cultural, community than that which he describes in the text, and this is only really apparent with the inclusion of the adverb *hier*. Even without this adverb, specifying northern lands suggests a narrator who is aware of his primarily Icelandic, northern audience, even if he is not himself characterized as nordic. The narrator is not yet concerned with commenting on the subject of his story, but emphasis is placed on northern lands, in a similar way to the northern focus evident in Group B.¹³⁰ The focus of this passage is, so far, on description and reinforcement of courtly norms and expectations through feasts and celebrations, with the only interpretive aspect mentioned in passing.

Having set up the magnificent celebrations in this way, though, the description continues with a much more interpretive viewpoint, which shows the narrator's relationship with the material he is relating to the audience:

verdur ei alltt skýrtt *med öþialgre tungu*, huørsu mikill fagnadur vered mun hafa ä þeim Dögumm J öndueige heimsinnz, hjä slýku höffölke. Stendur nu Brullauped *med mikille glede þessa heimz*, & Dýrlęgre skiemtan, af höfðinglegre tilfeyngiu, sem nög er til j þuilýkumm stöðumm. Enn af þui ad þessa heimz glede lýdur skiött, og ei sýst Brullaups glaumur, þä var Brullauped wtdrucked, og höfðingiar wtleýster

¹³⁰ This focus is evident in the narrator's comment about the inadequacy of his language to describe the wedding festivities; I discuss this further in Chapter Six.

*med störumm giøfum gulle og gymmsteinumm, perlumm og dýrgripumm, skildest þesse hoflýdur med bestu vinattu.*¹³¹

[All is not clear with a clumsy tongue, how great rejoicing might be had in those days in the throne of the world, near such courtiers. Now the wedding stands with great joy of this world, and splendid amusement, from courtly provisions, as is sufficient in such a place. And because this world's joy passes quickly, and not least the merriment of a wedding, then the wedding was concluded, and the nobles led out with great gifts of gold and gemstones, pearls and precious jewels, these courtiers parted with the best friendship.]

In this half of the passage, description becomes secondary to commentary, inverting that relationship set out in the first half. More is said in this version of the commentary than that in Group B, with small additions to the text. Further, even where the message is essentially identical in the two manuscript versions, it is relayed with rather different diction. JS 166's *ei alltt skjrtt* is used for AM 529/537's *ei audsagt*, it is *öþialgre tungu* for *öfrode tungu*, and *öndueige heimsinnz* (repeating exactly the phrase used at the saga's opening) for *midiumm heimum*, to give only a few examples. Further, the addition of *ä þeim dögumm* works to distance the story temporally, whereas in other versions the distance implied in the corresponding section is simply spatial. Despite focusing on the transitory nature of celebrations like the triple wedding, the passage still emphasizes the importance of the occasion and the relationships fostered through it—those present leave *med bestu vinattu*.

Another striking part of this version, which defines Group A, is a small expository passage in the closing remarks of the text after the weddings have been described, where the narrator explicitly connects *Nítíða saga* to *Nikulás saga leikara*:

¹³¹ JS 166 fol., f. 190r.

Livorius kongur & meykongur stýrdu Franns vel & lengi. þau áttu sier ägiæt born 4. sonu & 2. dætur. Rýgardur hét þeirra ellste son, eptter mödur fœdur sýnum, er sýdann stýrde Fracklande med allann heidur og sæmd, enn hannz son hét Fhaustus, er vann Ungaria med her skylle & seigät fornar bækur ad hann hafe vered fadir Niculásar leýkara, er vmm sýdir eignadest Döttir kongsinnz af Grycklande Walldemarz, huor ed [sic] hiet Dormä huoruim kvennkoste hann näde medur med brögdumm [...], sem seigir j søgu hannz.¹³²

[King Livorius and the maiden-king ruled France long and well. They had excellent children: four sons and two daughters. Their eldest son was called Rígarður, after his mother's father, and he ruled France with all honour. And his son was called Faustus, who won Hungary by harrying, and old books say that he had been the father of Nikulás leikari, who at last married the daughter of Walldemar king of Greece, who is called Dormä, whom he got as a match through tricks [...], as it says in his story.]

The reference must be an established part of this group of manuscripts, as in JS 166 it was not included in order to provide a smooth transition to the following text: *Nikulás saga leikara* does not appear in this manuscript at all, though it does occur in manuscript with *Nítíða saga* very often in other Group A manuscripts such as JS 632, Lbs 3966, AM 568, Rask 32, and Lbs 998. Further, within Group A, when both sagas do occur together, *Nikulás saga leikara* is often adjacent to *Nítíða saga*. Making Nítíða and Liforinus the great-grandparents of Nikulás leikari sets a firm connection between the two texts. From this evidence one can suggest that these two sagas were considered related in certain aspects of theme, style, or characterization, or a combination of these, by those who heard or read them, or at least by those who copied them. Because of this, it will be useful to compare the two sagas' narrative elements in later chapters of this thesis, for example to demonstrate similarities in the stories' themes and styles. This type of specific genealogical connection between different texts is relatively uncommon in Icelandic romance. Two of

¹³² JS 166 fol., f. 190r.

the only other examples of this occur in the younger recension of *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*, where that text links itself to *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*,¹³³ and in the long redaction of *Sigurðar saga þögla*, which connects itself to *Flores saga ok Blankiflur*.¹³⁴ Apart from this very specific intertextual connection, this ending quotation also demonstrates once more the importance of literary culture, physical books, and the act of reading or being read to, when it specifies that the story of Nikulás is known from *fornar bækur*. Just as books and stories are mentioned at the weddings and elsewhere in this version, here they reinforce the connection between sagas and their characters, the ancient books validating what is being written at present in the seventeenth century, despite their mention in this context being a well-known literary trope, which I discuss in Chapter Six.

After this, at the very end of the text, the saga is brought to a close and in so doing provides a final characterization of Nítíða, which is also a key aspect of Group A texts. After stating that none of their other children's names are known, the narrator says, 'Og liükumm vier hier med þessa søgu, af Nitedä frægu & hennar breýtelegumm brøgdumm' [And we end here this saga, of Nítíða the Famous and her various tricks].¹³⁵ Unlike in Group B versions, here Nítíða really does have the last word. Liforius is not mentioned again, and this is not just another mention of Nítíða's name, but one last opportunity to round out this character. Here, Nítíða's prominent role is seen through to the very end, and the audience is told to remember Nítíða as a trickster, which considering the preceding explicit connection to Nikulás leikari, who is called such

¹³³ Hugo Rydberg ed., *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns i yngre handskrifters redaktion* (Copenhagen: Møller, 1917). I must thank Alaric Hall for alerting me to this.

¹³⁴ Loth, ed., 'Sigurðar saga þögla', pp. 99–102.

¹³⁵ JS 166 fol., f. 190r. While JS 166 is certainly a representative manuscript of Group A, this final sentence is here missing a phrase that appears in one of the Group A branches. Rask 32, for example, adds to this ending 'med so voxnu nidurlæge' [with such an augmented conclusion], f. 35r.

because he is a trickster and uses magic, is even more appropriate. I deal with this in further detail in the following chapter on *Nítíða saga*'s intertextual relationships.

In JS 166, once the saga is brought to a close, there is one more noteworthy addition where the voice of the scribe comes to the fore. This verse in rhyming couplets is unique to this particular manuscript:

Hafe þeir þœck er hlýddu,
 & mæled og gamaned¹³⁶ þrýddu.
 Lesaran<um> Launist
 enn Langmælge riemst.
 Sætur og seggia lid,
 sitied allur j Gudz frid,
 Eg þesse öska & bid,
 ä þad haldest vid.¹³⁷

[May those who listened be thanked,
 and the speech and entertainment exhausted.
 May the reader be rewarded
 and longwinded talk diminish.
 Women and company of men,
 remain, all of you, in God's peace.
 I wish this and pray
 that it prevails.]

Here the scribe Þórður Jónsson (presumably, though of course the possibility exists that he copied the verse into this manuscript from his exemplar) speaks directly to his audience in the first person. Similar verses appear after other sagas in this manuscript as well, and were a somewhat common feature in Icelandic romance manuscripts in

¹³⁶ MS 'gamaded'.

¹³⁷ JS 166 fol., f. 190r.

general.¹³⁸ This final verse not only shows the voice of the scribe, but shows through the specific mention of listeners (*þeir [...] er hlýddu*) that the environment in which this saga was enjoyed was that of a community and not an individual: this instance in which the saga was written down was for it to be read aloud and enjoyed, not just as a record of the text, nor for personal study.

In terms of the geographical picture presented in the Group A *Nítíða saga* of JS 166, the passage of text is actually slightly shorter than that of some Group B versions. When *Nítíða* and *Eskelvarður* look into the *náttúrusteinar*, the world is, as expected, divided into thirds, though fewer lands are named specifically in this version. When they see Europe, it is ‘alla Frackland, Gasconia, Hispania, Galicia,¹³⁹ Flandren, & nær verande slot, lønd & þiöder, þar byggjande’ [all France, Gascony, Spain, Galicia, Flanders, and present castles, lands, and people dwelling there].¹⁴⁰ When they see the ‘Nordur älfu heimsinnz’, the only places specified are ‘Noreg, Danmørk, Eingland, & öll önnur er þar lyggia, & hann visse einginn Deyle ä’ [Norway, Denmark, England, and all others which lay there, and which he knew nothing of].¹⁴¹ This covers a couple of the basic Nordic countries while leaving room for a mental addition of other northern lands known by audience members, being suggestive of *öll önnur* without having to name any definitive locations. And when the ‘Austur älfu heimsinnz’ is seen, mention is made of ‘Indiäland,

¹³⁸ Jürg Glauser provides examples from romances including *Dínus saga drambláta*, *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*, and *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, and also suggests that some manuscripts favour these types of formulaic endings (Schlußformeln), while other manuscripts (of the same sagas) end their texts differently, confirming the involvement of the scribe in shaping the text (*Isländische Märchensagas*, pp. 86–92).

¹³⁹ This may explain AM 529/537’s *Hallitiam*, which has not been identified satisfactorily before. As has been noted above and will be evident in the remaining two case studies below, *Galicia* appears consistently in other manuscript version groups, while *Hallitia* does not. For another example of scribal error identified through textual comparison see McDonald, ‘Variance Uncovered’, p. 314.

¹⁴⁰ JS 166 fol., f. 188r.

¹⁴¹ JS 166 fol., f. 188r.

Falstnia,¹⁴² Asia, Serkland, & øll lønd austur og sudur vnder bruna belltted, þar sem ecki er bygt' [India, Falstnia, Asia, Serkland, and all lands east and south under the burning belt, which is uninhabited],¹⁴³ with the significant inclusion of *sudur* (south) in the designation of the region, as in Group B there is no mention of the south as a direction or as a region. While *øll lønd* in addition to those named are again evoked, they are less concrete than in the north, as a point is made not to say that Livorius knows of those other lands, perhaps rather ironically considering that is the general region—east and south, classified as one region here—from which he comes. But again, the focus returns to the lands of the north with the addition of information concerning the location in which Livorius's aunt resides: 'ei er hann j Svþa løndumm nie Sv<ij>jod> hiä Aldýnu frænd konu sinne [...]' [he is not in Swedish lands nor Sweden near his kinswoman Aldína].¹⁴⁴ This apparent distinction between Sweden proper and Swedish lands is not present in some other groups (though it does echo the distinction sometimes made between *Svíþjóð* and *Svíþjóð hinn kalda*),¹⁴⁵ but is consistent with its focus on the North and the many different lands and people within that world region.

Overall, this Group A version of *Nítíða saga* in JS 166 shows great variation in comparison to the Group B version, better known by scholars, which comes from AM 529/537. While JS 166 by far contains a longer story, there are still instances of contraction, such as in the portrayal of geographical knowledge, but even here, the text shows significant alteration, and differences that appear to be deliberate and meaningful, just as much as those changes that result in the text's length. As demonstrated in JS 166, there is a greater focus on literature, textual reception, and literacy as a cultural

¹⁴² This is a corruption of *Palestinam* [Palestine], which is present in AM 529/537 and other groups.

¹⁴³ JS 166 fol., f. 188r.

¹⁴⁴ JS 166 fol., f. 188r.

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter Three on geography and space.

phenomenon in Group A than in some other groups, and this has been shown in the references not merely to stories and tales internal and external to the present saga, but to different types of physical books, the acts of reading and listening, and the implication within the saga and without in metatextual material such as the scribe's verse, that enjoying stories is a shared social experience through which communities can be built and maintained.

2) Add. 4860 fol. (1r–16v)

This manuscript belongs to Group B, but it contains a different version than that in Loth's edition from AM 529/537. Therefore, while many similarities exist between the two, this version's differences and the specific manuscript's history are significant enough to warrant it as the second case study. Add. 4860 fol. is part of the British Library's Banks Collection. It was, along with many other manuscripts, given to the British Museum by Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), who is better known as a botanist and explorer alongside Captain James Cook,¹⁴⁶ but who also visited Iceland in 1772 (primarily to observe and collect samples of the local flora), and took back with him about thirty manuscripts in 1773. Banks also had manuscripts sent to him from Iceland upon his return to England in subsequent years up to 1781.¹⁴⁷ It is uncertain into which of these two categories Add. 4860 falls, and as the manuscript contains no scribal notations revealing any dates, the precise date of this version of *Nítíða saga* is uncertain beyond being from the later eighteenth century based on manuscript's palaeography and the possibility that the manuscript may have been commissioned for Banks in particular. In any case it can be no

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, Charles Lyte, *Sir Joseph Banks: Eighteenth-Century Explorer, Botanist and Entrepreneur* (Sydney: Reed, 1980).

¹⁴⁷ Halldór Hermannsson, *Sir Joseph Banks and Iceland*, *Islandica*, 18 (London: Cornell University Library, 1928), p. 15.

later than 1781. It is a large folio written in one very legible hand throughout and employing very few abbreviations. Further, there are clearly defined chapters, page headings, and plenty of white space. If it was not commissioned especially for Banks, then it must have been prepared as a display copy for someone at a slightly earlier date. Halldór Hermannsson states that in Iceland Banks ‘was anxious to get printed books and manuscripts’; in addition to being given ‘a copy of every book which lately had been printed at Hólar’, Banks was also in contact with ‘Bjarni Pálsson, the surgeon general, who lived at Nes not far from Hafnarfjord, and received from him as gifts various natural objects, antiquities, and books’.¹⁴⁸ This may mean that the manuscript could have been copied somewhere in (or possibly around) Hafnarfjörður (where Banks visited), if it was not brought there later. The latter possibility seems more likely considering the text’s incredible similarities with JS 27 (1670), which came from the Reykjarfjörður area, many miles north of Hafnarfjörður in the Westfjords.

Nítíða saga is divided into seventeen chapters in Add. 4860, and is the manuscript’s first text. Following it are *Drauma-Jóns saga*, *Viktors saga og Blávus*, *Hálfðans saga Brónu-Fostra*, *Floris saga kongs og sona hans*, *Hrólf’s saga Gautrekssonar*, *Bragða Máusar saga*, *Partalópa saga*, *Hrólf’s saga kraka*, *Friðþjófs saga Þorsteinssonar*, *Álaflecks saga*, *Tiódels saga*, *Dínus saga drambláta*, and *Vilmundar saga viðutann*, that is, a wide selection of *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, which are not surprising to appear together with *Nítíða saga*; some of these (such as *Drauma-Jóns saga*, *Hrólf’s saga Gautrekssonar*, and *Dínus saga drambláta*) occur regularly with *Nítíða saga* in manuscript in general. Add. 4860 is an even shorter version of *Nítíða saga* than the most familiar Group B version. Details that fleshed out the story and added depth in Group A and the other Group B branch are set aside in favour of a more streamlined and purposeful tale. Instead of the elaborately described

¹⁴⁸ Halldór Hermannsson, p. 13.

festivities that are usually recounted as the saga comes to a close, the weddings here take place in the space of a sentence:

Nu geingur meykongur fram*m* og lætur búa virdulega veitslu og fúllgiorast þessi kaup. fara þaug nú heim í Miklagard Ingi kongur og Svíalyn, en*n* Hlieskiolldur giftist Listalín, en*n* Livorius kongur og Nitida hin fræga untust leingi og vel þokti Livorius kongur hin*n* mest hofdinge og var vin sæll hvar sem hann kom fram*m* og lukum vier svo þessari sögu.¹⁴⁹

[Now the maiden-king goes forth and prepares a worthy feast and completes these dealings. King Ingi and Svíalyn now travel home to Constantinople, and Hlieskiolldur marries Listalín, and King Livorius and Nitida the famous love each other very well. King Livorius was thought the best leader and was popular wherever he went forth. And so we end this saga.]

This very short and pointed conclusion is in sharp contrast to that already discussed, and conspicuously missing here is any reference to worldly transience, which has been highlighted as a notable feature of *Nítíða saga*.¹⁵⁰ Considering that nothing elaborate had been described, however, it makes sense that this element is missing, with only passing mention of a typically vague *virdulega veitslu*. Add. 4860 presents a much simpler picture of European royalty, without any of the elaborate foods, entertainment, decorations, or gifts that are so carefully described in other versions, which is interesting considering the rather detailed description of *Nítíða* at the beginning of this version. This discrepancy in description suggests perhaps that it is sufficient to describe such a key character as *Nítíða* at first, to set the saga scene, and that further mention of finery later might be considered superfluous.

¹⁴⁹ Add. 4860 fol., f. 16v.

¹⁵⁰ Barnes, 'Margin vs. Centre', p. 111; Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', p. 272; Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction', p. 202; Driscoll, 'Nitida saga', p. 432.

Also significant, however, is this text's focus on Livorius at the end, with Nítíða all but out of the picture entirely. Livorius certainly has the last word here—without even mention of the couple's children—yet in the final words no reference is made to any character as the saga's focus; it is simply 'þessari sögu', rather than 'the saga of Nítíða and/or Livorius'. It is significant that Livorius is called *höfðingi* [leader, chieftain]. While *kóngur* [king] is used as a personal title or part of his name, *höfðingi* is used as his socio-cultural designation, something that never happens in the earlier standard version. Whereas the word *höfðingi* appears in AM 529/537 some eight times,¹⁵¹ it is always used of nameless vassals within Nítíða's kingdom, who are sometimes recognized as lesser kings or act as informal advisors when summoned; but none of the main characters, least of all Liforinus, is called by this term. Its use in Add. 4860, however, gives this excerpt a very Icelandic feel, bringing the saga's foreign action, which has been centred in Europe and the East, back home to Iceland, in a way, for *höfðingi* is an Icelandic word, and used throughout the *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* to designate chieftains in the early ages of settlement. This sense has been retained to the present day,¹⁵² meaning that the images associated with it in the eighteenth century likely included some sort of old chieftain, if that was not still its exclusive meaning at the time of this manuscript's composition. Of course *kóngur* is also an Icelandic word, but its use, as mentioned, is different than that of *höfðingi*, being far more common, and even expected, as an element of naming in romances (and does not appear as often in the *Íslendingasögur* unless referring to specific monarchs, not Icelandic chieftains). This difference, especially when in other versions the

¹⁵¹ 'Nítíða saga', pp. 134, 136, 140, 142, 144.

¹⁵² Modern Icelandic *höfðingi* '1. leader, chief, chieftain; 2. aristocrat; 3. generous person' (*Íslensk-Ensk Orðabók / Concise Icelandic-English Dictionary*, ed. by Sverrir Hólmarsson, Christopher Sanders, and John Tucker (Reykjavík: Iðunn, 1989), available online at <<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/IcelOnline.IEOrd>> [Accessed 19 October 2011]).

text ends with reference to *Livorius kóngur*, thus makes the appearance of *höfðingi* here remarkable. So, in an entirely different, subtle way, the focus of the story still, at the very last, looks back on Iceland. Perhaps it also glances back with an aim to encourage the audience—whether that audience is conceived by the scribe as Icelandic or English, plural (a household or community) or singular (Joseph Banks alone)—to reconsider what it means to be European, Icelandic, or whatever community, national or local, to which one might belong.

Moving back to portrayals of geography, in this version the locations mentioned when Nítíða and Livorius look into the *náttúrusteinar* are divided into three separate occasions, but the place names show interesting variation. The first time they see ‘Frackkland, Galisiam, Provinciam, Bravenam,¹⁵³ Spaniam og Galliam, Agyptum, Fríslanð, Frankaríki, Flandur, Normandi, Skotland, Grikkland’ [France, Galicia, Provence, Ravenna, Spain and Gaul, Egypt, Frisia, the Frankish Kingdom, Flanders, Normandy, Scotland, Greece].¹⁵⁴ As in some other versions, including other Group B branches, this part of the world is not given any kind of title, and the number of places named is similar as well (unlike the mention of far fewer in JS 166). However, with the addition of Egypt, this part of the world that Nítíða and Livorius see all at once cannot so easily be classified as a coherent geographical unit like Europe, as is possible in other versions—the locations grouped together are in reality all over the place. The form of the word *Agyptum* is also significant: it matches the Latinate character of the other locations in the list with the ending in *-um*, where if it were added at this later date it might be expected to be more Icelandic (as, for example, Modern Icelandic *Egyptaland*, from earlier *Egiptaland*). Interestingly though, the forms ‘Flandur, Normandi’ have left off their (pseudo) accusative

¹⁵³ This is probably an error, for *Ravenam*, as in AM 529/537 4to.

¹⁵⁴ Add. 4860 fol., f. 13v.

endings to become less Latinate than in, for example, AM 529/537, where they are ‘Flandren, Norðmandiam’. Another interesting addition to the list is *Frankaríki*, contrasted with the usual *Frackkland*, [France, the land of the Franks], with no indication as to how the two should be distinguished, if at all. The preservation of Latinate endings in this list of names suggests deep and possibly medieval roots for this branch of Group B, despite the manuscript’s much younger age, or a desire to present the text as archaic.

The second time, they see ‘Nordurálfúna alla, Noreg, Island, Færeyar, Sudureyar, Svíþjóð, Danmork, Irland, Eíngland og morg lond onnur sem hann hafði eí deili á’ [All the northern part, Norway, Iceland, the Faroes, the Hebrides, Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, England, and many other lands that he did not know].¹⁵⁵ This part of the world is called ‘the north’, and these places easily justify this title, despite the exclusion of some places named in AM 529/537 like the Orkney and Shetland Islands—further indicating that Add. 4860 is a somewhat shorter version of the story. The third time, ‘Meykóngur vendur þá upp einum steini síáandi þá í austúr alfú veralldarinnar, Indíaland, Palestínam, Asíam, Gríckland og oll lond út undir heimsskautid, jafnvel Brunabelltid síálft þad sem ecki er biggt’ [The maiden-king then held up a stone, seeing then in the eastern part of the world, India, Palestine, Asia, Greece, and all lands out past the corner of the world, including the Burning Belt itself, which is uninhabited].¹⁵⁶ Serkland is excluded from the list of eastern lands in this version, and Greece is listed instead, for the second time, perhaps showing that it was perceived as belonging both to the eastern and the western world, acting as a bridge between the two, maybe not unlike how Constantinople could be perceived.¹⁵⁷ Also interesting is the inclusion of the phrase ‘lond út undir heimsskautid’ within this eastern/southern group, as this phrase is used in other versions to describe the

¹⁵⁵ Add. 4860 fol., ff. 13v–14r.

¹⁵⁶ Add. 4860, fol., f. 14r.

¹⁵⁷ Divjak, pp. 240–47.

location of the island Visio, and in that context it is located somewhere towards or past the northernmost regions. In the beginning of this version, too, however, Visio is located, ‘útundann Svíþjóð hinzi kolldu ut undir heims skautinu’ [out past Sweden the Cold, out past the corner of the world].¹⁵⁸ There appears, therefore, to be somewhat less of an emphasis on the northern lands here than in other versions, though the text’s knowledge of geography is maintained, perhaps indicative of the scribe’s interest in geography and learning, perhaps merely a remnant of an earlier scribe’s interests, carried over from this manuscript’s exemplars.

Overall, in Add. 4860, the story of *Nítíða saga* is shorter than other Group B versions like AM 529/537, and especially compared to other groups in general like Group A, as seen above in JS 166. In addition to shortening the saga by excluding information that could be considered non-essential, the variety of other, relatively small, changes that are made, such as emphasizing the role of Liforinus at the end instead of Nítíða, or de-emphasizing the focus from the north as just seen, are employed deliberately, in order to shift slightly some of the focal points of the text that are exhibited in other versions of the saga. The focus still remains on Icelandic identity; however, it is subtler than in other versions and approached from different perspectives, allowing for identity and community in general, as well as specifically in terms of that of Icelanders, to emerge as a theme.

3) Lbs 3941 8vo (1r–18v)

This final case study considers a representative manuscript of Group E. Lbs 3941 8vo is among some of the youngest manuscripts in which *Nítíða saga* survives, dated to the first half of the twentieth century. While the scribe is unknown, a possible owner’s name, Hindrik Líndal, is written in pencil on the manuscript’s inside front cover, and Einar

¹⁵⁸ Add. 4860 fol., f. 2r.

Guðmundsson (1888–1975) of Reyðarfjörður in eastern Iceland owned it until 26 October 1970 when he sold it, along with at least five other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century saga collections.¹⁵⁹ After opening with *Nítíða saga*, which is divided into eleven chapters, the manuscript contains *Sagan af Ríkarði Ríkarðssyni*,¹⁶⁰ *Tristrams saga*,¹⁶¹ *Holta-Þóris saga*, and *Króka-Refs saga*. These are slightly less common companions for *Nítíða saga* than those seen in the other case studies. The manuscript is written in one clear hand with almost no abbreviations, and the choice of texts may have been influenced by the writing support available, a small ruled notebook.

In general, Lbs 3941, as a representative member of the young Group E, condenses the text of *Nítíða saga*, both stripping away superfluous details and also altering some of the details that make the saga so interesting in, for example, Groups A and B. It is, of course, also a possibility that the geographical isolation of Group E in eastern Iceland and the prospect that the group derived from a *rímur* led to this version of the story developing without these details from its inception rather than a scribe consciously choosing to eliminate them to produce a more streamlined story, meaning that we can still read this text and that it still has value as the product of a process of redaction. The text in Lbs 3941 is only about 3700 words, making this by far the shortest text under consideration in this chapter. The way in which *Nítíða saga* concludes in Lbs 3941 may be taken as an example of the brevity (and possibly contraction) of some parts of this version. The end of the saga is very succinct, though not as sparse as the conclusion of the saga in

¹⁵⁹ Handrit.is, ‘Biography: Einar Guðmundsson Skáleyjum á Breiðafirði úr’ <<http://handrit.is/en/biography/view/EinGud005>> [accessed 30 May 2011].

¹⁶⁰ This saga is also preserved in Lbs 2099 8vo (Handrit.is, ‘Manuscript Detail: Lbs 3941 8vo’ <<http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/Lbs08-3941>> [accessed 30 May 2011]).

¹⁶¹ In the manuscript the title is actually *Saga af Tístran Róbertssyni og Indiönu Mógúlsdóttur*—it is the post-Reformation story, not to be confused with the better-known translated romance *Tristrams saga og Ísöndar* or the Icelandic adaptation of that translation, *Tristrams saga og Ísöddar*.

Add. 4860 Here, Listalín is sent for, the weddings are prepared and occur in a matter of phrases, and the newlywed couples return to their respective kingdoms:

Var þá sent eftir Listalín, og kom hún Frakklands¹⁶² á tilteknum tíma, með veglegu föruneysi. Var svo búist við öllum þessum brúðkaupum, og var þá allvel drukkið með alls konar skemtun, en er veislan var úti, voru allir útleiddir með gjöfum í gulli og silfri. Hléskjöldur sigldi heim til Grikklands, og settist þar að ríki. Ingi og Svíalín fóru til Indíalands og stýrðu því ríki til dauðadags. Liforius og Nididá stýrðu Frakklandi meðan þau lifðu, og áttu son sem Ríkarður hét, og tók hann við ríki eftir foreldra sína. Lúkum vér svo sögunni af meykónginum Nididá og Líforíus konungi.¹⁶³

[Then Listalín was sent for, and she arrived in France at the specified time, with a splendid entourage. All these weddings were prepared, and then all was fulfilled with all types of entertainments, and when the feast was over, all were led out with gifts of gold and silver. Hléskjöldur sailed home to Greece, and set up his kingdom there. Ingi and Svíalín travelled to India and ruled that kingdom until their deaths. Liforius and Nididá ruled France while they lived, and had a son called Ríkarður, and he took up the kingdom after his parents. Thus we end the saga of the maiden-king Nididá and king Liforius.]

As in Add. 4860, the elaborate details that Group A and some Group B versions somewhat self-consciously describe are left out of the description of the weddings, relying instead on a vague reference to *alls konar skemtun* and *gjöfum í gulli og silfri*, which adequately suggests the richness of the celebrations without itemizing them. Interestingly, in this version the couples sail to the women's home kingdoms, rather than the men's. Hléskjöldur, who has married Listalín, goes to rule Greece, perhaps because the name of his mother Ydíá's realm was never specified from the beginning. In other versions Hléskjöldur and Listalín rule over *his* homeland Apulia. As Listalín's brother, though,

¹⁶² One might expect *kom hún til Frakklands* here, but the manuscript does not include the preposition *til* ('to' or, here, 'in'), which I have supplied in the translation.

¹⁶³ Lbs 3941 8vo, ff. 18r–18v.

Ingi might be expected to travel home to rule Greece with his new wife Svialín, but instead goes to her homeland, India; AM 529/537 and most other versions have this pair ruling Ingi's kingdom in Constantinople (equivalent to this version's Greece), and leave India unoccupied, or else it is implied that Liforius and Nítíða will combine India and France into a larger empire (with the exception of a couple of versions (ÍBR 47 and JS 56), where Liforius sends his son to rule India). However, in Lbs 3941 each kingdom previously attached to a major character is ruled by one of the couples at the end. The saga closes with report of Nítíða and Liforius: France is ruled as a single kingdom of its own not joined with India, completing the pattern of men travelling to co-rule women's lands, yet it is Liforius, not Nítíða, with whom the saga closes, mirroring their treatment at the end of Group B texts.

Differences in the geography of the saga are seen in the main representation of the world, which has been analysed in each of the previous versions discussed, and which will be addressed for Lbs 3941 momentarily, but geographical difference is also seen in small changes elsewhere throughout the text, such as when Nítíða travels to visit Ydíá (and not characterized as Nítíða's foster-mother though still as the mother of Hléskjöldur), she goes 'yfir fjallgarð einn' [over a mountain-range],¹⁶⁴ instead of by sea as in other groups. In fact, in the other versions examined, characters always travel by ship, making Nítíða's overland journey to Ydíá's unnamed realm even more exceptional. Other small changes characteristic of Group E include the name of the island Visio and its ruler, which are instead 'einni eyju er Viktoría heitir, henni ræður jarl sá er Vigerlíus heitir' [an island which is called Viktoria, over which ruled that earl called Vigerlius];¹⁶⁵ and the father of

¹⁶⁴ Lbs 3941 8vo, f. 1v.

¹⁶⁵ Lbs 3941 8vo, f. 2r.

Ingi and Listalín is ‘Febrúaríus’ who ‘stjórnaði Grikklandi’ [Febrúaríus who governed Greece],¹⁶⁶ instead of Hugon of Constantinople.

When *Nítíða* has Liforius look into the magical stones at different world regions, the extent to which Lbs 3941 is condensed compared to other versions becomes evident again. The scene is much briefer than those already discussed but despite this, it also demonstrates some striking variations:

Nididá tók einn steininn, og bað hann líta í, þau sáu þá um alla ~~Norður~~ Suður álfuna, og allar þær þjóðir, er þar voru í. [...] Hún tók þá annan stein, sáu þau þá um alla Vestur álfuna [...]. Hún tók þá upp þriðja steininn, sáu þau þá um alla austur álfuna, útnes og leynivoga, og jafnvel Bruna velli, sem ekki er bygt.¹⁶⁷

[Nididá took a stone, and asked him to look into it; then they saw over all the southern region, and all the people who were there. [...] She then took another stone; then they saw over all the western region [...]. She then took up the third stone; then they saw over all the eastern region, outlying headlands and hidden coves, and also the Burning Field, which is uninhabited.]

The most significant difference here is how the world is divided into three: instead of the unusual triad of Europe, the North, and the East that is demonstrated in AM 529/537 here is a different, though hardly more conventional division into the South, the West, and the East—the North is not designated at all. It is perhaps significant that the manuscript shows ‘North’ initially being written instead of ‘South’, but this is crossed out. Perhaps this is evidence of a deliberate change in the depiction of geography from that in the scribe’s exemplar, or from another version of *Nítíða saga* with which the scribe is familiar; this would make sense if the scribe had previous knowledge of another version, but was working from a Group E exemplar, as all of the other manuscript versions

¹⁶⁶ Lbs 3941 8vo, f. 3v.

¹⁶⁷ Lbs 3941 8vo, ff. 16r–16v.

identified as Group E also have the South as their first geographical region in this scene. Also significantly, specific lands and kingdoms are not named within these regions in this manuscript. Whereas in Groups A and B each time a region is mentioned the countries considered part of those regions is mentioned, here in Group E, and also in Group D, for example, it is merely the name of the region that is given, in a further example of the streamlined version exhibited here. Clearly knowledge of the world and its geography is not a priority for the scribe with whom this version originates. There is no need for him to display an awareness of lands located far from (or even near to) Iceland, nor is Iceland explicitly situated within the world in the way it is in other versions. This is not to say, however, that in Lbs 3941 *Nítíða saga* does not use geography with care, for the changes made seem deliberate, especially in the exclusion of a northern or European region in the passage just seen, in favour of a world divided into southern, western, and eastern regions: this division results in a bold statement that distances Iceland from the action of the saga, without ever mentioning it or noting the details of geography so heavily emphasized in the other versions analysed. With the difference in setting emphasized in this way, the saga also becomes more consciously a piece of literature, a work of fiction that does not take place in reality, even if most of the place names in it (the few that remain in this version) are recognizable. It is almost as if by the mid-nineteenth century, when Group E seems to have come into being, Icelanders, while still actively and enthusiastically appreciating medieval sagas like *Nítíða saga*, are now more aware of this aspect of such romances—their origin in the medieval world that now is such a distant part of the past, chronologically, even if culturally, medieval Iceland was still in relatively close proximity to the nineteenth-century Iceland out of which this version emerged. Thus without commenting on literature in the direct ways that earlier versions do, this late version, through its increased and accentuated geographical distance from its Icelandic audience

(mirroring the chronological distance between the original and the present audience), also facilitates reflection on the nature of the text and the relationship between literature and society.

Overall, this Group E version of *Nítíða saga* preserved in the early twentieth-century Lbs 3941 is a pared-down version, without many of the specific details seen in other versions. While it could be called a rather basic version, it is still substantial enough to be called a separate version in its own right—it is by no means a summary, as are a couple of the other manuscript versions (listed at the beginning of this chapter), which contain most of the main *Nítíða saga* elements, but are only a mere 400 or 800 words. And, as has been demonstrated, though it is the shortest version examined in this chapter, it does not fail to negotiate some of the themes prominent in other versions, such as social identity, though the way in which this is accomplished is different. Though the story may be understated and its messages subtle, that it was recorded in such a way, at a time so much closer to our own than those of the other versions in which the saga exists, speaks to *Nítíða saga*'s continual relevance throughout the ages—the story's appearance may change with (or throughout) time, but its essence remains appealing to its readers and listeners.

III: CONCLUSIONS

I have shown how the many manuscripts in which *Nítíða saga* survives may be classified and grouped into six versions, some of which correspond to geographical regions such as western Iceland (Group A) and eastern Iceland (Group E). I have shown how the saga's transmission and reception was far more complicated than simply repeated copying of a single text. From evidence of the saga being read aloud once copied down and enjoyed in a group setting seen in JS 166, to signs of the specific, careful copying of some

manuscripts for (perhaps exclusively) presentation purposes seen in Add. 4860, to the possibility of a very different version of the text resulting from a later date and geographic isolation as seen in Lbs 3941, *Nítíða saga* not only survived, but thrived throughout Iceland in a variety of milieux and a variety of versions, for hundreds of years after its late-medieval debut, its popularity and success reflected in its diverse manuscript context. While the text is continually recognizable as *Nítíða saga*, the variation evident among even the earliest vellum manuscripts testifies to the fact that the plot, character names, and structure were more fluid than has been previously recognized in research on the saga. The accidental differences among versions in the textual history of the saga still always point to a story the substance of which remains constant. In the chapters that follow, in order to understand more fully the inner workings of such a well-received and popular late-medieval romance it will be analysed in greater detail, from various points of departure. For now, the following chapter comprises further discussion of the saga as a cultural artefact by looking at its relationships with other texts, and how readers may have encountered it alongside other, equally treasured stories.

Chapter 2

INTERTEXTUALITY: THE TEXT AS A CULTURAL ARTEFACT

In the previous chapter I considered *Nítíða saga*'s different textual versions as preserved in manuscript form—physical artefacts that were created, enjoyed, and re-created both in the Middle Ages and in later centuries. With this background context in mind, I will now consider the saga from a different yet closely related perspective, as a cultural artefact. Certainly the text's appreciation as part of Icelandic culture is evident through the many manuscripts it was copied into, as already discussed, but as a component of Icelandic society and culture this romance can also be seen as an abstract idea manifested in physical manuscript form in which late medieval Icelandic norms and values are both portrayed and questioned, and into which, in later copies, changing values, norms, and cultural priorities are inserted, keeping the text current in outlook while also preserving the medieval core that was so valued. As an originally medieval Icelandic romance, *Nítíða saga* was not conceived in isolation,¹⁶⁸ and as will be demonstrated shortly, it was in dialogue not only with the wider romance genre in general, but also with other individual texts in particular, which, both alone and in conjunction with other romances like *Nítíða saga*, were equally valued by Icelanders. It is some of these intertextual relationships on which this chapter focuses, in order to understand better how *Nítíða saga* may have been viewed in relation to other texts.

¹⁶⁸ General studies of the medieval Icelandic romance milieu can be found in Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', pp. 266–86; Bibire, 'From *riddarasaga* to *lygisaga*', pp. 55–74; Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction', pp. 190–204; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, '*Viktors saga ok Blávus*: Sources and Characteristics', in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, *Riddarasögur*, 2 (Reykjavík: Handritastofnun Íslands, 1964), pp. cix–ccix; Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*; Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*; Kalinke, 'Norse Romance (*Riddarasögur*)', pp. 316–63; Kalinke, 'Riddarasögur, Fornaldarsögur, and the Problem of Genre', pp. 77–91; Torfi H. Tulinius, 'Íslenska rómansan—fornaldarsögur og frumsamdar riddarasögur', in *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga*, ed. by Böðvar Guðmundsson and others, 3 vols (Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 1992–93), II (1993), 218–44.

It would be too great a task to enumerate and analyse an exhaustive list of intertextual connections in *Nítíða saga* considering the very rich and diverse literary context from which it emerged;¹⁶⁹ therefore the scope of this chapter is restricted to two main case studies that highlight the relationship between *Nítíða saga* and two romances, *Nikulás saga leikara* and *Clári saga*, so as to demonstrate not only similarities and differences, but also the dialogue into which the author of *Nítíða saga* may consciously have entered with either or both of them. Alongside these two case studies, the chapter begins by touching upon some of *Nítíða saga*'s more general relationships with other romances through discussion of one example of a motif found in *Nítíða saga*—the use of *náttúrusteinar* [magical stones]—in order to situate the text in a wider context of romances employing similar strategies for negotiating the romance genre. The chapter will conclude with an overview of the most important and conclusive intertextual relationships that *Nítíða saga* demonstrates, and with a discussion of *Nítíða saga*'s intertextuality through time and in different versions of the text, drawing on the information presented in Chapter One to show how dialogue with other romances is an integral part of this text, and a means of showing its significance as a valued literary artefact in which Iceland's culture is reflected.

¹⁶⁹ To begin to see the complexity of the relationships that *Nítíða saga* and many other Icelandic romances engage in, and to understand the different approaches one could take in analysing these connections, see the number of motifs shared by *Nítíða saga* and others in Boberg's *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*; the manuscripts in which romances co-occur in Kalinke and Mitchell's *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*; and studies that explore specific romances and their relationships in detail, such as Peter Hallberg, 'A Group of Icelandic "Riddarasögur" from the Middle of the Fourteenth Century', in *Les Sagas des Chevaliers (Riddarasögur): Actes de la 5ième Conférence Internationale sur les Sagas (Toulon, Juillet 1982)*, ed. by Régis Boyer (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1985), pp. 8–53.

I: THE *NÁTTÚRUSTEINAR*: A SHARED MOTIF

The motif of *náttúrusteinar* (literally ‘nature-stones’ or ‘power-stones’,¹⁷⁰ and clearly signifying ‘supernatural’ or ‘magical’ stones here, which are my preferred terms) is integral to *Nítíða saga*’s plot, as these stones are a major source of power by which Nítíða is able to outwit her suitors. The *náttúrusteinar* are a typical example of the useful magical objects that are found by or given to heroes in Icelandic romances;¹⁷¹ their physical form, however, is never described, making it unclear whether they are, for example, more like precious stones and jewels, or rocks, or what colours they might be.¹⁷² In the simplest terms, the *náttúrusteinar* allow Nítíða to know in advance when people are planning to attack her kingdom, while also providing a means of escape, as they have three specific functions: 1) to allow Nítíða to see throughout the world,¹⁷³ 2) to render her invisible,¹⁷⁴ and 3) to transport her back to France after being abducted.¹⁷⁵ The *náttúrusteinar* motif is present in other late medieval Icelandic romances, and *Sigurðar saga þogla* is a prime

¹⁷⁰ Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 449.

¹⁷¹ See Boberg’s motif section D ‘Magic’ (pp. 54–93), especially D1300–1599 ‘Function of Magic Objects’ (pp. 67–79) and D1600–1699 ‘Characteristics of Magic Objects’ (pp. 79–82); Vera Johanterwage, ‘The Use of Magic Spells and Objects in the Icelandic Riddarasögur: *Rémundar saga keisarasonar* and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*’, in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6–12 August 2006, ed. by John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, 2 vols (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), I, 446–53; Inna Matyushina, ‘Magic Mirrors, Monsters, Maiden-kings (The Fantastic in *Riddarasögur*)’, in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, II, 660–70; Schlauch, pp. 42–43, 76, 119–48; Wahlgren, pp. 51–60 (especially p. 53, where *Nítíða saga* and *Nikulás saga leikara* are given as prime examples of the use of magical stones). I discuss further the implications of these stones for Nítíða’s characterization in Chapter Three.

¹⁷² While *Nítíða saga* does not describe the stones, the *Alfræði Íslenzk* contains a section on precious stones based on the lapidary of Marbod of Rennes that could have been available to the author (Kristian Kálund, ed., *Alfræði íslenzk: Íslandsk encyklopædisk litteratur*, 3 vols, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 37, 41, 45 (Copenhagen: Møller, 1908–18), I (1908), 77–83).

¹⁷³ *Nítíða saga*, pp. 124, 130, 134.

¹⁷⁴ *Nítíða saga*, p. 130.

¹⁷⁵ *Nítíða saga*, pp. 130, 136.

example.¹⁷⁶ This maiden-king romance, in which the hero Sigurður pursues and eventually wins the maiden-king Sedentiana through magic, shares the most motifs (five) with *Nítíða saga* out of any other text according to Boberg's motif index.¹⁷⁷ Additionally, *Sigurðar saga þogla's* use of supernatural stones is markedly similar to the manner in which they are used in *Nítíða saga*. Major parallels can be seen in the maiden-kings' generally non-active use of their respective magical stones. In *Sigurðar saga þogla*, the stones allow Sedentiana to see what is happening in different parts of the world, as in the first function of Nítíða's stones, and each time they are mentioned, emphasis is placed on seeing and vision, as the result of looking into the stones: 'er hunn lijtur j hann sier hun og ueit huat uid ber j þessare alfu heimsinns. og huern mann þeckir hun at nafni og ætt huersu sem hann breytir sier ath yfirlitum' [when she looks into it [the stone] she sees and knows what occurs in this region of the world, and she recognizes each person by name and family [and] how he so changes himself in appearance].¹⁷⁸ While Sedentiana's ability to see through people's disguise is explicitly attributed to her stone, in *Nítíða saga* the maiden-king can also see through the disguise of her suitor Liforinus, though the saga never mentions that this intuition comes from the stones. Nevertheless, the same kind of focus on vision in *Sigurðar saga þogla* (and on intuition based on vision) is also important in *Nítíða saga*. In both sagas, through these characters' passive use of the *náttúrusteinar*

¹⁷⁶ Other romances with multiple shared motifs include *Gibbons saga*, *Nikulás saga leikara*, and *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*.

¹⁷⁷ Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*: the shared motifs are D1317.12 'Magic stone gives warning' (p. 68), H217.1 'Decision of victory by single combat or holmgang of who is to marry girl' (p. 150), K1812.3 'Prince disguises as another prince to woo princess' (p. 180), R111.1.9 'Princess (maiden) rescued from undesired suitor' (p. 230), and T311.4 'Maiden queen prefers to fight instead of marrying. She usually scorns or even kills her suitors or sets them difficult tasks' (p. 249).

¹⁷⁸ Loth ed., 'Sigurðar saga þogla', p. 191. Cf. *Nítíða saga*, pp. 130, 134. See also 'Sigurðar saga þogla', pp. 181–82: 'veit eg giorla at þetta er sanninnde af minne steinna natturu og fullum uijsdome þuiat mier ma eckj a ouart koma huat sem uid ber j þessarj alfu heimsins' [I know precisely that this is the truth from my supernatural stones full of wisdom, because I must not be ignorant about what occurs in this region of the world].

their vision becomes panoptic and omniscient: rather than merely being able to see into the distance or in one direction, Nítíða and Sedentiana, through the stones, can see in all directions equally well, whenever they wish to, and the people being watched have no way of knowing that they are under any kind of surveillance. In *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, Sedentiana's stones also reveal the truth about past events: 'Lijtur nu j sinn natturustein. ser nu og þeckir gerla ath þetta hefir uerit Sigur(dur) þögla er nær henni hefir legit' [Now she looks into her supernatural stone and sees and recognizes precisely that it has been Sigurður the Silent who has lain with her].¹⁷⁹ Additionally, Sedentiana elsewhere admits knowledge by means of her stones: 'þa uissa eg þegar af mijnum uiturleik og natturusteine' [then I knew immediately from my wisdom and magic stones].¹⁸⁰ These properties are not evident in Nítíða's stones, nor is there any indication that they may have been in other versions of the saga. It is of course possible that at some point other properties were attributed to the *náttúrusteinar* in *Nítíða saga* and subsequently lost; however, it seems more likely that in *Sigurðar saga þøgla* these properties were added, and that they were possibly added to an understanding of the stones gained from *Nítíða saga*. The dates of these sagas do not clarify the matter though, as both can be dated, rather vaguely, to the fourteenth century. The shorter redaction of *Sigurðar saga þøgla* has been dated to the second half of the fourteenth century,¹⁸¹ and while *Nítíða saga* has been dated similarly,¹⁸² the shorter redaction of *Sigurðar saga þøgla* is thought possibly to be closer to an original.¹⁸³ This shorter version does not mention supernatural stones at all, suggesting that they were added to the longer redaction, and perhaps inspired by their

¹⁷⁹ Loth, ed., 'Sigurðar saga þøgla', p. 210.

¹⁸⁰ Loth, ed., 'Sigurðar saga þøgla', p. 245.

¹⁸¹ Driscoll, ed., *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, p. lxvi.

¹⁸² Driscoll, 'Nitida saga', p. 432.

¹⁸³ Driscoll, ed., *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, pp. lxxxix–xcii; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, 'Viktors saga ok Blávus: Sources and Characteristics', p. cxxxvii.

appearance in *Nítíða saga*. Considering also, for example, the somewhat indiscriminate inclusion of many place names in the long redaction of *Sigurðar saga þogla* as I discuss in Chapter Three, the insertion of this motif along with them would not be surprising. Overall, the *náttúrusteinar* motif in *Sigurðar saga þogla* shows links to *Nítíða saga* in its essentially passive, vision-centred use of the stones. In this manifestation of the motif, there is nothing that the maiden-king must *do* in order to gain knowledge and supernatural vision from the stones, except merely to look into them. In this way the *náttúrusteinar* here resemble magic mirrors and other magical objects associated with seeing,¹⁸⁴ and it is this type of interpretation that some scholars have imparted on the stones in *Nítíða saga*.¹⁸⁵ However, this association with seeing and vision is not the only attribute of *Nítíða saga*'s *náttúrusteinar*, and the motif, when considered in relation to other texts, can be seen to have an alternative interpretation.

Gibbons saga, another maiden-king romance in which the hero Gibbon enjoys liaisons with both the fairy mistress Gríka and the maiden-king Florentia, is a notable example of another side of the *náttúrusteinar* motif. Whereas in *Sigurðar saga þogla* the focal point of the motif was passive vision for a passive outcome (intellectual knowledge), in *Gibbons saga*, the motif is employed to increase the maiden-king's active power. Near the beginning of *Gibbons saga*, Gríka, the princess of Greece, uses a magic stone to gain control over Gibbon: 'hun tekr þa einn natturu stein ok bregdr yfir hofud honum' [then she takes a supernatural stone and waves it over his head].¹⁸⁶ Gríka's active use of the stone is highlighted, and a similar scene also occurs later in the text, when Florentia gives her magic stone to another woman: 'tak minn natvrru steinn [...] hvn geingr ok ap<t>r

¹⁸⁴ Johanterwage, 'The Use of Magic Spells and Objects in the Icelandic Riddarasögur', pp. 446–53; Matyushina, 'Magic Mirrors, Monsters, Maiden-kings', pp. 660–70.

¹⁸⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, p. 179; Wick, pp. 212–13.

¹⁸⁶ R. I. Page, ed., *Gibbons saga*, Editiones Arnarnagænar, B2 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960), p. 8.

kemr færrandi drottningv steninn frvin stendr þa vpp ok bregdr þessvm steini yfir hofvd kongs s(yni)' ['take my supernatural stone' [...]. She goes and comes back bringing the queen's stone. Then the woman stands up and waves the stone over the prince's head].¹⁸⁷

In both quotations, it is the woman's action that is crucial rather than her passive use of a magical object. These scenes showcase the *náttúrusteinar's* use as indicative of female power and male powerlessness. Rather than being affected by the magical properties of the stones and capitalizing on these properties accordingly, as in *Sigurðar saga þogla*, the women here harness the stones' power by physically brandishing them. In this way the women are more practising magic than simply using objects. The action reinforces power and thus reinforces female power and prominence instead of male power and superiority. The diction used to convey this action of practicing magic in *Gibbons saga* is, furthermore, almost identical to the way Nítíða's three active uses of her *náttúrusteinar* are conveyed throughout the saga as she escapes, first from Virgilius and subsequently from Ingi and Liforinus:

1) 'm(ey)kongur tok nu eirn natturu stein og bra yfer skipit og haufud þeim avllum'

[the maiden-king now took a supernatural stone and waved it over the ship and all their heads]¹⁸⁸

2) 'bregdur hun einum steine yfer hofud sier'

[she waves a stone over her head]¹⁸⁹

3) 'hun bra þä steinum vpp ýfer haufud þeim bádum'

[then she waved the stone up over both their heads]¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Page, ed., *Gibbons saga*, p. 44.

¹⁸⁸ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 7.

¹⁸⁹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 13.

¹⁹⁰ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 24.

The three key words here are *bregða*, *yfir*, and *höfuð*, which are used each time in *Nítíða saga*, as well as in *Gibbons saga*, suggesting that the motif's appearance in both texts may not be merely coincidental. It is not just that magic stones are used, but that they are specifically waved over people's heads for their transportative and other powers to be enacted. Another key word is, of course, (*náttúru*)*stein*. Where *Nítíða saga* here only uses the word *stein*, the fact that it is a *náttúrustein* from Visio had been specified the sentence before in quotation 3), and in quotation 2) the stone is immediately qualified as that which was obtained from Visio. It seems clear that there is a relationship between these sagas in their use of this motif in an active sense, and between them and *Sigurðar saga þogla*. While all three texts employ the motif of supernatural stones, there are two main ways in which the motif is manifested, and *Nítíða saga* is the bridge between them, as it presents the *náttúrusteinar* in both active and passive use. The text therefore reinforces, through Nítíða's power and influence, a dual use of a single motif, and while there is clearly a relationship between *Nítíða saga* and both *Gibbons saga* and *Sigurðar saga þogla*, and perhaps a larger relationship among all three romances, it is difficult to discern exactly which texts influenced the other(s). However, considering that *Nítíða saga* exhibits two rather different uses of this motif, it seems possible that its author was influenced by at least one, if not both, of the other texts. In addition to the texts considered so far, this motif also appears in *Nikulás saga leikara*, whose relationship with *Nítíða saga* is more clearly defined, and which I will discuss in greater depth in the second case study of this chapter. Before doing so, I turn first to the relationship that *Nítíða saga* has with *Clári saga*.

II: CASE STUDY: *CLÁRI SAGA*

Clári saga is a romance the plot of which can be summarized as a bridal quest in which the prince Clárus is violently rejected by the princess Séréna, but the prince eventually succeeds in marrying the princess after subjecting her to disgrace in return for her scornful actions; a moralizing ending warns wives to respect and obey their husbands.

Clári saga is generally more widely known than the other texts discussed above.¹⁹¹ This romance is usually understood to be that from which the maiden-king motif in late medieval Icelandic romance originates;¹⁹² it is for this reason that it seems suitable to undertake a case study of *Clári saga* in relation to *Nítíða saga*. *Clári saga* is classified as a maiden-king saga entirely based on Séréna's personality and actions, as she is never once called *meykóngur* or *kóngur* in the text (neither by herself nor by the narrator). Although Séréna is incredibly cruel to her suitors compared to Nítíða's far lesser degree of hostility, the two sagas, if not their 'maiden-kings', are certainly related to each other. This has been acknowledged for many years. Paul Bibire, for example, has suggested that *Nítíða saga* is a deliberate response to *Clári saga* and therefore a departure from the motif of the ruthlessly cruel romance maiden-king.¹⁹³ The present case study will develop further this

¹⁹¹ Recent scholarship on the saga includes Marianne Kalinke, 'Clári saga: A Case of Low German Infiltration', *Scripta Islandica*, 59 (2008), 5–25; Marianne E. Kalinke, 'Table Decorum and the Quest for a Bride in *Clári saga*', in *At the Table: Metaphorical and Material Cultures of Food in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Timothy J. Tomasik and Juliann M. Vitello, Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 51–72; Sean F. D. Hughes, 'Klári saga as an Indigenous Romance', in *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, ed. by Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin, *Islandica*, 54 (London: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 135–63. Additionally, major works in older scholarship includes Alfred Jakobsen, *Studier i Clarus saga: Til spørsmålet om sagaens norske proveniens* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1964); and the analytical introduction in Cederschiöld, ed., *Clári saga*, pp. ix–xxxviii.

¹⁹² Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction', p. 202; Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 98–107.

¹⁹³ Bibire, pp. 67, 70. See also Guðbjörg Aðalbergsdóttir, 'Nítíða og aðri meykóngar', pp. 49–55. *Nítíða saga* has even been labelled 'proto-feminist' (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, pp. 274–80), again in response and comparison to *Clári saga*. See also Chapter Four.

basic assumption about the relationship between the two texts by examining their style, and in particular, examples of shared Latin and Low German vocabulary.

Bibire, in his assessment of the links between *Clári saga* and *Nítíða saga*, points primarily to connections between the names of the protagonists. Both names are based on Latin adjectives meaning ‘shining’ (*clarus* and *nitidus*).¹⁹⁴ In addition to this, Bibire notes that the name *Eskilvarður* is the false identity assumed by both Liforinus in *Nítíða saga* and Clárus in *Clári saga*, when they visit their respective maiden-kings.¹⁹⁵ Unfortunately, Bibire does not spend more than a couple of sentences discussing such evidence that *Nítíða saga*’s author may have had *Clári saga* in mind when composing the text. I would, however, like to explore this relationship in more detail here. Points to be considered include the style of these texts. Whereas *Clári saga* is overtly moralizing at the end, and makes reference to God and Christianity throughout, *Nítíða saga* does not. Rather, without referring to the Church, *Nítíða saga* exhibits a strong presence of Latin vocabulary and clerical style throughout the text, which is something also characteristic of *Clári saga*,¹⁹⁶ suggesting that both texts had a clerical author or early scribe. E. F. Halvorsen classifies the style of *Clári saga* as belonging to the late court style, which imitates Latin syntax and can be quite complex, and which Jónas Kristjánsson prefers to call the ‘younger florid style’, which he argues is, in combination with the ‘older court

¹⁹⁴ Bibire, pp. 67, 70.

¹⁹⁵ Bibire, p. 67.

¹⁹⁶ Foster W. Blaisdell, Jr., ‘Some Observations on Style in the *riddarasögur*’, in *Scandinavian Studies: Essays Presented to Dr. Henry Goddard Leach on the Occasion of His Eighty-Fifth Birthday*, ed by Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Erik J. Friis (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), pp. 87–94; E. F. Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, Bibliotheca Arnarnagnæana, 19 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1959); Jakobsen, *Studier i Clarus saga*, pp. 33–40; Jónas Kristjánsson, ‘The Court Style’, in *Les Sagas des Chevaliers (Riddarasögur): Actes de la 5ième Conférence Internationale sur les Sagas (Toulon, Juillet 1982)*, ed. by Régis Boyer (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1985), pp. 431–40; Robert Tannert, ‘The Style of *Dínus saga drambláta*’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 52 (1980), 53–62.

style' characteristic of late medieval Icelandic romances.¹⁹⁷ He illustrates this point using *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, but others, such as *Nítíða saga*, can certainly be characterized similarly. Jónas Kristjánsson notes that the basic traits of the learned style are 'the present participle used in the active sense' and 'the frequent use of the past participle used in apposition to a noun',¹⁹⁸ both of which occur regularly in both *Nítíða saga* and *Clári saga*. This section will first examine these stylistic features and the shared Latin vocabulary between the sagas, before moving on to discuss other aspects of these sagas' intertextual relationship.

I would like first to emphasize that *Nítíða* ought to be directly compared, as hero, to *Clárus*, rather than to the cruel maiden-king *Séréna* (whose name could also be considered of equivalent meaning, see below), and with whom she is more usually compared, as I discuss further in Chapter Four. These female characters are arguably very different, and the principal role enjoyed by *Nítíða* and *Clárus* links them more easily than gender links *Nítíða* and *Séréna*. Considering the adjectives *clarus* and *nitidus* as a pair seems especially deliberate and telling, even when there are many female romance characters with names suggestive of refulgence or brightness, like *Alba* in *Valdimars saga*, *Albína* and *Lúciana* in *Sigurðar saga þogla*, and *Fulgida* in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*.¹⁹⁹ Most importantly, one of the meanings of *clarus* is 'celebrated, illustrious, famous' in addition to 'clear, bright, shining'.²⁰⁰ This appears to have gone unnoticed by previous scholars. With this in mind, the author of *Nítíða saga* could conceivably have named *Nítíða* 'hin fræga' [the famous] as a further hint at a relationship between her character and *Clárus*, and thus

¹⁹⁷ Jónas Kristjánsson, 'The Court Style', p. 440.

¹⁹⁸ Jónas Kristjánsson, 'The Court Style', p. 437.

¹⁹⁹ Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction', p. 109.

²⁰⁰ Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary: Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), p. 349.

between the two sagas as a whole, even if such connections would be lost on audiences without a detailed knowledge of Latin, or indeed without knowledge of both saga texts.²⁰¹

In any case, this is still evidence that *Nítíða saga*'s author was himself educated and well acquainted with Latin. In *Clári saga*, the primary meaning of the protagonist's name does seem to be that connected with brightness, for the text goes to the trouble of explaining the name: 'Réttliga ok viðrkvæmiliga fekk hann þat nafn—því at "clárús" þýðiz upp á vart mál "bjartr"—sakir þess, at í þann tíma var engi vænni maðr í veröldu með hold ok blóð' [Rightly and fittingly did he have that name—because 'clárús' means in our language 'bright'—for in that time there was no better man of flesh and blood in the world].²⁰²

The explicatory note indicates that the saga's intended audience would most likely be unfamiliar with Latin. This of course does not preclude the possibility of *Nítíða saga*'s author naming *Nítíða* *bin fræga* with *Clárus* in mind, for whatever was the primary meaning in *Clári saga* does not necessarily matter when considering either saga's audience and the variety of interpretative possibilities. But complicating the matter further, even the name of *Clári saga*'s maiden-king, Séréna, has connotations similar to *Clárus* and *Nítíða*, as it derives from Latin *serenus* [clear, fair, bright, serene].²⁰³ This similarity in name to *Nítíða* might thus provoke the careful reader to re-evaluate expectations and interpretations of both characters, but particularly expectations surrounding *Nítíða*: if Séréna's portrayal in *Clári saga* is so radically different from that of *Nítíða* despite these connections the characters have in their names and as maiden-kings, why should this be? This question is addressed further in Chapter Four, but it should be noted here that such provocation and questioning regarding expectations of the romance genre is one of the

²⁰¹ *Clári saga* and *Nítíða saga* appear together in manuscript far less often than might be expected—only one of the sixty-five surviving manuscripts (ÍB 138 4to, 1750–99) transmits them together.

²⁰² Cederschiöld, ed., *Clári saga*, p. 2.

²⁰³ Lewis and Short, p. 1678.

most important facets of *Nítíða saga*. Finally, it is somewhat unusual for a male romance hero to have such a Latinate name as Clárus: heroes more often seem to have vernacular names like Sigurður, no matter where they are meant to be from,²⁰⁴ though in *Nítíða saga*, Liforinus' name is also Latinate, even if it cannot be connected to any particular Latin word—it is the implied style and form of the name that in this case matters more than its meaning.

Clári saga also shares genre-specific vocabulary with *Nítíða saga*. The preceding examples of shared Latinate style and vocabulary, as well as those now following (including Low German examples), attest to this and show how both texts draw on the established vocabulary of romance in Icelandic and how the style of *Clári saga*, as an earlier romance, may have influenced *Nítíða saga*. In addition to Latinate names, further more general Latin influence is evident in both *Clári saga* and *Nítíða saga*. *Clári saga* has a distinctive clerical style, including a number of Latin expressions that have been translated directly into Icelandic. For example, the narrator frequently interjects the saga with phrases like *hvat meira*, which have been identified as Icelandic renderings of Latin phrases like *quid multa*, and detailed in earlier studies.²⁰⁵ While it does not make use of such Latin phrases in particular, *Nítíða saga* (as a text of only about 5500 words) does contain forty-three present participle constructions (ending in *-andi*), thirty-four of which are examples of a Latinate syntactic structure characteristic of learned style.²⁰⁶ The first of these, for example, appears early on: 'eiRn haukur [...], breidandi sina vængi framm' [a

²⁰⁴ Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction', p. 109.

²⁰⁵ Cederschiöld, ed., *Clári saga*, p. xx; Jakobsen, *Studier i Clarus saga*, pp. 34–35.

²⁰⁶ Geraldine Barnes, 'The *riddarasögur* and Mediæval European Literature', *Mediæval Scandinavia*, 8 (1975), 140–58, p. 155; Blaisdell, 'Some Observations on Style in the *riddarasögur*', p. 90; Hughes, 'Klári saga as an Indigenous Romance', pp. 142–43; Jónas Kristjánsson, 'The Court Style', pp. 437–38; see also Tannert, especially p. 57.

hawk [...], spreading its wings forward].²⁰⁷ The rest are distributed throughout the saga and utilized to propel the action forward. Other loans of obviously Latin origin in *Nítíða saga* are *karbunculus* [carbuncle], with a Latin nominative ending rather than the alternative Icelandicized form *karbunkli*;²⁰⁸ *lileam* [lily], inflected as a Latin accusative; *purpuri* [purple]; and *púsa* [wife, spouse, from Latin *sponsa* via French],²⁰⁹ which shows no unusual inflection. And yet the Latin nature of these words is not necessarily especially noteworthy, for such words are not rare in Icelandic romances. While they nevertheless lend an exotic or learned air, such words would not necessarily strike the medieval Icelandic reader as particularly marked.²¹⁰

The relationship that *Nítíða saga* shares with *Clári saga* goes deeper than similarity between the meaning of names and the use of a general Latinate, clerical style. There are further lexical similarities, and the metaphorical use of the word *gimsteinn* [jewel] is the prime example. Again, this latter parallel has not previously been noted. In both cases the word is used to describe beautiful women—Séréna's handmaiden Tecla in *Clári saga* and Sýjalín in *Nítíða saga*—near to their introductions in each text.

Clári saga:

Bæði var hon listug ok fōgr með heiðrligri málsnild ok myndi þykkja hit kurteisasta konungsbarn, ef eigi hefði þvílíkr gimsteinn legit í annat skaut, sem var Séréna konungsdóttir.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 4.

²⁰⁸ Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 331.

²⁰⁹ Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 480.

²¹⁰ 'Karbunculus' or 'karbunkuli stein' appears also in *Karlamagnúss saga*, *Máguss saga jarls*, *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, *Sigurðar saga frækna*, and *Þiðriks saga af Bern*. *Purpuri* is common in many romances, including *Clári saga*, *Sigurðar saga frækna*, and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, and *púsa* appears in translated romances like *Strengleikar* (where the word is first recorded in Old Norse), *Partalopa saga*, and *Erex saga*; Icelandic romances like *Rémundar saga keisarasonar* and *Saulus saga ok Nikanors*; and also religious literature like *Maríu saga (DONP)*.

²¹¹ Cederschiöld, ed., *Clári saga*, p. 12.

[She was both skilled and beautiful with honourable eloquence and would seem the most courteous princess, if such a jewel might not have lain in another garment's fold, that is, Princess Séréna.]

Nítíða saga:

hvn var suo væn og listug at hun mundi forpris þott hafa allra kuenna j veraulldvnni. ef ei hefði þvilíkur gimsteinn hiä verit sem Nitida hin fræga²¹²

[she was so beautiful and skilled that she would have been thought to be most prized of all the women in the world, if nearby there had not been such a jewel as Nítíða the Famous]

Cederschiöld interprets the *gimsteinn* in *Clári saga* literally, as part of Séréna's embellished clothing,²¹³ but Shaun Hughes argues that the sense is metaphorical, and, particularly, legal in nature:

The term að leggja í skaut is a legal term referring to the casting lots which were marked and placed in the lap or fold (*skaut*) of a garment from which they would be drawn by some third person. [...] The term is used here metaphorically to indicate that it was not to fall to Tecla's lot to be drawn for the honor of being considered the most elegant and accomplished young woman in the realm, that being reserved for the Princess Serena.²¹⁴

The sense is certainly also metaphorical in *Nítíða saga*, but the legal aspect has been lost, forgotten, or deliberately omitted by the scribe; the phrase 'ef ei(gi) hefði þvilíkr gimsteinn' is too specific to have occurred in both sagas coincidentally, and I take it as further evidence that *Nítíða saga's* author knew *Clári saga*. Additionally, this use of figurative language could have further significance, in terms of grouping texts together based on known medieval Icelandic centres of text production. Peter Hallberg notes the

²¹² Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 9.

²¹³ Cederschiöld, *Clári saga*, p. 12, note.

²¹⁴ Hughes, 'Klári saga as an Indigenous Romance', pp. 140–41.

metaphorical use of *gimsteinn* also in the religious texts *Nikolaus saga*, *Michaels saga*, and *Guðmundar biskups saga*, and suggests that this group may have been composed by a single author, Bergr Sokkason, who was likely to have been influenced by Jón Halldórsson, *Clári saga*'s probable author.²¹⁵ In addition to these examples, the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* yields more examples of apparent metaphorical use of *gimsteinn*; these are listed alphabetically by saga title, in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: The Use of *gimsteinn* in Sagas

Text	Phrase(s)	Translation
<i>Nítíða saga</i>	ef ei hefði þvilíkur gimsteinn hiä verit sem Nitida hin fræga	if nearby there had not been such a jewel as Nítíða the Famous
<i>Clári saga</i>	ef eigi hefði þvilíkur gimsteinn legit, sem var Séréna konungsdóttir	if had not such a jewel laid in another lap, as was Princess Séréna
<i>Gibbons saga</i>	vænleikr systir hans var sem duft e(dr) dumba hia þessvm gimsteini ²¹⁶	his sister was as dust or mist next to this jewel
<i>Hungrvaka</i>	Þorláki byskupi, er at réttu má segiask geisli eða gimsteinn heilagra ²¹⁷	Bishop Þorlákr, who rightly might be said to be a sunbeam or a most holy jewel
<i>Katerine saga</i>	hinn skjárasti gimsteinn allra kvinna i heiminum ²¹⁸	the most shining jewel of all women
<i>Guðmundar biskups saga</i>	er svá opt líkist gimsteininum Thome Kantuariensi ²¹⁹	who so often resembles the jewel Thomas of Canterbury
	sem hinn bjartasti gimsteinn ok geisli skínandi sólar ²²⁰	as the brightest jewel and shining beam of sun

²¹⁵ Hallberg, 'A Group of Icelandic "Riddarasögur"', pp. 18, 24 (n. 28). However, Hallberg does posit that Bergr Sokkason wrote *Clári saga* as well, and not Jón Halldórsson (pp. 13–14, 20–21). On the metaphorical use of *gimsteinn*, see also Peter Hallberg, 'Imagery in Religious Old Norse Prose Literature', *Arkiv för nordisk Filologi*, 102 (1987), 120–70. See also Karl G. Johansson, 'Bergr Sokkason och Arngrímur Brandsson—översättare och författare i samma miljö', in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference 2–7 July 2000, University of Sydney, ed. by Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, 2000), pp. 181–97.

²¹⁶ Page, ed., *Gibbons saga*, p. 11.

²¹⁷ Jón Helgason, ed., 'Hungrvaka', in *Byskupa sögur*, ed. by Jón Helgason, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1938), I, 25–115 (p. 115).

²¹⁸ C. R. Unger, ed., 'Katerine saga', in *Heilagra Manna Sögur*, I, 400–21 (p. 407).

²¹⁹ Jón Helgason, ed., 'Guðmundar biskups saga', in *Byskupa sögur*, ed. by Jón Helgason, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1938), II, 3–187 (p. 109).

Text	Phrase(s)	Translation
<i>Mariu saga</i>	Martein gimstein kennimanna ²²¹	Martein, jewel of priests
<i>Martinus saga byskups</i>	kalladr af allri cristni gemma sacerdotum, þat þyðiz gimsteinn kennimanna ²²²	called of all Christendom <i>gemma sacerdotum</i> , which means jewel of priests
<i>Marthe saga ok Marie Magdalene</i>	See her liosan lampa heimsins ok skinanda guds gimstein med gðfugligri birti Mariam Magdalenam ²²³	see here the clear lamp of the world and the shining jewel of God with noble brightness, Mary Magdalene
<i>Michaels saga</i>	gimsteinn allra meya ²²⁴	jewel of all maidens
<i>Nikolaus saga</i>	Her skinn liosi biartara, hverir heilagleiks gimsteinar raktu med frabærri fegrð i gofugligum anda Nicholai erkibyskups ²²⁵	Here shines the brightest light, the holiness of jewels ruled with great beauty in the noble spirit of Archbishop Nikolaus
<i>Ólafs saga Trygvassonar</i>	guds gimstæin oftnefndan Olaf konung ²²⁶	God's jewel, the said King Ólaf

Apart from the similarity to *Clári saga*, the closest phrasing to that in *Nítíða saga* is in *Katerine saga*'s 'allra kvinna i heiminum' (cf. 'allra kvenna í veröldunni'). *Michaels saga*'s 'allra meyja', in reference to the Virgin Mary, is also close. This manner of comparing women to precious jewels seems likely to have first appeared in the religious texts and later influenced the romance saga authors or scribes; this reinforces the possibility that romances like *Clári saga* and perhaps even *Nítíða saga* were composed in a religious environment. Stefán Einarsson asserts that *Clári saga*, along with *Gibbons saga* and *Viktors saga ok Blávaus*, was probably written at Skálholt, but that *Nítíða saga*, and others including the maiden-king sagas *Dínus saga drambláta* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, came

²²⁰ Jón Helgason, ed., 'Guðmundar biskups saga', p. 175.

²²¹ C. R. Unger, ed., *Mariu saga: Legender om jomfru Maria og hendes jertegn* (Christiania: Brøgger & Christie, 1871), p. 190.

²²² C. R. Unger, ed., 'Martinus saga byskups', in *Heilagra Manna Sögur*, I, 554–642 (pp. 641–42).

²²³ C. R. Unger, ed., 'Marthe saga ok Marie Magdalene', in *Heilagra Manna Sögur*, I, 513–53 (p. 530).

²²⁴ C. R. Unger, ed., 'Michaels saga', in *Heilagra Manna Sögur*, I, 676–716 (p. 701).

²²⁵ C. R. Unger, ed., 'Nikolaus saga', in *Heilagra Manna Sögur*, II, 21–158 (p. 109).

²²⁶ Guðbrandur Vigfusson and C. R. Unger, eds, 'Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar', in *Flatteyjarbok: En samling af norskse konge-sagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og uden for Norge samt annaler*, 3 vols (Christiania: Mallings, 1860–68), I (1860), 39–583 (p. 515).

from the farm Reykhólar; additionally, he places *Sigurður saga þogla* at the centre of learning at Oddi.²²⁷ Even if *Nítíða saga* was composed at a secular location, the clear influence of Latin and vernacular religious style seems to point to an educated, widely read, and religious author, whether professionally religious in holy orders or a religiously educated layman. Geraldine Barnes notes that Icelandic romances, albeit translated ones in particular, sometimes bear strong resemblance to Icelandic saints' lives, an observation that further supports the possibility that both romance and religious literature emerged from similar environments and even perhaps from similar authors and translators.²²⁸ Further investigations into such religious literary-cultural environments and, especially, more research involving the reading of Icelandic romances against Icelandic saints' lives and related religious writing would surely be important and useful work.²²⁹

Not only does *Nítíða saga* show Latin stylistic influence, but it also contains Low German vocabulary, and in this too it is similar to *Clári saga*. Kalinke explains a number of *Clári saga*'s Low German loans,²³⁰ and some of these also occur *Nítíða saga*, such as *hof* [courtly], *kukl* [magic], *klók* [cunning], *mekt* [power], *skari* [entourage], *stað* [place], and *undirstanda* [understand].²³¹ In addition to these, the word *ævintýr* [narrative or

²²⁷ Stefán Einarsson, 'Heimili (skólar) fornaldarsaga og riddarasaga', p. 272.

²²⁸ Barnes, 'The *riddarasögur* and Mediæval European Literature', pp. 155–58. For more on the relationship between religious and secular texts and genres, see also Marianne E. Kalinke: *The Book of Reykjabólar: The Last of the Great Medieval Legendaries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), especially the first two chapters, pp. 3–44.

²²⁹ Unfortunately, this falls outside the scope of this thesis. It must suffice to say that more research will undoubtedly uncover previously unnoticed cross-genre connections that at present can only be inferred from *Nítíða saga*.

²³⁰ Kalinke, '*Clári saga*: A Case of Low German Infiltration', pp. 5–25.

²³¹ Hughes, '*Klári saga* as an Indigenous Romance', pp. 144–45; Kalinke, '*Clári saga*: A Case of Low German Infiltration', pp. 14–18; and Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2nd rev. edn (Leiden: Brill, 1977), pp. 318, 333, 383, 484, 682. See also Kurt Braunmüller, 'Language Contacts in the Late Middle Ages and in Early Modern Times', in *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, ed. by Oskar Bandle, et al., 2 vols, Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft, 22 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002–05), II (2005), 1222–33; Veturliði Óskarsson,

exemplum], coming ultimately from French, is a further possible example of Low German influence.²³² Again, whereas many of these words do appear in other Icelandic romances, their presence here in *Nítíða saga* alongside so many other clear parallels with *Clári saga* can serve as further evidence to reinforce *Nítíða saga*'s response to and mirroring of *Clári saga*. There are hints of not just a surface dialogue between the two texts, but a rich and deep-seated conversation effected by a complex echoing of vocabulary to produce in *Nítíða saga* a truly informed and conscious interplay with *Clári saga*. Low German vocabulary in both sagas also suggests the possibility of an even more specific relationship between these texts' authors. Jón Halldórsson, the bishop to whom *Clári saga* is sometimes attributed, writes in an identifiable style, which includes Low German and Norwegian vocabulary.²³³ It is uncertain whether *Nítíða saga* was composed or copied by someone whose Icelandic vocabulary contained these words because he had read widely enough to encounter them consistently in other texts of a similar genre or style (such as *Clári saga*), or whether the author or scribe may have himself been originally from or spent a substantial amount of time in an area in which Low German was spoken, as Jón Halldórsson did in the Hanseatic port of Bergen.²³⁴ Having considered the influence that *Clári saga* very likely had on *Nítíða saga*, I will now consider how *Nítíða saga* in turn most probably influenced the composition of another Icelandic romance, *Nikulás saga leikara*.

Middelnedertyske Låneord i islandsk Diplomsprog frem til År 1500, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 43 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2003).

²³² Veturliði Óskarsson, p. 346.

²³³ Hughes, 'Klári saga as an Indigenous Romance'; Jakobsen, *Studier i Clarus saga*, pp. 17–22, 43–104; Kalinke, 'Clári saga: A Case of Low German Infiltration'; Erika Ruth Sigurdson, 'The Church in Fourteenth-Century Iceland: Ecclesiastical Administration, Literacy, and the Formation of an Elite Clerical Identity' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Leeds, 2011), pp. 53–65.

²³⁴ Hughes, 'Klári saga as an Indigenous Romance', pp. 137–38, 145; Kalinke, 'Clári saga: A Case of Low German Infiltration', pp. 24–25.

III: CASE STUDY: *NIKULÁS SAGA LEIKARA*

Nikulás saga leikara is a little-studied Icelandic romance, but, as will be demonstrated shortly, it seems definitely to have a relationship with *Nítíða saga*. *Nikulás saga leikara*'s neglect may be explained in part because it does not appear in Kalinke and Mitchell's *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*. *Nikulás saga leikara*'s earliest manuscript attestations are only from the first half of the seventeenth century, whereas the *Bibliography* generally lists only medieval romances.²³⁵ At the time of the *Bibliography*'s publication, then, this saga may have been considered a post-medieval romance. However, since then evidence has been uncovered that suggests *Nikulás saga leikara* originated in the Middle Ages, despite its exclusively post-medieval witness. A table of contents on folio 28v of the fifteenth-century manuscript Stockholm Perg. fol. nr 7 'seems to include the letters ...lafe leikara, suggesting the presence of Nikuláss saga leikara'.²³⁶ Had Kalinke and Mitchell been aware of this evidence, they might have included *Nikulás saga leikara* among the medieval romances in the *Bibliography*. Further, however, and perhaps more importantly, the saga is not widely available for study; despite existing in sixty manuscripts (indicating a contemporary popularity comparable to that of *Nítíða saga*), the only English translation appears in Keren Wick's 1996 doctoral thesis,²³⁷ and Icelandic-language editions have only been published in 1889,²³⁸ and in 1912,²³⁹ the latter being 'a direct copy' of the former 'in all but the finer points of orthography'.²⁴⁰ The saga does

²³⁵ Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romance*, p. viii.

²³⁶ Christopher Sanders, ed., *Tales of Knights: Perg. fol. nr 7 in The Royal Library, Stockholm (AM 167 VIβ 4to, NKS 1265 IIc fol.)*, Manuscripta Nordica: Early Nordic Manuscripts in Digital Facsimile, 1 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2000), p. 17 (see also pp. 14, 21).

²³⁷ Until the thesis was recently digitized and made available online it was largely unknown.

²³⁸ *Nikulás saga leikara* (Winnipeg: Prentfjelag Heimskringlu, 1889).

²³⁹ Sigurður Kristjánsson, ed., *Sagan af Nikulási konungi leikara* (Reykjavík: Helgi Árnason, 1912).

²⁴⁰ Wick, p. 58, n. 9.

appear a handful of times in Boberg's motif index,²⁴¹ is mentioned in Wahlgren's thesis (though it is ultimately dismissed),²⁴² and has a brief entry in Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson's dictionary,²⁴³ but it is probably safe to say that many scholars are simply unaware of *Nikulás saga leikara's* existence, and that this is the reason for its neglect in scholarship.

In her thesis, Wick's analysis of the saga is arguably limited by her reading of it as a family drama, modelling her interpretations on Derek Brewer and Bruno Bettelheim.²⁴⁴ She defends this approach on the grounds that the saga is 'a tale read and listened to by families'.²⁴⁵ While the purpose of the present case study is not to offer a new interpretation of *Nikulás saga leikara*, but rather to highlight its intertextual relationship with *Nítíða saga*, what follows will, at times, offer readings of the text alternative to, or in greater detail than, those Wick provides. Additionally, as *Nikulás saga leikara* is not well-known, a brief synopsis will not be out of place. The saga follows the adventures of the Hungarian king Nikulás, who acquires the nickname *leikari* [trickster] because he practises magic.²⁴⁶ His foster-father Svívari suggests he marry Dorma, the daughter of King Valdimar of Constantinople, and travels there to ask, unsuccessfully, for her on behalf of Nikulás. Eventually Nikulás goes to Constantinople himself, disguised as the merchant Þórir. As Þórir he gains Valdimar's approval, woos Dorma, and takes her back to Hungary to marry, without her father's knowledge or approval. After their marriage, Dorma is abducted back to Constantinople through sorcery, but in the end she is rescued by Nikulás, who peacefully reconciles with Valdimar. The saga is thus structured

²⁴¹ Boberg cites the 1912 Reykjavík edition.

²⁴² Wahlgren, pp. 18–19, 63, and *passim*.

²⁴³ Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon der nordischen Literatur* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1987), p. 257.

²⁴⁴ Derek Brewer, *Symbolic Stories: Traditional Narratives of the Family Drama in English Literature* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1980) and Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976).

²⁴⁵ Wick, p. 196.

²⁴⁶ Wahlgren mistranslates this nickname, calling him instead 'Nikulás the Sportsman' (p. 18).

somewhat unusually for a romance, in that it does not end with a wedding: rather the protagonist's wedding occurs roughly in the middle of the story, and it ends with a feast of reconciliation.

Nikulás saga leikara and *Nítíða saga* contain several identical or near-identical phrases and sentences. Most of these similarities of diction are likely no more than evidence that the two texts are a part of a wider Icelandic romance tradition for which specific vocabulary came to be used as a matter of course, as mentioned above with *Clári saga*.²⁴⁷ If *Nítíða saga* were read in detail against other romance sagas that co-occur in manuscript and share similar themes,²⁴⁸ it is likely that some of the same stock phrases and descriptions would appear as they do here. However, other shared phrases point to a more specific relationship between *Nikulás saga leikara* and *Nítíða saga*. It is, though, worth beginning by mentioning some examples of genre-specific vocabulary shared by these texts, in order to begin to establish these texts' relationship, before focusing on more specific examples of phrases and ideas that were possibly borrowed from one text to the other.²⁴⁹ The first examples representative of the general relationship between *Nikulás saga leikara* and *Nítíða saga* result from the texts' origins in similar cultural and stylistic environments. Some prime examples of similar lexis concern Dorma's physical

²⁴⁷ Blaisdell, 'Some Observations on Style in the *riddarasögur*', pp. 87–94; Jónas Kristjánsson, 'The Court Style', pp. 431–40; Inna Matyushina, 'On the Imagery and Style of the *Riddarasögur*', in *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages*, Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference, Bonn, Germany, 28 July–2 August 2003, ed. by Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer (Bonn: Universität Bonn, 2003) <<http://www.skandinavistik.uni-bonn.de/saga-conference/>> [Accessed 13 August 2010].

²⁴⁸ *Dínus saga drambláta* would make another interesting comparison: see Tannert, pp. 53–62.

²⁴⁹ While it is not possible to take into account variations in different manuscripts in this case study, and while the manuscript on which the greater part of the version of *Nítíða saga* to be discussed is based is late-medieval (AM 529 4to, 1500s), that from which quotations from *Nikulás saga leikara* are taken is slightly later (Nks 331 8vo, 1600s): if both versions were medieval (or both post-medieval), the evidence available may be different, but I do not see this as a major methodological flaw, especially considering the role the seventeenth-century manuscript AM 537 4to plays in this version of *Nítíða saga* alongside the medieval AM 529: I have chosen to compare two standardized and edited versions of each text.

description: she is described in nearly the same way as *Nítíða*, and female beauty more generally is also pictured in similar terms, as shown in Table 2.2. This manner of description was also common in other medieval Icelandic romances and a conventional way of describing female characters in continental romance.²⁵⁰

Table 2.2: Descriptions of Female Beauty

<i>Nikulás saga leikara</i>	<i>Nítíða saga</i>
fögur sem rösa huýt sem lilia [beautiful as a rose, white as a lily] ²⁵¹	lios og rið j andliti þuilikast sem en rauda rosa væri samtemprad vid sniohuita lileam ²⁵²
øllum blöma og fegurd [in full bloom and beauty] ²⁵³	aull fegurd og blomi ²⁵⁴

Additionally, one phrase used in *Nikulás saga leikara*, which has to do with travel by sea, is echoed in three other phrases in *Nítíða saga*, each mirroring a different part of the phrase in *Nikulás saga leikara*, in the first part of Table 2.3. The diction used to describe the journey is general enough to be expected of a romance, but because *Nítíða saga* often describes sea voyages in this way, it could be conceivable that the author of *Nikulás saga leikara* chose to use this phrase for that reason. Another phrase used in *Nikulás saga leikara* can similarly be attributed to either the shared genre or to its use in *Nítíða saga*, listed in the second part of Table 2.3. This phrase is a bit more particular than the previous, and when used in *Nítíða saga* serves the function of distancing the narrator, and audience, from the action (see Chapter Six); it could thus be considered a stock phrase with a set function.

²⁵⁰ Eugen Kölbing, ed., *Elis saga ok Rosamundu: mit Einleitung, deutscher Übersetzung und Anmerkungen* (Heilbronn: Henninger, 1881), p. 136; Lise Præstgaard Andersen, ed., *Partalopa saga*, Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ, B28 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1983), p. 118. This manner of description was adopted from European (specifically French) romance, as noted in Kalinke, *King Arthur*, pp. 94–95 and *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 72–74.

²⁵¹ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 124. Translations of this text are based on those provided by Wick in her thesis.

²⁵² Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 3.

²⁵³ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 93.

²⁵⁴ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 18.

Table 2.3: Descriptions of Travel

<i>Nikulás saga leikara</i>	<i>Nítíða saga</i>
þeir drögu vpp segl og felldu ei firr enn þeir komu heým j vngaria [They hoisted sail and did not pause before they came back into Hungary] ²⁵⁵	allur hans lydur dragandi vpp sin segl flýtandi sinni ferd ²⁵⁶
	vinda sidan segl og sigla j burt og leggja sin segl ei fyr en j Miklagardi ²⁵⁷
	vinda nv seglin og letta ei sinni ferd fyrr enn þeir koma til Miklagardz ²⁵⁸
og er ei gjetid vm þeirra ferd firr enn þeir komu j vngaria [and there is nothing to be reported about their journey until they came into Hungary] ²⁵⁹	hef eg ei heyrt sagt fra þeirra ferd ne farleingd fyrr en þau taka eyna Visio ²⁶⁰

In addition to these loose resemblances, sometimes both texts use identical phrases. The quotations listed in Table 2.4 are also used in similar contexts in both texts. Such similarities could be coincidental, but may also be evidence of borrowing between texts.

Table 2.4: Identical Diction in *Nikulás saga leikara* and *Nítíða saga*

Text	Translation
j þessar aalfur heimsens	in this region of the world ²⁶¹
fullur (vpp) af golddrum og giorningum	(all) full of sorcery and witchcraft ²⁶²
er menn hafa spurn af / sem eg hefi spurn af	that people have had a report of / that I have had a report of ²⁶³

A final example of lexical similarity between these texts likely attributable to their shared romance vocabulary occurs when *Nikulás* enters *Dorma's* tower and sees elaborate murals depicting many stories painted there; after describing these in some detail, the narrator

²⁵⁵ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 129. 'Firr enn' emended from Wick's 'firer enn'.

²⁵⁶ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 24.

²⁵⁷ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 12.

²⁵⁸ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 16.

²⁵⁹ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 134. 'Firr enn' emended from Wick's 'firer enn'.

²⁶⁰ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 6.

²⁶¹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 30; *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 82.

²⁶² Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 8; *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 110. This phrase is also used in *Rémundar saga keisarasonar* (Sven Grén Broberg, ed., *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 38 (Copenhagen, Møllers, 1909–12), p. 96).

²⁶³ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 5; *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 103.

comments on the difficulty of describing what he sees. In *Nítíða saga* the narrator makes a similar comment after describing the triple wedding scene, and while the phrasing in each is quite different, both comments convey the same sense of feigned inadequacy, on the part of the author or narrator, to describe the scenes (see Table 2.5). It is in comparisons like this that we begin to see the possibility of intertextual connections reaching deeper than the examples considered thus far might suggest. Both narrators here project anxieties that either they themselves (as unlearned men) or the language they write in (an unlearned tongue) are not sufficiently equipped to describe the scenes at hand; both texts employ essentially the same word, meaning ‘unlearned’ or ‘ignorant’, though they take the slightly different forms *fáfröður* and *öfröður*.

Table 2.5: Modesty Topoi

<i>Nikulás saga leikara</i>	<i>Nítíða saga</i>
<i>var það af meýrra hagleýk giört enn eirn fáfröður madur kunne ordum til að koma [it was made of finer workmanship than any unlearned man can begin to relate]</i> ²⁶⁴	er og ei auðsagt með öfrödre tungu í utlegdum veralldarinnar [And it is not easily said with an unlearned tongue in the outer regions of the world] ²⁶⁵

The means of communicating these messages and the similarity of the messages themselves suggest that this aspect of the texts may have been inspired by or borrowed from each other.²⁶⁶ These similarities, while employed within the expected romance vocabulary and conventions, are close enough to suggest a deeper relationship between the two sagas.

I will now discuss further evidence of deeper intertextual connections between *Nítíða saga* and *Nikulás saga leikara*. To begin, Dorma, the only named female character in

²⁶⁴ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 125.

²⁶⁵ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 36.

²⁶⁶ These comments by the narrator can also of course be seen as conventional humility topoi, which were common in medieval literature; the similarity of the vocabulary, however, suggests that this is not just a coincidental correspondance. I discuss this further in Chapter Six.

this romance,²⁶⁷ shares characteristics with *Nítíða*. When Nikulás visits Dorma, disguised as the merchant Þórir, she recognizes him in the same way that *Nítíða* sees through Livorinus’s disguise, seen in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6: Direct Influence

<i>Nikulás saga leikara</i>	<i>Nítíða saga</i>
eigi þurftu nikuläs kongur ad diliast firer mier, þujad firsta sinne, er eg þig leýt j höll fœdur mÿnz, þekta eg ydur ökiendann [King Nikulás, you do not need to conceal yourself from me, because the first time when I looked on you in my father’s hall, I knew you without being taught] ²⁶⁸	‘Liv(orius) kongur’ seger hun, ‘legg aff þier dular kufl þinn, hinn fyrsta dag er þu komst kienna eg þig ²⁶⁹

Dorma, like *Nítíða*, addresses the man by name, tells him not to disguise himself, and reveals she knew him immediately: in both texts this revelation combines the same pieces of information and proceeds in the same order. This bit of direct speech is much more likely to be a direct borrowing than just a coincidence. Unlike in *Nítíða saga*, however, no explanation is provided in *Nikulás saga leikara* as to how Dorma knows Nikulás’s true identity—it is not through the *náttúrusteinarnar*, which in this saga are not even associated with Dorma, but with the protagonist, Nikulás, as will be discussed shortly. In terms of her characterization, Dorma is introduced as a typical maiden-king:²⁷⁰ ‘hennar bádu marger kongar og kongasiner ägiæter. og feýngu aller sneýpu, og voru sumer drepner enn sumer flýdu’ [Many famous kings and princes asked to marry her. And all suffered

²⁶⁷ Whereas *Nítíða saga* has many female characters, all of whom play important roles (as is discussed in Chapters Four and Five), in *Nikulás saga leikara* only one female character is named and the only other women mentioned at all are Dorma’s mother and Nikulás’s mother, both of whom are anonymously referred to as their husband’s queen (*Nikulás saga leikara*, pp. 162–63), as well as the Christian princess whom Nikulás saves from an evil Moor (pp. 116–17). This difference between the texts in terms of the representation of women nevertheless reveals something of the relationship between them.

²⁶⁸ *Nikulás saga leikara*, pp. 125–26.

²⁶⁹ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 31.

²⁷⁰ See Kalinke’s discussions of typical maiden-kings in a number of medieval Icelandic romances (*Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 66–108).

disgrace and some were killed, but some fled].²⁷¹ Nikulás later reinforces this characterization when he shows concern at the suggestion he marry Dorma.²⁷² When she is actually encountered in person, her positive opinion of and behaviour towards Nikulás suggests that her characterization as a maiden-king might better be understood as a blind motif,²⁷³ borrowed to give the saga the feel of a maiden-king romance, without following through on what that actually means for the characters involved. In this respect, *Nikulás saga leikara*, like *Nítíða saga*, can also be considered a saga in open dialogue with the bridal-quest and maiden-king genres of Icelandic romance, responding to texts that portray women in such negative roles such as *Clári saga*. Dorma seems sensible and intelligent, not haughty and condescending as would be expected from a maiden-king.²⁷⁴ Additionally, when Nikulás succeeds in wooing Dorma, she leaves with him freely, by her own choice,²⁷⁵ which is reminiscent of Nítíða's ability to choose freely to marry Liforinus as well.²⁷⁶ Like *Nítíða saga*, *Nikulás saga leikara* approaches the idea of the maiden-king from an unconventional perspective, even though the end result is different in each text. Further, it is possible, and even likely, that the author of the one text chose to approach romance in this way as a result of reading the other, rather than both late-medieval texts questioning romance independently.

The fame and wisdom of key characters in *Nikulás saga leikara* and *Nítíða saga* are also important, and demonstrate further connections between the texts. As Nítíða is

²⁷¹ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 65.

²⁷² *Nikulás saga leikara*, pp. 69–70.

²⁷³ *Nikulás saga leikara*, pp. 75–77, 126–27.

²⁷⁴ *Sigurðar saga þogla's* Sedentiana, *Clári saga's* Séréna, and *Dínus saga drambláta's* Philotemia are typically haughty maiden-kings. See also Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 66–108.

²⁷⁵ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 128.

²⁷⁶ Examples include Clárus's domination of Séréna in *Clári saga* and Sigurðar's domination of Sedentiana in *Sigurður saga þogla*; additionally, the forceful abduction of brides happens in texts like *Viktors saga ok Blávus* and *Vilhálms saga sjóðs*.

renowned for her wisdom and becomes even more famous through her various stratagems, Dorma is characterized as similarly famous when Nikulás says that ‘miklar sögur hafa geýngid frá hennar viturleýk’ [many tales are told of her wisdom].²⁷⁷ This again echoes Nítíða’s characterization, but the saga does not build on this, focusing instead on its hero Nikulás, whose reputation is predominantly negative, as a magician or sorcerer. Nikulás is a trickster like Nítíða, whose positive characterization depends to an extent on her ability to outwit and trick her suitors,²⁷⁸ yet for Nikulás this proves to be a negative trait, which he is only able to overcome through disguise and through his wisdom. That Nítíða and Nikulás should be compared and contrasted based on their shared characterizations as tricksters is further reinforced in those *Nítíða saga* Group A manuscripts that make a genealogical connection between the two characters. Not only does the one saga explicitly link itself to the other,²⁷⁹ but the connection also suggests a critical reading of the two against each other, as *Nítíða saga*’s acknowledgment of *Nikulás saga leikara*’s similarities indicates an open dialogue between them in the minds of their scribes and readers. While it is difficult to say at what point this connection entered the *Nítíða saga* manuscript tradition, it seems most likely that it was not part of an ‘original’ text, primarily because that would mean *Nikulás saga leikara* must be the older saga, which I find a difficult argument to entertain.

Further evidence of borrowing from one text to the other is also seen in the

²⁷⁷ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 106. The kingdoms from which these characters come are also compared, as another clear connection between the texts include Valdimar of Constantinople being said to rule over twenty other kings (*Nikulás saga leikara*, pp. 64, 76, 106), just as Nítíða’s kingdom of France comprises twenty subsidiary kingdoms (Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 11).

²⁷⁸ See Chapter Four for more on Nítíða’s characterization.

²⁷⁹ The earliest known version to do this is found in the Group A manuscript AM 567 I–II 4to, from the sixteenth century, indicating that *Nikulás saga leikara* was known before that time, maybe as early as the late sixteenth century. This is further evidence, alongside that cited above in Sanders, that *Nikulás saga leikara* was a late-medieval composition.

náttúrusteinar motif. Almost as equally important as the stones themselves is the way that Nítíða obtains them—from the island of Visio, against the will of the sorcerer Virgilius. More parallels with *Nítíða saga* dominate the stones' use and portrayal in *Nikulás saga leikara* than in the other texts discussed, especially concerning the manner in which they are acquired. In *Nikulás saga leikara*, Nikulás, like Nítíða, finds magical stones on an island within an island, and in both sagas the mysterious island is situated in an indeterminate northerly location. However, whereas this northern setting serves a specific purpose in *Nítíða saga*, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, it does not make much sense in *Nikulás saga leikara*. Nikulás and his men 'komu að eyrne eý sýd vm kuelld. hun var firer bretlande' [came to an island late in the evening. It was off Britain].²⁸⁰ Both islands are located in reference to a place (in *Nítíða saga* Visio is near Sweden), and whether real or imaginary, they are somewhere significantly further north than the places in which the rest of both sagas' action occurs. And while Nítíða's nautical route from Apulia past Scandinavia is, admittedly, somewhat difficult to picture and would be rather hard to map, that of Nikulás, who the saga tells us sailed past Britain from Hungary on his way to Constantinople, is so much more far-fetched that it seems indicative of the author's geographical ignorance, in sharp contrast to *Nítíða saga's* particularly learned author. This suggests that *Nítíða saga* may have influenced and inspired *Nikulás saga leikara's* use of the motif as the form but not the function of *Nítíða saga's* geography is imitated.²⁸¹

Alternatively, *Nikulás saga leikara's* author could have understood the significance of the

²⁸⁰ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 90. Cf. Loth, ed., 'Nítida saga', p. 5: 'þesse ey liggur vt vndan Suiþiod jnni kaulldu. vt vnder heims skautid'.

²⁸¹ Wick considers mapping the routes that Nikulás takes on his sea-voyages from Hungary, but concludes that the endeavour is futile (p. 205). She also considers it a problem that Nikulás travels by sea, noting that Hungary is landlocked, evidently forgetting that medieval Hungary was a much greater kingdom than the borders of modern post-World War II Hungary might suggest, and at times extended all the way to the Dalmatian coast in the west and nearly to the Black Sea in the east (Pál Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895–1526*, trans. by Tamás Pálosfalvi (London: Tauris, 2001), p. 374).

north as in general an otherworldly place where strange things can happen, and so localized the episode there for that reason,²⁸² but it seems more likely that *Nítíða saga* plays an equal if not greater role in the scene's construction than might this general cultural attitude.

In *Nikulás saga leikara* the descriptions of the expedition to the island are much more detailed than they are in *Nítíða saga*, and the episode is, overall, much more complex. The differences are discussed below, but comparison of phrasing begins with examples of identical or nearly identical diction, starting with the arrival at the mysterious island, as listed in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7: The náttúrusteinar

<i>Nikulás saga leikara</i>	<i>Nítíða saga</i>
hann keimur ad eýnu störu vatne, og sier eirn hólma j midiu vatninu ²⁸³ [he comes to a large lake. And he sees an islet in the middle of the lake]	j þessari eyiv er vatn eitt stort. enn j vatninu er holmi ²⁸⁴
hann þöttist siä vm allann heýmenn og vm öll lönd og kongarýjke og huad huer hafdist ad ä siö og lande ²⁸⁵ [He thought he saw over all the world, and all the lands and kingdoms, and what each man did at sea and on land]	hun sä þä vm allar hálfur veralldarinnar. þar med konga og konga sonu og huad huer hafdest at ²⁸⁶
hann þikist skinia ad þesser steynar mune hafa med sier allra handa nátturu ²⁸⁷ [He believes he understands that these stones must contain all kinds of powers]	hun vnder stod af sinni visku hueria nátturu huer bar ²⁸⁸

²⁸² See Chapter Three especially, but also Chapter Four, for discussions of the conceptions of different world regions in the Icelandic romances. John Shafer's chapter on the conception of the North in Icelandic sagas is also useful: John Douglas Shafer, *Saga Accounts of Norse Far-Travellers* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Durham, 2010) <<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/286/>> [Accessed 1 September 2011], pp. 207–72.

²⁸³ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 91.

²⁸⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nítida saga', p. 5.

²⁸⁵ *Nikulás saga leikara*, pp. 92–93.

²⁸⁶ Loth, ed., 'Nítida saga', p. 6.

²⁸⁷ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 93.

²⁸⁸ Loth, ed., 'Nítida saga', p. 6.

While not all of these phrases are identical, the same sense is present in each, with at least some parallel diction. Unlike in *Nítíða saga*, where the stones collectively have three functions, in *Nikulás saga leikara* the ability to see other places in the world is transferred to a four-coloured magical mirror, which might also be akin to the four-cornered vessel containing the stones in *Nítíða saga*,²⁸⁹ and in addition to this each specific stone has its own detailed properties and functions. Considering the styles of these two passages, it seems that *Nikulás saga leikara* might use more typically native Icelandic words, phrases, and constructions, compared to the borrowed words and more learned style of *Nítíða saga*. Where *Nikulás saga leikara* uses the simple past tense *lögðu* and the common Icelandic word *heiminn*, *Nítíða saga* uses the Latinate present participle *leggjandi* and the less prosaic term *veröld*;²⁹⁰ and where *Nikulás saga leikara* uses the native construction *þykist skynja*, *Nítíða saga* uses the borrowed verb *undirstanda*. Consequently, it is possible that *Nikulás saga leikara* was influenced by *Nítíða saga*, but was written either without adopting some of its learned stylistic features, or these features have been eradicated in the course of the text's transmission.

The functions and properties of the *náttúrusteinar* are revealed to Nikulás by a mysterious sort of helper figure, who also tells him that the stones 'eru so ägiæter griper ad önguer finnast þujlyker firer heidann hafid' [are such renowned treasures that nothing similar has been found beyond the heathen sea],²⁹¹ which is, again, reminiscent of Nítíða's assertion that in no place besides Visio might one find more treasures. The interpretation continues, and the properties of the three coloured stones are listed:²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Wick interprets the vessel as a 'water-mirror' (p. 212).

²⁹⁰ This word is used especially with an ecclesiastical sense (*Cleasby-Vigfusson*, p. 699).

²⁹¹ *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 94.

²⁹² It is worth remembering that Nítíða's *náttúrusteinar* are not physically described in any way, only that they are found in a vessel: 'sinn steinn var j hueriu horni kersins' [a stone was in each corner of the vessel], Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 6.

sä raudi steýrnenn hefur þá nátturu, ef þu hefur hann ä þier j bardögum þä fær þu sigur og alldrei verdur þier aflafätt vid huern sem þu ätt. og ei mä þier eitur granda og eýnginn jll älog meýga ä þier hrýna. enn su er náttura hinz bläa þier mä alldre kullde granda og ei ä sundi mädash ei elldur skada og eýnginn fiölkýnge. su er náttura hinz græna steýnsinz ef þu likur hann j hendi þinne þä mä eýnginn siä þig huar sem þu ert komenn. og þejm manni lýkur ad allre sköpun er þu villt, og þejrar kuinnu aster fá er þü villt kiösa.²⁹³

[That red stone has the power that if you have it with you in battles, then you will gain victory; and you will never become short of strength whoever you are dealing with. And poison may not harm you, and no evil spell may affect you. And this is the nature of the blue: cold may never harm you, and you will not grow tired swimming. And fire will not scathe you, and no magic. That is the nature of the green stone: if you enclose it in your hand, then no one may see you wherever you have gone. And you may adopt those human shapes for any destiny that you wish, and obtain the love of those women whom you wish to choose.]

Such detailed description and explanation characterizes the main difference between *Nikulás saga leikara* and *Nítíða saga* in the appearance of the *náttúrusteinar* motif: the former text takes its time and includes many details that might be seen as inessential, while the latter is a more direct and concise narration of the scene. The difference may be attributed to *Nítíða saga* narrating a specific, planned expedition, with a clear goal to find supernatural stones from the outset, whereas in *Nikulás saga leikara* the stones are found entirely by accident, and the protagonist has no foreknowledge of their existence and therefore no driving desire to seek them. This could explain *Nikulás saga leikara*'s lengthy episode, because neither Nikulás nor the audience has any expectations as to what could happen on the island, unlike *Nítíða* and her saga's audience, who both know what they are looking for and, in the most basic sense, what to expect from the episode. In her

²⁹³ *Nikulás saga leikara*, pp. 94–95.

commentary, Wick very briefly notes these parallels with *Nítíða saga*,²⁹⁴ and also draws attention to other similarities in passing, but without offering any thoughts on how the similarities between these texts may have arisen. I feel they are too strong to be mere coincidence, especially considering that these two texts occur together in manuscript more than any others do with *Nítíða saga*.

As I explained in Chapter One, the Group A *Nítíða saga* manuscripts make an explicit connection to *Nikulás saga leikara* as *Nítíða saga* ends. Because this Group A version of *Nítíða saga* is one of the oldest (along with Group B, which is the version to which the saga as discussed in this chapter up until now belongs), and because this specific intertextual connection is concentrated in that group, it is possible that the relationship is an original feature of *Nítíða saga*. It is also significant that the popularity of the Group A version containing this narrative element declined somewhat in the post-medieval period as other versions began to emerge and thrive, so by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were more extant versions that did not contain this connection than those that did. In the nineteenth century there are, as far as I know, only five manuscripts containing Group A versions of the saga, and fifteen containing versions from other groups that do not connect the texts. There are no Group A manuscripts from the twentieth century. This indicates that in later centuries this connection was not important to scribes, readers, and others to whom the story was known, and that this feature was not important enough to preserve in new copies of the text, even if some of the other lexical and thematic correspondences between the romances were preserved. In the larger branch of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Group E manuscripts, almost all of the similarities with *Nikulás saga leikara* that are present in earlier versions are absent; the smaller E-branch, comprising only two manuscripts, as mentioned, does refer

²⁹⁴ Wick, p. 213.

to *Nikulás saga leikara*, suggesting that in rare cases this connection may have continued to be included for tradition's sake, and it is of course possible that it is through these manuscripts or their lost exemplars that Group E might join up with Group A. *Nikulás saga leikara* appears in *Nítíða saga*'s manuscripts more than any other saga, as mentioned at the beginning of the thesis, strongly suggesting that they were transmitted together. While common post-medieval transmission of course does not necessarily mean that paired texts influenced each other and the opposite could in fact be the case, in which the texts are paired in manuscript because of their already existing (and thus perhaps incidental) similarities, it does seem likeliest to conclude that *Nikulás saga leikara* was influenced and perhaps even inspired by *Nítíða saga*, and is thus a slightly younger romance. Overall, while dissimilarity between some episodes exists, the basic motifs remain the same, and are too similar to be mere coincidence.

IV: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has only begun to uncover some of the intertextual relationships evident in *Nítíða saga*, from the texts that very possibly influenced its author, such as *Clári saga*, to texts that may also have been influenced by it, such as *Nikulás saga leikara* and *Sigurðar saga þogla*. Teasing out the complex web of connections that *Nítíða saga* exhibits is a great task, but in this chapter I have been able to suggest some of the directions from which to begin. I sought not definitively to explain *Nítíða saga*'s origin but to understand how the text relates to others on a basic level, in order to inform later discussions in the thesis. While *Clári saga*'s influence seems to have been fundamental to the conception and development of *Nítíða saga* in that it seems clear that the latter was written in order to

reconsider and negotiate some of the themes that the former brought to light,²⁹⁵ and, generally, to reconsider the genre of romance itself, in later versions of *Nítíða saga* preserved in paper manuscripts the connection to *Clári saga* becomes less pronounced, though the influence still remains as part of the text in crucial respects, like the bridal-quest and maiden-king motifs. Considering also some relationships based on shared vocabulary, *Nikulás saga leikara* shows fewer Latinate words and constructions than *Nítíða saga*, and in later centuries some versions of *Nítíða saga* also show less Latin influence while maintaining the thematic similarities to *Clári saga*, such as the maiden-king figure and the whole idea of the dialogue between these two texts evident in, for example, character names. Because *Nítíða saga* does not explicitly state the nature of any aspect of its relationship to *Clári saga* in the medieval manuscripts but rather plays off of the text, its genre classifications, and its themes, it is unsurprising that in later versions the connection between the two texts is obscured, if not lost completely, having been absorbed into the fabric of *Nítíða saga* as an essential component of that text.

What all of this suggests is that the intertextual relationships demonstrated in this chapter were present and important in *Nítíða saga* in the later Middle Ages when the text was first recorded and disseminated, and that they also played a significant part in the story's early development. Knowledge of other romances and religious texts shaped *Nítíða saga*'s characters, settings, and motifs, and most importantly situated the text within the literary landscape of not just Icelandic romance but also the hagiographic and other works of the almost certainly religious literary-cultural milieu in which the saga was produced and from which its author drew inspiration. In this first section of the thesis, I have considered what I call *Nítíða saga*'s 'external contexts', in contrast with its 'internal contexts', which the next section will cover. Having first discussed the text's many

²⁹⁵ See especially Chapter Four.

witnesses as a collection of physical artefacts in Chapter One, and now in Chapter Two having focused primarily on one textual witness as a cultural artefact (the abstract text known as *Nítíða saga*), I have presented mainly contextual information that will enrich the following primarily literary-analytical chapters. In the next chapter, I will discuss the saga's 'internal contexts'—its setting and the worldviews it exhibits—through the lens of *Nítíða saga*'s portrayal of geography and space, and how *Nítíða saga* maximizes certain similarities between Iceland and the rest of Europe and minimizes its differences to show how seamlessly peripheral Iceland fits as a part of Europe, by presenting a uniquely Icelandic understanding of the medieval world that shifts the world's centre closer to Iceland. I will consider the idea of Iceland becoming 'Europeanized' in its adoption, or appropriation, of a Continental form of literature (romance), taking *Nítíða saga*'s geographical worldview as an example. Chapter Three will thus complete my discussion of the saga's setting and atmosphere by complementing my findings regarding its connections with other types of literature.

Chapter 3

GEOGRAPHY AND SPACE: THE SETTING

Whereas in the previous two chapters I considered *Nítíða saga*'s manuscripts, scribes, and intertextual relationships, I now consider the saga's presentation of geography, along with brief mention of its lack of reference to religion; together these two aspects contribute to the setting and atmosphere of the story. While I began outside of the text, looking at 'external contexts', I now move more closely to the text itself to see its 'internal contexts', but stopping short of focusing further to analyse the characters, which will be the subject of Part Two. Geography plays an important role in most medieval Icelandic romances, *Nítíða saga* included. This has long been recognized, if not considered in much depth, for the Icelandic romances, practically by definition, are set away from Iceland, and away from Scandinavia.²⁹⁶ It is partly these non-Icelandic settings that have contributed to the neglect of Icelandic romances by many past scholars of Icelandic literature.²⁹⁷ With settings reaching from Sweden to Syria and including fantastic locations such as *Nítíða saga*'s island of Visio, the geographical range presented in the Icelandic romances as a group is impressive, and it is possible to analyse romance geography to consider how medieval Icelanders saw themselves in relation to the rest of the known world.²⁹⁸ Having looked at some of the external contexts of the saga, I will now discuss the conception of

²⁹⁶ Driscoll defines Icelandic romances as 'the group of sagas composed in Iceland from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries onwards *which take place in an exotic (non-Scandinavian), vaguely chivalric milieu*, and are characterized by an extensive use of foreign motifs and a strong supernatural or fabulous element' ('Late Prose Fiction', p. 190, my italics).

²⁹⁷ Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction', pp. 196–97; Kalinke, 'Norse Romances', pp. 317–17.

²⁹⁸ For overviews of medieval Scandinavian knowledge of geography see Alfred Jakobson, 'Geographical Literature', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and others (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 225; Judith Jesch, 'Geography and Travel', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 119–35; Rudolf Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie: Studien und Quellen zu Weltbild und Weltbeschreibung in Norwegen und Island vom 12. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990); and Simek, 'Elusive Elysia', pp. 247–75.

space in *Nítíða saga* as an important aspect of its setting and atmosphere, which could be understood as part of the text's internal contexts. I will consider space on both a global level by looking at the saga's unusual portrayal of world geography, and on a smaller scale by considering the much more typical separation of public and private space as it is represented in the text. I will first discuss how Iceland views itself within Europe—insofar as 'Europe' is a useful notion when dealing with the Middle Ages—through the worldview of *Nítíða saga*. I will also consider the notion of Iceland's cultural colonization of medieval Europe through romance literature, and whether such interaction between Iceland and Europe displayed in *Nítíða saga* could be called 'Europeanization', to use a term relatively recently employed by Bjørn Bandlien.²⁹⁹ Comparison with related Icelandic romances (*Clári saga*, *Dínus saga drambláta*, *Nikulás saga leikara*, and *Sigurðar saga þogla*) will also situate *Nítíða saga* in its literary environment, and showcase its unique developments alongside motifs and topoi incorporated from other texts. After discussing the saga's descriptions of world geography, a detailed reading of the saga's construction of different categories of space will accompany more detailed discussions in case studies of three main types of places found in *Nítíða saga*. Before delving into the text, it will be useful to discuss and define terms such as 'Europeanization' and 'Europe'.

I: INTRODUCTION: EUROPEANIZATION

Nítíða saga can be read as a text through which Icelandic society and culture enter into dialogue with the society and culture of medieval Europe. Bandlien has used the term 'Europeanization' in reference to the translated romances *Karlamagnús saga* and *Elis saga*

²⁹⁹ Bjørn Bandlien, 'Muslims in *Karlamagnúss saga* and *Elíss saga ok Rósamundar*', in *Á austrvega': Saga and East Scandinavia*, Preprint Papers of the Fourteenth International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9–15 August 2009, ed. by Agnete Ney, Henrik Williams, and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist, 2 vols (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), pp. 85–91 (p. 86).

ok *Rósamundu*, saying that ‘Although they are of French or Anglo-Norman origin, it seems promising to read these texts in their Norwegian and Icelandic setting with regard to a wider problem: the “Europeanization” of Scandinavia’.³⁰⁰ No definition of the term is offered, but the idea of ‘Europeanization’ is appealing as a means to classify Scandinavian (including Icelandic) interaction with and reaction to the cultural and political developments of the European Continent, as seen through socio-cultural attitudes mediated through literature. By looking at the representation of geography in Icelandic romance, we are also looking at Icelandic appropriation and interpretation of the geography inherited from and mediated by European sources, to see how in *Nítíða saga* the author or scribe’s aims to fulfil ‘geographical desire’ are achieved in crafting his own image of the world, separate and distinct from that of any of his sources.³⁰¹ My analyses focus not on potential sources of Icelandic writers’ geographical knowledge, but on how world geography is variously portrayed in their texts.³⁰² It is easy to see how the idea of ‘Europeanization’ applies to Bandlien’s two examples—translated sagas with definite European sources—and to other translated romances, especially those undertaken during King Hákon Hákonarson’s reign in thirteenth-century Norway. *Karlamagnús saga* ‘consists of adaptations of ten different branches of the Charlemagne cycle [...] commonly presumed to have been translated independently in the thirteenth century, probably by

³⁰⁰ Bandlien, ‘Muslims’, p. 86.

³⁰¹ Sylvia Tomasch, ‘Introduction: Medieval Geographical Desire’, in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 1–12 (p. 2).

³⁰² Tomasch’s view that accurate geography is unattainable—‘Faced with irreconcilable demands and expectations of politics and ideality, a totally successful “writing of the world” is simply not possible’ for modern (literary) historians of the Middle Ages—can be said also of medieval (and post-medieval) writers of romance, whose inclusion of geography and a set worldview necessarily reflects their own desires and ambitions, whether personal, cultural, nationalistic, or a combination of these, to assert themselves and their texts within medieval Europe (‘Introduction’, pp. 10–11).

Icelanders, [...] and then compiled into a long version as they are now preserved’,³⁰³ and some of its immediate sources are the *Chanson d’Aspremont*, *Chanson d’Otinél*, *La Chanson de Roland*, and *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*.³⁰⁴ *Elís saga ok Rósamundu*, however, ‘derives from an incomplete version of the French *Elie de St. Gille*, translated by a certain Abbot Robert at the request of Hákon Hákonarson’ and is one of the few romances to exist in a Norwegian manuscript (Uppsala University Library De La Gardie 4–7 fol., c. 1250), rather than only in Icelandic copies.³⁰⁵ In order to engage with the rest of Europe, the Norwegian king sought to import influential and successful European literature, thereby taking measures to ‘Europeanize’ his realm and appropriate European culture through chivalric, courtly literature.³⁰⁶ That most of the translated romances exist today in Icelandic versions—almost exclusively³⁰⁷—speaks also to the notion of ‘Europeanization’ on an even greater scale,³⁰⁸ for Iceland was so much further removed from the European continent, if only geographically, than was Norway. However, Bandlien’s suggested mode of reading can be applied not only to sagas known to have been translated from Continental sources, but also to romances composed by Icelanders, like *Nitíða saga*. Whether translated or not, Icelandic romances are in active communication with other

³⁰³ Bandlien, ‘Muslims’, p. 86, and n. 2.

³⁰⁴ Kalinke and Mitchell, p. 61.

³⁰⁵ Kalinke, and Mitchell, pp. 36–37.

³⁰⁶ Barnes, ‘The *riddarasögur* and Mediæval European Literature’, pp. 140–58; Bibire, pp. 56–58; Kalinke, ‘Norse Romance (Riddarasögur)’, pp. 320–22; Ian McDougall, ‘Foreigners and Foreign Languages in Medieval Iceland’, *Saga-Book*, 22 (1986–89), 180–233 (especially p. 233); Elizabeth Rasmussen, ‘Translation in Medieval and Reformation Norway: A History of Stories or the Story of History’, *Meta: Journal des traducteurs*, 49 (2004), 629–45.

³⁰⁷ De La Gardie 4–7 fol., just mentioned, is the main manuscript of Norwegian provenance preserving four translated texts (Bandlien, p. 86 n. 1). The many other Old Norse romances with known European sources exist in Icelandic manuscripts (see Kalinke and Mitchell’s individual entries in their *Bibliography* for translated romances).

³⁰⁸ Barnes, ‘The *Riddarasögur*: A Medieval Exercise in Translation’, pp. 403–41; Kalinke, ‘Norse Romances’, pp. 322, 332–33.

types of medieval romance, as a major form of entertainment in the later Middle Ages.³⁰⁹ Because of their similarity, at least in genre, to stories from the Continent, the Icelandic romances also place themselves, along with their authors, scribes, and audiences, in communication with the rest of Europe through literature, and specifically through the fact that in Iceland, just as in Europe, romance thrived.³¹⁰ Of course one cannot lump all forms of European medieval romance into a homogenous group with which to contrast the Icelandic romances, but broadly speaking, romances written in medieval France or Germany, for example, are rather more similar to each other than to their Scandinavian counterparts.³¹¹ As only one of many examples of this, courtly love, which might be considered one of the defining characteristics of Continental romance in the Middle Ages,³¹² is noticeably absent in the Icelandic versions of Chrétien de Troyes, and in the Icelandic compositions.³¹³ Instead, bridal-quest and marriage defines many Icelandic romances.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Kalinke, 'Norse Romance'; Nicola McDonald, 'A Polemical Introduction', in *Pulp Fictions of the Middle Ages: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. by Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 1–21; Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, p. 3.

³¹⁰ Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction', pp. 348–49.

³¹¹ Roberta L. Krueger, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1–9. The fact that this introductory volume excludes Scandinavian romance is enough to demonstrate its conception as belonging outside of medieval Europe, and to reinforce the homogeneity (whether justified or not) of romance from various other European vernaculars.

³¹² Krueger, pp. 2–5.

³¹³ Sif Rikhardsdóttir deals with such differences in style and content through examples from *Yvain* and its Norse translation in *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*, pp. 76–112. Other chapters looking at Norse translations of Marie de France's *lais* and the Middle English *Partonope of Blois* are also illuminating in this context.

³¹⁴ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*; Kalinke, *King Arthur*. See also Daniel Sävborg's discussion of depictions of love in Icelandic romance in *Sagan om kärleken: Erotik, känslor och berättarkonst i norrön litteratur*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Historia Litterarum, 27 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2007), pp. 558–89.

Icelandic romance composition (just as much as other literary genres like history writing) works to situate Iceland within the late medieval European literary-cultural milieu. That Icelandic romances were well received and enjoyed by their audiences for many years after their original composition, as seen in Chapter One, also demonstrates that Iceland's own popular literature could easily compete with other imported romances.³¹⁵ Indeed, the Icelandic romances survived much better than the translated ones.³¹⁶ Icelandic romance provided a popular literature suitable for comparison with that of other places such as England, where popular romance often functioned as a means of affirming national identity and even national mythologies surrounding that country and its rulers.³¹⁷ In Geraldine Heng's words, 'romance is, in fact, a genre of the nation: a genre *about* the nation and for the nation's important fictions'.³¹⁸ It seems to be similar in Iceland, with romance acting as an expression of collective late medieval Icelandic identity. There is little doubt that in composing romances, Icelanders actively engaged with the idea of European romance, and evaluated themselves in relation to it, even though in doing this Icelanders created romances distinct from those of Continental origin. European influence is evident in most Icelandic romances, even in those not directly

³¹⁵ The Arthurian romances are the best example of imported popular literature in Iceland; even while Icelandic versions exist in many manuscripts, there are more indigenous non-Arthurian romances that survive, demonstrating that in the end, Icelanders preferred romances of their own devising. See Kalinke, *King Arthur*.

³¹⁶ Hall, 'Making Stemmas', figs 2, 3.

³¹⁷ Heng, pp. 63–114; Diane Speed, 'The Construction of the Nation in Middle English Romance', in *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 135–57; Robert M. Stein, 'Making History English: Cultural Identity and Historical Explanation in William of Malmesbury and Laȝamon's *Brut*', in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 97–115.

³¹⁸ Heng, p. 113; italics original.

translated. Motifs and plots were borrowed and adapted,³¹⁹ and to a certain extent the romance form itself is imported, considering the saga types of the earlier Middle Ages,³²⁰ long understood to be more or less historically aware, if not factually accurate.³²¹ An example of European influence is the incorporation of motifs like that of the faithful lion in Chrétien de Troye's *Yvain*,³²² which appears in Icelandic romances including *Sigurðar saga þogla*.³²³ In modifying traditional elements of European romance,³²⁴ Icelanders interacted with Continental literature and engaged with Europe without slavishly copying foreign style, which was, instead, adapted to a distinctly Icelandic taste; Icelandic authors could not but recognize their land's place in the world and see how their differences made them unique.

I must briefly consider the usefulness of the term 'Europe' when speaking of the Middle Ages. Might a better term be employed instead? As will be seen below, some medieval Icelandic romances use 'Europe' to refer to roughly what it is today, that is, the part of the world that is neither Africa nor Asia (or the Americas).³²⁵ That said, might not 'Christendom' be a better designator for that geographical region during the time in question, as Christianity, though by no means uniform throughout the areas it reached,

³¹⁹ Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', pp. 273–74; Marianne Kalinke, 'Old Norse-Icelandic Literature, Foreign Influence On', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and others (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 451–54; Kalinke, 'Norse Romances', pp. 348–49.

³²⁰ Bibire, pp. 58–59.

³²¹ Vésteinn Ólason, 'The Icelandic Saga as a Kind of Literature', pp. 27–48; Jones, 'History and Fiction in the Sagas of Icelanders', pp. 285–306. See also Chapter Six.

³²² Kalinke, *King Arthur*, pp. 220–39.

³²³ Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*, B301.8 'Faithful lion follows man who saved him', B431.2 'Helpful lion', B520 'Animals save person's life' (pp. 47–48); Kalinke, 'Old Norse-Icelandic Literature, Foreign Influence On', p. 452; Schlauch, p. 167. See also Geraldine Barnes, 'The *riddarasögur* and Mediæval European Literature', 140–58.

³²⁴ Kalinke, 'Old Norse-Icelandic Literature, Foreign Influence On', p. 453.

³²⁵ Bernard Hamilton, 'The Lands of Prester John: Western Knowledge of Asia and Africa at the Time of the Crusades', *Haskins Society Journal*, 15 (2004), 126–41 (p. 128).

was perhaps the sole unifying cultural influence across such vast regions? Covering diverse ethnic and linguistic groups, medieval Europe stretched only as far as Christianity's infiltration and influence. Christendom thus might seem a more appropriate place name than Europe, but what then of the idea of 'Europeanization'? This term does not share the same relationship with 'Christianization' as does Europe with Christendom; it would be an entirely different thing to speak of the Christianization, that is the conversion, of Iceland. It is primarily for this reason that in this chapter I will use the terms 'Europeanization' and 'Europe', while also sometimes using 'Europe' and 'Christendom' interchangeably. As the place name *Europe* was certainly known in medieval Iceland,³²⁶ it in no way seems to me anachronistic to speak of late medieval Iceland's place in and conceptualization of Europe.

While Iceland lay on the fringes of the world (as defined according to medieval European geography), a fact of which Icelanders seem to have been aware, their understanding of their marginality also necessitated an understanding of the world's centre. Culturally and politically, this centre was in Continental Europe; spiritually, it was in Jerusalem (or Byzantium).³²⁷ Sverrir Jakobsson notes that 'Icelanders appropriated a world view that entailed that their own society was a marginal and peripheral one', rather than that 'of an isolated culture, as traditionally defined by anthropologists', in which

³²⁶ The world is divided into three parts, one of them being Europe in, for example, *Snorra Edda* (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005), p. 4), *Clári saga* (Cederschiöld, ed., *Clári saga*, p. 3), and *Dínus saga drambláta* (Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., p. 3).

³²⁷ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'From Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation', in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 19–34; Geraldine Barnes, 'Byzantium in the Riddarasögur', in *Á austrvega': Saga and East Scandinavia*, Preprint Papers of the Fourteenth International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9–15 August 2009, ed. by Agnete Ney, Henrik Williams, and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist, 2 vols (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), I, 92–98; Iain Macleod Higgins, 'Defining the Earth's Center in a Medieval "Multi-Text": Jerusalem in *The Book of John Mandeville*', in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 29–53.

marginal ‘cultures tend to view themselves as the centre of the world’.³²⁸ Thus not only do Icelanders know where they stand in relation to the ‘centres’, but they also recognize the part they play in the world’s ‘centres’. Not merely through contact with European culture and ideas following the settlement of Iceland,³²⁹ but in settlement itself and the subsequent literary tradition that aimed to record it,³³⁰ is medieval Icelandic interaction with Europe seen—recognition and remembrance of where their ancestors came from and where those places fit within Europe. Further, we must not forget later pilgrimages from Iceland to the centres of Christianity.³³¹ Iceland could not easily, as a part of Christendom, be too isolated from the rest of that pan-European community, and with a worldview locating itself within Europe-Christendom, no matter how far on the edge, Iceland thought itself in dynamic dialogue and exchange with the world’s centre. In considering these questions of ‘Europeanization’, worldview, religion, centre and periphery, and Iceland’s place in the world compared with other known places, medieval Icelandic romance is certainly involved in the idea of ‘the Europeanization of Scandinavia’, which, while seen as a ‘problem’ by Bandlien, I view rather as a notion or question alive and actively discussed in these texts. *Nítíða saga* is an especially active agent in these questions; it both prompts their debate in the sagas itself and is influenced by them in a reciprocal relationship between society and text, culture and literature. Further, Barnes for

³²⁸ Sverrir Jakobsson, ‘Centre and Periphery in Icelandic Medieval Discourse’, in *‘Á austrvega’: Saga and East Scandinavia*, Preprint Papers of the Fourteenth International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9–15 August 2009, ed. by Agnete Ney, Henrik Williams, and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist, 2 vols (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), II, 918–24 (p. 918).

³²⁹ Frederic Amory, ‘Things Greek and the *riddararsögur*’, *Speculum*, 59 (1984), 509–23; Barnes, ‘Byzantium’; Sigfús Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium: An Aspect of Byzantine Military History*, trans. by Benedikt S. Benediktz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

³³⁰ The main sources for the settlement of Iceland are *Landnámabók* and Ari Þorgilsson’s *Íslendingabók*, both composed in the twelfth century, along with episodes in later *Íslendingasögur*, such as *Laxdæla saga*.

³³¹ Sverrir Jakobsson, ‘Centre and Periphery’, pp. 920–22.

example considers *Nítíða saga* a romance with particular geographical awareness.³³² I will now examine this text's perspective on Iceland's place in Europe, keeping in mind especially the questions of Europeanization and cultural colonization through literature. After considering *Nítíða saga*'s descriptions of geography and travel in both real and imagined spaces, and what this means in view of Iceland's geographical and political position in the late medieval world, I will also analyse the saga's depiction of space along a public-private continuum in three case studies of real and imagined places.

II: GEOGRAPHY

Nítíða saga names thirty-one different places, which can be divided into three categories:

1) places understood to be real and which are relatively easy for modern readers to identify, 2) places understood to be real and which could be a bit more difficult for modern readers to identify, and 3) places understood to be fantastic or unrealistic—imagined or magical locations—which are essentially impossible for modern readers to identify. The first group is by far the largest, containing twenty-five locations; the second group has four; and the third group just two. I will begin this section with an overview of these places in *Nítíða saga*, followed by a brief discussion of what the saga excludes from its geography, before looking in some depth at an example of one location from each of the three groups of places in order to see how *Nítíða saga* depicts each type of location, and what this suggests about late medieval Icelanders' views about the world and their place in it. Although, as mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, little work has been carried out specifically on *Nítíða saga*, Geraldine Barnes has written on the saga's geography, interpreting the text as a 'cosmographical comedy' centred on a struggle for

³³² Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', p. 272

power between East and West.³³³ More recently, Ármann Jakobsson has also discussed the saga's geography, but paints a more negative picture of the global view represented in *Nítíða saga*, dismissing it as largely unrealistic, and therefore typical of late medieval Icelandic romances.³³⁴ These views will be considered and challenged in the discussions that follow.

Turning now to the text, the most significant episode depicting the geographical worldview of the saga occurs when Nítíða shows Livorinus her *náttúrusteinar* [supernatural stones]. I have above referred to this episode as the seeing-stones scene. On three occasions, Nítíða shows Livorinus (alias Eskilvarður) three global regions in her *náttúrusteinar*. The first time, 'meýkongur took upp stein og bad hann j lyta, hann sä þa yffer allt Frackland, Provintiam, Ravenam, Spaniam, Hallitiam, Friisland, Flandren, Nordmandiam, Skottland, Grickland, og allar þær þiöoder þar biggia' [The maiden-king took up a stone and asked him to look in it. Then he saw over all France, Provence, Ravenna, Spain, Hallitia,³³⁵ Frisia, Flanders, Normandy, Scotland, Greece, and all the peoples who live there].³³⁶ The second time, 'Drottning bad Eskil(ward) enn lyta j steinninn. þa sau þau nordur aalffuna alla, Noreg, Ysland, Færeýar, Sudureyar, Orkneýar, Svijþiöd, Danmork, Eingland, Ýrland, og morg lond onnur, þau er hann visse eý skil a' [The queen asked Eskilvarður to look into the stone. Then they saw all the northern region, Norway, Iceland, the Faeroes, the Hebrides, the Orkneys, Sweden, Denmark,

³³³ Barnes, 'Margin vs. Centre', pp. 104–12. See also Barnes, 'Travel and *translatio studii* in the Icelandic riddarasögur', pp. 138–39.

³³⁴ Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, p. 177.

³³⁵ This may be Galicia; see Chapter One.

³³⁶ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 30. In Group A it is, rather, 'Meýkongurinn tók vpp stejninn, & bad hann horfa j hann, hann sä alla Frackland, Gasconia, Hispania, Galicia, Flandren, & nær verande slot, lönd & þiöder, þar byggjande' [The maiden-king took up the stone and asked him to look in it. He saw all France, Gascony, Spain, Galicia, Flanders, and present castles, lands, and people dwelling there], JS 166 fol., f. 188r.

England, Ireland, and many other lands, which he did not know of].³³⁷ The third time, ‘meþkongr vindur upp enn eirn stein, siande þa nu austur aalffuna heimsins, Indialand, Palestinam, Asiam, Serkland, og oll onnur lond heimsins, og jafnvel umm bruna bellted, þad sem eý er bigt’ [The maiden-king lifted up a stone, seeing then the eastern region of the world, India, Palestine, Asia, *Serkland*, and all other lands in the world, and also the burning-belt, which is uninhabited].³³⁸ As touched on in Chapter Two, it is clear from these quotations and the details they include that Nítíða sometimes has, by means of her *náttúrusteinar*, panoptic vision.³³⁹ Nítíða can monitor the world as far as the stones allow her to see, and she can use this power to search for and locate anyone or anything she wants; indeed, in this scene Nítíða is ostensibly searching for Livorinus, using the supernatural stones as a tool to do so. In this succession of quotations, the division of the

³³⁷ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 30. In Group A it is ‘bæd Drottning hann enn lýta j steyninn, þa sa hann vmm alla Nordur älfu heimsinnz. Noreg, Danmörk, Eingland, & öll önnur er þar lyggia, & hann visse einginn Deyle ä [The queen asked him to look into the stone. Then he saw over all the northern region of the world: Norway, Denmark, England, and all others which lay there, and which he knew nothing of], JS 166 fol., f. 188r.

³³⁸ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 31. In Group A, we have ‘Meþkongur tekur þa enn vpp steyninn, & sýnde honum vmm Austur älfu heimsinnz. Indiäländ, Falstnia, Asia, Serkland, & öll lönd Austur og sudur vnder bruna bellted, þar sem ecki er bygt’ [The maiden-king then takes up the stone and shows him the eastern region of the world: India, Falstnia, Asia, Serkland, and all lands east and south under the burning belt, which is uninhabited], JS 166 fol., f. 188r.

³³⁹ Nítíða’s panoptic views of the world around her can also characterize her as participating in the often masculine-associated idea of the gaze. It is the act of looking and the knowledge this imparts on Nítíða that gives her power over her suitors and allows her to outwit them again and again. However, the people she views are, significantly, unaware of being watched and so do not consider themselves objectified, as noted in Chapter Two. This of course changes when she shares the view from her magic stones here with Liforinus, who by the end of the scene has realized his powerlessness against the maiden-king. For studies of the gaze in Old Norse literature see Jenny Jochens, ‘Before the Male Gaze: The Absence of the Female Body in Old Norse’, in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Joyce E. Salisbury, Garland Medieval Case Books, 3 (New York: Garland, 1991), pp. 3–29; and Carolyne Larrington, “‘What Does Woman Want?’ Mær and Munr in *Skírnismál*”, *Alvísmál: Forschungen zur mittelalterlichen Kultur Skandinaviens*, 1 (1992), 3–16. For comparison with Middle English literature see Robert Mills, ‘Seeing Face to Face: Troubled Looks in the Katherine Group’, in *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval Text and Image*, ed. by Emma Campbell and Robert Mills (New York: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 117–36.

world into three regions does not, however, correspond to the traditional medieval tripartite division of the world. It was common in medieval European texts to speak of the world as thirds consisting of Europe, Asia, and Africa,³⁴⁰ and this configuration of the world was also often represented graphically by what has come to be known as a T-O Map, illustrated in Figure 3.1.

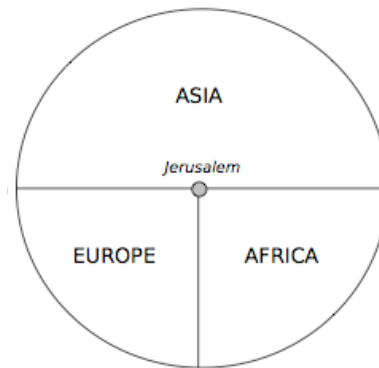


Figure 3.1: T-O Map 1

Having an eastern orientation, T-O maps, with all land encircled by the ocean, usually placed Jerusalem at the centre of the world;³⁴¹ Asia in the east was divided from Europe in the north by the Tanais River (the Don), and from Africa in the south by the Nile; Europe and Africa were divided by the Mediterranean Sea.³⁴² In *Nítíða saga*, instead of this type of configuration, the first quotation showcases what could be called Europe, despite not being explicitly named; Barnes calls this the ‘vast stretch of predominantly

³⁴⁰ Akbari, pp. 19–34; Dick Harrison, *Medieval Space: The Extent of Microspatial Knowledge in Western Europe During the Middle Ages* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1996), p. 4; Rudolf Simek, *Heaven and Earth in the Middle Ages: The Physical World Before Columbus*, trans. by Angela Hall (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1996), pp. 44–48; David Woodward, ‘Reality, Symbolism, Time, and Space in Medieval World Maps’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 75 (1985), 510–21. Certainly this division is known and preserved in many Icelandic texts, including romances such as *Dínus saga drambláta*.

³⁴¹ Simek, *Heaven and Earth in the Middle Ages*, pp. 44–48, 73–81; Woodward questions the notion that most medieval maps centred on Jerusalem throughout the Middle Ages (pp. 515–17).

³⁴² Simek, *Heaven and Earth in the Middle Ages*, pp. 44–46; Woodward, p. 511.

Latin Europe'.³⁴³ The second quotation presents the North (*nordur aalffuna alla*);³⁴⁴ considering the places specifically named therein, there is not really a better designation for this region, unless one wanted to call it 'Scandinavia', though this does not seem entirely appropriate as it includes, for example, England and Ireland. However, the presence of these places in some *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, in a 'Viking Age' context suggests that England and Ireland are in fact part of a wider Scandinavia than is recognized by that name today—something of a Viking world, for lack of a better term. Still, I prefer 'the North' as the most appropriate name for the region, as it easily encompasses both Scandinavia and the British Isles. The third quotation displays the East (*austur aalffuna heimsins*), and what could otherwise be called Asia. Thus in *Nítíða saga* three slightly unconventional world regions are portrayed: Europe is divided in two—Continental Europe and Northern Europe—and Asia is the third region. Further, generally speaking, the naming of locations radiates outwards from France, reinforcing its position in the centre, which is explicitly stated at the beginning of the text: *Nítíða 'sat j aunduegi heimsins j Fracklandi jnu goda og hiellt Pàris borg'* [sat in the centre of the world in the good kingdom of France, and ruled in Paris].³⁴⁵ In addition to the locations named here in the seeing-stones episode and Paris at the beginning, elsewhere the saga mentions *Púl*, *Smáland* (both presumably more or less equivalent with the modern regions of Apulia in southern Italy and Småland in southern Sweden, respectively), the island *Kartagia* and *Mundia* (either Cartagena on the southern Spanish coast or Carthage

³⁴³ Barnes, 'Margin vs. Centre', p. 110.

³⁴⁴ On what is meant by 'norður' and other directions in medieval Icelandic, see John Lindow, 'The Social Semantics of Cardinal Directions in Medieval Scandinavia', *The Mankind Quarterly*, 34 (1994), 209–24; and Kevin J. Wanner, 'Off-Center: Considering Directional Valences in Norse Cosmography', *Speculum*, 84 (2009), 36–72.

³⁴⁵ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 3.

on the North African coast; and the Alps,³⁴⁶ respectively), and the indeterminate locations of *Svíþjóð bin kalda* (which I distinguish from *Svíþjóð* [Sweden]), *Visio*, and *Skóga blómi*, an island within a lake on Visio. The Latinate character of many of these names is particularly interesting: *Asiam*, *Hallitiam*, *Norðmandiam*, *Proventiam*, and *Spaniam*, exhibit Latin rather than Icelandic grammar (all apparently first declension nouns in the accusative). At least in some cases, it seems likely that the author or scribe deliberately Latinized vernacular words by adding the *-am* ending, perhaps to show off. However, in other versions of *Nítíða saga*, the Latinate character of these place names is not preserved, such as in the Group A manuscripts, while the eighteenth-century Group C manuscripts retain some endings (*Asiam*, *Indiam*, *Gaskoniam*) but not others ([*Hi*]spaniam and *Proventiam* are not mentioned at all). Other manuscripts do keep this trait, such as the Group B offshoot of JS 27 and Add. 4860, which even add other place names to the list, such as *Ægiptam* and *Galliam*, while also substituting *Normandi* for *Norðmandiam*. Interestingly, the nineteenth-century Group F manuscripts also preserve many Latinate endings, even when the place names themselves have become garbled, as in, for example, SÁM 13's *Vardoniam* (ultimately from *Gasconiam*, via *Vasconiam*) and *Pístiliam* (ultimately from *Palestinam*). Still others (Groups D, E, and the rest of Group B) leave off place names at this point in the text altogether. Overall, it seems that with the exception of Group F, when *Nítíða saga* was preserved in later centuries, and perhaps especially in the east of Iceland, the text could be said to become more Icelandic, and lose some of the learned prestige associated with the Latin form of some names, whereas when the saga was preserved in a handful of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century manuscripts, these characteristics, while likely no longer indicative of the prestige of the author or scribe, were kept as an original feature of the text, evidently important to those transmitting it.

³⁴⁶ Barnes, 'Margin vs. Centre', p. 108.

What is strikingly missing from *Nítíða saga*, however, is any reference to the Southern (or Western) regions of the world, and to Africa in particular, which, as already mentioned, usually constituted the medieval known world together with Europe and Asia, especially according to T-O maps.³⁴⁷ Of course, *Nítíða saga* makes passing reference to ‘oll onnur lond heimsins, og jafnvel umm bruna bellted, þad sem eý er bigt’, but it seems clear that no particular location is here implied, if only because the narrator believes nothing is to be found in that region, quickly passing it over without any elaboration, at the most opportune time in the saga to demonstrate geographical knowledge. And while it is also true that *blámenn* (‘blue-men’ or ‘black-men’, a term that usually denotes evil or barbarous people) make an appearance in King Soldán’s army,³⁴⁸ this does not necessarily place his kingdom Serkland anywhere in Africa; on the contrary, the saga specifically situates it in the East. Further, *Nítíða saga* mentions neither *Bláland* nor *Affrika*, and makes no comment on any aspect of Soldán’s appearance.³⁴⁹ It seems logical to conclude that *blámenn* in particular make up only a small supporting contingent of Serkland’s army, and that it is for this reason that they are even mentioned at all, and at this point in the story. Serkland, as will be discussed further below, seems best understood as an eastern, but still indeterminate, land inhabited by Saracens. Finally, even if *Kartagia*, mentioned above, does refer to Carthage, the fact that it is not specifically located in any particular region of the world means that it is not *necessarily* to be associated with Africa. General ignorance of Africa on the part of the author seems unlikely, not only considering his awareness of so

³⁴⁷ On Africa as a western land in Icelandic romance, see Agnete Loth, ed., ‘Vilhjálm’s saga sjóðs’, *LMIR*, IV (1964), 1–136 (pp. 3, 41).

³⁴⁸ *Nikulás saga leikara* refers to *blámenn* as enemies of the Christians in Constantinople; in her translation of the saga Wick consistently renders the term as ‘Moor’ (Wick, p. 219), potentially indicating African origin. Blue-land and blue-people also appear in some Middle English romances. See Kathleen Ann Kelly, ‘Blue Indians, Ethiopians, and Saracens in Middle English Narrative Texts’, *Parergon*, 11 (1993), 35–52.

³⁴⁹ See Chapter Five for a discussion of the characters from Serkland and of Soldán’s son’s description.

many other world regions, but also considering that many other Icelandic romances, and especially those I have chosen to compare with *Nítíða saga*, mention Africa, as I discuss below. The geographical picture that the saga paints thus comes across distinctly as a shifted version of traditional medieval cosmography. Instead of the T-O map we are accustomed to, we could visualize the world as described in *Nítíða saga* with Africa pushed off the map and a separate northern region added, with Paris supplanting Jerusalem at the centre, as illustrated in Figure 3.2.³⁵⁰

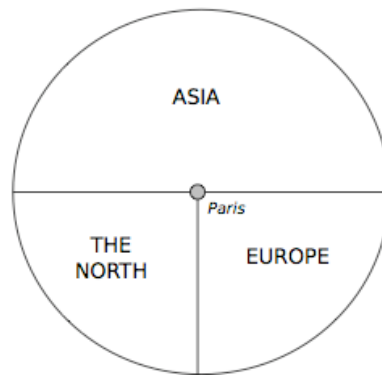


Figure 3.2: Alternative T-O Map

In direct contrast to this, the romance *Dínus saga drambláta* is set exclusively in the Africa that *Nítíða saga* lacks, and two distinct kingdoms within that region—Dínus’s Egypt and Philotemia’s Bláland (which perhaps refers to Ethiopia)—are not only named, but comprise the story’s main settings. In this saga, some twenty place-names appear, almost all of them located in Africa and what would today be called the Middle East. No European countries are named, in a direct reversal of *Nítíða saga*’s geography. From the beginning of *Dínus saga drambláta*, we see the world divided into its traditional medieval thirds, before situating the action in Egypt: ‘heiminum sie skiffit j þria hlute edur parta, og

³⁵⁰ I must thank Werner Schäfke for suggesting the possibility of viewing the saga’s geography as a variation of the traditional T-O map. The suggestion arose in discussing an early draft of this chapter, which I presented at the Leeds International Medieval Congress in July 2009.

heiter hinn fyrste sudur Hasia, enn hinn vestre Affricha, enn nordur älfann er kóllud Euröpä' [the world may be divided into three parts or divisions, and the first, in the south, is called Asia, and the west Africa, and the northern region is called Europe].³⁵¹ In the saga's first words, the reader perceives the author's knowledge of traditional medieval geography, which is quite different from the geographical reorganization evident in *Nítíða saga*. Furthermore, Paradise is located in Africa (again, according to medieval convention),³⁵² which, we are told, has 'og ein aa, su er Nijl heitir, ein aff þeim Paradijsar äm' [also a river, which is called the Nile, one of the rivers of Paradise],³⁵³ in opposition to *Nítíða saga*'s localization of Visio in the far north, if Visio is considered a type of Paradise (which I discuss below). Bláland is introduced as the home of 'miog jøtnar jmissliger og blaamen bannsetter, og allskins skiesseligar skiepnur' [many different giants and cursed blue people, and all monstrous creatures], yet despite this, the realm is ruled by a seemingly 'normal' king who is introduced and described in the same way as any other romance character.³⁵⁴ This may be evidence of a conventional association for Africa (or at least Bláland) meeting and mixing with *Dínus saga drambláta*'s unique incorporation of African lands into the main plot, on a par with traditional Icelandic romance settings, like France.³⁵⁵

As another example, *Sigurðar saga þøgla* contains over forty geographical references—many more than *Nítíða saga*—and among these, as in *Dínus saga drambláta*,

³⁵¹ Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Dínus saga drambláta*, p. 3.

³⁵² Francesc Relaño, 'Paradise in Africa: The History of a Geographical Myth From its Origin in Medieval Thought to its Gradual Demise in Early Modern Europe', *Terrae Incognitae: The Journal for the History of Discoveries*, 36 (2004), 1–11.

³⁵³ Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Dínus saga drambláta*, pp. 3–4.

³⁵⁴ Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Dínus saga drambláta*, p. 11.

³⁵⁵ For further analysis of *Dínus saga drambláta* see perhaps the only literary scholarship on the romance in Geraldine Barnes, 'Cognitive Dysfunction in *Dínus saga drambláta* and *Le Roman de Perceval*', *Arthuriana*, 22 (2012), 53–63.

are references to Africa. The saga speaks of princes ‘vtan af Affrica riki’ [from the kingdom of Africa],³⁵⁶ and of Bláland.³⁵⁷ Overall, the geographical distribution of locations named in *Sigurðar saga þogla* concentrates on Europe, with fewer in Asia, and the least in Africa. As noted in Chapter Two, the saga’s maiden-king Sedentiana possesses stones in which she can see over the world, like Nítíða. Additionally, her ‘alfu heimsins’ [region of the world] is, like Nítíða’s, Europe—and specifically France—but there is much less focus on the North in *Sigurðar saga þogla* than in *Nítíða saga*.³⁵⁸ Instead, the saga is set, at the beginning, within the context of another romance mainly taking place in ‘Kaldealande ur hinne miklu Babilon’ [Chaldea in Greater Babylon];³⁵⁹ and it is set, at the end, within the context of early medieval European history.³⁶⁰ Furthermore, in *Sigurðar saga þogla* the world is not divided into any number of regions, as it is in *Nítíða saga* and *Dínus saga drambláta*. Rather, the various places are mentioned throughout the text, often only in passing. The tripartite division of the world can be seen as evidence of the bookish, learned environment from which those sagas showing that worldview emerge; the absence of such a device for organizing and understanding geography in *Sigurðar saga þogla* suggests that perhaps its author was less well educated and did not understand the

³⁵⁶ Loth, ed., ‘*Sigurðar saga þogla*’, p. 193.

³⁵⁷ Loth, ed., ‘*Sigurðar saga þogla*’, p. 175.

³⁵⁸ Loth, ed., ‘*Sigurðar saga þogla*’, p. 182. See Chapter Two for further discussion of the relationship between this romance and *Nítíða saga*.

³⁵⁹ Loth, ed., ‘*Sigurðar saga þogla*’, pp. 101–02.

³⁶⁰ In the saga’s long prologue, background information connects *Sigurðar saga þogla* to *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*—or to the French original *Floire et Blancheflor*—casting Sedentiana as the daughter of the earlier text’s eponymous characters (Loth, ed., ‘*Sigurðar saga þogla*’, pp. 101–02). Situating the maiden-king in a wider textual and historical setting suggests the importance of Christianity among the community from which the saga emerged. This saga’s world is Christendom, the same Christendom, more or less, as that in which the saga was composed. Likewise, towards the end of the text, reference is also made to the Christianization of France in order to root the saga in history: ‘a dógum Constantini keisara og Flouenz er kristnade Frackland og frelsade unndan heidingia valldi’ [in the days of Emperor Constantine and Flóvent who converted France to Christianity and freed it from heathen power], Loth, ed., ‘*Sigurðar saga þogla*’, pp. 228–29.

medieval order of the world as well as other authors. The author or compiler of the longer redaction of *Sigurðar saga þøgla* is known for his almost indiscriminate eclecticism,³⁶¹ and it would not be unlikely for this great number of geographical references combined with the ignorance of the Asia-Africa-Europe division of the world thus to be the product simply of an insatiable desire to expand and compile plot lines, motifs, and allusions, from diverse sources. In *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, geography appears not to situate the story, its writer, or its readers in Europe or elsewhere, but mainly functions as a display of knowledge, and perhaps only superficial knowledge at that.

In contrast to the wide-reaching array of geographical locations in *Nítíða saga* and *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, *Clári saga* names only six places. The protagonist Clárus comes from Saxland in Europe, his teacher Pérus hails from Arábía (also called Arábíaland), and Séréna is the princess of Frakkland (also called Frannz). In addition to these, *Clári saga* also mentions Bláland, the homeland of Clárus's alter ego Eskelvarður, and, in passing, Érópa. Similarly, *Nikulás saga leikara* makes relatively few references to different geographical locations. The protagonist's homeland of Hungary is featured, as is that of the princess Dorma and her father Valdimar of Constantinople. From the beginning, the introduction of the king draws attention to both the geography of his and surrounding kingdoms and the integration of Christianity throughout the region: 'hann var rýkur miög og vel christinn og öll lönd firer nordann gricklandz haf' [He was very rich, and a good Christian, as were all lands north of the Mediterranean Sea].³⁶² Yet peculiarly, the Hungarian kingdom of Nikulás and his father before him is never affiliated with any religion. Nikulás also travels to an unnamed island off the coast of Britain, and more specific Byzantine locations are also named—the city *Gullborg* and *Stolpasund* (the Golden

³⁶¹ Driscoll, ed., *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, pp. xcvi–cx.

³⁶² *Nikulás saga leikara*, p. 64.

Horn). Paris and France are also mentioned, but only as the saga's source; I consider this further in Chapter Six. *Nikulás saga leikara* makes no mention of Africa, nor of much of Europe; there are no references to Northern Europe, Scandinavia, or Iceland. I have already, in Chapter Two, highlighted the similarity to *Nítíða saga* in *Nikulás saga leikara*'s use of Britain as a marker for the fantastic North, in parallel to *Nítíða saga*'s Sweden the Cold as a marker on the way to the fantastic island Visio, and concluded that this demonstrates *Nikulás saga leikara*'s author's attempt to emulate *Nítíða saga*. *Nikulás saga leikara*, like *Clári saga*, is not as concerned with worldviews or questions of belonging and identity, or even of showing off knowledge, in the way that *Nítíða saga* is, along with *Sigurðar saga þogla* and *Dínus saga drambláta*. Instead of using geography to set its scenes, *Nikulás saga leikara* is more concerned with conveying meaning through the depiction of religion, both implicitly as in the quotation just mentioned and explicitly in the portrayal of Christian triumph over non-Christian adversaries.³⁶³

Of course it is by no means essential for a scribe or especially a reader to know the precise real world location of any of the places a romance mentions; the more important question is, rather, *why* so many (or in some cases so few) place names are included in

³⁶³ Christianity and its heathen opposition are quite unselfconsciously incorporated into the text, and it is Nikulás (from religiously neutral Hungary) who showcases this rather than Christian Valdimar or anyone else from Constantinople. In a dramatic exorcism scene, Nikulás (disguised as the merchant Þórir) calls on God to free a Christian princess from a heathen *blámaður*: 'nu skulum vier kalla ä nafn gudz. og bidia þess ad hann veýte þejm riddara nockra hiälp og huggan. enn þessi skeýti er výgd af .5. biskupum. [...] þä tök þörer kaupmadur bogann, og lagdi ä streýng örina, og signdi sig j nafne heýlagra þrennýngar, hann giördi kross firer öruaroddinum. og nu bendi hann bogann, og mäellte nu skýt eg ör þessare j nafne faudur og sonar og heilags anda. hann saung vers vör däüýdz psalltara ä medann örinn var ä flugenne' ['Now we shall call on God's name, and ask this that he offer the knight some help and comfort. And this arrow is blessed by five bishops'. [...] Then Þórir the merchant took the bow, and lay the arrow on the string, and signed himself in the name of the Holy Trinity. He made a cross over the arrow's point, and now he bent the bow, and said, 'Now I shoot this arrow in the name of the Father, and Son and Holy spirit'. He sang a verse out of David's psalms while the arrow was in flight], *Nikulás saga leikara*, pp. 116–17. In the end, these measures are successful, and praises to God follow, marking the epitome of Christianity's presence in the text.

these romances. The displays of geography serve different functions in different texts (a scribe or author showing off in *Sigurðar saga þögla* as opposed to perhaps a scribe wanting to create a realistic setting in *Dínus saga drambláta* by focusing on local geography), and provide interesting contrasts with that in *Nítíða saga*, with its scribe or author's interest in demonstrating the proximity of Iceland to the rest of Europe. Having considered the overall cosmographical worldview of this romance and compared it to those of other related texts, I will now delve deeper into examples of the three different types of places that *Nítíða saga's* geography encompasses, as outlined above.

III: CASE STUDIES

Looking at geography has shown how space is conceptualized on a global scale in *Nítíða saga*, but the text also organizes space on a much smaller scale, in terms of social use within various settings. Space on this smaller scale can be classified primarily in terms of its social function as either public or private, and it is possible also to identify public and private space as predominantly (though not exclusively) masculine and feminine gendered spaces, respectively.³⁶⁴ Depending on the focus of interpretation, space may also be considered in terms of physical location and natural surroundings—indoor versus outdoor, such as halls versus gardens, which can also be considered in terms of architectural versus natural space. Perhaps surprisingly, considering the importance given to geography in *Nítíða saga*, dividing space in terms of the familiar versus the foreign (such as the domesticity of France versus exotic India or Constantinople) does not appear to be a productive line of enquiry. While descriptions of different geographical spaces are by no means identical, it is evident that the same types of things do happen in different

³⁶⁴ Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Land-Taking and Text-Making in Medieval Iceland', in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 159–84.

types of places, and distinctions between public and private are also applicable in different locations. Overall this suggests that differentiating space as domestic and foreign is invalid in *Nítíða saga*.³⁶⁵ Further, I will consider in these case studies how the confusion of basic distinctions between public and private can signal danger, drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias, that is, 'places [...] outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality',³⁶⁶ and especially the notion that 'The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible',³⁶⁷ which will be especially evident in discussing the meaning of space at sea. I will begin by discussing France, before considering Serkland, and ending with the island Visio.

1. Frakkland

Frakkland (France) is an example of a place that *Nítíða saga* presents as real and which is more or less identifiable with its medieval historical equivalent. As to the geography of France itself, the only detail provided in the saga is an incidental reference (albeit in a stock phrase) to 'þær hafner er lagu vt vid Paris borg' [the harbours which lay outside the city of Paris],³⁶⁸ perhaps, but not necessarily, suggesting that Paris is here placed on the coast;³⁶⁹ no mention is made of how far outside of Paris the harbours are but people reach

³⁶⁵ However, as will be evident especially in my discussion of Serkland as a place and how space functions when characters from Serkland are involved, the distinction between Self and Other does appear to be valid. Because this is more a matter of characterization than of geography and spatiality, I only touch on it briefly in the present chapter, and more developed discussions of Self and Other in the text are carried out in Chapters Four and Five.

³⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), 22–27 (p. 24). Foucault contrasts heterotopias with utopias: 'sites with no real place' but which 'present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down' (p. 24).

³⁶⁷ Foucault, p. 25.

³⁶⁸ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 22.

³⁶⁹ Barnes, 'Margin vs. Centre', p. 104.

Paris from their ships with ease. The first mention of France occurs as *Nítíða* is first introduced: ‘Þessi meykongur sat j aunduegi heimsins j Fracklandi jnu goda og hieilt Páris borg’ [This maiden-king sat in the centre of the world in France the Good and held the city of Paris].³⁷⁰ What may be surprising about the saga’s representation of this country is France’s location relative to the rest of the world. As mentioned above in discussing T-O maps and the saga’s overall geographical shift northwards, Paris is here situated in the absolute centre, taking the place of Jerusalem.³⁷¹ With France as the centre of the world in *Nítíða saga*, Iceland becomes much closer to that centre in the saga’s cosmography. This also, importantly, gives power and significance to the ‘nordur halfu veralldarinar’ (essentially Europe) in general, which, while already closer to the traditional centre than Iceland, is not usually thought of as such in the Middle Ages. With rather similar diction, the romance *Gibbons saga* also locates Paris at the world’s centre: ‘<j> midiv ondvegi heimsins i Fraklandi j Paris borgg’ [in the middle of the centre of the world in France in the city of Paris].³⁷² Einar Ólafur Sveinsson interprets this as indicative of ‘the measure of the author’s admiration’ for France,³⁷³ but I think there is much more to it than this, certainly in *Nítíða saga*, and perhaps also in *Gibbons saga*.³⁷⁴ Barnes examines in detail this relationship between centre and periphery, arguing that the saga is, ‘Geopolitically, [...] a contest for global primacy, played out in the [bridal-]quest’.³⁷⁵

³⁷⁰ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 3.

³⁷¹ Akbari, pp. 19–34; Barnes, ‘Margin vs. Centre’, p. 104; Heng, p. 258; Higgins, pp. 34–39. Byzantium is also sometimes placed at the centre in Norse texts and other late medieval European romances; see Heng, pp. 9–10; Sverrir Jakobsson, ‘Centre and Periphery’, p. 920.

³⁷² Page, ed., *Gibbons saga*, p. 43.

³⁷³ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, ‘*Viktors saga ok Blávus*: Sources and Characteristics’, p. cx.

³⁷⁴ There is not room here to discuss the relationship between *Nítíða saga* and *Gibbons saga* further than I have already in Chapter Two; suffice it to say that *Gibbons saga* is considered one of the earlier Icelandic romances whose influence is seen in a number of others (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, ‘*Viktors saga ok Blávus*: Sources and Characteristics’).

³⁷⁵ Barnes, ‘Margin vs. Centre’, p. 104.

Nítíða's suitors' intense interest in gaining her hand is certainly evidence that France is the hub of international power in this text, and that Nítíða's influence reaches far. By showing in literature how alliances are made and where political power lies, the narrator demonstrates that Iceland is a real part of the late medieval international European community. The Europeanization of Scandinavia, begun in Hákon's Norwegian court in the thirteenth century, here reaches its completion in Iceland, through the integration of European knowledge and interest reflected in this popular romance.³⁷⁶ The Europeanization of Iceland at its zenith can be demonstrated in the fact that the literature of late medieval Iceland now incorporates many of the themes, settings, and concerns of European romance in original compositions such as *Nítíða saga*, rather than only through translations of romance.

If we now consider the basic division of space into public and private in the saga's French locations, Nítíða meets visitors in her hall: Ingi is invited 'heim til hallar með aullum sinum skara' [home to the hall with all his troops].³⁷⁷ Liforinus, too, first visits Nítíða in her hall: he 'gengur nu heim til hallarinnar en drott(ning) stendur vpp j moti honum og setur hann j häsæti hiä sier' [goes now to the hall and the queen stands up to meet him and seats him in the high-seat beside her].³⁷⁸ By setting him next to her, Nítíða shows she trusts Liforinus, a trust he has not yet earned, and one which he betrays. By receiving suitors in the hall's public setting, however, Nítíða keeps herself safer than if she were to receive them in a private space. When Liforinus visits later disguised as Eskilvarður, Nítíða likewise 'biöda honum til hallar' [asked him home to the hall].³⁷⁹ That the hall is the appropriate venue to receive guests is reinforced also by its repetition

³⁷⁶ See also Barnes, 'Travel and *translatio studii* in the Icelandic riddarasögur', p. 139.

³⁷⁷ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 10.

³⁷⁸ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 23.

³⁷⁹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 29.

in places outside of France: Egidía welcomes Nítíða to Apulia ‘giorandi fagra vezlu j sinni hall’ [preparing a fair feast in her hall],³⁸⁰ and in Constantinople Ingi’s sister Listalín also prepares Nítíða’s welcome ‘j hallina med miklum heidri og pris’ [into the hall with great honour and ceremony].³⁸¹ Her reception by her subjects is also associated with her hall: when Nítíða returns from Constantinople, ‘kemur m(ey)k(ongur) heim j Franz gangandi hlægiandi j fagra hall’ [the maiden-king came home to France, walking laughing into her fair hall].³⁸² Thus, through its association with the public, the hall in *Nítíða saga* can also to a certain extent be associated with masculinity and acts typically performed by men: as a maiden-king, Nítíða carries out the duties of a ruler in the appropriate setting, which may traditionally be thought of as masculine-charged spaces.³⁸³ I will further consider Nítíða’s role as female king and protagonist in Chapter Four.

Not surprisingly, in contrast to public space, private space—indicated by the *skemma* [bower, private chamber]—is reserved for more personal interactions among characters. Both invited visits to and uninvited intrusions on private space are evident. When Ingi captures Nítíða with the help of Refsteinn, he enters her private room to do so—‘þeir koma til skemmv drott(ningar)’ [they came to the queen’s chamber]³⁸⁴—and this is only possible because he has been made invisible. As strangers, neither Refsteinn nor Ingi would have ever been invited to the *skemma*. Ingi’s success in taking Nítíða by force is only guaranteed because he has been able to impinge on her private space—he was

³⁸⁰ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 5.

³⁸¹ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 12.

³⁸² Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 13.

³⁸³ Considering *Íslendingasögur* and their depiction of the settlement of Iceland, Clunies Ross delineates ‘male space as the public, nondomestic, social and geographic domain in contrast to female space, which lay within the domestic environment, *innan stokks* [“indoors”]’ (‘Land-Taking and Text-Making in Medieval Iceland’, pp. 159–60). While this is arguably applicable also to other types of Icelandic literature, romances like *Nítíða saga* clearly problematize this distinction.

³⁸⁴ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 12.

not successful in the public hall—and to read this breach in terms of violence and violation, it could also be conceptualized as a sort of rape. Though Ingi does not physically violate Nítíða, it is implied by his violation of her personal chamber, her private space, and foreshadows Ingi’s later actions when a rape is physically carried out during his second abduction, this time of Nítíða’s *ambátt* [bondswoman] Íversu.³⁸⁵ When Ingi ‘gengur [...] hinn beinasta veg til skemmu drott(ningar)’ and then ‘vt af skemmunni og ofan til skipa’ [goes [...] straight to the queen’s chamber’ and then ‘out from the chamber and down to the ship],³⁸⁶ his entrance and exit is brief and forceful, and is notably framed by reference to the *skemma*, reinforcing the idea of violation. It is also significant that the physical violation occurs onboard Ingi’s ship, neither in France nor Constantinople, but somewhere in between. The ship is at once a private and public space: private as it is small, self-contained, and access is privileged; public as it encloses all sorts of people, from king to retainers to crew; furthermore, Ingi takes his captive in the open space above deck (‘kongur lætur þegar bua sæng i lyptingunni’ [The king ordered at once to prepare a bed in the raised part of the deck]),³⁸⁷ to contrast further the privacy of the bedroom with this public space on the ship. The ship is, further, a transitional space between one distinct, enclosed, and ostensibly ‘safe’, kingdom and another, and can be seen as a heterotopia. Indeed, Foucault states that ‘The ship is the heterotopia *par excellence*’.³⁸⁸ There are many scenes in *Nítíða saga* involving ships, and they can be seen as representing strange, neutral, yet symbolically charged spaces. These ships are heterotopias in the fullest and yet most basic sense of the word as Foucault defines it: *espaces autres* (other spaces). In this first example, Ingi’s ship acts as a private-public space wherein the physical violation of the

³⁸⁵ See Chapter Five for further discussion of the role of Íversu in the saga.

³⁸⁶ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, pp. 15–16.

³⁸⁷ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 16.

³⁸⁸ Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p. 27, italics original.

objectified servant is able to take place. Another instance of ship as heterotopia occurs when Hléskjöldur takes French troops to meet that of Soldán and fight a sea-battle, away from France:

sigla nu þessar skipa stolar huorir moti audrum. og finnast vnder eý einni er Kartagia heiter. [...] taka þeir þegar at beríast er vigliost var. gengur Solldan kongur hetíur hans og blámenn j gegnum lid Franzeisa suo at ecki stod vit. er þa ei meira epter en halft þat er Hle(skilldi) fylgdi.³⁸⁹

[These fleets then sailed, each against the other, and met each other close to an island called Kartagia. [...] they immediately took to fighting when it was light out for war. King Soldán went with his heroes and black men through the French troops so that nothing withstood him; after, it was then not more than half that which Hléskjöldur led]

The space in which the battle occurs is both very specific (near an island the author has taken the time to name) and also no place at all: the two sides fight not on this island or any other bit of land, but onboard each other's ships. The space is also representative of a clash of kingdoms, France and Serkland, and so it is nowhere, somewhere, and somewhere else entirely, all at once. Yet because the saga's action never actually takes place in Serkland, as will be discussed below, the heterotopic nature of this encounter at sea, near Kartagia, is also the closest that the saga gets to Serkland, the opposition's homeland.

Invited visits and personal conversations within private space also revolve around the *skemma* as much as do the intrusions just mentioned, and in places outside France as well. When Listalín confronts Íversa in Constantinople, before speaking to her, 'kuedur fru Lista(lin) burt af skemmvni allar frur og hird konur' [Lady Listalín summons away

³⁸⁹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 26.

from the chamber all the ladies and court women],³⁹⁰ in order to construct an illusion of privacy so that Ingi can listen in on their conversation in hiding. In this case private space is not a reality, but an illusion, and this is possible because it involves an unfamiliar setting for the character being spied on: the same type of trick could not as easily be carried out in a setting with which everyone involved was familiar, suggesting that private space might only be private if it is one's own space. As guests, or as a hostage in Íversu's case, the characters are always, to an extent, in a public and not necessarily safe space. Additionally, in India Nítíða is brought on arrival 'til skemmu drott(ningar) Syjalín' [to the chamber of the princess Sýjalín],³⁹¹ a private chamber used as a women's space separate from the men's, but it is not her own private space—Nítíða must share with Sýjalín (who at this point is a stranger). Back in France, it is only once Nítíða has got to know Eskilvarður better—after he has stayed in her castle for many months—that she welcomes him into her private chamber to look into the magic stones: he 'geingur með þeim j skiemmuna' [goes with them into the chamber],³⁹² and a second time 'bydur drottning Eskilvard til skiemmunnar' [the queen asks Eskilvarður to the chamber].³⁹³ The fact that he is a guest away from familiar surroundings aids Nítíða's ability to trick and outwit him, in addition to her advantage through the supernatural stones and her inherent cleverness. More significantly, though, when Nítíða explicitly asks Liforinus into her private space this also indicates not only that she accepts him but even that she has already chosen (or at least seriously considered choosing) him as a suitable partner and husband.

³⁹⁰ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 17.

³⁹¹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 24.

³⁹² Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 30.

³⁹³ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 30.

In terms of the construction and presentation of space, the arrival of characters from Serkland to France demonstrates a different consideration of space than seen in previous examples. When Heiðarlogi is expressly invited to Nítiða's hall, the invitation is only a pretext. He is first told that his brother 'situr nu j haullinni og dreckur' [sits now in the hall and drinks] with Nítiða,³⁹⁴ in the expected location for visitors to be received. Upon arrival at the castle, however, Heiðarlogi is, perhaps surprisingly, directed 'til skemmu drott(ningar)' [to the queen's chamber],³⁹⁵ and this turns out to be a trap leading to his death. The mixing of public and private space—directing a public guest, not previously encountered, to a private area—signals that something is not right, and reinforces the planned deception, as public and private space is not usually confused in this way. Yet Heiðarlogi misses this clue, and the trick works.³⁹⁶ We might presume the saga's audience, however, to be attentive to the mixed signals, along with their foreknowledge of the preparation of physical traps. Extant structures, like Nítiða's castle and the rooms it contains, may also be contrasted with the new building projects described in the saga, showing an opposition between fixed stability (the castle) and fluid changeability (new projects). When she learns that armies from Serkland are approaching France, Nítiða adds elaborate defences to her castle:

hvn lætur giora glerhimin med þeirri list at hann liek ä hiolum og mätti fara jnn yfer haufudport borgarinnar og mätti þar mart herfolk ä standa. hon liet og giora diki ferlega diupt framm fyrir skemmunni og leggja yfer veyka vidue en þar yfer var breitt skrud og skarlat.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 20.

³⁹⁵ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 21.

³⁹⁶ See Chapter Five for discussion of Heiðarlogi's role, and that of the other characters from Serkland, and why it seems necessary to eliminate them.

³⁹⁷ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 18.

[She commands that a glass roof be made that could move on wheels and could go over the main gate of the castle so that many warriors could stand thereon. She commanded also that a monstrously deep ditch be made before her chamber, and to lay weak wood over it, and over that was to be spread costly stuff and scarlet.]

When the time comes to put these additions to use, France is victorious: all the mechanisms work, both to trap the enemy and to set ‘biki og brennesteini’ and ‘skotuopnum’ [pitch and burning-stones and projectiles] showering down on them as well.³⁹⁸ These defences not only protect France as a whole by protecting the castle, but the ditch in particular is built directly in front of Nítíða’s private chamber (‘fyrir skemmunni’), it directly and explicitly protecting her private space, which had previously been violated. The newly constructed spaces are thus aligned with private space, and in reversal of the previous violation of private, indoor space, when the enemy arrives at these ‘private’, outdoor spaces, it is not they who perform any violation, but they who are ‘violated’ by annihilation. This type of space is also, then, transitional, akin to the heterotopic ships discussed above, but with a major difference being that here these inverted spaces allow roles to be reversed and previous violations atoned for, in a manner of speaking.

To round out my consideration of France in the text, I now turn to the place name in full: the narrator, whether deliberately or not, assigns a value judgement to France when describing it as ‘Frackland jd goda’. This name appears in other Icelandic romances such as *Viktors saga ok Blávus* and has been thought ‘without doubt’ originally to have entered Old Norse in the translation of *Karlamagnús saga* from Old French *chansons de geste*, and so, that the phrase is an Old Norse approximation of ‘la dulce France’ [sweet

³⁹⁸ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 20.

France].³⁹⁹ Still, one cannot be certain that the late medieval Icelandic audience of *Nítíða saga* did not interpret ‘Frakkland hið góða’ as literally, ‘France the Good’ (as opposed to *hið illa* [the Bad]), instead of as a name devoid of further meaning once translated. What this might mean for Icelandic identity when readers could now, in the reading of *Nítíða saga*, consider themselves nearly on a par with France is uncertain, and, again, further investigations into the inclusion of *Frakkland hið góða* in this and other romances and its understanding by scribes, readers, and listeners, would yield more concrete conclusions.

2. Serkland

In *Nítíða saga*, Serkland, mentioned by name five times, is the best example of a place that the saga presents as real, but the location of which does not necessarily readily correspond to one real location, and about which scholars sometimes disagree. Indeed, it seems to have been somewhat problematic even among Icelandic scribes and readers. In post-

³⁹⁹ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, ‘*Viktors saga ok Blávus*: Sources and Characteristics’, p. cix. *Nítíða saga* and *Viktors saga ok Blávus* also both contain another similar type of name, ‘Svíþjóð hin kalda’ (literally ‘Sweden the Cold’), which in Loth’s summaries is usually translated as ‘Scythia?’ (Loth, ed., ‘*Nitida saga*’, p. 5). Loth does not explain her choice, and it is unclear what exactly she understands ‘Scythia’ to mean. In the Middle Ages ‘Scythia’ could refer to a number of different locations, Scandinavia included, and a more common, related name, ‘Svíþjóð hin mikla’, appears in romances and other Old Norse-Icelandic literature as well. See Lars Gahrn, ‘*Svitjod det stora och Skytien—ett exempel på norrön tolkning av latinske områdesnamn*’, *Scandia*, 68 (2002), 5–22; Tatjana N. Jackson’s recent conference paper (‘“Scythia er uær köllum miklu Suíþjóð”: Memory, Fiction, or Something Else?’), paper presented at the Fifteenth International Saga Conference, Aarhus, Denmark, 6 August 2012); Simek, ‘Elusive Elysia’, pp. 267–69; and Simek, *Heaven and Earth in the Middle Ages*, pp. 47, 67. *Nítíða saga*’s only other place name taking this format is ‘Índialand hið mikla’ [Great(er) India], the homeland of Liforinus, which also appears in *Gibbons saga* (Page, ed., *Gibbons saga*, p. 21). Though he does not explain the name itself, Einar Ólafur Sveinsson notes that India first became well known in Iceland through the translation of *Alexanders saga*, and was likely popularized in Iceland through the romance *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, in which much of the action occurs in exotic India (‘*Viktors saga ok Blávus*: Sources and Characteristics’, p. cx). Barnes has proposed that ‘Índialand hið mikla’ could refer to Greater India, suggesting the notion of the Three Indias described in medieval travel texts like that of Marco Polo: *The Travels*, trans. by R. E. Latham (London: Penguin, 1958), pp. 260, 294, 303–04; see also *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, trans. by C. W. R. D. Moseley (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 165, which divides India into only the Greater and the Lesser; see also Simek, *Heaven and Earth in the Middle Ages*, pp. 56–61 (especially p. 61).

medieval versions of *Nítíða saga*, this indeterminate place name is replaced with more easily identifiable, real-world place names, such as *Miklagarðar* [Constantinople] in Group E, as I have discussed in the final case study of Chapter One, and with *Saxland* [Saxony, Germany], in the Group A manuscript Lbs 644 4to, which could possibly be (since it is a one-off error) attributable to the scribe's inability to understand what was meant by Serkland. Various theories have been posited as to the origin of this place name, such as the idea that the word *Serkland* came to Scandinavia via Latin *sericum* [the land of silk],⁴⁰⁰ or that it is a tribal name—Sariq/Sarik—for one of the Turkic groups that comprised the Khazars residing between the Black and Caspian seas in the Middle Ages.⁴⁰¹

However, the most prominent (and plausible) explanation of *Serkland* is that it is simply the 'land of Saracens', that is, one or all of the predominantly Muslim areas of medieval Europe, Arabia, or Africa,⁴⁰² potentially making this place name one of the saga's only implicit references to religion. The identification of Saracens and their localities in other medieval literature is similarly vague, as they appear as Arabs and/or Muslims in Spain, North Africa, the Middle East, or even sometimes places as diverse as Persia, India, Ethiopia, and Armenia in many medieval French chansons de geste.⁴⁰³ Even further, Saracens often denoted simply any non-Christian group of people,⁴⁰⁴ and by extension

⁴⁰⁰ Gunnar Jarring, 'Serkland', *Namn och Bygd*, 71 (1983), 125–32 (pp. 126–28), including his arguments opposing this reading.

⁴⁰¹ Jarring, pp. 128–31. See also Jesch, 'Geography and Travel', p. 125.

⁴⁰² Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the Chansons de geste* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), pp. 8–9, 66–67, 264; Jesch notes that 'in both runic inscriptions and skaldic verse [Serkland] has emblematic status as the southeastern most destination of the far-travelling Vikings, wherever it was ('Geography and Travel', p. 125); *Cleasby-Vigfússon* states that the term is 'used of northern Africa, southern Spain', and that it is 'said to be derived from Arabic *sharkeyn* = *Easterlings*' (p. 523). *Serkland* appears in a number of other late medieval Icelandic romances, as well as in the *konungasögur* [kings' sagas] in *Heimskringla*. See also Jarring pp. 125–26.

⁴⁰³ Daniel, pp. 8–9, 67.

⁴⁰⁴ Daniel, p. 264; John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 127–28.

non-Europeans—people outside of Christendom.⁴⁰⁵ Ármann Jakobsson takes such an approach in calling Serkland ‘mjög frumstætt og ósiðmenntað og greinilega *heiðið*’ [very primitive and uncivilized and clearly *pagan*],⁴⁰⁶ though he does not comment any further on the religion of Serkland, or offer any evidence of just what makes these characters pagan, perhaps, though not explicitly, equating them with Saracens.

Whereas both Christianity and Islam are freely referred to and incorporated into many Icelandic romances,⁴⁰⁷ *Nítíða saga* does not include any overt references to either religion; not even the word *guð* [God] appears. It might be argued that the presence of Latin in *Nítíða saga* is evidence of the Christian context in which it was conceived and produced. While Latinisms such as those already mentioned in Chapter Two certainly are

⁴⁰⁵ The term was also used, ‘in translations of ancient Latin writers, of the Assyrians, Babylonians’ (*Cleasby-Vigfússon*, p. 523).

⁴⁰⁶ Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, p. 177, my italics.

⁴⁰⁷ Just as medieval romances from elsewhere in Europe often display clear evidence of the religious climate in which they were composed and consumed, in Iceland even romances without European sources demonstrate the Christian culture of the scribes and readers who composed and enjoyed them in the late Middle Ages, by the time the religion had taken a real hold in society (van Nahl, pp. 155–64). One example of such incorporation of religion in romances is the explicitly Christian passage of time in many of them. Towards the end of *Sigurðar saga þogla*, for example, reference is made to the Christianization of France in order to authenticate the saga’s events (Loth, ed., ‘*Sigurðar saga þogla*’, pp. 228–29). By including such a religious reference, the text also asserts that regardless of whether or not it depicts historical events, it is set in a real place, that same Christendom to which the saga’s Icelandic readers belong, connecting audience with characters and thus making the text more relatable. Other romances refer to Christianity throughout in order to signal that the world the characters inhabit is a romance world, which in turn is a part of Christendom, showing not so much the Christian setting, but simply reflecting the Christian social norms of romance. Religious figures (saints, bishops, popes, monks, nuns) and institutions (churches, monasteries) appear regularly in *Saulus saga ok Nikanors* and *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*. Biblical characters, stories, and names are incorporated into *Saulus saga ok Nikanors* and *Adonias saga*. Additionally, many romances including *Adonias saga*, *Ectors saga*, *Sigurðar saga turnara*, and *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* end with prayers or other Christian references, which are also common in Middle English romance (see Roger Dalrymple, *Language and Piety in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000) and Lynn Thorndike, ‘More Copyists’ Final Jingles’, *Speculum*, 31 (1950), 321–28). *Nikulás saga leikara* in particular has a dense concentration of religious references, with Christianity pervading the story much more readily than in many of the romances already mentioned. Islam features in many Icelandic romances, even where, given the settings of texts such as *Ectors saga* and *Kirialax saga*, the inclusion of Muslim characters is anachronistic.

evidence of the saga's production in a religious environment within Christendom, none of the Latinisms, nor any other aspect of the saga, suggests that the world in which *Nítíða* is depicted is a Christian world, whereas other Icelandic romances do suggest as much. The distinction between the environment in which the saga was conceived and produced and that which the saga characters inhabit is an important one. Without any explicit religious references, it could be said that *Nítíða saga*, to a certain extent, ignores the notion of Europe as Christendom—the geographical region united by a religious institution—or at the very least discounts its importance. However, despite this, it is possible to see the saga's Serkland as representative of a non-European (and therefore non-Christian) Other. To take this to an extreme, one might say it is possible to see an element of crusading in the saga, where France could represent Christendom and the characters from Serkland could be seen as invading Muslims. Geraldine Barnes favours this reading of the land and its people when she argues that *Nítíða saga* is 'a narrative in which the West is threatened by the Saracen East' and that *Nítíða* commits her efforts mainly to defending her kingdom against Saracens, and suggests the sack of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204 as a potential influence on the saga's writer;⁴⁰⁸ an essential aspect of this argument is that *Serkland* should be understood as 'land of Saracens'. Such a broad identification of *Serkland* does not clash with *Nítíða saga*'s locating it within the Eastern region of the world along with India, Palestine, and Asia, and yet still would not explicitly associate the place with Africa.⁴⁰⁹ However, the evidence that Barnes uses in order to support her argument relies on stretching the meaning of the Old Norse word *vikingur*, which I do not think is necessary. She states that in *Nítíða saga* 'the term appears [...] to

⁴⁰⁸ Barnes, 'Margin vs. Centre', pp. 105–06.

⁴⁰⁹ Jesch, 'Geography and Travel', p. 125.

be more or less synonymous with “Saracen”,⁴¹⁰ instead of simply leaving the characters from Serkland as Saracens. In medieval Icelandic literature, *vikingur* usually means either ‘Scandinavian seafarer’, as in some *Íslendingasögur*,⁴¹¹ or ‘villainous pirate’, as in many romances.⁴¹² In *Nítíða saga*, the word appears three times:

1) ‘hann [...] drap ransmenn og vikinga’.⁴¹³

[He [...] killed robbers and vikings]

2) ‘litur hun j sina naturu steina at siä [...] ef vikingar kiæmi og villdi strida ä hennar riki’.⁴¹⁴

[she looks into her supernatural stones to see [...] if vikings were coming to attack her kingdom]

3) ‘eÿ einni er Kartagia heitir. þar var vikinga bæli mikit’.⁴¹⁵

[a certain island that is called Kartagia. A great viking camp was there]

In 1), the sense is most likely a synonym for ‘robbers’. In 2), the sense could be stretched to refer to Saracens, but there is nothing to suggest that this reading is preferable over another. The word could just as easily refer to robbers as in the first quotation, or more generally to pirates or warriors—these *vikingar* could be anyone, Saracens included, but the information given in the text is not specific enough to draw concrete conclusions as to their precise identity. In 3), the sense of the word is, again, much the same as in the two preceding quotations. Barnes understands *Kartagia* as ‘probably the port of Cartagena in southeast Spain, which was known in the Middle Ages for its pirate attacks’.⁴¹⁶ Barnes

⁴¹⁰ Barnes, ‘Margin vs. Centre’, p. 106.

⁴¹¹ *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, p. 716.

⁴¹² *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, p. 716.

⁴¹³ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 8.

⁴¹⁴ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, pp. 14–15.

⁴¹⁵ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 26.

⁴¹⁶ Barnes, ‘Margin vs. Centre’, p. 108.

does not say whether these pirates were Saracens specifically, although certainly the port was part of Muslim al-Andalus until 1245 when it was incorporated into the Castilian kingdom, meaning that this island could easily have been conceived of by medieval scribes and readers as Muslim territory. If Kartagia is to be understood, rather, as Carthage, as suggested above, then associating this place with the Saracens in general would be equally valid. In any case, this indeterminate island location is best understood broadly in connection to Serkland and the characters from that place, rather than in connection specifically with vikings. In none of the instances quoted above does *víkingur* seem to denote anything other than the common senses of the word: a claim that *víkingur* is ‘synonymous with “Saracen”’ in *Nítíða saga* thus seems questionable. Further, Barnes later states that *Nítíða* may at one point characterize Eskilvarður (i.e. Liforinus) as a viking, while never implying that he is a Saracen; he does, in fact, fight against the army of Serkland, whom Barnes identifies as Saracens.⁴¹⁷ While plausible in isolation, the argument stands in direct opposition to her previous equation of vikings with Saracens. This argument does, however, echo a medieval European confusion of vikings (and others) with Saracens, particularly in some chansons de geste.⁴¹⁸

As a final note to conclude my consideration of Serkland, it is interesting to find that at no point in the saga does any of the action occur in Serkland. This, unfortunately, makes it impossible to compare the construction of space in this location to that in others such as France, as discussed above, or Visio, to be considered shortly. However, the absence of Serkland as one of the saga’s settings is significant. By not describing the place from which the characters from Serkland come, the saga signals their alterity (which will be discussed further later chapters): not only are the other characters’ homelands

⁴¹⁷ Barnes, ‘Margin vs. Centre’, p. 109.

⁴¹⁸ Daniel, pp. 66–67.

described, allowing them to contribute to the saga's setting overall, but Nítiða travels to, or finds herself in, most of these other places at some point in the saga as well. The closest we get to Serkland is perhaps the encounter near the island Kartagia, mentioned above as a place in between saga locations, in conjunction with the heterotopic space associated with ships.

3. Visio

Thus far, I have discussed those places *Nítiða saga* portrays that are understood, for the most part, to exist in the real world.⁴¹⁹ It is simple to locate France on a map, and Serkland, while less concretely identifiable, is still conceivable as existing in the physical world, able to be reached by medieval readers as easily as the characters in the story who travel there. But the island Visio is an imagined, as opposed to a real, saga location that also merits investigation.⁴²⁰ Nítiða herself provides the main description of Visio at the beginning of the saga in a conversation with her foster-mother Egidia: 'Þesse ey liggur vt vndan Suiþiod jnni kaulldu. vt vnder heims skauted. þeirra landa er menn hafa spurn af. j þessari eyjv er vatn eitt stórt. enn j vatninu er holmi sæ er Skoga blomi heiter' [This island lies out beyond Sweden the Cold, out past the corner of the world of those lands which people have heard of. In the island is a large lake, and in the lake is that islet which is called The Flower of the Woods].⁴²¹ These details are only hearsay, but prove more or less accurate when an expedition to the island is launched. Once Nítiða and her companions

⁴¹⁹ Ármann Jakobsson insists that the places named in *Nítiða saga* bear little if any resemblance to those in the real world (*Illa fenginn mjöður*, pp. 177–78), going as far as saying that 'hinum fjarlægðu löndum þar sem sagan gerist en eru first og fremst nöfnin tóm' [the remote countries where the saga takes place are first and foremost empty names], p. 179.

⁴²⁰ See Anna Hansen, 'Crossing the Borders of Fantastic Space: The Relationship Between the Fantastic and the Non-Fantastic in *Valdimars saga*', *Parergon*, 26 (2009), 57–74 (especially pp. 65–66).

⁴²¹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 5.

reach Visio, no more details are given, only that they anchor in a hidden cove—‘leggiandi skipet j eir<n> leyni vog’—and upon finding the lake, find also a boat with which to row out to Skóga blómi.⁴²² The narrator does not comment on the voyage, protesting that he knows nothing of the journey, and cannot state the island’s exact whereabouts.⁴²³ It is on Visio that Nítíða sees ‘margar eikur med fagri fruckt og agiætum eplum’, and finds, ‘j midian holman [...] eitt stein ker med .iiij. hornum. kerit var fullt af vatni. sinn steinn var j huerju horni kersins’ [many oaks with fair fruit and fine apples, and finds, in the middle of the islet [...] a stone vessel with four corners. The vessel was full of water, and there was a stone in each corner of the vessel].⁴²⁴ These stones are Nítíða’s *náttúrusteinar*, which, as I have discussed, are integral to her success later in the story. The saga describes Visio as mysterious and hidden away beyond the known world. That it appears to be situated in the far reaches of the North brings to mind Thule,⁴²⁵ but Visio does not seem to be an obviously northern island once it is reached: it is lush, and by no means a place of snow and ice. Margaret Schlauch is tempted to equate Visio with Sicily, but does not make a convincing argument of it.⁴²⁶ Barnes, however, puts forth a brief but thought-provoking case for Visio being an Earthly Paradise,⁴²⁷ noting parallels with other medieval Icelandic texts (*Stjórn* and *Konungs Skuggsjá*), and highlighting the fact that ‘Visio is also the source of global knowledge’, referring to the power of the stones found there.⁴²⁸ The importance of knowledge and wisdom is also evident in the name of the place itself: it is

⁴²² Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 6.

⁴²³ See Chapter Six for an interpretation of this and other comments made by the narrator.

⁴²⁴ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 6.

⁴²⁵ Tatiana N. Jackson, ‘Ultima Thule in Western European and Icelandic Traditions’, *Northern Studies*, 39 (2005), 12–24. See also Jeff Rider, ‘The Other Worlds of Romance’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 115–31.

⁴²⁶ Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, pp. 167–68

⁴²⁷ Barnes, ‘Margin vs. Centre’, p. 105.

⁴²⁸ Barnes, ‘Margin vs. Centre’, p. 105.

from Visio—a Latinate name perhaps intended as a pun—that Nítíða gains not just magical objects, but the powers of supernatural vision. While it is certainly possible for medieval and later audiences of this text to have understood this possibly humorous linguistic connection, it is clear that many post-medieval scribes did not make the connection. In other versions of *Nítíða saga* copied in post-medieval manuscripts, the importance of Visio as the source of knowledge remains, though sometimes in slightly garbled form. For the most part, the form *Visio* remains throughout the transmission of the text in Groups A, B, C, and D (with occasional differences in spelling like ÍB 132’s *Vicio*), with the exception of Group A’s offshoot of AM 568 and ÍB 116, which have *Vysia* and *Visia*, respectively. However, it is in later versions in the nineteenth century when the name’s meaning changes but is still significant, as in Group E’s variations on *Viktoria*, perhaps indicating the ultimate victory that Nítíða will gain from the island; or when the name morphs into a form devoid of any further significance, as in Group F’s *Vikio*. All groups, however, preserve the name *Virgilius*, with orthographic variation. In the translated romance *Flóres saga ok Blankiflur*, it says of the protagonist Flóres that ‘foera hann til skóla í þann stað, er á Visdon heitir’ [he went to school in that place, which is called Visdon].⁴²⁹ This association with wisdom and learning is significant, and it is certainly possible that the author of *Nítíða saga* was inspired by this name and its context. Further, that the island is the abode of the earl Virgilius is also suggestive of the learned environment from which *Nítíða saga* was produced,⁴³⁰ and while casting him as an evil magician might at first seem to clash with the idea that Visio is as an Earthly Paradise,

⁴²⁹ Eugen Kölbing, ed., *Flóres saga ok Blankiflur*, Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek, 5 (Halle a.S.: Niemeyer, 1896), p. 8.

⁴³⁰ For a discussion of the characterization of Virgilius as an antagonist in *Nítíða saga* specifically and of the figure of Virgil’s negative reputation in late medieval and early modern Iceland more generally, see Chapter Five.

within medieval Europe the North was often viewed as a place of ‘danger and wildness’.⁴³¹ In the saga’s description of Visio, which as an isolated island might also be thought of as a space of wilderness, the location’s remote wildness is intensified through doubling, as it is not merely an island, but an island within an island. The only signs of habitation there are the boat conveniently allowing Nítíða’s passage to the central island (‘þau siä einn bát flíotandi. taka hann og roa vt j holminn’), and the box or vessel in which the four *náttúrusteinar* have been placed (‘sem þau framm koma j midian holman siä þau eitt stein ker med .iiij. hornum’). Apart from these crafted objects, Visio and Skóga-blómi are indeed a paradisiacal wilderness.⁴³²

IV: CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have shown the extent of *Nítíða saga*’s geographical knowledge, and compared it to the presentation of geography in four romances related to *Nítíða saga*. I have also considered *Nítíða saga*’s presentation of space on a smaller scale, comparing public and private space, and considering how and to what purpose different types of

⁴³¹ Barnes, ‘Margin vs. Centre’, p. 105. See also Shafer, pp. 207–72.

⁴³² These woods, however, because of their isolation from the rest of the world, are rather different to those experienced by Liforinus, who encounters a dwarf in the midst of an open space, a space of uncontrolled nature, yet still enclosed by surrounding woods (Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 21). It has been noted that ‘deserts, islands and forests’ to him exemplify the wilderness, which is ‘always perceived as a spatial region fundamentally different from that of “normal” space’ (Harrison, p. 12). This encounter includes the only other mention of *skógur* [woods] in the saga apart from the place-name *Skóga-blómi* (and also the only mention of *rjóður* [clearing]); Liforinus’s caution there highlights the potential danger and insecurity of a clearing in the midst of the wild woods, as opposed to cleared areas more akin to gardens. Though Icelandic texts do not describe cultivated medieval gardens as such, this saga includes nods to the idea, in contrast to the natural clearing just noted. ‘Gardens’ seem to be associated with private space, but also with fluidity and escape: Nítíða escapes from India out of ‘einn lund plantadan er stod vnder skemmunní’ [a certain planted grove that stood below the chamber], Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 24. The garden’s proximity to a private chamber suggests an equivalence of spaces, perhaps as extensions of each other. But whereas the enclosed, indoor spaces suggest security, stability, and predictability, even when a supposed security may be breached, the open, outdoor spaces suggest fluidity, movement, and uncertainty.

spaces are characterized throughout the text, in anticipation of my discussions of characters and their interactions in the remaining section of this thesis. I have shown that different spaces can hinder or facilitate different characters in combination with their own personal attributes and motivations depending on the circumstances. As has also been mentioned briefly in discussion of the three case studies of later versions of *Nítíða saga* in Chapter One, it seems that as time passes, some versions show different geographical focuses. Generally speaking, we might say that as time passes there is less of a need for scribes to display their book knowledge, or to portray their degree of learnedness, as can be seen in for example the loss of Latinate endings on many place names in later versions. Certainly by the nineteenth century, manuscripts of all groups, but especially those that appear for the first time only in the nineteenth century like Groups E and F, put much less emphasis on place names, and no longer underscore the exoticism of some names: *Miklagarður* becomes *Grikkland*, and *Serkland* becomes *Miklagarður* in Group E; the composite *Miklagarður í Grikkland* appears in seventeenth-century Group B and two Group D manuscripts, to clarify with the latter what is meant by the former.

Overall, I have sketched out the literary landscape in which many readers and listeners encountered *Nítíða saga*, while also further reinforcing some of the intertextual relationships I first discussed in Chapter Two. I have shown that *Nítíða saga* is innovative in its portrayal of world geography—how on a global scale it divides the world into unprecedented thirds and excludes Africa altogether in order to draw Iceland closer to the world's centre, in contrast to *Dínus saga drambláta*, which divides the world into its traditional thirds but concentrates so closely on Africa that other regions are barely mentioned, and Europe conspicuously ignored. I have also considered the eclecticism of *Sigurðar saga þogla*, whose scribe focuses on Europe overall, but includes so many diverse place names that the text's geography becomes cluttered and disordered, in opposition to

Nítíða saga's clearly structured cosmography. Comparisons with *Clári saga* and *Nikulás saga leikara*, both of which include very few place names, has further shown how directed and deliberate *Nítíða saga*'s geographical descriptions are, as a means of demonstrating the proximity of Iceland to the rest of Europe.

Nítíða saga presents a decidedly nordicentric picture of the world. That the text, situating both itself and Iceland within Europe in this way, was copied, read, and heard alongside *Dínus saga drambláta* and *Nikulás saga leikara*, and that thematically it has so much in common with *Clári saga* and *Sigurðar saga þogla*, suggests that these texts along with *Nítíða saga* comprise a group of five which, if considered together, act as a complex and relatively complete, yet distinctly Icelandic, picture of late medieval world geography in romance, the realization of geographical desire and cultural appropriation (or even colonization) in a late medieval Icelandic milieu.⁴³³ Through geographical description as well as passing mention of certain places, *Nítíða saga* makes a statement about its place within Europe, and this only becomes more evident when *Nítíða saga* is considered alongside these other sagas: the text's statement is louder and more pronounced when encountered before, after, or between sagas that, while also possessing their own messages and opinions, speak of geography and localization in other ways. When *Dínus saga drambláta* is conventional and centres its action inward on Africa to the exclusion of other settings, *Nítíða saga* disregards tradition completely and is equally self-centred, but in the North, a setting to which Icelanders can relate. Where *Sigurðar saga þogla* displays an impressive but somewhat haphazard collection of geographical knowledge, *Nítíða saga* purposefully collects and displays meaningful references with a greater significance in mind. It is not only what *Nítíða saga* says about the relationship between Iceland and

⁴³³ Barnes, 'Travel and *translatio studii* in the Icelandic riddarasögur', pp. 138–39; McDougall, p. 233; Tomasch, 'Introduction', p. 2.

Europe, but also the manner in which the saga says it that is meaningful. With its focus clearly set on the peripheral North, and yet with its action mainly centred on France, *Nítíða saga* brings Iceland to the European forefront through its manipulation of traditional medieval geography, and affirms its connection to that major cultural centre of the late medieval world. In doing so, the saga fulfils its author's geographical desire in its inherent depiction of a longing for, and realization of, Europeanization, in the appropriation and adaptation of various aspects of European culture into Icelandic culture.

This chapter's end also marks the end of the first section of the thesis, in which I have discussed *Nítíða saga*'s 'external contexts'—the saga's manuscripts and intertextuality in Chapters One and Two—and now its 'internal contexts'—the romance's setting and atmosphere as seen here primarily through its incorporation of geography and negotiation of space. Through geography we have also seen *Nítíða saga* considering its depiction of certain romance norms to produce a text that clearly engages with and challenges its genre and the other texts therein, and also engages with, more broadly, the wider European cultural community from and with which romances, Icelandic and otherwise, emerge and engage. In the second part of this thesis I will consider further *Nítíða saga*'s questioning nature in discussions of the various characters that populate the text, from the protagonists to the narrator, and how they interact with each other. I first turn, in Chapter Four, to the idea of *Nítíða saga*'s hero.

PART TWO

Characters and Their Interaction

Chapter 4

THE HERO

In Part Two I focus on *Nítíða saga*'s characters and how they interact with each other; I consider in this first chapter the main characters and the hero specifically. I will discuss supporting characters in Chapter Five, and the role of the narrator in Chapter Six. I will also examine the importance of speech to characterization by comparing dialogue in *Nítíða saga* as represented by both direct and indirect speech. Just as *Nítíða saga* plays with the norms of romance and challenges generic boundaries as seen in the previous section of this thesis, so does the saga reconsider traditional or expected norms of characterization, most importantly with respect to the hero. In medieval Icelandic romances, heroes are usually identified through features such as a text's introductory and concluding remarks, or its title. In almost all Icelandic romances, the saga's eponymous hero is male and the plot generally focuses on his exploits; in many romances the culmination of the plot and the hero's actions is his marriage. Although not all romance sagas bear titles as such in manuscript and titles are more common in later post-medieval manuscripts,⁴³⁴ many sagas, whether accompanied by a title or not, begin with a formulaic introduction of their heroes, and end equally formulaically by clearly stating the characters on whom the story has focused. Considering *Nítíða saga*, where the title character is a woman who has a prominent role throughout the text,⁴³⁵ the question of what constitutes this text's hero

⁴³⁴ Of the four medieval (pre-1600) manuscripts of *Nítíða saga*, only one, AM 529, preserves the beginning, and it does not bear any sort of title, nor has a large initial been added, though space has been left in the manuscript. The saga begins immediately after *Gibbons saga*, which precedes it, and without actually reading the manuscript leaf, it would be impossible to tell by glancing at it that a new text has begun. Conversely, most of the sixty post-medieval *Nítíða saga* manuscripts bear a declaratory title of some kind, clearly marking off the new text. Saga titles will be discussed further below.

⁴³⁵ Possibly the only other medieval romance with a female title character is *Mábel saga sterku*, but unfortunately this text is known today only through post-medieval re-tellings in the form of *rímur*; this text is little studied, but see Matthew Driscoll, 'In Praise of Strong Women', in *Frejas Psalter: En psalter i 40*

has not yet been addressed in scholarship. Instead, what little has been written about Nítíða, and mainly only noted in passing, seems to imply that though a powerful maiden-king, she is not a hero, and instead this role must be fulfilled by her suitor Liforinus, because the saga resembles a bridal-quest romance.⁴³⁶

However, as I argue in this chapter, Nítíða is the hero of a saga that challenges and redefines what it means to be a protagonist and hero in Icelandic romance. As a foundation for my argument, I will first offer a definition of the Icelandic romance hero. I will then explore the characterization of Liforinus and touch on the crucial aid his aunt Alduria provides, as well as the positive role King Ingi has toward the saga's end, in order to show how these two characters contribute to Liforinus's success. But I will also demonstrate that Liforinus's success alone is not enough to make him the saga's hero. I will show how Nítíða fulfils the criteria for a hero in ways Liforinus cannot, and I will also explore the support of Nítíða's foster-brother Hléskjöldur and foster-mother Egidía as important instruments through which Nítíða's character is reinforced. Throughout this chapter, I will show how this text arguably questions and re-evaluates the traditional conceptualization of an Icelandic romance hero in its portrayal of Nítíða in a heroic, central role, which in turn provides an opportunity for audiences to reassess what it means to be a hero in this type of late-medieval Icelandic literature, just as in previous chapters I have shown how *Nítíða saga* questions and reinterprets other traditional components of

afdelinger til brug for Jonna Louis-Jensen, ed. by Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir and Peter Springborg (Copenhagen: Det arnamagnæanke Institut, 1997), pp. 29–33. *Hervarar saga*, a *fornaldarsaga*, can also be considered a medieval saga named after a woman, but it is also often called *Heiðreks saga* (or *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*). For a relatively recent discussion of this text, see for example Alaric Hall, 'Changing Style and Changing Meaning: Icelandic Historiography and the Medieval Redactions of *Heiðreks saga*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 77 (2005), 1–30. After the medieval period, many sagas and *rímur* were composed and circulated, which had female protagonists reflected in their titles, such as *Amalíu saga drottningar*, *Flórentínu saga fögru*, and *Helenu saga vænu* (see for example Glauser's list in *Isländische Märchensagas*, p. 278).

⁴³⁶ Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, pp. 174–77; Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction', p. 201; Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 22, 75.

romance, such as the geographical setting its characters inhabit and the expectations of a Christian setting. I will conclude by assessing the literary and cultural implications of *Nítíða saga's* alternative portrayal of the hero.

I: DEFINING THE ICELANDIC ROMANCE HERO

The categories of hero, helper, and protagonist are unavoidably problematic. I find it unnecessary to distinguish between masculine *hero* and feminine *heroine*, and will use the term *hero* throughout this chapter, regardless of the character's gender. Further, it is important to be able to call Nítíða a hero, considering some of the word's connotations in English. The fourth sense given for 'hero' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is 'the man who forms the subject of an epic; the chief male personage in a poem, play, or story; he in whom the interest of the story or plot is centred'.⁴³⁷ In this sense, *hero* is essentially synonymous with *protagonist*, but I favour the former word over the latter because of its other senses, which highlight 'extraordinary valour' (sense two, first in 1586), as well as 'bravery, firmness, fortitude, or greatness of soul' (sense three, first in 1661), as key characteristics of a hero.⁴³⁸ The term *hero* seems thus much more important, and charged, than *protagonist*, and I see it fitting better the character and setting of the medieval vernacular tales with which I am concerned (as notions like the bravery and valour of characters feature strongly in many).

⁴³⁷ 'hero, n.', *OED Online* <<http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/86297?rskey=ZPR2N6&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> [Accessed 15 December 2011]. This is the fourth of four senses provided in the entry, and is said to appear first in 1697, over three hundred years after the first appearance of *hero* in English in 1387, where the sense is much more specific, relating directly to the 'men of superhuman strength' in Homeric epic.

⁴³⁸ The sense that a hero is someone of 'superhuman strength', or 'one who does brave or noble deeds; an illustrious warrior', is not important to me for the idea of a hero, and seems unnecessary to retain here in the discussion of the hero as protagonist (*OED Online*).

Unfortunately, little scholarship focuses on the question of what constitutes a romance hero in a specifically medieval Icelandic context, and what there is does not clearly define its terms. There has also been surprisingly little work on how Icelandic sagas more generally identify their protagonists or heroes (the most comprehensive general assessment in English is from 1970⁴³⁹) and there has been even less work on romance sagas in particular. Some Icelandic-language scholarship does, however, tackle the issue with broad strokes. In the second volume of the general reference work *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga*, Torfi Tulinius's chapter on Icelandic romance (covering both *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*) discusses the characters of Icelandic romance. Torfi says that 'Hetjum íslenskra rómansa má skipta í tvo andstæða flokka' [Heroes of Icelandic romance can be divided into two opposite categories], namely, 1) noble, masculine heroes ('af tignum ættum og fagur ásýndum. Hann ber ástarhug til tiginborinna kvenna og ást hans er endurgoldin' [of noble lineage and handsome appearance. He loves noblewomen and his love is requited]) and 2) the *kolbitur* (lit. coal-biter) type ('ekki fögur, nýtur sjaldan kvenhylli [...] yfirleitt ekki af höfðingjættum' [not handsome, seldom enjoys success with women [...] usually not of noble lineage]).⁴⁴⁰ About female characters, Torfi says that they are 'oftar þolendur en gerendur og því sjaldan í aðalhlutverki' [more often victims than agents and seldom take a main role], but he names *Nítíða's* character specifically as an exception 'sem hetjan er kvenkyns' [where the hero is female].⁴⁴¹ The relationship between *Nítíða saga's* popularity in manuscript and the tale's female protagonist is also highlighted, and it is suggested that a woman could have written the saga, but this idea

⁴³⁹ Alan Boucher, 'The Hero in Old Icelandic Literature', *Atlantica and Iceland Review*, 8 (1970), 41–45. See also Jan Geir Johansen, 'The Hero of Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða', *Scandinavian Studies*, 67 (1995), 265–86.

⁴⁴⁰ Torfi H. Tulinius, 'Íslenska rómansan', p. 226.

⁴⁴¹ Torfi H. Tulinius, 'Íslenska rómansan', p. 228.

remains merely speculative, as is not explored in very much detail.⁴⁴² Guðbjörg Aðalbergsdóttir picks up on this notion and discusses the role of Nítíða as protagonist and the saga as a piece of feminist writing.⁴⁴³ However, more recently Ármann Jakobsson, while acknowledging that in *Nítíða saga* ‘sjónarhorn sögunnar er í ríkara mæli hjá Nítíðu en almennt hjá meykóngum í meykóngasögum’ [the point of view of the saga is to a greater extent with Nítíða than generally with maiden-kings in maiden-king sagas], still insists on a more traditional stance that ‘þrátt fyrir það er karlinn samt hetja sögunnar’ [despite this the man [Liforinus] is still the hero of the saga].⁴⁴⁴ What exactly a hero is, though, remains unexamined, and this is as far as the discussion of romance heroes and Nítíða’s role, specifically, goes. Outside of Iceland, some important studies of medieval Icelandic romance skirt the issue and make assumptions about heroes that are worth interrogating. As noted in the introduction to the thesis, within the romance genre, a useful sub-genre into which *Nítíða saga* is often placed is that of maiden-king romance, itself being a type of bridal-quest romance, another sub-genre. The most significant work on this subject is Marianne Kalinke’s *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, where bridal-quest romance is ‘in the strictest sense, [...] a narrative the plot of which is generated primarily by the hero’s efforts to obtain a bride’.⁴⁴⁵ As for maiden-king romances, ‘their plot is dominated by a misogynous female ruler who insists on being called *kongr* (“king”) rather than *drottning* (“queen”)’.⁴⁴⁶ However, without any indications as to what constitutes the hero, that definition must be sought through a sort of

⁴⁴² Torfi H. Tulinius, ‘Íslenska rómansan’, pp. 228–29, 245.

⁴⁴³ Guðbjörg Aðalbergsdóttir, ‘Nítíða og aðri meykóngar’, pp. 49–55.

⁴⁴⁴ Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, p. 176, in first quotation, the original is italicized apart from last two words.

⁴⁴⁵ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p. viii. Indeed this view has dominated some scholars’ passing understanding of *Nítíða saga* (as in van Nahl, p. 28).

⁴⁴⁶ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p. 66; Sif Ríkharrsdóttir, ‘Meykóngehefðin í riddarasögum’, pp. 410–33.

backformation whereby a hero is the character who obtains a bride in the end. But how would a definition like this work for *Nítíða saga* where, I would argue, the hero is a woman? The solution is not so simple as merely to modify it to include ‘bride *or* groom’, and as is evident in the above quotations, it is often taken for granted, without questioning, that romance heroes are male. Surely a broader, more inclusive definition can be found for the Icelandic romances, many of which fall under the bridal-quest rubric.

The formalist theory of Vladimir Propp,⁴⁴⁷ who analysed folk and fairy tale structure as the combination of a fixed set of narrative variables, holds a certain appeal, as Icelandic romances certainly have fairy tale elements—such as, indeed, the basic bridal-quest structure itself. Propp notes that ‘non-fairy tales may also be constructed according to the scheme’ he has laid out in his *Morphology*, and that ‘novels of chivalry’, that is, romances, also ‘may be traced back to the [fairy] tale’.⁴⁴⁸ It is useful to consider Icelandic romances such as *Nítíða saga* in this light, as a mixture of the fairy/folk tale and the European chivalric romance (about which more will be said below). Propp’s own definition of a hero is helpful in the context of Icelandic romances:

The hero of a fairy tale is that character who either directly suffers from the action of the villain [...], or who agrees to liquidate the misfortune or lack of another person. In the course of action the hero is the person who is supplied with a magical agent [...] and who makes use of it or is served by it.⁴⁴⁹

Heroes of Icelandic romance often conform to this definition, even if their quests are motivated by their own need—for example, to find a bride—rather than by someone else’s need. Whether the bridal-quest dominates the entire plot or is only one of many

⁴⁴⁷ V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. by Laurence Scott, 2nd edn (London: University of Texas Press, 1968).

⁴⁴⁸ Propp, pp. 99–100.

⁴⁴⁹ Propp, p. 50.

elements, Propp's hero-type, as the character around whom the plot revolves, and who is helped along his or her way when in need, is appealing in its simplicity. Jürg Glauser's *Isländische Märchensagas*, an important work on the structure and function of Icelandic romances, is in places influenced by Propp, and as such his interpretations of Icelandic romance heroes are rooted in the formulaic organization of the texts and tend to generalize romance heroes with broad descriptions. He says, for example, that 'Schönheit, Adel, höfische Sitten, Stärke gehören zu den zentralen Merkmalen des Märchensagahelden' [Beauty, nobility, courtly manners, and strength are among the key features of the *Märchensaga* [literally 'fairy-tale-saga'] heroes], and that 'der idealtypische Held der Märchensagas ist ein aristokratischer Ritter inmitten seiner Lehnsdiener' [The typically ideal hero of the *Märchensagas* is an aristocratic knight among his liegemen].⁴⁵⁰

Such statements are insightful, and will contribute to our understanding of Icelandic romance heroes, but must be built upon further as they describe only a broad trend in romance, rather than the nuanced collage of heroes and their traits that might better represent the differences seen among texts. While a Proppian approach has its place in considering a fantastical romance like *Nítíða saga* that at times seems to verge on the folk-tale, some of Propp's black and white distinctions (sometimes echoed in Glauser's characterization of the ideal hero), between villain and hero, for example, do not adequately deal with the many shades of characters found in most of the Icelandic romances, including the innovative and convention-challenging *Nítíða saga*. It is not merely a formulaic tale. Propp's seven character types (villain, donor/provider, helper,

⁴⁵⁰ Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*, pp. 165, 181. More recently, Alenka Divjak, too, has taken a Proppian approach to understanding the structure of the romance *Kirialax saga* and the function of its characters (see especially pp. 262–85); and see also Werner Schäfke, 'The "Wild East" in Late Medieval Icelandic Romances—Just a Prop(p)?', in *Á austrvega': Saga and East Scandinavia*, Preprint Papers of the Fourteenth International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9–15 August 2009, ed. by Agnete Ney, Henrik Williams, and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist, 2 vols (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), II, 845–50.

princess/sought-for person and her father [interestingly presented as one unit], dispatcher, hero, and false hero) are static, eliminating the possibility of a villain turning into a hero or vice versa,⁴⁵¹ as in *Nítíða saga*, where Nítíða's previously antagonistic suitors Ingi and Liforinus are presented in the end as positive characters. This is not to say that the characters of Icelandic romance are so mutable as always to morph from one role into another, but it is fair to say that initially antagonistic characters fulfil by the story's end a positive role. A significant example of this is seen in *Clári saga's* cruel maiden-king Séréna, who in the end becomes the hero's submissive wife, promoting a moral for its audience, which also conveniently acts to justify the abuse suffered by Séréna at the hands of the saga's male characters.⁴⁵²

Other scholars of Icelandic romance have found Northrop Frye's conceptions of plot and hero useful. Frye employs a very straightforward definition whereby a 'plot consists of somebody doing something. The somebody, if an individual, is the hero'.⁴⁵³

This is also easily applied to romance sagas, explaining them really as simply about the

⁴⁵¹ Propp, pp. 79–80.

⁴⁵² As the saga ends, we hear that 'Görðu þeir þetta allt svá sem til prófs hennar staðfestu [...]. En hon þolði allan þenna tíma angist og armæðu fyrir ekki vætta útan fyrir sína eiginliga dygð og einfaldleik [...]; og þetta allt lagði hon að baki sér og þar með fǫður, frændir og vini og allan heimsins metnað, upp takandi, viljanligt fátæki með þessum hinum herfilega stafkarli, gefandi svá á sér ljós dæmi, hversu ǫðrum góðum konum byrjar að halda dygð við sína eiginbændr eða unnasta' [They did all this so as to test her steadfastness [...]. And she endured all the while that anguish and distress only because of her natural and virtue and simplicity [...]; and she left everything behind her including her father, family and friends and all worldly ambitions, taking up poverty willingly with that horrible poor beggar, thus making herself a good example, how other good women begin to keep virtue with their own husbands or sweethearts], Cederschiöld, ed., *Clári saga*, pp. 73–74. Whereas Hallberg downplays this ending as no more than 'a rather thin varnish of religious edification' ('Imagery in Religious Old Norse Prose Literature', p. 166), Hughes argues that the saga's end is deliberately moralizing, and that the author 'is using the romance genre as an elaborate exemplum to promote his uncompromising views on the responsible behavior of wives towards their husbands' ('*Clári saga* as an Indigenous Romance', p. 157). In demonstrating a character's ability (and willingness) to change from negative to positive and learn from her mistakes, *Clári saga* could also have been used as a didactic tool to teach morals as well as an entertaining romance, both in the Church or at home amongst families.

⁴⁵³ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 33.

exploits of one character. Taking this as a starting point, Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards's *Legendary Fiction in Medieval Iceland*, an influential study of a select group of *fornaldarsögur*, puts forward the idea that 'there must be some relationship between the characteristic qualities of the hero, and the kind of action he takes, or for that matter, the tone and even the structure of the tale—the nature of the hero dictates the form of the narrative'.⁴⁵⁴ Building on this, Kalinke, too, has argued 'that examination of the hero's quest, as well as motivation for that quest, is necessary if we are to arrive at a more convincing and satisfactory classification and thus at a better understanding of the character and diversity of imaginative Icelandic literature'.⁴⁵⁵ This notion of quest as important in the identification of a hero complements Propp's definitions, and fits well with the romances where, as noted, the plot on a basic level does more or less simply follow an individual protagonist's bridal-quest adventures ending in marriage, and which may or may not be supported by a helper.

Considering another perspective on heroes will help to define them in an Icelandic romance context, while situating them within the wider context of medieval European romance, which, as mentioned previously, has contributed to romance in Iceland along with folk tale and other elements. The medieval European romance hero is very different from the specifically Icelandic romance hero, and we must appreciate these differences in order to understand the Icelandic romance hero in general, and in *Nítíða saga* in particular. Tony Hunt describes medieval European romance (by contrast with medieval epic), as 'an inquiring mode, a critical investigation in the course of which more

⁴⁵⁴ Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, *Legendary Fiction in Medieval Iceland*, *Studia Islandica*, 30 (Reykjavík: Heimspekieild Háskóla, 1971), p. 36. Their indebtedness to Frye is outlined on pp. 10–12.

⁴⁵⁵ Kalinke, 'Riddarasögur, Fornaldarsögur, and the Problem of Genre', p. 82. Kalinke elsewhere refers to 'Frye's classification of fiction on the basis of the hero's power of action' in reference to Icelandic romance in 'Norse Romance (Riddarasögur)', p. 325.

individualistic values are gradually disengaged’, and the hero of which is ‘a voluntary exile’ on a ‘discovery of identity’ and ‘self-realization through “adventure”’.⁴⁵⁶ Rather than having internal motives of self-discovery and abstract quests, Icelandic romance heroes generally have concrete, external goals and motivations, such as a bridal-quest. The *Strengleikar*, translated from Marie de France’s *lais*, along with the Arthurian stories *Parcevals saga*, *Valvens þáttur*, *Ívens saga*, and *Erex saga* from Chrétien de Troyes’ romances, and *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* from Thomas of Britain’s *Tristan* are the first European romances to be translated into Old Norse.⁴⁵⁷ While the introspective heroes and protagonists of the original French texts were not necessarily fully adapted into these translations,⁴⁵⁸ these first romances in Old Norse did influence, either directly or indirectly, the authors of the later medieval Icelandic romances, and arguably introduced echoes of a different kind of protagonist to Scandinavia, which some authors of Icelandic romance, including that of *Nítíða saga*, may have picked up on and incorporated into their characters and texts. But such heroes of English, French, and other romances are rather different from the decidedly active heroes of Icelandic romance, particularly the action-driven bridal-quest romances. While it may be tempting to think of this also as an issue of courtly or literary versus popular romance regardless of country or language of origin, European popular romance (i.e. later prose romance) was almost certainly not known in medieval Iceland—it was only the earlier literary verse, courtly romances that were

⁴⁵⁶ Tony Hunt, ‘Chrétien de Troyes’ Arthurian Romance, *Yvain*, in *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. I: Medieval Literature, Part II: The European Inheritance*, ed. by Boris Ford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 126–41 (pp. 128–29).

⁴⁵⁷ Robert Cook and Matthias Tveitane, eds, *Strengleikar: An Old Norse Translation of Twenty-One Old French lais*, *Norrøne tekster*, 3 (Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1979); Marianne E. Kalinke, ed., *Norse Romance I: The Tristan Legend* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1999); Marianne E. Kalinke, ed., *Norse Romance II: Knights of the Round Table* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999); Marianne E. Kalinke, ed., *Norse Romance III: Herra Ivan* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999); Paul Schach, ed., *The Saga of Tristram and Ísönd* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973).

⁴⁵⁸ See Sif Rikhardsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*, pp. 24–52, 76–112.

translated and reworked in Scandinavia—meaning that it really is a matter of contrasting Icelandic romance with European romance in terms of active versus the often more introspective heroes. What comes to be known as popular romance in (especially post-medieval) Iceland, that is, Icelandic romance plain and simple, developed, directly and indirectly, from the courtly romance of France and Britain. A further integral aspect of European romance heroes is their morality. Josseline Bidard states that ‘there is one [quality required of a medieval hero] which sums up and comprehends all the others, i.e. truth’.⁴⁵⁹ Very broadly speaking, the heroes of medieval European romances can be thought of as Christian heroes whose abstract quests often include, if they are not exclusively centred on, quests for truth and similar Christian virtues. These varying constructions of romance heroes involve a moral element and intense focus on the self, and especially the inner self, which is not usually where the focus of Icelandic romances lies. Paul Bibire states the difference quite bluntly: ‘The hero of Icelandic Secondary [= non-translated] Romance usually has little or no ethical significance: he does not explore or (usually) significantly exemplify ideals of [...] Christian morality. And since he has no ethical significance, the possibility of tragedy does not exist’.⁴⁶⁰ This is of course despite the obviously Christian settings of almost all Icelandic romances, which I mentioned briefly in Chapter Three.

As one final contrast, I turn briefly to the hero in a different genre of medieval Icelandic literature, the *Íslendingasögur* (sagas of Icelanders, family sagas). Whereas the Icelandic romances are in terms of plot very obviously driven by their heroes, this is not often the case in the *Íslendingasögur*, where the driving force behind the plot is usually the

⁴⁵⁹ Josseline Bidard, ‘Reynard the Fox as Anti-Hero’, in *Heroes and Heroines in Medieval English Literature: A Festschrift Presented to André Crépin on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Leo Carruthers (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 119–23 (p. 122).

⁴⁶⁰ Bibire, p. 69.

struggles of a whole family spanning several generations, or even a community of many families, rather than the adventures of a single person.⁴⁶¹ To take only two examples, which of course grossly simplifies the genre in question, in *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga* it is difficult with their multiplicity of characters and relationships to pinpoint these texts' heroes in the same way one can for a romance. In both texts, to some extent the only thing the various families of characters have in common is their place of residence, which is in turn reflected in the sagas' titles; to consider how romance titles usually contain their heroes' names, the same idea can be transferred to these stories of collective groups and families. These *Íslendingasögur* could be thought of as having as heroes those communities that live in the specific geographical locations indicated in their titles when the sagas' complexity makes naming a single hero complicated. Of course many other *Íslendingasögur* are named after specific characters who can be thought of as their heroes (such as *Hrafnkels saga* or *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*). It is therefore justifiable to keep titles in mind when assessing a saga's hero, romance or otherwise, as saga titles are descriptive (although of course a title should not be the main criterion).⁴⁶² Of most importance is the role of characters within the saga, and the degree to which the saga draws the audience's attention to one character, making the one who is featured most prominently the protagonist, bringing us back again to the notion of questing, which, while absent or only marginally important in the *Íslendingasögur*, is crucial to both European and Icelandic romance (and fairy tale).

⁴⁶¹ O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, pp. 34–43; Vésteinn Ólason, 'Family Sagas', pp. 101–18.

⁴⁶² Kalinke has also argued based on saga titles in manuscript as to how the focus of *Sigurðar saga fòts* should be considered: 'The full title *Sigurðar saga fòts ok Ásmundar Húnakónungs* suggests that the saga is to be read not as the account of Signý's tragedy, [...] but rather as the tale of two men who start out as rivals for the same bride but who become sworn brothers because of mutual respect' (*Bridal-Quest Romance*, p. 196). Of course in this and the cases just mentioned above it is the case that such sagas' titles vary in their manuscripts as well.

With all of this considered, an Icelandic romance hero might be best defined simply as the protagonist, with two essential criteria: 1) the hero is the character on whom the saga's action focuses and, consequently, 2) the hero is the character with whom the audience is led to sympathize. The hero's action and involvement in the plot therefore function in Icelandic romance to propel the action forward to its end, and so there is usually some sort of journey or quest that the hero must fulfil, or some lack or injustice that the hero must right, as the motivating force behind the hero's decisions and actions. A helper character, then, would best be seen as crucial to success of the hero's quest: not just an incidental acquaintance who offers help in passing, but a character known to the hero previously and whose help is ongoing.⁴⁶³ I will now examine the characterizations of Liforinus and Nítíða, and the roles of directly supportive characters, to demonstrate how *Nítíða saga* portrays the hero and relationships among characters in unconventional ways, and to consider what this demonstrates about how *Nítíða saga* situates itself, and the Icelandic culture that produced it, in European society and literary culture.

II: LIFORINUS

Liforinus is often taken for granted as the hero of *Nítíða saga* because by the end of the saga he successfully wins Nítíða's hand. Kalinke, for example, specifically refers to him as the 'hero' and 'male protagonist' of the saga,⁴⁶⁴ in keeping with her statement that 'as a rule, bridal-quest narratives have as their protagonist an eligible young bachelor',⁴⁶⁵ necessarily making the hero the successful wooer. Undeniably, he is on a bridal-quest to marry Nítíða, a quest that ends in success, after which the saga promptly closes. Further,

⁴⁶³ I thus depart from Propp in his acceptance of almost any cooperative character as a sort of helper (Propp, pp. 80–82).

⁴⁶⁴ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 22, 75.

⁴⁶⁵ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p. 26.

Liforinus is introduced positively, and the manner in which he is described mirrors that in which Nítíða is introduced earlier on in the tale:

Blebarnius [...] ätti son er Liforinus hiet. hann var vænn at aliti. lios og <riodur> j anndliti snareygður sem valur. hrockinn hærður og fagurt härit. herda breidur enn keikur ä bringuna. kurteis. sterkur og stormannlegur. hann kvnni vel sund og sæfarar skot og skilmingar tafl og runar og bækur at lesa. og allar jþrotter er karlmann mätti pryða. [...] Liforinus lä j hernadi bædi vetur og sumar og afladi sier fjær og frægðar. og þotti hinn mesti garpur og kappi. huar sem hann fram kom. og hafði sigur j huerri orrustu. hann var suo mikill til kuenna at eingi hafði nærð fyrer honum. en eingua kongs dottur hafði hann manadi leingur.⁴⁶⁶

[Blebarnius [...] had a son called Liforinus, who was fair in appearance, light and rosy in face, sharp-eyed as a hawk, had beautiful curly hair, was broad across the shoulders and upright of chest, and was courteous, strong, and magnificent. He was a good swimmer and could sail well, and he was also good at shooting, fencing, board games and runes, reading books, and all physical activities that a man should pursue. [...] Liforinus engaged in plundering both winter and summer and earned for himself wealth and fame, and was thought the best hero and champion wherever he went, and was victorious in each battle he fought. He was so keen on women that none had peace from him, and he did not stay with any princess longer than a month.]

This lengthy characterization is typical of Icelandic romance heroes, comprising all the courtly expectations of a well-rounded man, and these types of descriptions have their roots in European romance.⁴⁶⁷ Liforinus's implied promiscuity, however, seems rather to be a blind motif,⁴⁶⁸ since this is its sole mention, and when the plot turns to him, he is

⁴⁶⁶ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', pp. 8–9.

⁴⁶⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, p. 178 (Ármann also notes Liforinus's riding in the woods later in the text as indicative of the influence of the European romance hero on the saga); Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 72–74.

⁴⁶⁸ The promiscuous hero motif also occurs in *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, where it allows for a reading of the saga in which Sigrarðr deserves the abuse heaped on him by the maiden-king Ingigerðr. *Berings saga*, which co-occurs with *Sigrarðs saga frækna* in manuscripts, also does this (Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 22–23).

set only on winning Nítíða.⁴⁶⁹ Liforinus' physical description is even at one point identical to that of Nítíða, also described as *ljós og rjóð í andliti*. This correspondence of outward appearance sets up the possibility that the two will be paired in the end and might be equals in their relationship. In the introduction to her monograph on the depiction of Saracen women in medieval French epic and romance, Jacqueline de Weever notes that when marriages occur in such texts, 'union seems only possible by identification with the other. The Saracen princess who marries the Christian prince must, therefore, resemble him as much as possible'.⁴⁷⁰ It is this type of romance convention that *Nítíða saga's* narrator employs in his description of Liforinus, making him appear as similar as possible to Nítíða in order both to conform to convention and also side-step it, by altering the male character's appearance to match the woman's, rather than the other way around, which would be expected. Furthermore, this imagery, of a man from India having fair and rosy skin comparable to that of a French woman,⁴⁷¹ could also have been potentially unusual and therefore significant for any Icelanders who might have been aware of any physical differences between the inhabitants of Europe and Asia, though in the Middle Ages such knowledge would of course have been very limited.⁴⁷² Liforinus is further

With this in mind, it then becomes possible, on the one hand, to consider that a contributing factor to Nítíða's restraint towards and acceptance of Liforinus may have to do with his pristine character, though, on the other hand, he does attempt abduction by force and magic, and this certainly does not make the best of impressions on Nítíða.

⁴⁶⁹ Henric Bagerius, *Mandom och mödom: Sexualitet, homosocialitet och aristokratisk identitet på det senmedeltida Island*, Avhandling från Institutionen för historiska studier (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, 2009), p. 136.

⁴⁷⁰ Jacqueline de Weever, *Sheba's Daughters: Whitening and Demonizing the Saracen Woman in Medieval French Epic* (London: Garland, 1998), p. xx. See also the first chapter, pp. 3–52, which focuses on whitening in particular.

⁴⁷¹ Ármann Jakobsson notes Liforinus's fair complexion '*Þrátt fyrir indverskan uppruna*' [*despite his Indian origin, my italics*] in *Illa fenginn mjöður*, p. 177; see also p. 178.

⁴⁷² In terms of historical interaction with India and the East, by the early seventeenth century at least one Icelander had travelled to India and returned to Iceland: Jón Ólafsson Indíafari (1593–1679). See *The Life of the Icelander Jón Ólafsson Traveller to India*, trans. by Bertha Phillpotts, 2 vols (London: Cambridge

linked to Nítíða when he is re-introduced relatively late in the saga: ‘Nv er at seigia af hinum fræga kongi Liforino’ [Now it is to be said about the famous King Liforinus].⁴⁷³ This phrasing mirrors Nítíða’s own character tag, ‘hin fræga’. Additionally, Nítíða herself twice calls Liforinus by name in this way during the seeing-stones scene, perhaps signalling she accepts him as an equal: ‘mun Livorius kongr hinn fræge eckj sigla j þesse lond’ [will King Liforinus the Famous not sail into these lands?] and ‘enn huar mun Liv(orius) hinn fræge vera’ [but where will Liforinus the Famous be?].⁴⁷⁴ While these clues are all subtle, when considered together they clearly point to the ultimate union of Liforinus and Nítíða, and could arguably identify Liforinus as the saga’s hero.

Liforinus’s similarity to Nítíða also sets him apart from Ingi of Miklagarður,⁴⁷⁵ who is also introduced favourably:

Ingi [...] var allra manna sæmilegastur og best at j þrottum buen. hann læ j hernadi huert sumar og afladi sier suo fiar og frægdar. drap ransmenn og vikinga. en liet fridmenn fara j nådum.⁴⁷⁶

[Ingi [...] was the most honourable of all men and the best endowed in athletic arts. He went plundering each summer and in doing so got for himself wealth and fame; he killed robbers and vikings, and let peaceful people move in peace.]

University Press, 1923–31), II (1931). Even if there was no direct medieval Icelandic knowledge of India, something of it was at least known even if only in literature like *Alexanders saga*; historiographical and pseudohistoriographical texts based on biblical, classical, and continental medieval texts like *Sjórn*; and encyclopedic works like *Alfræði íslenzk* (see Stephanie Würth, ‘Historiography and Pseudo-History’, in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 155–72). Other romances also displayed more detailed knowledge of India, as discussed in Divjak, pp. 220–39. Of course it is also likely that this aspect of Liforinus’s characterization is yet another blind motif been included according to romance convention but not fully thought through in practical terms.

⁴⁷³ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 21.

⁴⁷⁴ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, pp. 30–31.

⁴⁷⁵ Bagerius considers Ingi to be Russian rather than from Constantinople or Byzantium (p. 218).

⁴⁷⁶ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 8.

If it were not for the explicit linking of Liforinus with Nítíða, Ingi might be considered a viable choice as successful suitor and saga hero, even if his descriptive introduction is significantly shorter than that of Liforinus. Ingi is characterized as ‘like’ the protagonist, whereas, for example, the other suitors Soldán and his sons from Serkland, are decidedly ‘other’ in their descriptions.⁴⁷⁷ Ingi, though neither the hero nor any sort of heroic companion, takes part in the courtly triple wedding that closes the saga despite his previously antagonistic characterization both as a threat to Nítíða (as a forceful suitor willing to resort to abduction) and to Liforinus (as rival suitor willing to fight to gain a wife). Ingi’s positive, conventional description sets up the possibility, and even expectation, for his positive end, even though he is not the hero.

Ingi’s ultimately positive characterization might be seen also in terms of as a foster-brother to Liforinus even though this only becomes a possibility in the final scenes of the saga. Once the two are reconciled after the final battle, they join their families together through marriage: Ingi falls in love with Liforinus’s sister Sýjalín, who heals his wounds at Liforinus’s suggestion, and once their marriage is agreed upon, Liforinus also offers his soon-to-be foster-brother-in-law Hléksjöldur as a husband for Ingi’s sister Listalín, fulfilling the traditional role of a foster-brother rewarding his foster-brother (for his service and help) with not only a bride, but also other family and political connections for his prosperity.⁴⁷⁸ This further shows how the previously antagonistic Ingi, his kin, and his homeland have been elevated to a status comparable to that of Nítíða and Liforinus—Constantinople is as courtly and civilized as France and India. Ingi’s kingdom has at once

⁴⁷⁷ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, p. 276. I discuss the characterization of Soldán, Logi, Vélogi, and Heiðarlogi in detail in Chapter Five.

⁴⁷⁸ This type of behaviour between foster- and sworn-brothers is evident in other romances including, as only a couple of examples, *Þjalar-Jóns saga* and *Saulus saga ok Nikanors*, and in *fornaldarsögur* such as *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*. See also Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 156–202.

become doubly strengthened through his connection to Liforinus, in his acquisition of a wife with whom to build his own kingdom in Constantinople, in his links to India and France through this wife's family, and in his sister's joining the Apulian kingdom with her own new husband. That this can take place—that a former antagonist can become allied with the protagonists—is possible because of his courtly characterization early on, which, as noted, is similar to that of Liforinus, and wholly dissimilar to the 'other' characterization of the brothers from Serkland, who, because of this, never had a chance to end up as Ingi does. The positive, courtly characterization of Ingi thus serves ultimately to strengthen and reinforce the kingdom, and the courtliness, of Liforinus, and through him, of Nítíða, who also benefits greatly from these new alliances. With Ingi as Liforinus's companion and ally, not only is Nítíða's powerful French kingdom united with and strengthened by India, but it also gains ties with Constantinople. At the saga's end, then, everyone who has at one point been identified as significant, powerful, and courtly or civilized, ends up prosperous.

Liforinus's aunt Alduria plays a brief but important role in the saga. Liforinus seeks her out specifically because of her reputation: 'þu ert kaullud vitur kona og klok. legg til ræð at eg mætti m(ey)k(ong) vt leika og aast hennar nã' [you are considered a wise and cunning woman. Give me counsel that I might out-play the maiden-king and gain her love].⁴⁷⁹ Significantly, Liforinus wants to be able to *útleika* [out-play, outwit] Nítíða; throughout the saga, this word describes the maiden-king's victories. Liforinus has, after his failure to win her by force, realized that he must take a different approach, and that his success depends on being able to beat Nítíða at her own game. Alduria understands this well. Not only is Alduria *vitur* [wise]—an adjective used elsewhere only of Nítíða, and

⁴⁷⁹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 28.

in Nítíða's evaluation of Virigilius and Liforinus⁴⁸⁰—she is also *klók* [cunning]. This is the saga's only instance of the adjective (as mentioned briefly in Chapter Two, borrowed into Old Norse from Middle Low German), which may have had negative connotations to do with magic or sorcery, but not necessarily so.⁴⁸¹ It may not, then, be coincidental that Alduria resides in Småland in Sweden, which is sometimes is a favourite saga-location for strange happenings and the scene of the otherworldly North.⁴⁸² Alduria's advice to Liforinus demonstrates her knowledge of magic, highlighting her as *klók* perhaps more concretely than as *vitur*: 'nu er þad mitt rad, ad þu sigler þetta sumar til Fracklands og nefnest Eskilvardur, sonur kongs af Mundia, og haff þar vetursetu, eg skal gefa þier gull þad er þig skal eingenn madur kienna, hvorki meýkongur nie þyn systir' [Now, it is my counsel that you sail this summer to France and call yourself Eskilvarður, son of the king of Mundia, and stay there over the winter. I will give you gold, so that nobody will know you, neither the maiden-king nor your sister].⁴⁸³ Alduria's use of magic is not negatively portrayed here, but shown as a practical means to an end, not dissimilar to Nítíða's own uses of the *náttúrusteinar*. And it is because Alduria is *vitur* that she advises Liforinus to win Nítíða's favour by building a relationship with her: 'eff þu situr þar allann þann vetur,

⁴⁸⁰ The narrator says of Nítíða: 'hun var bædi vitur og væn' [she was both wise and beautiful], Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 3. Nítíða says of Virigilius: 'hann er vitur og fiolkunnigur' [he is wise and skilled in magic], Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 5. The narrator also reveals Nítíða's first impression of Liforinus (disguised as Eskilvarður): 'virdist henne hann vitur madur' [she judged him a wise man], Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 29.

⁴⁸¹ Some texts use *klókur* to describe dwarves, who often have magical powers (*Viktors saga ok Blávus*, p. 14 and *Samsons saga fagra*, p. 21). Medieval Icelandic religious literature also sometimes uses *klókur* to characterize the devil, for example in C. R. Unger, ed., *Stjórn: Gammelnorsk bibelhistorie fra verdens skabelse til det babyloniske fangenskab* (Christiania: Feilberg & Landmark, 1862), p. 34: 'Hóggorminn uar klokaztr og slægaztr af ollum kuikendum' [Poisonous snakes were the cleverest and most cunning of all creatures], and then proceeding to the story of Eve's betrayal by the devil in the form of such a creature, and Unger, ed., *Mariu saga*, p. 523: 'fiandinn er klokr' [the devil is clever].

⁴⁸² Strange things happen in Sweden in sagas such as *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (the hard and quick-tempered woman Þórbergur rules, in the guise of a man, part of Sweden). See also Shafer, pp. 207–72, on the mysterious and dangerous North in the *fornaldarsögur*.

⁴⁸³ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', pp. 28–29.

þa er undur, eff þu fær eckj fang a henne' [if you remain there for the whole winter, it will be a wonder if you do not get a hold on her].⁴⁸⁴ Ármann Jakobsson reads Alduria's help here as the single instance in the text where someone manages to outwit Nítíða,⁴⁸⁵ but it seems clear that Nítíða knew all along that it was Liforinus, disguised, who was able to win her over, and was not outwitted—why should we not believe Nítíða when she tells him so? Alduria's role is crucial to Liforinus's success in winning Nítíða over, as she understands not only the best courtly way to go about it, but also how important an actual relationship is for building a marriage, at least from a female point of view.⁴⁸⁶ Nítíða's change of heart has been read as 'unmotiviert und plötzlich vollzog' [unmotivated and carried out suddenly],⁴⁸⁷ but her reasons for agreeing to Liforinus's proposal instead of continuing to scorn him are obvious: Alduria's courtly advice does not fail Liforinus as the different approach to marriage that he now takes is something Nítíða clearly also values.

Even though some of the evidence that I have presented thus far might suggest that Liforinus should be considered the saga's hero, there are important problems with his role and characterization, which must be addressed and which reveal him to be insufficient as hero. To begin, Liforinus is only a major, active character in the second half or even last third of the saga. His exploits only begin in the fourth chapter out of five in the version on which these discussions are based, after nearly all the other characters have enjoyed active roles.⁴⁸⁸ Simply put, his actions do not drive the plot. Further, he is

⁴⁸⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 29.

⁴⁸⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, pp. 176–77.

⁴⁸⁶ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, pp. 278–79.

⁴⁸⁷ van Nahl, p. 41.

⁴⁸⁸ When he is re-introduced into the saga, the narrator even reminds the audience that the character 'fjór var nefndur' [was mentioned before], in case he may have been forgotten in the midst of the rest of the action up until that point (Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 21).

not even introduced or mentioned at all until the second chapter has got under way, again, after all other rival suitors are introduced, and long after Nítíða herself has become known to the audience through her visit to Apulia and expedition to Visio. Liforinus's absence from the initial scenes and his absence from much of the tale are decidedly uncharacteristic of the introduction of a romance saga hero. Conversely, Nítíða's immediate introduction and early expeditions are entirely characteristic of romance heroes, who often assemble a team of helpers and gain special objects or powers that will prove useful, before embarking on their bridal-quests or other adventures. In Icelandic romance, if the hero is not introduced straight away, then he is usually only preceded by necessary family background information such as a brief history of his father's position and marriage to his mother, as in *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*,⁴⁸⁹ or sometimes with the addition of a more or less self-conscious prologue, in for example *Clári saga*, *Sigurðar saga þögla*, and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*.⁴⁹⁰ In *Nítíða saga*, of course, there is no prologue, which facilitates Nítíða's immediate introduction.

III: NÍTÍÐA

To demonstrate Nítíða's position as the saga's heroic protagonist, I turn now to evidence that it is she around whom the entire story revolves and that it is she with whom the audience is led to sympathize, as these are the two most important criteria of the hero, which Liforinus fails to satisfy. To begin, the saga is named after Nítíða, not Liforinus. In manuscript, the saga is usually titled *Nítíða (hinni) frægu* and a couple of times as *Meykónginum Nítíða*.⁴⁹¹ Liforinus is never a part of the title, whereas, as mentioned

⁴⁸⁹ Agnete Loth, ed., 'Sigrgarðs saga frækna', *LMIR*, v (1965), 39–107 (p. 39).

⁴⁹⁰ See Chapter Six for a detailed discussion of romance saga prologues, including these texts.

⁴⁹¹ It is only a few of the rather late manuscripts (mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century) that give the title as *Sagan af Meykónginum Nitedá* (Lbs 1711 8vo [1848]), *Sagann af Meykongynum Nýtida* (ÍB 290 8vo

above, romance heroes are nearly always title characters.⁴⁹² Secondly, *Nítíða* is introduced first and described immediately, which not only positions her as the main character but as one with whom the audience can sympathize, rather than with any of her suitors. The saga's first chapter focuses carefully on introducing *Nítíða* and preparing her for what action is to come throughout the rest of the tale, beginning:

HEYRet vnger menn eitt æfintyr og fagra frasaugn fra hinum frægasta meykongi er verit hefur j nordur hálftu veralldarinar er hiet Nitida hin fræga [...]. Þessi meykongur sat j aunduegi heimsins j Fracklandi jnu goda og hieilt Páris borg. hun var bædi vitur og væn lios og riod j andliti þuilikast sem en rauda rosa væri samtemprad vid sniohuita lileam. augun suo skiær sem karbunkulus. haurundit suo huitt sem fils bein. hær þuilikt sem gull og fiell nidur ä jord vm hana. [...] hun var suo buen at viti sem hinn frodasti klerkur. og hinn sterkasti borgarveggur matti hun giora med sinu viti yfer annara manna vit og byrgia suo vti annara ræd. og þar kunni hun .x. Ræd er adrer kunnu eitt.⁴⁹³

[Young people heard an adventure and wonderful tale about the most famous maiden-king there has ever been in the northern region of the world. She was called *Nítíða the Famous* [...]. This maiden-king sat on the throne of the world in the good kingdom of France, and ruled in Paris. She was both wise and fair, light and rosy in face just as if the red rose was tempered together with a snow-white lily; her eyes were as bright as a carbuncle, and her skin as white as ivory; her hair was like gold and fell down to the earth around her. [...] She was as endowed with knowledge as the wisest scholar, and, surpassing other people's intelligence, she

[1851]), or simply *Sagann af Nitida* (Lbs 4656 8vo [c. 1859–60]). In over sixty other manuscripts from the late fifteenth century onwards, the title, when it exists, is the saga of *Nitida (hinni) frægu*. See Chapter One for a full discussion of *Nítíða saga's* manuscripts.

⁴⁹² Some other romances do include the maiden-king and the male hero who marries her in the title of certain later manuscripts, showing that some audiences or scribes interpreted the woman's role as equally important as the man's, but still, significantly, not important enough to change the title fully to that of the woman alone. Notable examples of this include *Dínus saga drambláta* titled as *Sagann af Dínus drambláta og Philómu drottningu* (JS 623 4to [1853], f. 199r), as well as *Clári saga* as *Sagann af Claro Keisarasyne og Serena Drottningu* (AM 395 fol. [1760–66], f. 416r, and similar in Lbs 3021 4to [1877], f. 75v) or *Saga af Klares og Serena* (ÍB 138 4to [1750–99], f. 93r).

⁴⁹³ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', pp. 3–4.

could make the strongest castle-wall with her own intellect, and thus outmanoeuvre others' plans; and she knew ten answers when others knew one.]

Nítíða's introduction is longer than that of Liforinus. As Kalinke notes, Nítíða is physically described in a characteristically European courtly romance manner,⁴⁹⁴ from her long golden hair to her *lilia-mixta-rosis* complexion.⁴⁹⁵ It is also clear that such a description emphasizes Nítíða's foreign nature, distancing her from the present reality in Iceland.⁴⁹⁶ After this elaborate introduction, the saga follows Nítíða to Apulia and then to Visio, before she returns to France having been prepared for what action is to come within the romance world that follows, once her suitors are introduced. Nítíða is equipped in a way similar to that in which other saga heroes are prepared with the acquisition of helpful objects and the aid of other characters. It is not simply that *Nítíða saga* 'presents the heroine in as favourable a light as possible',⁴⁹⁷ but that the audience experiences the saga almost entirely from her point of view, and thus is better able to sympathize with her.⁴⁹⁸ Of course having a female hero may have been challenging for audiences who might have been more used to the male heroes of other Icelandic romances, but *Nítíða saga* may well be responding to a gap in the market. *Nítíða saga*'s

⁴⁹⁴ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 72–73; Kalinke, *King Arthur*, pp. 94–95.

⁴⁹⁵ Cf. the translated romance *Elis saga ok Rósamundu*: 'hennar kinnr voro þvilikaztar, sem þa er ravda rosa væri blandit vid hvita liliam' [her cheeks were the most like as though a red rose were blended with a white lily], p. 136. Some groups of *Nítíða saga* manuscripts show further similarity to *Elis saga* in their descriptions of Nítíða: Group D and some Group B and C manuscripts additionally call Nítíða 'hin fridasta frægasta & kurteisasta' [the most beautiful, famous, and courteous], ÍBR 59 4to (1798/99), p. 193, which is very similar to Rósamunda's threefold description as 'hin kurtæsia, hin friða oc hin frægia [...]' [the courteous, the beautiful, and the famous], p. 76. Of course these similarities may be evidence of nothing more than the fact that many formulaic descriptors were adopted into the Icelandic romance vocabulary from translated romances (as noted in Chapter Two), but it is intriguing to consider the possibility of a closer relationship than that between these two sagas—see Chapter Six, which further highlights similarities between the sagas' openings.

⁴⁹⁶ van Nahl, pp. 74–75.

⁴⁹⁷ Bibire, p. 67.

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, p. 176.

extraordinary popularity clearly attests to its audiences' acceptance of Nítíða as the hero, and of the saga presenting the story from a markedly female perspective. Nítíða equips herself to ensure her safety and gain an advantage over any suitors who pursue her, by securing the help of her foster-brother Hléskjöldur: 'sidan lætur hun bua sina ferd og skipa stol heim til Fracklandz. beidandi fru Egi(dia) at Hle(skiolldur) hennar son fylgdi henni at styrkia hennar riki fyrir ahlaupum hermanna' [Afterwards she prepared for her journey and readied her fleets of ships to go home to France, and asked lady Egidía that Hléskjöldur her son accompany her to strengthen her realm against warrior attacks].⁴⁹⁹ She then procures magic objects including the *náttúrusteinar*, which help her later on: 'drott(ning) gladdist nu vit þessa syn. takandi kerit og alla þessa steina eple og læknis graus. þuiat hun vnder stod af sinni visku hueria natturu huer bar' [The queen then grew glad at this sight, and took the vessel and all the stones, apples, and healing herbs, because she understood from her wisdom how magical each was].⁵⁰⁰ Further, almost immediately after gaining possession of these things, Nítíða must escape from Virgilius with the aid of a magic stone: 'm(ey)kongur tok nu eign natturu stein og bra yfer skipit og haufud þeim avllum er jnnan bordz voru. sa jar(l) þau all dri sidan' [The maiden-king then took a supernatural stone and quickly waved it over the ship and the heads of all who were on board. The earl saw them nevermore].⁵⁰¹ This first escape foreshadows her later magical trickery and escapes. Whereas the audience therefore knows how Nítíða will overcome her suitors if and when necessary, in other maiden-king romances it is often a mystery as to how the women will trick the heroes right up until it happens, simply because the action follows the men more closely than the maiden-kings. This is the case in *Clári saga*, when Séréna humiliates Clárus, as well as *Sigurðar saga þögla*, which is in

⁴⁹⁹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 7.

⁵⁰⁰ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 6.

⁵⁰¹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 7. See Chapter Five for more on Virgilius.

some ways even more misogynistic than *Clári saga*. But if one asks whom *Nítíða saga* is about, clearly the answer is Nítíða herself, and at no time is she characterized as an obvious antagonist. Whereas she resists marriage and aims to defeat her suitors, the saga does not portray the suitors as protagonists but as intruders on Nítíða's peaceful kingdom, which she nonetheless governs proactively, regularly taking precautions against raiders and other intruders on her realm and defending herself when intruders do appear.

Unlike in other maiden-king (and for that matter some bridal-quest) romances, in *Nítíða saga* the line between the two usually distinct categories of maiden-king and hero is blurred. The saga presents a story in which we find a maiden-king who is never really antagonistic, and is never reduced to submission through humiliation or punishment, but who willingly accepts Liforinus after observing his attempt to outwit her as she outwitted her suitors.⁵⁰² Ultimately she outwits Liforinus again, with both her superior knowledge and her ability to use the magic stones acquired at the beginning of the saga. Even though Nítíða is clearly willing to marry when the circumstances are right, she does avoid and escape from her suitors, when they attempt to take her by force. Her objection to this treatment is something she has in common with maiden-kings from other sagas, but that she freely agrees to marry Liforinus after he chooses to win her by a less objectifying means demonstrates her willingness to marry when it is an equal partnership. In this, Nítíða is unlike other maiden-kings. As seen above, after allowing his aunt to guide his actions, Liforinus's efforts turn from coercive to interpersonal and persuasive, indicating his respect for Nítíða rather than reducing her to an object to possess. Nítíða realizes this difference in Liforinus, and that he is nearly as clever as she, for none of her other suitors had attempted to outwit her or negotiate on courtly terms to build a relationship before

⁵⁰² Whereas, as mentioned already, Nítíða does have the suitors from Serkland killed, they are from the beginning typecast as the monstrous Other in order to justify their killing. See Chapter Five for a more detailed discussion of this.

proposing.⁵⁰³ It is based on these realizations that she agrees to become his partner by marrying. Kalinke, commenting on the ‘peculiar character’ of *Nítíða saga*, says that ‘the titular heroine appears to be more in charge of her fate than other maiden kings’.⁵⁰⁴ This is certainly true and supports Nítíða’s comparison and contrast, as hero, not only with for example *Clári saga*’s cruel maiden-king Séréna, but also with that saga’s hero Clárus, in the ultimate reworking of conventional maiden-king romance.⁵⁰⁵ In *Nítíða saga* it is not merely that a woman is the hero, but that the notion of the romance hero itself is challenged, questioning what it means to be the focus of such a saga, and whether this female Icelandic romance hero might also possess something of that introspectivity noted above as a feature of some European romance heroes.⁵⁰⁶ Nítíða not only takes ‘charge of her fate’, so to speak, but does so in a way that highlights her nature as an individual rather than as just a particular romance ‘type’. In this way, the saga further questions the traditional Icelandic romance form, giving this female hero more psychological depth than might be expected.⁵⁰⁷

An important aspect of the romance hero touched on only briefly above is the hero’s usual accompaniment by a helper figure, like a foster-brother. Romance heroes

⁵⁰³ The consent of women became an important aspect of marriage in medieval Iceland, and especially by the late medieval period from which *Nítíða saga* survives. See Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Property and Virginity: The Christianization of Marriage in Medieval Iceland 1200–1600* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2010), as well as Jenny Jochens, ‘Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law, Life, and Literature’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 58 (1986), 142–76. See also Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, pp. 277–79.

⁵⁰⁴ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p. 102; see also Driscoll, ‘*Nitida saga*’, p. 432.

⁵⁰⁵ As discussed in Chapter Two, the comparison of these main characters seems deliberate, and the intertextual relationship between *Nítíða saga* and *Clári saga* extends beyond the correspondences in character names and roles.

⁵⁰⁶ Nítíða’s internal negotiation of the romance world instead of an active quest for a partner is more like some of the French romance heroes discussed above than other heroes of Icelandic romance. In this way the romance genre and its expectations are further challenged through the characterization of a protagonist who although she abstains from actually engaging in active opposition herself day-to-day, is intellectually and internally active in her ability to outwit her suitors time and again.

⁵⁰⁷ See also Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, pp. 278–80.

often do not function well without someone by their side. Supportive foster-brothers are found in a great number of maiden-king and other Icelandic romances,⁵⁰⁸ such as Viktor and Blávus, Jarlmann and Hermann, and Sigurður fótur and Ásmundur; even in *Clári saga*, Clárus has his teacher Pérus to help him. To reward their efforts, helpers usually find or are given a bride of their own, which accounts for the high occurrence of double and triple wedding scenes that conclude most late-medieval Icelandic romances noted above in the discussion of Ingi: the triple wedding in *Nítíða saga* sees Nítíða marry Liforinus, Hléskjöldur (Nítíða's foster-brother) marry Listalín (Ingi's sister), and Ingi (Nítíða's first suitor) marry Sýjalín (Liforinus's sister). In *Nítíða saga*, Liforinus does not have a personal helper who accompanies him throughout his quest. Whereas he stumbles upon a benevolent dwarf who unsuccessfully attempts to get Nítíða into Liforinus's power, and travels to get advice from his aunt, these characters are only introduced when absolutely necessary and are not the sort of companion helpers who provide ongoing support. Considering this, it is therefore especially significant that Nítíða's foster-family is introduced before her adventure to the island of Visio, and it is significant also that her foster-brother Hléskjöldur accompanies her, setting up the fact that throughout the rest of the saga he remains at her side, carrying out her commands.

In one sense, Nítíða cannot properly function as a ruler without Hléskjöldur's assistance. Boberg, in her *Motif-Index*, strangely considers the foster-siblings' relationship to be romantic.⁵⁰⁹ I propose instead an alternative reading of their relationship. It is conceivable that in this saga, the main character, the hero, could be split into two parts—one female (Nítíða), one male (Hléskjöldur), in order to make a complete, fully-

⁵⁰⁸ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 156–202.

⁵⁰⁹ Boberg, motif P274.1, 'Love between foster-sister and foster-brother' (p. 213).

functioning whole,⁵¹⁰ with the rationale that whereas for a woman to perform all the duties and tasks that in this saga are carried out by Hléskjöldur (namely engaging in battle with her suitors) might make her character unfeminine like a traditional maiden-king,⁵¹¹ which, I maintain, she is not, if her male counterpart enacts her commands, she continues to be a powerful figure while distancing herself from the violence and deception she nevertheless sometimes must plan. Because Nítíða is portrayed throughout as successful, wise, and quintessentially feminine, it might follow that in her reluctance or inability to adopt male traits she cannot alone be considered a good ruler. Thus Hléskjöldur would not merely be a conventional helpful foster-brother, but an inextricable part of Nítíða's ruling maiden-king hero character. A reading this extreme, however, is not necessary. Characterizing Hléskjöldur as an ordinary helper to Nítíða's hero works just as well, if not better. As the hero in her own right, supported by her foster-brother, Nítíða is thus even more similar to other Icelandic romance heroes. Hléskjöldur lacks the motivations of his own needed to make him any more than a stock companion character, as his only aims are to serve Nítíða. For example, when Nítíða instructs Hléskjöldur to gather her army and fight Soldán at sea, she addresses her foster-brother in direct speech, and he assents only indirectly: 'Hl(eskiolldur) giorer suo' [Hléskjöldur did so].⁵¹² In this way, the focus remains on the active female character who here instigates the action, even though it is carried out by the male character. Further, when Nítíða asks her foster-mother Egidía to send Hléskjöldur back to France with her, he is not consulted, nor is his opinion heard:

⁵¹⁰ This idea has also recently been put forth by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, who suggests that 'The control that Nitida exercises over Hleskiolldur suggests that the pair could be seen as split aspects of the same character where the female aspect takes care of decision-making while the male one executes her orders in the male sphere' (p. 276).

⁵¹¹ Nítíða is not like 'traditional' maiden-kings like Þórnbjörg, already mentioned, or Sedentiana in *Sigurðar saga þögla*, whose excessive violence towards her suitors even sometimes results in their death.

⁵¹² Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 26.

sidan lætur hun bua sina ferd og skipa stol heim til Fracklandz. beidandi fru Egi(dia) at Hle(skiolldur) hennar son fylgdi henni at styrkia hennar riki fyrir aðhlaupum hermanna. hennar fostur modur veiter henni þetta sæmilega⁵¹³

[Afterwards she had people prepare for her journey and ready her fleets of ships to go home to France, and asked lady Egidía that Hléskjöldur her son accompany her to strengthen her realm against attacks by raiders. Her foster-mother granted her this graciously]

It is the women who are the decision-makers in this early episode, again foreshadowing Nítíða's independence and sovereignty throughout the saga. Hléskjöldur is not even given direct speech until he lures the brothers from Serkland to Nítíða's deadly trap.⁵¹⁴ Her complexity of character, from her resourcefulness and wisdom to her relationship with her foster-brother, shows she is a worthy and able hero, her gender notwithstanding. This further allows for sharper contrast between this saga and other romances, and to see how *Nítíða saga* questions and re-evaluates romance conventions. Before concluding, it will be useful to discuss further the role occupied by Nítíða's foster-mother Egidía.

While Egidía appears in the saga only briefly, she is integral to Nítíða's characterization. In naming Egidía, it is possible that the author borrowed from *Elis saga ok Rósamundu's* own Egidius,⁵¹⁵ which is that saga's translation of the French name Giles: the saga begins in 'lande hins helga Egidij' [the land of Saint Giles].⁵¹⁶ If this is the name's source in *Nítíða saga*, it is interesting to note that the originally masculine name is here feminized for a female character, who occupies an important role in the text. First and foremost, Egidía establishes Nítíða's characterization by reinforcing her foster-

⁵¹³ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 7.

⁵¹⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 19.

⁵¹⁵ van Nahl, p. 139.

⁵¹⁶ Unger, ed., *Elis saga ok Rósamundu*, p. 1.

daughter's reputation as a powerful sovereign, by welcoming her with feasts and later sending her off with lavish gifts and the support of her son: 'hennar fostur modur [...] vt leidandi <hana> med fogrum fegiofum og agiætum dyrgripum j gulli og gimsteinum og dyrum vefium' [Her foster-mother [...] led her out with fair gifts of money, fine jewels of gold and gemstones, and precious woven cloth].⁵¹⁷ Additionally, as foster-mother of a young woman whose own mother the saga never mentions, Egidía's relationship with her foster-daughter is even more meaningful as a mother-daughter relationship, and it can be inferred that Egidía may actually have raised Nítíða due to her own mother's absence. Thus an even deeper bond arguably exists between the two women than at first might be suggested by their fosterage relationship on which the text does not elaborate. Nítíða trusts and relies her foster-mother, which is why she travels to Apulia to meet with her: she knows Egidía will help and support her. Egidía does not, however, provide much in the way of counsel for Nítíða, and what concerns she does raise, Nítíða discounts rather than accepts: 'drott(ning) Egidia taldi tormerki ä ferdinni. og þotti häskaleg. meyk(ongur) vard þo at räda' [Queen Egidía raised difficulties about the journey, and thought it dangerous, but the maiden-king nevertheless decided to go].⁵¹⁸ Egidía's very brief reply (after Nítíða states her intentions to go to Visio) is only relayed by the narrator indirectly, in sharp contrast to Nítíða's words immediately preceding, which constitute the first example of direct speech in the saga. That Egidía's response is indirect reflects the lesser degree of importance the saga imparts on it, compared to Nítíða's speech and the desires it expresses. Further, the lack of importance given to the reply anticipates Nítíða's disregard of it when she decides to go ahead with her plan despite Egidía's warning. Egidía's indirect concerns work to highlight Nítíða's direct speech:

⁵¹⁷ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 7.

⁵¹⁸ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 5.

mier er sagt at fyrer eyiu þeirri er Visio heiter ræði jarl sá er Virgilius heiter [...] og svo er mier sagt at huergi j heiminum meigi finnast naturu steinar epli og læknis graus fleiri en þar. Nu vil eg halda þangad einnskipa og son þinn Hleskiolldr med mier.⁵¹⁹

[I have heard that beyond that island which is called Visio rules that earl who is called Virgilius [...] and I have heard thus, that nowhere in the world might one find more supernatural stones, apples, and healing herbs than there. Now I wish to travel there in a ship and to take your son Hléskjöldur with me.]

It is quite a lengthy and rather detailed speech, but interestingly, Nítíða's own, active, intentions (*nú vil ég*) emerge only after she relays indirect, reported knowledge about the place she means to visit. While her desire to travel to Visio indicates her belief in the reports about it, the passive manner in which the information is presented (*mér er sagt*) indicates that she has no way of verifying such reports until she goes herself—there is no reference to eyewitnesses. When Nítíða speaks to Egidía directly, she does so familiarly, with the informal second person singular pronoun *þinn*, which is not surprising, considering their close relationship, just as the conversation between Liforinus and his aunt Alduria also uses informal address. Alongside her practical, motherly concerns, Egidía continues to support Nítíða in her determination to carry out the quest, recognizing her independence and capabilities, as is evident when she consents to equip Nítíða with her son's aid as she travels back to France upon her successful return to Apulia from Visio. In this way, Egidía plays the part of a benevolent helper to Nítíða in her preliminary preparatory adventures, which are integral to her later success.

Though I have argued that Nítíða is the saga's hero, one could, however, put forward possible issues with this characterization.⁵²⁰ A major factor is of course her

⁵¹⁹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 5.

⁵²⁰ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 68, 90, 102.

gender. It upsets the conventions of Icelandic romance to have a female hero considering the well-established bridal-quest paradigms of many Icelandic romances, but considering everything else about Nítíða's characterization as hero, this is by all means a deliberate upset meant to provoke the questioning of the romance hero in general. With Nítíða as one of the only female heroes in medieval Icelandic romance, this makes the saga unique and unconventional in its portrayal and interrogation of traditional romance themes, plots, and motifs. In the sense that all romances (and indeed other texts) that are aware of their genre question it, it is sufficient to say that few romances do so in the way that *Nítíða saga* does. Furthermore, rather than attempting to act as a man, Nítíða's passive affirmation of her own femininity reinforces her gender, meaning that at no point do characters have the opportunity to forget that she is a powerful woman. Nítíða is 'presented as the epitome of femininity, the ideal woman',⁵²¹ and never actively engages in battle or directly challenges her suitors, except verbally, and even then her words are firm, but not abusive. When she speaks up for herself directly, it is in reference to the size and importance of her kingdom, with her own power only indirectly implied, for example, when Nítíða rejects Ingi's offer of marriage. Their exchange begins with the narrator indicating Nítíða's initial question: 'drott(ning) spurdi Jn(ga) kong huert erendi hans væri' [The queen asked King Ingi what his errand might be].⁵²² This is followed by Ingi's response in direct speech: 'þat er mitt erendi j þetta land at bidia ydar mier til eigin konu. gefandi þar j moti gull og gersemar. land og þegna' [I have come to this land to ask you to me to be my wife; in return, I would give you gold and treasures, land and servants].⁵²³ Nítíða's response is likewise direct, and amounts to a rather dramatic speech:

⁵²¹ Kalinke, 'The Misogamous Maiden Kings of Icelandic Romance', pp. 56–57.

⁵²² Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 10.

⁵²³ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 10.

þat viti þier. Jn(gi) kongur. at þier hafit eingvan rikdom til motz vit mig. hafa og litit lond ydar <ad> þyda vit Frackland jd goda og .xx. konga riki er þar til liggia. nenni eg og ecki at fella mig fyrer neinum kongi nu rikianda. en fullbodit er mier fyrir manna saker. en þo þurfi þier ecki þessa mæla at leita optar.⁵²⁴

[You know, King Ingi, that you have no kingdom to compare with me. Your lands have little to compare with the good kingdom of France and the twenty kings' realms that lie therein. I also cannot bear to give myself up to any king now ruling, and the offer in and of itself is not unacceptable; and furthermore, you need not address this matter again.]

Not only does she definitively answer Ingi, but also justifies her answer, reiterating some of the expository information presented at the beginning of the text, such as the size and power associated with Nítíða's kingdom. This in turn is made complete with further elaboration detailing the maiden-king's point of view on the subject of partnership and marriage, foreshadowing failure in Ingi's further attempts to win Nítíða, and also the failure of other suitors. Because all this is relayed through direct speech from a major protagonist, the audience is meant to take note, perhaps more so than had the information been conveyed indirectly. We know the speech reflects Nítíða's true feelings because she is allowed to speak directly: had the narrator said it, its importance would not be stressed as much because it would not have mattered as much. Additionally, the exchange here is formal. Nítíða uses the second person plural *þér* and *yðar* when addressing Ingi, which not only mirrors his formal address to her (*að biðja yðar mér til eigin konu*), but also indicates her diplomacy and respect towards him, even while harshly rejecting him. Nítíða's speech here is as aggressive as she becomes with her suitors in person. In contrast, some other maiden-kings arrogantly refer to themselves as kings and demand that others do so too, a prime example being Þórnbjörg in *Hrólfs saga*

⁵²⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', pp. 10–11.

Gautrekssonar, who, ruling a third of Sweden, goes by the name King Þórbergur and not only confronts her suitors personally, with words, but in battle as well. In *Nítíða saga*, only the narrator and other characters call Nítíða *meykóngur*, and it is her foster-brother who carries out her plans to trick Vélogi and Heiðarlogi to their deaths. No matter how questionable this may seem, an important part of Nítíða's character is her intelligence and ability to plan defences, as highlighted in her initial description; I will consider this further in the following chapter.

Another reason why Nítíða's role as hero could initially be questioned is her lack of an obvious, externally motivated quest that dominates a large portion of the plot. While she does travel to Visio in search of supernatural stones and is successful on that quest, it only occurs in the beginning of the story as a means of introducing the fact that she will be protected later on by the magic she can wield through these stones; this mini quest is not her ultimate aim, and the saga's plot does not revolve around her success in it the way that other sagas' bridal-quests form the basis of much of their plots. This quest is very important nonetheless, giving her power over her suitors. If Nítíða had not acquired the magical stones, apples, and herbs, she would not have been able to evade her suitors and prepare defences against them in the way she can with the help of these objects, and the outcome of the quest allows her the ability to choose for herself the man she will marry. Whereas Liforinus is specifically looking for a wife, Nítíða does not fulfil what might be called a traditional heroic role because she is not on a quest for a husband. Nítíða's quest is much more internal and introspective. She negotiates the romance world in which she finds herself, rather than actually seeking any one thing. As such, Nítíða is more like the introspective heroes of early European romance, like the original romances of Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France, while at the same time lacking the strongly self-reflective character of such heroes—she remains true to Icelandic romance style in

that respect. *Nítíða saga* thus also resembles the literary, courtly romances of France, while remaining close enough to the Icelandic style to call it and its values deliberately into question. By working with the norms of Icelandic romance to stretch them and question their value, *Nítíða saga* is still bound by certain expectations of the genre, and even in fulfilling them the saga does so unconventionally. Nítíða must employ the most effective strategy to outwit her suitors when they attempt to take her by force, so that she may keep an advantage over them. In choosing Liforinus, she has already made up her mind when she calls together her under-kings for counsel:

So er sagt ad m(ey)k(ongur) hafe sendt j allar halfur landsins til 20 konga, er aller þionudu under hennar ryke. byrjar Liv(orius) kongr nu bönord sitt vid m(ey)k(ong) med fagurlegum frammburde og mikille rögsemd, stirkia hans mäl aller kongar og hoffdingar ad þesse Raadahagr takest.⁵²⁵

[So it is said that the maiden-king had sent word to all the regions of the land, to twenty kings, all who served under her power. King Liforinus then began his marriage proposal to the maiden-king with fair words and great reason; all the kings and nobles at this counsel supported his speech, agreeing that this proposal should be taken.]

While Nítíða evidently has many people to advise her if needed, the choice is still her own, and she still has the last word concerning the arrangements with Hléskjöldur, who, being her foster-brother, is her closest advisor. Furthermore, Liforinus's proposal is restricted to being reported indirectly, instead of through direct speech, once more reinforcing Nítíða's central role. This is the culmination of a scene that highlights Nítíða's superior intelligence and ability to outwit her suitor: leading up to this, Nítíða reveals her knowledge of Liforinus's disguise: 'm(ey)k(ongur) talar þa "Liv(orius) kongur" seiger hun, "legg aff þier dular kufl þinn, hinn fyrsta dag er þu komst kienda eg þig, fær þu afftur

⁵²⁵ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 32.

gulled Aldvia, þui ydur stendur þad lyted leingur med þad ad fara”. Liv(orius) kongr lætur nu ad ordum drottningar’ [Then the maiden-king said, ‘King Liforinus, remove your cloak of disguise. I knew you the first day you came. Take off Alduria’s ring, because it will do you no good to continue in this way any longer’. King Liforinus then obeyed the queen’s words].⁵²⁶ Of course, Nítíða speaks directly, and again Liforinus does not—instead he is humbled and shown subordinate to Nítíða. His subsequent proposal, indicated almost as hearsay (beginning with *svo er sagt*), doubly reinforces his position in relation to the maiden-king, again reflecting her prominence. With all of this considered, it seems difficult to consider Nítíða as anything but the hero of her saga.

IV: CONCLUSIONS

Over the course of this chapter I have demonstrated how the portrayal of the saga’s hero—its protagonist—is different and unconventional in *Nítíða saga*. In the following chapter I will deal with relationships among other characters who also reinforce Nítíða’s characterization as hero. As I have demonstrated, *Nítíða saga*’s plot of is significantly centred not on a male protagonist’s bridal-quest for Nítíða, but on Nítíða’s negotiations and manoeuvres through the world of bridal-quest to emerge in marriage as an equal with her husband, and the saga ends placing them on a par with each other: ‘lykur so þessu æfentyre af hinne frægu Nitida og Livorio konge’ [so ends this adventure of the famous Nítíða and King Liforinus].⁵²⁷ Significantly, Nítíða, though no longer called the ‘maiden-king’, is still named before Liforinus (who is now ‘king’) even though the saga began with her alone and she is now joined together with a man, in keeping with the saga’s consistent favouring of Nítíða and highlighting women’s resourcefulness over that of men.

⁵²⁶ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 31.

⁵²⁷ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 37.

This theme will feature again in the following chapter. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, classifying *Nítíða saga* as proto-feminist, notes that it is centred more on female friendships than on romantic relationships, which are not normally seen in bridal-quest or maiden-king romances.⁵²⁸ Instead, with these sagas focusing on male heroes and foster-brothers or other helpers, the emphasis usually falls on male friendships, with romantic relationships featuring merely as the saga's end goal to be fulfilled.

However, when other, later versions of the saga are taken into consideration, the overall focus shifts slightly in some texts. Different groups of manuscripts show different priorities in terms of the presentation of Nítíða and Liforinus. While all versions maintain the essential prominence of Nítíða in a way that she can be recognized as the hero, in some versions Liforinus's role is increased, sometimes diminishing the impact that Nítíða's character has on the saga and its overall message. For example, in one branch of Group B, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscripts JS 27 and Add. 4860 focus much more on Liforinus as a leader and king at the end, once he has married and allied with Nítíða, whose role more or less ends when she marries. While many post-medieval manuscripts preserve Nítíða's powerful, central role to the very end, and some— notably those in Group A—enhance her image even further when closing the saga, that priority seen in the medieval version discussed in this chapter evidently diminished in importance for some scribes and audiences in later centuries, suggesting shifting cultural values and perhaps even a deliberate disconnect from the medieval world that produced a saga that showcases a female hero so strongly with the purpose of questioning the idea of the romance in literature and culture. Perhaps once this had been questioned, some versions of the texts developed that unselfconsciously aimed merely to entertain or

⁵²⁸ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, pp. 279–80.

hearken back to an imagined Middle Ages that differed from that in which *Nítíða saga* really was composed.

As I have shown, *Nítíða saga* it is not just another bridal-quest maiden-king romance identical to all others apart from its female hero. Nítíða does not simply take on the attributes of a bridal-quest hero. Rather, by unsettling audience expectations relating to questions of the characterization of heroes and antagonists, the saga presents a story with a female protagonist, and it is from her point of view that the story unfolds. The story contains elements of bridal-quest without becoming a full-out bridal-quest romance. It seems better to think of *Nítíða saga* not exclusively as a bridal-quest or maiden-king romance, but as a conscious response to other bridal-quest and maiden-king romances,⁵²⁹ and, furthermore, to see it even as an inverted bridal-quest romance in which the quest is portrayed from the point of view of the sought-after woman, and as an inverted maiden-king romance in which the woman is not only portrayed positively but is the saga's hero. I have shown how this saga's characterizations of Liforinus and Nítíða support such readings. In *Nítíða saga* the idea of the hero is turned upside down through its characterization, facilitating an opportunity for audiences to reassess what it means to be a hero in this type of literature, insofar as it can be agreed that the saga fits into a homogenous romance genre at all. Although, arguably, any individual romance, like all literature, can be and is self-reflexive, and depends on the texts that shape its genre, metatextual discourse is at the forefront of *Nítíða saga*, and indeed, is its defining characteristic, more so than other Icelandic romances. This helps to explain why it seems to be a bridal-quest romance, yet focuses so keenly on Nítíða, her feelings and concerns, and her relationships. The saga's self-reflexiveness and internal inquiry also seem more in line with other European vernacular romance, so the Europeanization of *Nítíða saga* may

⁵²⁹ Bibire, pp. 67, 70.

be said to extend to the conceptualization of the protagonist and the representation of the protagonist's quest. In extending the idea of the late medieval Icelandic romance hero to include *Nítíða*, then, I have questioned not simply how *Nítíða saga* is different from other bridal-quest and maiden-king sagas, but also the accepted scholarly notions of what a so-called 'traditional romance hero' is in late medieval Icelandic romance. I will develop these themes in the following chapter, in which I discuss characterization and the further portrayal of the hero by means of the other characters (both positive and negative) who feature in *Nítíða saga*.

Chapter 5

CHARACTERIZATION

In this chapter I continue and develop some of the issues raised in the previous chapter, in which I dealt with the question of *Nítíða saga's* hero and the characterization of Nítíða, Liforinus, and those characters most integral to their success—Egidía and Hléskjöldur in Nítíða's case, and Alduria and Ingi in that of Liforinus. While the relationships between Nítíða and other characters already discussed serve to reinforce Nítíða's powerful role as the saga's hero, the same can be demonstrated of the characterization of many other figures in the saga, and this is the subject of the present chapter. I will show how audience sympathy for Nítíða is encouraged through all of her relationships and interactions with both positive and negative characters, and how these characters all function to draw attention back to Nítíða, regardless of whether or not Nítíða herself is present in some of the episodes. I will begin this chapter by analysing the characterization of two important female figures, Sýjalín and Listalín, the sisters of two of Nítíða's suitors, and their relationships with both their brothers and with Nítíða. I will then analyse the characterization of the two servant figures at Nítíða's court, the bondswoman Íversa and the smith Ypolitus, followed by a consideration of Nítíða's interactions with the saga's major antagonists, the earl Virgilius of Visio and the four characters from Serkland—characters who could be called villains in the traditional, Proppian sense. Finally, I will look at the three helper characters (Refsteinn, Slægrefur, and the Dwarf) who try, but fail, to aid Ingi and Liforinus in their bridal-quests. I will at times also mention specific differences in the presentation of these characters in other versions of *Nítíða saga*, and in concluding I will discuss not only my findings here, but also the general trends and overall differences in characterization evident in post-medieval paper manuscripts.

I: FEMALE COMPANIONSHIP: SÝJALÍN AND LISTALÍN

Sýjalín, the sister of Liforinus, and Nítíða's eventual sister-in-law, is an important source of support for Nítíða, even if her role is small. Because of her inability to see through her brother's disguise when he visits her and Nítíða in Paris, and because she does not have a readily identifiable influence over the actions of other characters, unlike Listalín of Constantinople (as I will discuss shortly), she may seem unimportant in the grand scheme of the saga. Sýjalín does not even have any direct speech. Sýjalín's most important role, however, is as Nítíða's companion. When Nítíða escapes from India, she abducts Sýjalín in retaliation against her abductor Liforinus, and brings her back to France. The two women develop a close relationship, despite the less than ideal circumstances that drew them together, and there is no indication that Sýjalín does not enjoy keeping Nítíða company. Before leaving India, the two seem to get along well with one another, as Nítíða is brought to Sýjalín's room upon arrival, and Nítíða makes her escape some time later. The escape scene begins, 'og þat var einn dag at drott(ning) var gengin fram vnder einn lund plantadan er stod vnder skemmuni' [It happened one day that the princess had gone down to a planted grove that stood below her chamber].⁵³⁰ Nítíða seems to have stayed in India for at least a few days, getting to know both Sýjalín and the location in which she is being kept, and waiting for an opportunity to escape. Of the women's relationship in France the saga says: 'tekur m(ey)k(ongur) Syialin kongs dottur og setur hana j hasæti hiä sier dreckandi af einv keru badar og skilur huorki suefn ne mat vit hana. tok huor at vnna annari sem sinni modur' [the maiden-king took princess Sýjalín and set her in the high-seat next to herself, both of them drinking from one cup, and she separated from her

⁵³⁰ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 24.

neither in sleep nor during meals. Each loved the other as she would her own mother].⁵³¹

That the friendship between the young women develops and is described in this way is significant because Nítíða has essentially kidnapped Sýjalín in bringing her back to France. The audience is not told whether or not she went willingly, but it is clear that either way, the two women grow very close in France. These scenes are important because they function as an example of the type of romance themes and motifs evident in the saga as a whole. On a micro-level Nítíða's abduction of her own suitor's sister exemplifies the degree of control Nítíða wields in the romance world she inhabits. The abduction as well as the women's relationship mirrors the bridal-quest motif within the wider romance genre: the author here plays with this convention and lays it in front of his audience for scrutiny, comment, and question in a prime example of the challenging of one of the genre's norms. Further, the norm of a man abducting and marrying a wife is here inverted to portray a woman taking a friend in this way, and Nítíða's friendship with Sýjalín also serves the additional purpose of foreshadowing Nítíða's eventual relationship with Liforinus, complete with Nítíða turning the tables to outwit her future spouse. On a grand scale the saga shows France 'abducting' India and the two becoming close partners, first here in female friendship, and ultimately in marriage and politics. On another level, it is also significant that the relationship between Sýjalín and Nítíða is described in terms of a mother-daughter relationship. Neither woman's mother is mentioned at all in the saga.⁵³² Whereas Nítíða has an important and positive maternal figure in her foster-mother Egidía,⁵³³ other female bonds are evidently also necessary in her life.

⁵³¹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 25.

⁵³² In fact, the only female character whose mother is mentioned is Ingi's sister Listalín, of whose parents the saga says, 'Hygon er kongur nefndur. hann ried fyrer Miklagardi. hann atti drott(ning) og .ij. bavn. son hans hiet Ingi. [...] Listalin hiet dotter hans' [There was a king named Hugon who ruled over Constantinople. He had a queen and two children. His son was called Ingi; [...] his daughter was named

This close female friendship's importance is also hinted at early in the saga when Sýjalín is first introduced and it is said of her that 'hvn var suo væn og listug at hun mundi forpris þott hafa allra kuenna j veraulldvnni. ef ei hefði þvilikur gimsteinn hiä verit sem Nitida hin fræga' [she was so fair and skilled that she would have been thought to be most prized of all the women in the world, if nearby there had not been such a jewel as Nítíða the Famous].⁵³⁴ This description places the two women on a par with each other and suggests the possibility that they could be compatible equals in friendship, in a similar manner to Nítíða and Liforinus's parity in terms of physical description, mentioned in the previous chapter. Werner Schäfke has suggested the possibility that the relationship between Nítíða and Sýjalín is to be interpreted as a same-sex romantic relationship,⁵³⁵ but I do not see the need to interpret their closeness erotically, especially when their relationship is described as close in a familial—literally motherly, but perhaps also sisterly—way, as just noted. Jóhanna Katrin Friðriksdóttir sees the women's relationship—that of close friends only—as evidence of the deeper workings of the text: 'the female friendship between Nitida and the sister of her suitor whom she abducts, [conveys] an interest in women's psychological existence outside their marriage, whereas in the other [Icelandic romance] texts, if the woman is seen interacting with anyone else than the suitors it is usually her father'.⁵³⁶ In this way, Sýjalín, though a less obviously active character than some, without even speaking, plays a very important role. She

Listalín], Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', pp. 7–8. The only other mother in the saga is Hléskjöldur's—Egidía, who, as I discussed in Chapter Four, is also a maternal figure towards Nítíða.

⁵³³ It is significant that while Nítíða has a foster-mother, no foster-father or other paternal figure is mentioned, and this lack does not seem to impact her negatively.

⁵³⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 9. See Chapter Two for further discussion of this quotation in terms of the imagery it employs.

⁵³⁵ Werner Schäfke, 'Werte- und Normensysteme in den isländischen Märchen- und Abenteuersagas' (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Freiburg, 2010), pp. 252–55.

⁵³⁶ Jóhanna Katrin Friðriksdóttir, pp. 279–80.

provides moral support and companionship for Nítíða in the latter part of the saga, while their relationship at the same time foreshadows what is to follow it. Overall, her role reinforces the saga's interest in women and in challenging the norms of the genre. A final important aspect of Sýjalín is her direct contrast with Nítíða again at the end of the text, when her skill as a doctor is highlighted. Liforinus calls his sister to heal the wounded after the final battle because 'hun uar hinn agiætaste lækner og enn kunne hun framar j þessu enn m(ey)k(ongur)' [she was the most excellent physician and she knew even more about this than the maiden-king].⁵³⁷ This calls to mind the saga's first comparison between the two women, as well as their friendship, while also showing that Nítíða does not excel in everything, even with the help of her magical stones; this, further, does not detract from her skill and power as the ruler of her own kingdom and all the powers of negotiation and abilities to outwit she enjoys, for it is these, more internal skills and wisdom, rather than such practical skills as medicine, that make Nítíða the maiden-king hero that she is. However, in some Group F manuscripts, the youngest versions of the saga, Nítíða is compared at the beginning to a doctor rather than to the more general 'scholar' of other versions;⁵³⁸ consequently, in these manuscripts Sýjalín is not described as a better doctor than Nítíða: Liforinus simply 'bád sistur sina leggja sinar hendur yfir Ingja og so gjörir hún' [asked his sister to lay her hands over Ingi and she did so].⁵³⁹ Although Nítíða is described with the loan word *doktor*, which can be seen as a synonym for the Old Norse *klerkur* 'scholar', rather than *læknir* [physician], the connotation of 'physician' is still possibly present here, and therefore may necessitate the need to eliminate the mention of Sýjalín as a better doctor than Nítíða. This suggests that for some later readers and scribes, Nítíða's importance as the protagonist makes it necessary

⁵³⁷ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 35.

⁵³⁸ In SÁM 13 she is as wise 'sem eirn vel Lærður doktor' [as a very learned doctor], f. 164r.

⁵³⁹ SÁM 13, f. 176v.

deliberately to lower the importance of other supporting characters, to ensure Nítíða remains in the spotlight throughout the text.

Listalín of Constantinople, who like Nítíða is skilled intellectually, occupies a different type of role than that of Sýjalín. Listalín is given direct speech in the saga, and it is obvious that she possesses the ability to influence those around her. When compared with her brother Ingi, Listalín is presented as the more perceptive and intuitive of the two. The best example of this occurs when Listalín raises doubts after Ingi believes he has succeeded in abducting Nítíða. Listalín asks him,

‘er þier eingi grunur ä hueria konu þu hefur heim flutt j landit. synist mier tiltæki hennar ei likt og m(ey)k(ongsins) og fleiri greinir adrar ER mier sagt ä at vier sem vit braugdum at siä. vil eg nu foruitnast vm j dag at giora nockra til raun. enn þu statt j nockru leyni og hejR ä’. kongur giorer nu svo.⁵⁴⁰

[‘Do you not have any suspicion as to what woman you have brought home into the land? It seems to me her actions are not like the maiden-king’s, and others who are more discerning tell me that we should find out with a trick. I will inquire today about doing some kind of test, and you should stay in a certain hiding-place and listen’. The king then did so.]

Listalín addresses her brother familiarly, as would be expected, but this also highlights her as the scene’s primary agent, which is only further reinforced when Ingi is quickly passed over in order to, again, showcase Listalín’s words when she speaks directly to Íversu. It is significant both that Listalín questions the identity of the supposed maiden-king, and that Ingi agrees, without any problem, to follow her advice. He does not even respond verbally to defend his perception of the woman he believes he has abducted and married, but instead immediately does as his sister suggests. Ingi’s intense anger at the revelation that Nítíða has fooled him for a second time thus seems unjustified; he appears

⁵⁴⁰ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, pp. 16–17.

to have given the situation no previous thought. Listalín thus acts as Ingi's counsellor, and although she does realize that he has not successfully got Nítíða, she does not offer further counsel as to how to win his bride. In this her counsel differs from that of Alduria, as counsellor for Liforinus, as discussed above. Listalín's importance is seen further in her discussions with Íversa, who has Nítíða's appearance. In the only other represented conversation between two women apart from Nítíða's conversation with Egidía at the beginning of the saga, Listalín says, 'drott(ning) min. huad velldur þui er þier vilet eda meigit vit aungvan mann tala. e(dr) þann beiska grat er alldri gengur af ýdrum augum. þuiat kongur og allur landz lydur bidia suo sitia og standa huern mann sem ydur best liki' [My queen, what causes it, that you do not want to—or cannot—speak with any man? And what causes that bitter weeping which never leaves your eyes? Because the king and all the courtiers of the land ask how to sit and stand, so that everyone might please you best].⁵⁴¹ Listalín addresses Íversa formally, using the second person pronouns *þér*, *ýdrum*, and *yður*, which shows Listalín's respect and concern for the woman who appears (physically) to be Nítíða, but whom she suspects may be someone else. Also significantly, their conversation is allowed to continue, even though the direct speech is then limited to Íversa's immediate reply, which I will discuss separately, below. This bit of dialogue showcases the importance and influence of female characters and their crucial roles in driving the saga's action forward, even when Nítíða is not directly involved in the scene. However, apart from her introduction as a courtly lady 'hlaðin kuenlegum listum' [skilled in feminine arts],⁵⁴² and her interactions with Íversa, Listalín only appears again at the end of the saga when her marriage to Hléskjöldur is arranged by Liforinus and Ingi. She has no further speaking parts and obediently arrives to be married when bidden.

⁵⁴¹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 17.

⁵⁴² Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 8.

What power, influence, and independence she displays earlier is seemingly forgotten as the saga ends, and traditional gender roles are once again reinforced. Listalín is not consulted about her marriage, and significantly, even Ingi does not suggest it himself but passively agrees to Liforinus's suggestion, which reinforces the latter's role as the successful suitor, and, accordingly, the most powerful character alongside Nítíða. The marriage of Listalín to Hléskjöldur works to further Liforinus's alliance with Constantinople, through his future wife Nítíða's foster-brother.

That the saga appears to need to revert to traditional gender roles and models of behaviour at the end of the story is, admittedly, puzzling, considering that it has, up until this point, actively challenged such traditional romance saga elements. Alternatively, it is possible that the text I have been considering is itself problematic: it is, as discussed at the beginning of the thesis, a composite of two manuscripts (the vellum AM 529 and the slightly later paper manuscript AM 537). The saga in AM 529 may have ended differently, and might thus have required a different reading. However, the beginning of the text in AM 537 is mostly similar to that of AM 529 as an unconventional Icelandic romance. Ultimately, it is perhaps easiest to say that this saga still ends traditionally while at the same time invest new meaning into a conventional happy ending. There is, for example, not merely a triple wedding, but three unions forming new political alliances and strengthening kingdoms, as discussed above. Listalín serves her role in earlier scenes, and her more traditional appearance at the end does not undermine her earlier strength. The saga here re-focuses on Nítíða, as it should, and as the audience may have come to expect.

II: SERVANTS: ÍVERSA AND YPOLITUS

While it is clear from these analyses that women are important and positive figures in *Nítíða saga*, we must not forget a minor female character who appears in the middle of the

saga, and who could be said to have a slightly more worrying role than some of the other female characters: Íversu, the *þýgiu* [bondswoman] and *ambátt* [servant, slave woman], whom Nítíða uses to save herself from marrying Ingi,⁵⁴³ in a scene where at first Nítíða appears to be quite uncaring and emotionless. What makes the episode so problematic is not merely what could be called Nítíða's objectification of the servant, but also that the servant is not a flat stock character. Íversu's brief appearance characterizes her as a kind woman with her own feelings and concerns, who by the end of the episode may have garnered sympathy from the audience for having suffered a great injustice at Nítíða's hands. Íversu is introduced as follows: Nítíða 'kallar til sin eina arma þýgiu er þionadi j gardinum. hun ätti bonda og .iij. born. þau geymdu suina j gardinum. drott(ning) tekur nu ambattina. hun hiet Jversu' [summoned a poor bondswoman who had a husband and three children; they kept swine in the yard. The queen then took the slave woman, who was called Íversu].⁵⁴⁴ After 'taking' Íversu, Nítíða transforms her into a mirror image of herself with her magic stones and herbs, and causes her to become mute by giving her apples to eat, which 'bäru þau natturu lif at hun mätti ecki mäla ä næsta mänudi' [held the supernatural property that she could not speak for the next month].⁵⁴⁵ Once all of this is complete, Nítíða renders herself invisible, again with a supernatural stone, to complete her plan to trick Ingi into abducting and marrying the woman, acting against her will as decoy. This plan succeeds and Nítíða remains safe in France, but Íversu is left Ingi's captive and it is clear from what follows that she is miserable because of it. When asked by Ingi's sister Listalín, Íversu replies, 'þat velldur minum grati og þungum harmi at m(ey)kong(ur) hefur skilit mig vit bonda minn og baurn og mun eg huorcki sia sidan' [What causes my tears and heavy grief is that the maiden-king has separated me from my

⁵⁴³ See Bagerius, p. 264 (n. 493), as well as Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*, pp. 182–85.

⁵⁴⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 15.

⁵⁴⁵ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 15.

husband and children, and I will never see them again].⁵⁴⁶ It is not enough for the narrator or another character to state that this woman has been traumatized but leave her silent, which would make her a less significant and perhaps easily forgettable character. Instead, she is allowed to speak in her own words, making it much easier for the audience to sympathize with her and even to question Nítíða's moral integrity. Further, the saga does not even say whether Íversa can return to her family in France; as soon as Ingi hears she is not the real maiden-king, the story shifts its focus to his anger and ultimately back to Nítíða again. The scene ends by saying that 'fer nu og flýgur ä huert land þetta gabb og suivirding' [This mockery and disgrace then flew to each land].⁵⁴⁷ So this episode, disturbing as it might be, furthers Nítíða's characterization as a woman of superior intelligence than her suitors, who can use magic effectively to outwit them. In doing so, the episode also reinforces a courtly medieval social hierarchy where nobles have power over the peasantry, something that was not necessarily fully understood in medieval Icelandic society and culture, and thus, which may be an echo of the medieval European romances that first introduced concepts such as chivalry, courtliness, and tournaments to Scandinavia. Of course the Icelandic romances are still to an extent 'Aristokratenliteratur' [aristocrats' literature] as Glauser calls them, where 'Die niedrigen Schichten [...] genießen wenig Sympathie' [The lower strata [...] enjoy little sympathy] and 'Sklaven werden [...] als ängstlich gezeichnet' [slaves are [...] depicted as fearful].⁵⁴⁸ Finally, it is also significant that Liforinus does not face this trick; instead, it reflects badly on Ingi, and essentially confirms that he will never win Nítíða—he can only ever attain a poor reflection of her. At the same time, then, the way is subtly paved for Liforinus to become Nítíða's chosen suitor. These scenes might be easier to accept as such if Íversa were not a

⁵⁴⁶ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 17.

⁵⁴⁷ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 18.

⁵⁴⁸ Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*, p. 184.

dynamic, named, character, or if the narrator, who is conspicuously silent here, had provided some comment on her treatment.

The fact that Íversa is provided with a name in the version under consideration is significant. In all other versions of the saga, this servant woman has no name at all, and is called instead simply an *ambátt*. The only manuscripts in which she is named are AM 529, the version already considered; AM 537, also associated with this version; and Lbs 3128, which is a summary of *Nítíða saga* written in 1885 and which states after its title that it is based on both of the manuscripts already mentioned. As an example of how the servant woman is described in other versions, the Group A manuscript version in JS 166, discussed in Chapter One, states simply that Nítíða ‘kallar til sýn a<mb>att eina er j Gardinum var’ [called to herself a certain servant woman who was in the yard].⁵⁴⁹ No mention is made of her husband and children until the end of the episode when Listalín speaks with her. In this Group A version, the impact of the servant woman revealing that she has a family is not as strong as it would be if she had been introduced as having a family, occupation, and name, as occurs in the Group B version on which my discussion above has focused; instead, this character, when left anonymous, remains far less sympathetic, and so, less problematic. This suggests that it is possible, and even likely, that this character really should not be named, and that such few instances where she is mark a scribal innovation. This may explain the name’s absence from the rest of the manuscript tradition, indeed even from the other Group B manuscripts. Clearly, other scribes and audiences did not find it convenient to name the *ambátt*, as such a personal characterization also problematizes that of Nítíða.

The other servant figure in *Nítíða saga* is the smith Ypolitus, who is introduced after Nítíða’s description at the beginning of the saga as someone who ‘kunni allt at smida

⁵⁴⁹ JS 166 fol., f. 184r.

af gulli og silfri gleri og gimsteinum. þat sem giorast matti af manna hondum' [knew how to craft all things—from gold and silver, glass and gemstones—that could be made with one's hands].⁵⁵⁰ Like Íversa, Ypolitus's primary function is to highlight Nítíða's character, to show her as industrious, able to defend herself, and to facilitate her escape from dangerous and undesirable situations. Unlike Íversa, however, Ypolitus does not have a speaking role, and his characterization does not extend past his mastery of craftsmanship described in the passage just quoted. After this brief introduction, Ypolitus does not reappear in the text until his services are needed, towards the middle of the saga when Nítíða prepares defences against an attack on France by Serkland. At that point, it is clear that Nítíða herself has planned two defensive construction projects, which she then passes on to Ypolitus to carry out:

Nu er at seigia af m(ey)k(ongi) at hun helldur ei kýrru fyrir. þuiat hun lætur saman lesa smidu og meistara. fyrir þeim var Ypolitus. hvn lætur giora glerhimin með þeirri list at hann liek ä hiolum og mätti fara jnn yfer haufudport borgarinnar og mätti þar mart herfolk ä standa. hon liet og giora diki ferlega diupt framm fyrir skemmunni og leggja yfer veyka vidu. en þar yfer var breitt skrud og skarlat.⁵⁵¹

[Now it is to be said of the maiden-king that she did not sit still nor idle, because she summoned together her smiths and masters; Ypolitus would oversee them. She commanded that a glass roof be made that could move on wheels and could go over the main gate of the castle so that many warriors could stand thereon. She commanded also that a monstrosly deep ditch be made before her chamber, and to lay weak wood over it, and over that was to be spread costly stuff and scarlet.]

This is Ypolitus's only other appearance in the saga. From what follows, his involvement in the projects is beneficial, as the newly constructed mechanisms provide the means by which Hléskjöldur and the French army win the battle for Nítíða. Ypolitus's skill as a

⁵⁵⁰ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 4.

⁵⁵¹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 18.

smith and his competence in overseeing these construction projects reflects back on *Nítíða* as a competent ruler whose subjects and servants have been chosen well for their skill and loyalty. As a smith, Ypolitus might also be compared to dwarfs in other Icelandic romances,⁵⁵² who are sometimes skilled as smiths in addition to being characterized as the helpers of heroes.

In other versions of *Nítíða saga*, however, Ypolitus is not always viewed as an essential character. Only eight manuscripts name Ypolitus (or some variation on that name, like Ipolitus or Hippolitus) at the beginning of the saga, and they all belong to Group B and are relatively early manuscripts. The name was most likely taken from the figure Hippolytus of Classical mythology, although it seems that the author or scribes merely liked the name, as there are not any obvious connections between *Nítíða saga*'s Ypolitus and the mythological figure. At most, the name further reinforces the medieval author or scribes' high level of education in a clerical setting, as I have discussed in previous chapters. There are, moreover, three other versions of the smith's name, all significantly different from the form Ypolitus. In the nineteenth-century Group E and ÍBR 47, the smith is introduced at the beginning and named Bonius (or Bomus); in Group F (from the nineteenth and twentieth century) he is also introduced at the beginning and called Vibuls (or Vipilius), which seems most likely to have derived from the alternative, Latin name of the Classical Greek Hippolytus, that is, Virbius.⁵⁵³ One late branch of Group A, however, does not introduce the smith until he is needed later, in the midst of the saga, and in this case he is called Probus; all but one of the manuscripts that do this are nineteenth-century. However, in Groups C and D, as well as an eighteenth-century branch of Group B and a couple of Group A manuscripts, the smith is not present

⁵⁵² I discuss the dwarf in *Nítíða saga* below.

⁵⁵³ Pierre Grimal, *A Concise Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, ed. by Stephen Kershaw, trans. by A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 204, 450–51.

in any form. Overall, it appears that for some post-medieval scribes and audiences the smith best known as *Ypolitus* was not important enough to retain as a named character, or perhaps was simply a name not widely known (reinforcing the likelihood that the saga was composed by an educated cleric), and further was not an enduring enough character to retain the same identification across different versions of the saga. When the smith does appear, as seen in the quoted examples above, his purpose is to remind the audience of Nítíða's primacy as a successful, resourceful ruler, enhancing her fame in the same way that the negative treatment of the servant woman Íversa is ostensibly justified because it highlights Nítíða's superior intellect and heroic character.

III: VILLAINS: VIRGILIUS AND SERKLAND

In the following section I discuss antagonistic characters, of what Propp would call the 'villain' type. They are the only characters who are portrayed exclusively as negative threats to Nítíða and her kingdom—unredeemable characters to be (in the case of Virgilius) outwitted and escaped from, or (in the case of the four characters from Serkland) eliminated outright. Because they are antagonists, there is, as a rule, no opportunity for their redemption. On her expedition to Visio, Nítíða deliberately sets out to steal magical objects from the earl Virgilius. The audience knows this because she says as much to her foster-mother Egidía. A benevolent helper does not give her these objects, nor does she simply find them while adventuring, as is the case with some heroes in other romances like *Nikulás saga leikara*, whose corresponding and related scenes I discussed in Chapter Two. Nítíða knows who owns the stones, apples, and herbs that she finds, but takes them nevertheless. But while (apparently in subtle judgement of Nítíða's actions) the narrator states that 'jarlinn verður vis hueriu hann er ræntur' [the earl discovered that he had been

robbed],⁵⁵⁴ Virgilius is specifically characterized as an antagonist, an obstacle in the way of the saga-hero Nítíða's goal. Accordingly, *Nítíða saga* here draws on a tradition of Virgil as a negative character in medieval literature rather than a positive Classical author.⁵⁵⁵ The epitome of such characterization in Iceland, might best be represented by *Virgilius rímur*, which carries on the tradition of Virgil as a supremely negative character, and in particular, as a pagan sorcerer.⁵⁵⁶ Nítíða calls Virgilius 'vitur og fiolkunnigur' [wise and skilled in magic: specifically witchcraft or sorcery—'bad' magic] when she mentions him and her intention to find Visio early in the saga.⁵⁵⁷ The only other characters who are associated with the word *ffölkunningur* are Ingi's helpers Refsteinn and Slægrefur, who are likewise obstacles or hindrances to Nítíða. I will discuss these two later in Section Four of this chapter. Virgilius functions only as an initial challenge for Nítíða to overcome in order to reinforce her position as the saga's hero and to foreshadow her ability to outwit everyone else. Consequently, despite being characterized as a sorcerer, Virgilius is powerless against Nítíða once she has gained possession of his magic objects, and she can return to Apulia unscathed. Nítíða's quest is a success, and the fact that the magical objects were previously associated with an evil sorcerer is of no importance. When they

⁵⁵⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 6.

⁵⁵⁵ See Craig Kallendorf, *The Other Virgil: Pessimistic Readings of the Aeneid in Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); John Webster Spargo, *Virgil the Necromancer: Studies in Virgilian Legends* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).

⁵⁵⁶ Stephen A. Mitchell and Gísli Sigurðsson, 'Virgilessrímur', in *The Virgilian Tradition: The First Fifteen Hundred Years*, ed. by Jan M. Ziolkowski and Michael C. J. Putnam (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 881-88.

⁵⁵⁷ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 5. On Virgil as magician, see Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the 'Aeneid' from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Domenico Comparetti, *Virgil in the Middle Ages*, trans. by E. F. M. Benecke (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895); Leander Petzoldt, 'Virgilius Magus: Der Zauberer Virgil in der literarischen Tradition des Mittelalters', in *Hören-Sagen-Lesen-Lernen: Bausteine zu einer Geschichte der kommunikativen Kultur*, ed. by Ursula Brunold-Bigler and Hermann Bausinger (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995), pp. 549-68; Juliette Wood, 'Virgil and Taliesin: The Concept of the Magician in England', *Folklore*, 94 (1983), 91-104.

enter Nítíða's possession, the objects become connected with her (the hero and protagonist), and she converts their potential association with negative magic to positive magic intended to help her throughout the rest of the saga.⁵⁵⁸ Virgilius is forgotten once he serves his function as the first challenger of the maiden-king. In some of Finnur Jónsson's only remarks about *Nítíða saga*, he describes Virgilius's role as 'noget underordnet og ynkelig' [somewhat subordinate and pathetic] and takes this to mean that 'denne person er dårlig udnyttet af forf' [this character is poorly utilized by the author].⁵⁵⁹ Such a simplistic view misses the point that the character's main function is to draw the saga's focus back to Nítíða. Once she escapes and 'sa jar(l) þau allri sidan' [the earl saw them nevermore],⁵⁶⁰ the story returns to its positive portrayal of Nítíða, so as to reinforce her position as hero. There is no need to develop further Virgilius's character—it is enough that Nítíða has managed to outwit him, a character with a name full of significance and suggestion. In all versions of the saga, in later centuries as well, Virgilius is present and known by this name, and he serves this same important function.

I now turn to Nítíða's destruction of Serkland's armies and the brutal deaths of the four named characters from that place, which has come up in a number of discussions in previous chapters: first Vélogi and Heiðarlogi are killed in France through deception, followed by Soldán and Logi in a separate battle outside France. This act of mass

⁵⁵⁸ Jóhanna Katrin Friðriksdóttir discusses the use of magical objects for good and the difference between types of magic (pp. 88, 245–46). Wick also distinguishes between 'black, grey, and white wizardry' in a discussion of magic in *Nikulás saga leikara* (p. 199). While the use of magical objects seems, in *Nítíða saga*, to be associated with good, productive magic in the interests of protecting the protagonists and securing their success (as in Nítíða's use of the *náttúrusteinar* and Alduria's use of a magic charm to see Liforinus's success in wooing the maiden-king), a natural ability to practise magic is associated with bad magic, and its negative characterization as sorcery (as in Virgilius's alleged magical powers, and those of Refsteinn, Slægrefur, and the dwarf, the latter three of which also use magical objects like charms and a cloak, but who, significantly, can also cause magical occurrences with nothing more than their own abilities).

⁵⁵⁹ Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, III (1924), 113.

⁵⁶⁰ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 7.

elimination is in some ways comparable to the abuse and even killing of unwelcome suitors found in other maiden-king romances.⁵⁶¹ However, whereas a maiden-king's violence often serves to further the misogynistic portrayal of women as negative figures, typical of maiden-king sagas, in *Nítíða saga*, the violence Nítíða authorizes characterizes her positively. The number of named, active characters from Serkland is greater than those from elsewhere because the threat they form is recognized not only by Nítíða and her French subjects and advisors, but also by Liforinus, who likewise joins forces to protect Nítíða and her kingdom. Furthermore, the four characters are all from the same family and the three brothers share similar names. The father's name, Soldán, is French meaning 'sultan', and was imported along with medieval French romances designating someone from the East, or a Saracen.⁵⁶² It is a suitable name for the family's father as it gives an indication of character 'type'. Other Icelandic romances also give this name to similar characters. The sons' names, however, all contain the element *logi* 'flame'. *Cleasby-Vigfússon* gives a second meaning under the entry *logi* as 'a pr[oper] name; of a mythical king', alone and in compounds, thus also providing Logi, Vélogi and Heiðarlogi with connotations of power as well as the danger associated with a flame.⁵⁶³ The combined force of all three names, as well as the frightening description of one of them (discussed below) solidifies these characters as formidable pairs of threats.

⁵⁶¹ Examples of this include the flogging of Clárus in *Clári saga*, Fulgida covering in tar and flogging Viktor after cutting his hair in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, and Sedentiana shaving and tarring Sigurður's brothers Hálfðan and Vilhjálmur in *Sigurðar saga þegla*.

⁵⁶² *Cleasby-Vigfússon*, p. 578.

⁵⁶³ *Cleasby-Vigfússon*, p. 397. Separating the compound names into their respective parts, *vé-logi* could be understood either literally as two common nouns together, 'mansion-flame, house-flame', or as 'holy-flame', where *vé* is a component found initially in other personal names with the sense 'holy' (p. 687), neither of which necessarily makes a great deal of sense. Additionally, *heiðar-logi* could be understood as 'bright (or clear) flame', or 'heath flame, flame of the heath', the second of which is possibly more likely as the element *heiðar-* [of (the/a) heath] appears in other proper names (p. 247); alternatively, of course, this element could be seen as *heiður* [honour]. Either way, these names need not have been intended to be lexically meaningful.

The characters work in pairs as doubles,⁵⁶⁴ enhancing the threat that Serkland poses by making Nítíða defend her kingdom in two battles on one occasion and against two major antagonists on another, which comes about as revenge for the first defeat. Additionally, the doublings and parallels allow Nítíða multiple opportunities to prove herself and reinforce her successful image as a positive, heroic character (along with those who help her, namely Hléskjöldur in the first instance and Liforinus in the second). The negative Serkland characters, then, exist exclusively to strengthen Nítíða's character, and so are indispensable to the plot and feature consistently in other versions of the saga. While the fathers of Ingi and Liforinus, for example, are sometimes omitted, as they are really no more than names to introduce those characters,⁵⁶⁵ Soldán, the father of Logi, Vélogi, and Heiðarlogi, is a full character, with a specific function in the plot, although he does not actively move against Nítíða until the end. When the saga turns to Vélogi and Heiðarlogi travelling to France to try to force Nítíða to marry one of them, it seems as though their introduction earlier and their role now is conventional in that their father is mentioned as background information before focusing on the real antagonists, the sons. But when Soldán appears later with Logi to avenge their deaths, the dual antagonist structure is revealed.

In the first instance, as soon as Nítíða discovers that the brothers are on their way to France with 'ovigan her af Serklandi' (an invincible army from Serkland),⁵⁶⁶ she begins to plan her defence and eliminate the threat they pose to her kingdom. Communication

⁵⁶⁴ See Propp, pp. 74–75, in which trebling of various story elements is discussed; the same can be said of doubling.

⁵⁶⁵ Ingi's father Hugon (in Group E called Februarius) is absent from some eighteenth-century Group B manuscripts (ÍB 132, ÍB 138, ÍB 312, Lbs 1172, for example), and Liforinus's father Blebarnius (in most other groups called Februarius or Fabrutius) does not appear in either the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Group E manuscripts, or those same Group B manuscripts in which Ingi's father is absent.

⁵⁶⁶ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 18.

between Hléskjöldur (on Nítíða's behalf) and the brothers also demonstrates the significance of direct speech as compared to indirect speech. Whereas it is Nítíða who plans to trick Vélogi and Heiðarlogi, her plan is only evident indirectly, as the audience is not privileged to hear her conversation with Hléskjöldur, only that 'kallar m(ey)k(ongur) Hleskiolld ä sinn fund. og bad hann ganga til herskipa og seiger honum fyrir alla hlute hueriu hann skal fram fara' [the maiden-king called Hléskjöldur to a meeting with her, and asked him to go to the warships and told him all things about how he should proceed].⁵⁶⁷ These instructions are incredibly vague, and the indirect nature of this communication indicates that Hléskjöldur is the focus of this scene, which is also evident in the significant amount of direct speech he enjoys in the subsequent conversations with the brothers. The first conversation begins with reported speech, but quickly becomes direct speech:

Hle(skiolldur) gengur nu til skipa og fretter huort kongar fara med fridi. Heidarlogi s(eger) 'ef drott(ning) vill giptast audrum huorum ockrum brædra. þä er þetta land og riki frialst fyrir ockrum hernadi. ella munu vit eýða landit. brenna og bæla og þyrma aungu'. Hle(skiolldur) svarar 'eigi kenner m(ey)k(ongur) sig mann til at hallda strid vit Serkia her. og suo ägiæta kongs sonu sem þit erud. vil eg seigia þier Velogi trunad m(ey)k(ongs). hun vill tala vit sier huorn ýckarn og profa visku ýckra og mäil snilld. vill hon at þu ganger snemma ä hennar fund ädur en broder þinn stendur vpp. þuiat eg veit at hon kýys þig til bonda'. binda þeir þetta nu med sier.⁵⁶⁸

[Hléskjöldur then went to the ship and learned whether the kings came in peace. Heiðarlogi said, 'If the queen wants to marry either of us brothers, then this land and kingdom is free from our plundering, or else we shall destroy the land, burn and consume it, and spare nothing'.

⁵⁶⁷ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', pp. 18–19.

⁵⁶⁸ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 19.

Hléskjöldur answered, ‘The maiden-king does not think herself equipped to wage war against Serkland’s army and such excellent princes as you are. I will tell you, Vélogi, the maiden-king’s promise: she wants each of you to speak with her, and to test your wisdom and eloquent speech. She wants you to go early to meet her before your brother gets up, because I know that she chooses you as husband’. They then bound this pledge with each other.]

This conversation is detailed and contains important information. It is also the first in the text among more than two interlocutors. Hléskjöldur begins by addressing both brothers (*kóngar*), and Heiðarlogi replies on behalf of them both, using the dual pronouns *okkrum* [us two] and *við* [we two]. Hléskjöldur’s answer begins directed at both brothers with the second person dual *þið* [you two], but the rest of his reply appears directed to Vélogi only (*Vil ég segja þér, Véloga*), using informal, second person singular pronouns. The familiarity now projected shows that no extra care is taken to show these strangers—foreign princes—the respect they might rightly deserve (despite their threatening greeting), indicating the treachery behind the words. Perhaps, due to the sensitive nature of these words, it is to be assumed that Heiðarlogi has turned away and does not hear. While the audience can reasonably expect to interpret Hléskjöldur’s words to Vélogi ironically, considering foreknowledge of the defences Nítíða has constructed in preparation for this encounter, neither brother has any reason to suspect foul play, and in his initial reply Heiðarlogi appears confident, relying on the force of his threats and strength of his army. Interestingly, Vélogi never speaks (neither directly nor indirectly, and after this agreement, he meets his death. This may have been anticipated in the fact that Heiðarlogi acts as the mouthpiece for the both of them. However, later, when Hléskjöldur speaks privately with Heiðarlogi, he is not given direct speech himself, perhaps demonstrating that his end is also near: the narrator only relates (after Hléskjöldur’s direct speech) that ‘Heidarlogi þackar honum sinn trunad og fyrir gongu’ [Heiðarlogi thanked him for his

good faith and visit].⁵⁶⁹ That the brothers from Serkland are essentially silenced once Hléskjöldur speaks to them individually to relate Nítíða's so-called *trúnað* [promise] only reinforces their doom, Nítíða's power, and the power of speech itself and its association with living.

Furthermore, the saga continues by describing Nítíða's preparations for battle, which include the construction of a retractable glass roof and a hidden ditch. With these devices in place, the brothers are lured there one by one with Hléskjöldur's help. The outcome of the two battles sees few from Serkland survive; the saga describes their downfall in detail:

lætur Hleskiolldur vinda fram yfer þä glerhiminn. og hella yfer þä biki og brennesteini. Enn Hleskiolldur gengur at þeim af borginni med skotuopnum og storum havggum. [...] og sem þeir ganga fram ä klædin brestur nidur vidurinn. Enn þeir steyptust j dikit. j þessu þeyser Hles(kiolldur) ovigan her vR borginni og bera griot j haufud þeim og skot vopn og drepa huern mann [...].⁵⁷⁰

[Hléskjöldur commanded [his men] to winch the glass roof down over them, and to pour pitch and sulphur over them. And Hléskjöldur attacked them from the castle with projectiles and great blows. [...] and as they went across the cloth, the wood collapsed, and they tumbled into the ditch. At this Hléskjöldur charged out of the castle with an invincible army and they threw stones and projectiles onto their heads, and killed every man [...].]

If this were not brutal enough, it is perhaps most disturbing that the narrator passes over these scenes without any question or comment, in order to praise Nítíða and her ability to outwit her enemies: 'fer og flygur ä huert land frægd og megt su er m(ey)k(ongur) fieck' [The maiden-king's new fame and might hastened to every land].⁵⁷¹ Once again the text

⁵⁶⁹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 20.

⁵⁷⁰ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', pp. 20–21.

⁵⁷¹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 21.

focuses again on Nítíða to reinforce her position as hero without question, and the slaughter of the brothers from Serkland is used to characterize her as a tactically superior battle opponent able to contrive detailed plans to defeat her enemies. Significantly, Nítíða succeeds here without the magical aid of her *náttúrusteinar*. Rather, this episode functions to underline her initial characterization as the woman who is ‘suo buen at viti sem hinn frodasti klerkur. og hinn sterkasti borgarveggur matti hun giora med sinu viti yfer annara manna vit og byrgia suo vti annara rad. og þar kunni hun .x. rad er adrer kunnu eitt’ [as endowed with knowledge as the wisest scholar, and she could construct the strongest castle-wall over other people’s intelligence with her own intellect. She could also outwit the counsel of others, so much that she knew ten answers when others knew one].⁵⁷²

These abilities to outwit with her own mental power are confirmed in these scenes, dispelling any notions the audience might have that she could really be helpless without her magical objects. The destruction of most of Serkland’s army thus specifically functions as reinforcement of an important part of Nítíða’s characterization, which explains why it is taken in stride by the narrator and does not sully Nítíða’s character, just as her ‘robbing’ Virgilius—an action that could in isolation be considered negative—also reinforces her position as the hero of the text.

The characters from Serkland are destined to be killed from their very introduction at the saga’s beginning because they are characterized as dangerous Others. This is the function of the extended physical description of Heiðarlogi:

⁵⁷² Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 4. Some late manuscripts emphasize her linguistic abilities in addition to her intelligence, appearing either to confuse the end of the passage or deliberately substitute ‘languages’ for ‘answers’ as mentioned in Chapter One (Lbs 3165 [1870–71], p. 48, for example). This suggests that her superior intelligence need not be reinforced through further example and instead the opportunity is taken to enhance her characterization even further.

hann hafði svart hár og skegg. hann var hokulangur og vanga suangur. skakk tentur og skiopul myntur. og vt skeifur. annad auga hans horfði á bast en annad ä kuist. hann var hermadur allmikill. og fullur vpp af golldrum og giorningum og rammur at afli. og fieck sigur j huerri orrostu.⁵⁷³

[He had black hair and beard. He had a long chin and thin cheeks, he was crooked-toothed, and had a twitchy, crooked mouth. One of his eyes looked inwards and the other outwards. He was a very great warrior, and knew much sorcery and witchcraft. He was physically strong and won every battle.]

By focusing on how unlike this character is from those described already and by using negative terms to do so, the saga places Heiðarlogi, and by extension the others from Serkland, outside of the courtly, civilized romance world to which everyone else belongs.⁵⁷⁴ As Jóhanna Katrin Friðriksdóttir says of such manner of characterization, ‘this depiction codes them as racially Other, malevolent threats who deserve their fate, like many of the giants, giantesses and other non-human creatures in the *fornaldarsögur*’.⁵⁷⁵ Not only are the four characters from Serkland uncivilized and different, they can be considered inhuman, and necessary to eliminate, as essentially non-human adversaries. In addition to this, Jacqueline de Weever, whose interpretations I also mentioned in the previous chapter, discusses the portrayal of black Saracen women in medieval French literature, and many of her conclusions are applicable also to the representation of these characters in *Nítíða saga*, despite this being a different type of text produced in a very different world than the French romances she considers, which come out of a culture actively engaged with Saracens in the Crusades: it should be remembered that medieval French romance heavily influenced medieval Icelandic romance. Speaking of the ‘vituperative’ portraits French poets paint of such characters, de Weever states that ‘the

⁵⁷³ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 8.

⁵⁷⁴ Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, p. 178.

⁵⁷⁵ Jóhanna Katrin Friðriksdóttir, p. 276.

aim is not only to withhold [audience] admiration but also to control all that [the black Saracen] represents and to annihilate that representation when [he or] she dies on the battlefield'.⁵⁷⁶ The destruction of Serkland in *Nítíða saga* thus not only proves Nítíða's own prowess and the strength of her kingdom, but also denies any memory of this Other opponent to live on once it has been eliminated. The outcomes of the battles are absolute, unlike those between Nítíða's army and that of Ingi, who, because he is characterized as like Nítíða (even though she refuses to marry him), is allowed to return to the story as an ally after his rejection and last defeat. Finally, it is also notable that Nítíða deceives Vélogi and Heiðarlogi to their deaths without first giving them the chance to speak to her, as she allowed Ingi to do. The saga only shows them telling Hléskjöldur their intentions to marry the maiden-king or ravage the land, and he answers definitively for Nítíða; if she actually hears about this from him, which is possible, it is, so to speak, off-stage.⁵⁷⁷ This also shows that they are seen as the Other, further confirming the fate that had been sealed when their characterization arguably drew on both a native Icelandic folk tradition of non-humans (such as trolls or other supernatural figures) being categorized as Other alongside a foreign French tradition of categorizing Saracens as Other.

Later on, the saga also describes Logi's and Soldán's deaths in a detailed battle scene. Instead of constructing elaborate traps, this time Nítíða organizes an army of her own to fight that of Soldán, but again, it is her foster-brother who is left to put Nítíða's plans into action: she tells him, 'hallt þessum <her> ä moti Solldani kongi, þuiat eg vil ecki hann komi j mitt riki' [Lead this army to meet King Soldán, because I do not want

⁵⁷⁶ de Weever, p. 54.

⁵⁷⁷ After Hléskjöldur speaks with Vélogi and Heiðarlogi there is perhaps a day that passes before they are lured into Nítíða's traps: the saga briefly introduces the betrayal scene after the conversation with Hléskjöldur, with 'at næstu natt lidinni' [At the end of the next night], Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 19.

him to come into my kingdom].⁵⁷⁸ As far as Nítíða is concerned, she really does only make the plans this time, and does not further influence the course of the battle, as it takes place outside of France where she remains, perhaps to watch at a safe distance in a magic stone. Thus in contrast to the previous battles against the first pair where Nítíða's own intelligence and abilities to orchestrate defences are proven, here it is the skill of her armies and the loyalty of her subjects that are tested to show Nítíða not only as a great ruler but also surrounded by a worthy kingdom eager to serve her. It is therefore an interesting development when on the second day of battle, Liforinus arrives and fights on France's side. Since at this point Liforinus has not yet succeeded in winning Nítíða, he might view this opponent as a rival suitor. His ability to defeat Soldán in single combat may contribute to Nítíða's acceptance of him; Hléskjöldur would surely have related the details of the battle to Nítíða after the fact. These two men whose relationships with Nítíða are different but both important, are named as those who defeat these last two faces of Serkland: 'at sidustu þeirra vidrskipti lagdi hann einum brynþuara fyrir briost Solldani kongi suo at vt gieck vm herdarnar. fiell hann þa daudur nidur. Lif(orinus) leitar nv at Hles(killdi) en hann lä þa j einum dal sar nær til olifis. en Logi lä daudur hia honum' [At the end of their exchange he [Liforinus] laid a spear into King Soldán's breast so that it came out through the shoulders. He then fell down dead. Liforinus then searched for Hléskjöldur, who lay in a dale, wounded near to death, and Logi lay dead next to him].⁵⁷⁹ This shared experience of fighting to defend Nítíða and her kingdom also allows the men to form a bond before it is certain that Liforinus will marry Nítíða, as further foreshadowing of their union and the future friendly relations between France and India. Significantly, though France initiated the battle against Serkland, India enjoys the

⁵⁷⁸ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', pp. 25–26.

⁵⁷⁹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 27.

victory and for a brief moment becomes the focal point in its power: ‘tekur Lif(orinus) þar nu mikit herfang og verður frægur af þessi orrustu víða um lönd. sigla nu heim til Jndialandz með fagrum sigri’ [Liforinus then took great booty there and became famous far and wide throughout the lands on account of this battle. Then they sailed home to India with fair victory].⁵⁸⁰ The plural verb *sigla* here indicates that Liforinus brings Hléskjöldur back to India with him in order to heal his injuries, instead of letting him return to France directly. This demonstration of hospitality also shines a favourable light on Liforinus, and it can be inferred that he impresses Nítíða even further, though this is not stated directly, apart from the simple declaration upon Hléskjöldur’s return, which ends the episode: ‘verður m(ey)k(ongur) all glöð vit hans heimkomv’ [the maiden-king became very glad at his homecoming].⁵⁸¹ Thus, again, the ultimate purpose behind the defeat of Serkland here is to develop the major characters, and always to direct the story back to Nítíða before moving it forward by turning to another scene.

IV: HELPERS: REFSTEINN, SLÆGREFUR, AND THE DWARF

The two mysterious characters who on separate occasions act as helpers to Ingi in his quest to marry Nítíða by force after she refuses his initial offer are treated here in one section for much the same reason that the four characters from Serkland were treated together above. In addition to these figures, I here discuss the dwarf who helps Liforinus as well, as each character is associated with the suitors’ failure to succeed in winning the maiden-king. As will be clear shortly, their failures are connected to the suitors’ consideration of Nítíða as subordinate, rather than treating her more as an equal as Liforinus eventually does. Refsteinn and Slægrefur are two sides of the same coin, a

⁵⁸⁰ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 27.

⁵⁸¹ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 28.

doubled antagonistic helper character,⁵⁸² in the same way that the two pairs of Serklanders are doubled antagonists. This is reinforced not only by their helping the same character, but also through their similar names, which both share the element *refur* [fox], indicating their wiliness and deceit.⁵⁸³ The manner of their introduction also reinforces these characters' connection with each other. When Ingi meets Refsteinn, their exchange begins with indirect speech, but the conversation that follows uses direct speech, lending a sense of immediacy to their dialogue:

kongur spurdi þenna mann at nafni. hann kuedzt Refsteinn heita. kongur spyR ef hann væri suo sem hann hiet til. hann s(eger) 'þat ætla eg at mig skorti vit einguan mann kukl og galldur og fiolkingi huad sem giora skal'. kongur m(ælti) 'Eg vil giora þig fullsælan at fie og baurn þin ef þu kemur mier j hendur Nitida bardaga laust'. Ref(steinn) s(eger) 'fyrer þessu er mier ecki'. kongur m(ælti) 'gack vt a skip min med mier og fullgior þat er þu hefer heitit. er hier gullhringur stor er eg vil giefa þier og .xx. ælner rautt skarlat er þu skalt færa konu þinni'. Ref(steinn) þackar nu kongi mikilega. byR sig og ganga a skip.⁵⁸⁴

[The king asked this person his name. He said he was called Fox-Stone. The king asked if he might be such as he was called. Fox-Stone said, 'I suppose that my knowledge is inferior to no person in terms of sorcery and spell-craft and wizardry, whatever one might do'.

The king said, 'I will make you and your children wealthy in riches if you get Nítíða into my hands, without battle'.

Fox-Stone said, 'This is nothing to me'.

The king said, 'Go out to my ships with me and fulfil that which you have promised; here is a great gold ring which I want to give to you, and twenty ells of red scarlet which you must bring to your wife'.

⁵⁸² I realize the oxymoron of calling them antagonistic helpers, but considering that the help they provide is really an obstacle for Nítíða, the term seems appropriate.

⁵⁸³ In addition to its literal sense, the word *refr* [fox] in Old Icelandic could be understood metaphorically as 'a tricky person, sly fox' and was used 'mostly in sayings' (*Cleasby-Vigfússon*, p. 488).

⁵⁸⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', pp. 11–12.

Fox-Stone then thanked the king greatly and prepared himself, and they went onto the ships.]

This direct speech is framed by indirect narration, which nevertheless propels the action forward with a quick, sharp exchange in brief sentences. Once the conversation turns into direct speech, it continues to push forward at a steady pace, but each character's statements become progressively longer and more drawn out as the conversation proceeds, conveying more information, and essentially drawing up a contract between them. Further, Refsteinn's subordinate position to Ingi (at least in Ingi's view) is demonstrated by the informal, second person singular pronouns Ingi employs. The conversation ends as a contract between the two. This exchange is so similar to that between Ingi and Slægrefur, the former's second helper, that the first conversation can be viewed as a template for the second: it begins indirectly, reported by the narrator, and amounts to the same type of back-and-forth banter. Ingi again addresses his helper informally.⁵⁸⁵ It is tempting to think that these two conversations set out and follow a general formula for contractual agreements between more prominent characters (Ingi) and minor helper, or facilitator, characters who appear only once (Refsteinn, Slægrefur), and that other interactions between similar characters (such as the dwarf) would follow this pattern.

Their deceitful nature may also indicate in advance their inability to succeed in helping Ingi. Further, they are agents of sorcery—magic intended to harm rather than for good—similar to Virgilius, noted above. Refsteinn says he can do 'kukl og galldur og fiolkingi' [sorcery and spell-craft and wizardry],⁵⁸⁶ and Slægrefur says 'ei kann eg minni fiolkynki en Re(f)st(einn)' [I am not able to do less wizardry than Refsteinn].⁵⁸⁷

Refsteinn's talents in magic are only evident in the good wind he magically provides for

⁵⁸⁵ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 14.

⁵⁸⁶ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 11.

⁵⁸⁷ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 14.

Ingi to sail to France and his ability to produce an invisibility cloak,⁵⁸⁸ which while allowing Ingi to abduct Nítíða, cannot guarantee success. Slægrefur, though he promises to do better, helps Ingi even less, and this second mission is doomed to fail because of Nítíða's foresight—they abduct Íversa instead. Whereas there is evidence to confirm Refsteinn's claims, Slægrefur does nothing, according to the text, to prove he really can accomplish any 'wizardry'. Once in France, all he does is enter Nítíða's hall with Ingi, without providing any magical objects or casting any spells. The saga only says that 'kongur hleypur at og steýper ýfer hana suartre sueipu. og fer þegar vt af skemmunni' [the king ran in and cast a black hood over her, then immediately went out of the chamber].⁵⁸⁹ It does not explicitly say that Slægrefur provides the hood, although it is the same colour (*svart*) as the cloak that made Ingi invisible and the same verb (*steypa*) is used to lay the items on their objects. This seems to imply a deliberate connection of the two objects and, accordingly, magical properties, though nothing more is said of the hood. The similar diction links the two figures and reinforces their relationship as two faces of the same double character. In his surprising ineffectiveness, Slægrefur reinforces Refsteinn's failure, and any action taken by the first is cancelled out by the total inactivity of the second.⁵⁹⁰ In other ways too, Slægrefur is more an incomplete shadow of Refsteinn than a functional independent character: when Ingi encounters Refsteinn, the saga says that 'þeir sia mann einn ganga ofan af eyiunni. helldur mikinn og alldradan' [they saw a person walking down from the island who looked rather large and old], whereas meeting Slægrefur, the saga only states that 'þeir siä mann ganga ofan af nesinu' [they saw a person

⁵⁸⁸ The journey to France takes 'en beinasta byr' [the straightest course], 'þuiat Ref(steinn) gaf þeim nogan byr og hagstædan' [*because* Refsteinn gave them enough of a favourable wind], and then 'steyper R(efsteinn) yfer kong kufli suortum' [Refsteinn cast a black cloak over the king], Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 12, my italics.

⁵⁸⁹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 16.

⁵⁹⁰ Ármann Jakobsson, *Illla fenginn mjöður*, p. 179.

walking down from the headland].⁵⁹¹ The mystery surrounding both figures (including the shadowy evening settings in which they appear), and their inability to help Ingi succeed both shows *Nítíða* to be a more powerful character and more skilled in the use of magic attributes than those characterized as wizards or sorcerers, and also foreshadows the failure of the third mysterious figure, the dwarf, to help Liforinus when his approach to fulfil his aims is still the same as Ingi's—coercive and uncourtly, viewing *Nítíða* as an object to be won rather than a partner with whom to share his life.

This dwarf, who tries to help Liforinus after they appear to meet by chance one day in the woods, is an interesting character whose role not only mirrors Ingi's helpers, but also reinforces the saga's aims in challenging certain romance norms. The nameless dwarf is perhaps one of the only benevolent dwarves in any medieval Icelandic romance whose assistance does not produce the desired results and lead to the character's success.⁵⁹² The reasons for this failure seem to have to do with the fact that *Nítíða*, not Liforinus, is the saga's hero. Dwarves in other romances allow heroes to succeed, whether by helping them do something, by giving them magical objects, or by acting as intermediaries. Thus, the dwarf's ultimate ineffectiveness in *Nítíða saga* upturns this expectation of such a character in such a text, especially when, initially, the help provided appears to work (*Nítíða* is in fact brought to India). Unlike the unexplained nature of Refsteinn and Slægrefur, where it is uncertain whether they are human or some sort of supernatural figures, Liforinus, and consequently the audience, seems to be familiar with the dwarf as a type of being from which he might get help but of which he must be wary,

⁵⁹¹ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', pp. 11, 14.

⁵⁹² Ármann Jakobsson, 'Enabling Love: Dwarfs in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances', in *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, ed. by Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin, *Islandica*, 54 (London: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 183–206; Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, p. 179; Werner Schäfke, 'Was ist eigentlich ein Zwerg? Eine prototypensemantische Figurenanalyse der *dvergar* in der Sagaliteratur', *Mediaevistik*, 23 (2010), 197–299.

and with the setting of their meeting being the brightness of day rather than the evening when Ingi meets his helpers, Liforinus's certainty of just what the dwarf is, is further reinforced. His reaction upon seeing the dwarf is telling: 'kongss(on) renner nu sinu ersi á milli steinsins og duergsins og viger hann vtan steins' [The prince then rode his horse between the stone and the dwarf, and separated him from the stone].⁵⁹³ There is an element of fear in Liforinus's reaction, and an uncertainty as to whether interacting with the dwarf will prove helpful or harmful; it is up to the dwarf to reveal his willingness to help before Liforinus will ask for it. The differences between Ingi's dialogues with his helpers and that between Liforinus and the dwarf are apparent from the beginning of the exchange when it is the dwarf, not Liforinus, who initiates the conversation, in contrast to Ingi's initiation of dialogue both times before, and, so, confounding any expectation that their conversation will be carried out as were those between Ingi and his helpers. The dwarf's words are not brief either: 'meiri frægd væri þier j at leika vt me(y)k(ong) j Franz enn banna mier mitt jnni eda heyrer þu ei þa frægd er fer og flygur vm allan heimen af hennar megt at hvn vt leikur alla konga med sinni spekt og vizku' [You would gain greater fame to out-play the maiden-king in France than to ban my entry, or have you not heard of the fame which flies throughout all the world concerning her strength, that she out-plays all kings with her foresight and wisdom?].⁵⁹⁴ Unlike in the cases seen above, here the helper assesses the situation better than the king and offers advice accordingly, before Liforinus can ask for it. Further, the dwarf (perhaps surprisingly) addresses Liforinus informally, essentially turning the tables on the preceding exchanges. Having the dwarf take control of the situation in the first instance also reinforces Liforinus's uncertainty as to whether the dwarf might be helpful or harmful. The dwarf not only initiates

⁵⁹³ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 21–22.

⁵⁹⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 22.

conversation and takes control, but in doing so also sets the tone of their exchange, which is initially slightly confrontational. The conversation continues, and Liforinus reciprocates the dwarf's informal address without challenging it:

kongur s(eger) ‘mart hef eg heýrt þar af sagt og ef þu villt fylgia mier til Fracklandz og vera mier hollur so at med þinu kynstri og kuckli mætti eg fá m(ey)k(onginn) mier til eiginnar pusu þä skylldi eg giora þig fullsælan og born þin’. duer(gur) mælti ‘þat mun eg vpp taka at fylgia þier. helldur en missa steininn. þuiat eg veit at þu ert ägiætur kongur’.⁵⁹⁵

[The king said, ‘I have heard much said of this, and if you will accompany me to France and be loyal to me so that with your magical arts and sorcery I could get the maiden-king as my wife, then I shall make you and your children very wealthy’.

The dwarf said, ‘I will agree to accompany you, rather than lose the stone, because I know that you are an excellent king’.]

The entire conversation between these characters suggests that unlike Ingi's pair of helpers, simply the *idea* of the dwarf endows this character with real power, and that power turns out to be a reality when help is provided. Once they have reached their agreement, the conversation essentially continues upon arrival in France in order to carry out their plan, and it is again the dwarf who speaks further, giving Liforinus detailed instructions about how to use a magic ring to bring Nítíða back to the ship: ‘legg þina hond med gullinv vpp ä berann hals m(ey)k(ong)s. þä mun gullit fast vit hennar liosa likam. fanga hana sidan. en eg skal giora rad fyrir at eingi epterfaur sie veitt’ [Lay the hand with the ring on the bare neck of the maiden-king, and then the gold will be stuck to her radiant body. Seize her then, and I shall make sure that no chase will be made].⁵⁹⁶ These instructions, which had not been discussed before, are very precise, and the use of

⁵⁹⁵ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 22.

⁵⁹⁶ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 23.

informal address likewise continues in this extension of their previously agreed verbal contract, in contrast with Ingi's conversations with Refsteinn and Slægrefur, which ceased before their pursuit of Nítíða. The dwarf's plan is successful and he even helps further, causing Nítíða's courtiers to be stuck to their seats, ensuring Liforinus's escape.⁵⁹⁷ To top it all off, 'duer(gurinn) gefur þeim fagan býr heim til Jnndia landz' [the dwarf gave them a fair wind home to India],⁵⁹⁸ confirming that this helper means to see the task through to completion, unlike Refsteinn and Slægrefur, who are not mentioned again after Ingi's abductions take place. In a different romance, this may have been sufficient help to secure the suitor's success, but it is because Nítíða, characterized as the hero, can use her *náttúrusteinar* first to anticipate their arrival and second to escape back to France, that the dwarf's efforts do not pay off. Thus, even the dwarf, a seemingly insignificant, anonymous character, both draws more attention to Liforinus's efforts and characterization, reinforcing his central role in the saga, and the fact that he, unlike Ingi, will be successful in his quest for Nítíða (despite the failure of the dwarf's efforts to help him in the long run), and also highlights Nítíða's role as hero and reinforces the interrogation of the romance genre that makes up such a significant part of the saga.

V: CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of *Nítíða saga's* characters—whether major, like Listalín or Sýjalín, or minor helper figures—has revealed much about the inner workings of the saga, its hero, and some of the socio-cultural attitudes reflected in the text. While other, more cursory, discussions of *Nítíða saga's* plot and character-functions have concluded that it is merely derivative, and even a 'strained' narrative that relies on the reduplication of a single

⁵⁹⁷ This motif also occurs in *Nikulás saga leikara* (p. 152, and noted by Wick as parallel with *Nítíða saga*, pp. 225–26), among other Icelandic texts (see Boberg's *Motif-Index*).

⁵⁹⁸ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 24.

theme,⁵⁹⁹ I have shown in this chapter that far from laboriously and blindly repeating the motif of the misogynous maiden-king, the repetitions and doublings of scenes and characters serve, rather, to enhance *Nítíða*'s character in terms of power, influence, and audience sympathy. In *Nítíða saga*, the characterization of what would normally be considered merely minor characters works alongside the depiction of the hero *Nítíða* to reconsider the traditional idea of what it means to be a hero in Icelandic romance, demonstrating how Icelanders (authors, scribes, and audiences) were able and seemingly happy to question, re-evaluate, and re-invent the idea of the hero and to a certain extent other typical character roles in romance. Once again, seeing the saga as a reaction to and revaluation of traditional bridal-quest and maiden-king romance also clarifies and puts into perspective the reasons why *Nítíða saga* is so reflexive and innovative in other ways, such as in terms of travel and geography, as discussed already in Chapter Three. In this second part of the thesis, I have shown how *Nítíða saga* questions all of these notions through *Nítíða*'s characterization, through that of other major characters like Liforinus, Ingi, and Hléskjöldur, and through the saga's minor supporting characters, helpers, and, just as importantly, its antagonists. This is the foundation for the final chapter of the thesis, in which I consider the figure and function of *Nítíða saga*'s narrator.

⁵⁹⁹ In showing how *Nítíða saga* is different from other romances in its use of the maiden-king motif, Astrid van Nahl concludes: 'In der *Nitida saga* ist das Grundmotiv der betrügerischen Prinzessin verdreifacht [...]. Das Erzählelement erscheint dadurch strapaziert und verliert letzten Endes seinen Reiz' [In *Nítíða saga* the basic theme of the deceptive princess is tripled [...]. The narrative element appears strained and thereby ultimately loses its appeal], pp. 37–38.

Chapter 6

CHARACTERIZING THE NARRATOR

This chapter completes my consideration of characterization and relationships among characters by looking at the voice of *Nítíða saga*'s anonymous narrator, seen through his comments in the first person. I will focus especially on the narrator's interventions in the saga's opening and closing, which I will compare with those of other Icelandic romances. The narrator is important in *Nítíða saga* as a teller of this version of the tale, and as such he is portrayed as a character with his own personality and opinions, which are sometimes revealed quite freely. In the discussions that follow, I have chosen in general not to distinguish between author, scribe, and narrator when discussing Icelandic romances. I recognize, of course, that each is usually a very different person, and that the medieval texts we study today are almost always amalgamations of at least two versions—that of author and that of scribe, as I have pointed out in Chapter One. Whether the narrator in *Nítíða saga* or any other Icelandic romance can be identified with either or both an author or a specific scribe is difficult to discern in any given version of the text. While I acknowledge that author, scribe, and narrator are separate, I will in this chapter generally refer to the narrator as a character, for it is he who is most readily visible in the texts with which I am concerned. Whereas the author's views or intentions are virtually impossible to determine unless through (nearly) blind conjecture because it is difficult if not impossible to match a name or even a precise location with *Nítíða saga*'s author, the narrator and his views as they exist in the version of the text under consideration could be interpreted as a complex mixture of the original author, whatever sources and influences he drew on, and the anonymous scribes through which the story has been preserved up until the version that I discuss. In speaking of scribes instead of narrator characters,

Kalinke states that ‘Icelandic scribes were an individualistic lot’ with varying ‘attitudes to the texts they were transmitting’.⁶⁰⁰ Such diversity of style, attitude, and opinion will be evident in the romance sagas discussed in this chapter, as each scribe (Kalinke’s choice in the quotation above), or narrator (an alternative perspective, which I generally employ here), relates to the story told in a slightly different manner.

A saga’s beginning and ending, related by the narrator, are integral saga elements. They frame the story, and often situate it within a wider literary context: in the case of *Nítíða saga*, Group A manuscript endings link this text with *Nikulás saga leikara*. With all of this in mind, my discussion of the narrator in this chapter is also influenced by Suzanne Fleischman’s suggested model for analysing medieval narrators, as a part of her investigation into the differences between history and fiction as modes of composition in medieval narratives and seeing distinct trends in romance approaches to narration. In her article, romance is contrasted with epic, but other forms of narrative (such as the chronicle) are also assessed. The discussion of narrators is particularly helpful for Icelandic romance, as its narrators can be such prominent and vocal figures. In considering ‘the apparent presence or absence in the account of a narrative *ego*’, Fleischman asks questions such as:

What sort of distance does the narrator set up between himself and the events he relates? Does he intervene in the narrative, or is he effaced? Does he display self-consciousness? To what extent does he function as an interpreter, mediating between his text and its consumers?⁶⁰¹

⁶⁰⁰ Marianne E. Kalinke, ‘Scribes, Editors, and the *Riddarasögur*’, *Arkiv för nordisk Filologi*, 97 (1982), 36–51 (p. 39).

⁶⁰¹ Fleischman, ‘On the Representation of History and Fiction in the Middle Ages’, *History and Theory*, 22 (1983), 278–310 (p. 295, italics original).

Along with narrator involvement she also considers questions of narrative authenticity, authorial intent, and the social function of the romance, which also come into play in the following discussions. I will use Fleischman's approach in conjunction with a specifically Old Norse model of interpretation in Paul Schach's analysis of narrators in the *Íslendingasögur*. The five forms Schach identifies are 'use of the first person', authorial 'value judgements', 'enlightening observations on life in the "saga age"', 'source references', and 'cross references'.⁶⁰² Most of these are also present in Icelandic romances, making Schach's study another useful model. I will begin the chapter by considering the figure of the narrator as he appears at the beginning of the saga and comparing and contrasting *Nítíða saga's* opening with those of other Icelandic romances, many of which include much more detailed prologues. I will then turn to the end of the saga and the narrator's role there, again in comparison with other romances. In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss the role and function of the narrator as he appears throughout the main saga text, including brief comparisons of the narrator's role among *Nítíða saga's* different manuscript versions.

I: THE NARRATOR OPENS THE SAGA

It is very common for Icelandic romances to begin with some sort of prologue, through which we can sometimes see the first glimpse of the saga's narrator. These prologues are often defensive and self-conscious, and while not entirely formulaic, they do often follow a pattern of either attributing the romance in question to a real or imagined ancient authority, or to the authority of the written word more generally. Scholars have called romances that include the first type of prologue 'graffiti sagas', since many claim to have

⁶⁰² Paul Schach, 'Some Forms of Writer Intrusion in the *Íslendingasögur*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 42 (1970), 128–56 (pp. 154–55).

been found on walls.⁶⁰³ While such origins are easily dismissed today, these narrators appeal to both the authority of the written word in the Middle Ages, and also to the authority of ancient authors like Homer and Virgil. However unlikely it is that any one author actually found these stories written on walls is of course beside the point; what matters is that such an idea appealed to Icelanders, who thus justified their enjoyment of romances by linking them to known authors and the written word more generally.⁶⁰⁴

While this does not necessarily mean that medieval Icelanders absolutely believed these attributions and thought of these sagas as accounts of true events, such details are clearly included for specific reasons, playing on the very notion of authorization and the value, or truth, inherent in the texts. These types of prologues represent their romance saga not as indigenous to Iceland (which they in reality are), but as inherited and translated from wise masters of the past, introducing a great distance between the story's source and the narrator who tells it,⁶⁰⁵ along with, contrastingly, the power of continuity for the written as this very distance is essentially negated by the manuscript page.

Clári saga begins with a brief prologue in which its narrator not only appeals to the authority of a bishop, but to the authority of Latin, and a European romance

⁶⁰³ Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', p. 271; Ralph O'Connor, 'History or Fiction? Truth-Claims and Defensive Narrators in Icelandic Romance-Sagas', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 15 (2005), 101–69 (p. 129). In *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* the narrator attributes the saga to Homer, assuming this will make the text more credible: 'þessi saga var tekin af steinuegginum j Babbilon hjnni miklu. og meistari Humerus hefer samsett hana' [This saga was taken from stone walls in Babylon the Great, and master Homer had composed it], Loth, ed., 'Vilhjálms saga sjóðs', p. 3. *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* similarly opens by appealing to the classical authority of Virgil: '<M>Eistari Uirgilius hefer samansett marga fræde til skemtanar maunnum j bok þeirre er Saxfræde heiter, en sögu þa sem nu munu uær byria fann hann skrifada a steinuegginum borgar þeirrar er Licibon heiter i Franz' [Master Virgilius has composed many tales of entertainment for people in the book which is called *Saxfræði*, and the saga which now we must begin he found written on a stone wall of the city in France which is called Lisbon], Agnete Loth, ed., 'Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns', in *LMIR*, III (1963), 1–66, p. 3.

⁶⁰⁴ See Alaric Hall and others, ed., '*Sigurðar saga fóts* (The Saga of Sigurðr Foot): A Translation', *Mirator*, 11 (2010), 56–91 (pp. 67–70).

⁶⁰⁵ Fleischman, 'On the Representation of History and Fiction', pp. 295–97.

tradition: ‘Þar byrjum vér upp þessa frásögn, sem sagði virðuligr herra Jón byskup Halldórson, ágætrar áminningar,—en hann fann hana skrifaða með látínu í Frannz, í þat form, er þeir kalla “rithmos”, en vér köllum hendingum,—ok byrjar svá’ [There we begin this narrative, as told by the venerable lord, Bishop Jón Halldórsson, of excellent memory,—and he found it written in Latin in France, in that form, which they call ‘rithmos’, but we call hendingum,—and it begins thus].⁶⁰⁶ The narrator (whose voice, however conventional this may be, we see here directly in the first person plural *vér*) is compelled to provide background information about not only the saga’s origin, but also about its presumed composer or translator, and its form. The temporal proximity of Jón Halldórsson ‘ágætrar áminningar’ [of excellent *memory*] to the narrator further reinforces the credibility of the tale and its claim to truth and plausibility. This prologue has prompted some scholars to regard *Clári saga* as a translated romance rather than an Icelandic composition. Shaun Hughes, however, has recently argued the opposite, and explains the prologue’s function as an authorizing and authenticating technique: ‘Latin is the prestige language, and France is the home of the romance’.⁶⁰⁷ This appeal to French literary authority is also echoed in the beginning of *Nikulás saga leikara*, but instead of attributing the romance to any identifiable source, the prologue simply provides a named figure, alongside other anonymous wise men: ‘suo seýgia sannfröder menn og meýstarar ad sä kongur hafé rädid firer vngaria er Faustus hiet. enn søgn þessa fann herra biarne j pärýs ä Fraclande. sýdann skrifadi huer sem mätti j sýnu lýki j þann týma’ [Well informed men and scholars say this, that the king who ruled over Hungary was called Fástus. And Sir Bjarni found this saga in Paris in France. After that everyone wrote it in their own way at

⁶⁰⁶ Cederschiöld, ed., *Clári saga*, p. 1. On the literary terminology—*rithmos* and *hendingum*—see Hughes, ‘*Klári saga* as an Indigenous Romance’, p. 137, nn. 6–7).

⁶⁰⁷ Hughes, ‘*Klári saga* as an Indigenous Romance’, p. 158; see also pp. 146–48 for a more detailed argument.

that time].⁶⁰⁸ What matters is that a name is given as a source—it does not matter who this Bjarni is.⁶⁰⁹ The saga is further legitimized in reinforcing its facts by sages and scholars, and its status as a romance by its ostensible origin in Paris, in the saga's only mention of that city. This not only connects *Nikulás saga leikara* by its brief prologue to *Clári saga*, but also to *Nítíða saga*, whose action centres on Paris.

Moving away from 'graffiti sagas' and romances naming particular authors and translators, *Sigurðar saga þøgla* opens simply with an appeal to book learning: '<M>Argir fyrri men hafa saman sett til scemtunar monnum margar frasagner. sumar eptir fornkuædum e(dur) frædimonnum enn sumar eptir fornum bokum er j fyrstu hafa samann settar verit med skiotu male. enn sidan med hagligum ordum fylldar' [Many people in former times have composed many fair tales for people's entertainment. Some come from old tales or learned men, and some from old books which at first were composed with brief words, and later filled with skilful words].⁶¹⁰ In this, the narrator seems accurately to explain just what this saga's redactor has done, that is, to fashion a story based on an existing narrative by fleshing it out and embellishing it as he pleased.⁶¹¹ An appeal to old books, especially, is an appeal to the authority of the written word; an appeal to old tales, whether written or oral, is an appeal to the authority and implied gravity of antiquity in and of itself.⁶¹² There is no interest in presenting new, original work; rather it is more credible and even usual to report or rework what someone else wrote long ago.⁶¹³ Either ironically or fittingly, the same prologue in this redaction of *Sigurðar saga þøgla* appears in

⁶⁰⁸ *Nikulás saga leikara*, pp. 62, 162.

⁶⁰⁹ Schach, p. 145.

⁶¹⁰ Loth, ed., 'Sigurðar saga þøgla', p. 95.

⁶¹¹ *Dínus saga drambláta* also begins similarly, appealing to previously written narratives: 'Suo finst j fornnum fræde bökum skriffad' [Thus it is found written in old wise books], Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., p. 3.

⁶¹² Schach notes that 'Quite frequently [...] saga writers [...] tend strongly to accept the written word rather than oral tradition' to support their stories (p. 140).

⁶¹³ See for example Geraldine Barnes, 'Travel and *translatio studii* in the Icelandic riddarasögur', pp. 123–39.

two manuscripts of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*,⁶¹⁴ demonstrating the fluidity of such textual elements and their ability to be taken and incorporated into various works. This also corroborates the degree of borrowing done by *Sigurðar saga þögla*'s eclectic redactor, as I have discussed above in relation to geography in Chapter Three. Nevertheless, the frequency of such prologues among the Icelandic romances demonstrates a general concern with the truth-value of these texts, which often contain blatantly non-realistic elements, but still ring true for Icelanders in the late Middle Ages and beyond. While not imploring readers to believe that everything related is *true* in the sense of being *real* or *historical*, these narrators at least desire the stories they tell to be taken seriously and enjoyed for what they are—what modern readers might call fiction, and what medieval Icelanders seem at times only to have been able to describe using the word *lygi* [lie].⁶¹⁵ Ralph O'Connor has discussed the use of this term with reference to its medieval attestations and argued alternatively for interpreting romance prologues' truth claims as genuine arguments in support of the stories' veracity, and not necessarily as fiction.⁶¹⁶ Either interpretation is, to me, plausible, but I would like to think that such defensive narrators and prologues are the by-product not of overly credulous audiences but of a society that has come to associate the written word with truth alone. Overall, the presence of a prologue, in whatever form it takes, indicates a perceived need to defend and

⁶¹⁴ These manuscripts are AM 589f 4to and AM 567 4to XI β. See Loth, ed., 'Sigurðar saga þögla', p. 96n; See also Ralph O'Connor, 'Truth and Lies in the *fornaldarsögur*: The Prologue to *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*', in *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed. Studier i de oldislandske fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. by Agnete Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Annette Lassen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums, 2009), pp. 361–78.

⁶¹⁵ Geraldine Barnes, 'Authors, Dead and Alive, in Old Norse Fiction', *Parergon*, 8 (1990), 5–22; Jakob Benediktsson, 'Lygisögur'; Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction'; Glauser, 'Lygisaga', p. 398; Marianne E. Kalinke, 'The Genesis of Fiction in the North', in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6–12 August 2006, ed. by John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, 2 vols (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 1, 464–78.

⁶¹⁶ O'Connor, 'History or Fiction?', pp. 133–41.

authenticate the text in some way. *Nítíða saga*, by contrast, has no prologue, but presents the story, simply as what it is, perhaps because of the narrator's confidence, rather than in spite of it.

Nítíða saga's lack of a prologue shows its narrator's lack of anxiety about whether the story will be taken seriously, and his willingness to believe his readers will enjoy it, without needing to defend it.⁶¹⁷ Rather than starting with a substantial prologue, the narrator begins *Nítíða saga* by saying 'HEYRet vnger menn eitt æfintyr og fagra frasaugn fra hinum frægasta meykongi er verit hefur j nordur hælftu veralldarinar er hiet Nitida hin fræga' [Young people heard an adventure and fair tale about the most famous maiden-king there has been in the northern region of the world, who is called Nítíða the Famous].⁶¹⁸ With these words, the narrator shows what could be seen as one part of the saga's intended audience: 'ungir menn', young people and perhaps children, although it is of course also likely that this opening consists of no more than a simple formula for beginning a written or performed text. Significantly, the tale is specified as being heard rather than read (even if read aloud), highlighting the role of an active audience rather than a possibly more passive readership. Assuming that we can take this opening at face value, we might also by extension see here another intended audience, that is, those who read or tell this story to the 'ungir menn', such as parents, extended family, or other members of a reading (or story-telling) community. These first few words, in suggesting

⁶¹⁷ O'Connor, 'History or Fiction?', pp. 101–69. Astrid van Nahl states that this saga's brief address to the audience is not typical of introductions in the genre, and as such is not really the same kind of prologue (p. 13).

⁶¹⁸ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 3. This opening echoes that of the thirteenth-century translated romance *Elis saga ok Rosamundu*, which also starts by bidding its audience listen (van Nahl, pp. 138–39): 'HÆyrit, horskir menn, æina fagra saugu' [Wise people heard a fair story], Kölbjng, ed., *Elis saga ok Rosamundu*, p. 1. Other manuscript versions of *Nítíða saga* are even more similar to this phrasing, as in this version, which is, unfortunately, only a single-leaf fragment: 'Heÿred hōsker menn <á>gi<æ>t æfenntyr<r> og fagra frasogur' [Wise people heard an excellent adventure and fair tale], ÍB 201 8vo [1650–99], f. 6v.

an audience of children being read to by adults, also suggest the setting in which such readings may have taken place, the *kvöldvaka* [evening-wake], during the *sagnaskemmtun* [saga-diversion]—it was then that texts including romances like *Nítíða saga* were read aloud or copied in Icelandic farmhouses during long winter nights, as I first discussed in Chapter One.⁶¹⁹ Direct evidence of the *kvöldvaka* has been recorded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it seems to be agreed upon that the practice has its roots in traditions stretching back to the Middle Ages.⁶²⁰ With the written saga setting the scene in this way, private readers can also experience something of the saga’s performative aspects. In only the first three words of the saga, then, the narrator paints a picture of the environment in which *Nítíða saga* may have been consumed, and the types of people who may have there taken it in. The narrator presents the saga as one to be enjoyed by both young (whom he names specifically), and old (whose appreciation may be inferred).⁶²¹

In contrast to *Nítíða saga*’s lack of any prologue longer than the ‘ungir menn’ sentence, and in contrast to those prologues noted above, appealing to written authority, the romance *Viktors saga ok Blávus* begins by mixing oral and written. On the one hand, the narrator appeals to King Hákon himself and the translations he commissioned:

<M>arga merkiliga hlute heyrdum wer sagda heidarligum herra Hakoni Magnus syni Norigs kongi. einkannliga ad hann hiellt mikit gaman at fogram fra sogum. ok hann liet venda morgum riddara sogum jnorænu ur girzsku ok franzeisku mali.⁶²²

⁶¹⁹ Davíð Ólafsson, pp. 118–22, 154–58; Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*, pp. 38–46.

⁶²⁰ Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*, p. 38; Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 92–114.

⁶²¹ With this in mind, Sverrir Tómasson notes ‘the text stat[es] that it was meant for “youngsters”’, in his section ‘Old Icelandic Prose’, trans. by Gunnþórunn Guðmundsóttir, in *A History of Icelandic Literature*, ed. by Daisy L. Neijman (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), pp. 64–173 (p. 145).

⁶²² Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, Riddarasögur, 2 (Reykjavík, Háskóli Íslands, 1964), p. 3.

[Many remarkable things we hear told about the venerable lord Hákon Magnusson the king of Norway, especially that he considered fair tales very amusing, and he ordered many knights' sagas translated into Norwegian from Greek and French.]

The written word and the authority of a respected king are invoked, and in doing so, royal approval is understood to be granted to these kinds of stories, romances. On the other hand, the narrator continues his prologue by framing the story as one for young and simple people, contrasting them with older, and perhaps wiser, people:

ok þui weit ek að góðer gamler menn vilja líkja sig ok sína skemtan eftir hans fögrum haatum enn af leggja hlaatur ok hopp danss ok dáraskap ok hégomligt herianskit. Enn til þess at eigi þegi huer at aðrum byrium ver eina boguliga frá sögn bornum ok ofroðum monnum til skemtunar [...] ⁶²³

[and so I know that good old people desire to liken themselves and their entertainment to his fair custom and leave off laughter and leaping, dance and ridicule and vanity. And so that each after the other is not silent we begin a twisting tale for the entertainment of children and unlearned people [...]]

Here the word *barn* [child] is employed, rather than the less explicit phrase *ungir men* [young people] used by *Nítíða saga's* narrator. The pairing of children with *ófróðum mönnum* [unlearned, illiterate, simple people] is also noteworthy, as this connection reinforces the saga's intended audience as people not developed to their potential, either intellectually or physically. That children are the intended audience of *Viktors saga ok Blávus* suggests that similar Icelandic romances, with their adventure and action, may have been thought appropriate as children's entertainment. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson notes that 'some of the [romance saga] authors yield to the temptation to set forth the history of the translation, and in doing so sometimes lay it on rather thick' (as seen above with the

⁶²³ Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, p. 3.

‘graffiti sagas’), but that here, the author ‘follows this custom, but without departing excessively from the way of the truth’.⁶²⁴ By referring to the king and his customs regarding entertainment, the opening of *Viktors saga ok Blávus* is almost immediately more realistic, or believable, but I do not think that ‘departing excessively from [...] the truth’ need equal implausibility or tackiness, as Einar seems to imply. Many approaches to authenticating a saga are valid, and while the former may seem excessive or desperate to some, it serves the same purpose as the latter, arguably, more toned-down, approach employed in defence of *Viktors saga ok Blávus*. O’Connor’s scepticism of interpreting prologues as ironic or necessarily indicative of fiction in the sense of that which is blatantly unrealistic and untrue is helpful here.⁶²⁵ Overall, though, a prologue indicates an anxiety to defend and authenticate the text, which *Nítíða saga* does not share.

Alternatively, *ungir menn* need not refer specifically to children, though they could still be included within a larger audience comprising a certain level or cross-section of society rather than one based strictly on age. The young people could be young adults, the next generation of medieval Icelanders, possibly more progressive than their elders in their literary tastes. *Nítíða saga* might be declaring itself a new text for a new generation, or at least for those people receptive to a new aesthetic in literature—the blossoming genre of romance composed in Iceland by Icelanders for Icelanders—as opposed to the older, established, ‘classic’ family sagas, or indeed imported European romances (arguably self-consciously prestigious in their somewhat exotic origin). Significantly, rather than appeal to old authorities, written or oral, the narrator lets the text speak for itself, in contrast to both many other native Icelandic romances, and to medieval Icelandic writers of history,

⁶²⁴ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, ‘*Viktors saga ok Blávus*: Sources and Characteristics’, p. clxxix.

⁶²⁵ O’Connor, ‘History or Fiction?’, pp. 129–30.

such as the late-eleventh- and early-twelfth-century author of *Íslendingabók*, Ari Þorgilsson ‘inn fróði’ [the wise], who looks to oral sources to authenticate his work.⁶²⁶

In the next few opening words, the narrator further holds his audience’s attention by building on what has already been said. What *ungir menn* have heard is *eitt ævintýr og fagra frásaga*: an adventure (or perhaps even an exemplum) and a lovely tale. The narrator builds the audience’s interest by hinting that what follows will be exciting, good or useful, and also a pleasure to read or hear. Finally, the narrator piques the audience’s interest once more, by at last revealing what the story is about: ‘fra hinum frægasta meykongi er verit hefur j nordur hálfu veralldarinar’. The narrator has now presented in his opening a number of ingredients for a romance adventure story about the most famous maiden-king in the north, seeking to draw in his audience, young and old alike. In introducing the saga, the narrator subtly tries to persuade the intended Icelandic audience of its worth,⁶²⁷ while also hinting at its relevance to them: the saga is not about just any maiden-king, but about one who rules *í norður hálfu veralldarinar*. An Icelandic audience is of course geographically situated in just that part of the world. It is only after Nítíða has been introduced in the remainder of this first sentence that the audience learns precisely where she reigns—‘j aunduegi heimsins j Fracklandi jnu goda’ [in the centre of the world in France the Good].⁶²⁸ Now, the narrator has set the scene, far away from the Iceland in

⁶²⁶ *Íslendingabók* contains many references to oral sources, from the anonymous ‘It is said with accuracy that [...]’ and ‘Wise men have also said that [...]’ to the specific ‘Hallr Órækjason said so’ and ‘[...] in accordance with what Bjarni the Wise, their paternal grandfather, had said, who remembered Þórarinn the lawspeaker and six of his successors’ (Siân Grønlie, trans., *Íslendingabók; Kristini saga: The Book of the Icelanders; The Story of the Conversion* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2006) pp. 4, 5, 11).

⁶²⁷ While this may have been a winning strategy in the late Middle Ages, these same words have alternatively convinced nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics (such as Finnur Jónsson) of this saga’s worthlessness along with the other ‘frivolous’ and non-realistic romances, reinforcing the notion that cultural assumptions and values are reflected in both the literature and its audiences, however receptive they might or might not be.

⁶²⁸ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 3.

which the audience sits and reads, in France; but he has also made *Nítíða's* realm relevant and familiar to Iceland by situating it in such a way that the centre of the world seems just around the corner, or at least in the same region. The narrator has played with his audience's preconceived geographical perceptions in such a way that a location readers may have understood to be a place far away from marginal Iceland now becomes comparable to it. The juxtaposition of the northern hemisphere and the world's centre makes Iceland part of that centre, and a part of Europe.⁶²⁹ Looking back at the opening as a whole, the narrator, in only a couple of sentences, centralizes Europe, and Europeanizes Iceland.⁶³⁰

Different versions of *Nítíða saga*, and particularly later, post-medieval versions, have different openings, which, as with other variants discussed earlier, convey different messages and priorities. A relatively early representative of Group A, Lbs 715 (1670–80) begins: 'Hier *mega* unger menn heýra hýstoriú og fagra frasógú af einre kongs dottúr fagre og frýdre er hiet NITIDA hin fræga' [Here can young people hear a story and beautiful tale of a lovely and fair princess who is called Nitida the Famous].⁶³¹ The narrator in this version likewise introduces the story and mentions a possible intended audience—again, 'young people'—but does so in a less matter-of-fact way. Instead of stating that people 'have heard', as in the version discussed above, the narrator here rather refers to the possibility of hearing the story, with the inclusion of the modal verb *mega* [can].

Alternatively, Group D's Lbs 2786 (1869) focuses at once on the story and the hero: 'Sá meikóngr riedi fyrir norðr løndum, edr norðr álfu heimsins, er Nitida hiet. hún var hin fridasta frægasta og kurteisasta mæR j þann tima' [That maiden-king rules over northern lands, or the northern region of the world, who is called Nitida. She was the prettiest,

⁶²⁹ Barnes, 'Margin vs. Centre'; Barnes, 'Travel and *translatio studii*', pp. 123–39.

⁶³⁰ Sverrir Jakobsson, 'Centre and Periphery'. See also my discussion above in Chapter Four.

⁶³¹ Lbs 715 4to, p. 85.

most famous, and most courteous maiden in that time].⁶³² There is no mention of an audience, and the storyteller's voice is left to the individual reader, whether reading aloud to a group or alone silently.

II: THE NARRATOR CLOSES THE SAGA

It is at the end of the saga that we find probably its most significant comment on the situation of Iceland within Europe, and at the same time one of the most self-conscious of the narrator's many asides. Furthermore, it is one of the most often quoted passages from *Nítíða saga*,⁶³³ and indeed that with which I opened this thesis: 'er og ei audsagt med öfrodre tungu i utlegdum veralldarinnar, so mǫnnum verde skemtelegt, hvor fögnudur vera munde i midiumm heimenum af sliku hoffólke samannkomnu' [It is also not easily said with an unlearned tongue in the outer regions of the world, how it might be entertaining for people, what joy may be in the middle of the world when such courtiers come together].⁶³⁴ The deliberate references to periphery and centre—*í útlegðum veralldarinnar* and *í miðjum heiminum*, respectively—reflect the narrator's view of his place in the world. This statement near the end appears to contradict the saga's earlier view at the opening, portraying Iceland and the Icelanders as not far from Europe and the world's centre in this text's geography, as discussed in Chapter Three. The idea that the Icelandic language is an 'unlearned tongue', seems also to reinforce the notion that Iceland is a marginal backwater while Europe is a central and learned place. But again, that the narrator recognizes Iceland's peripheral geographical location compared to France and the

⁶³² Lbs 2786 8vo, p. 14.

⁶³³ Barnes, 'Margin vs. Centre', p. 111; Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', p. 272; Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction', p. 202.

⁶³⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 36.

rest of Europe indicates his own understanding of European ideas.⁶³⁵ Were the narrator really as ignorant as he claims to be, and especially were the Icelandic language as inadequate as implied, the saga itself might not have been written. Such a modesty topos could also be further invitation for audience participation, encouraging the audience to imagine for themselves, while the description is already being made through the narrator's language of denial as a sort of *occultatio*—in describing the weddings by refusing to describe them fully. The narrator proves his own 'rhetorical gesture of modesty' invalid, by already having crafted the saga using the same language he claims is inappropriate for such a purpose.⁶³⁶ Geraldine Barnes adds that "The two indices of Icelandic marginality delineated by *Nítíða saga*—distance and language—were matters of topical concern in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Iceland":⁶³⁷ the island's increasingly different form of language developing in the late Middle Ages in arguably relative isolation from other Scandinavian languages reinforces Iceland's physical distance from Norway.⁶³⁸ Anxieties about language were likely in the mind of the saga author and/or its later scribes, and these concerns are here placed in the mouth of the narrator. Perhaps such a narrator would be more comfortable using Icelandic to write about Iceland itself. This demonstration of the narrator's self-consciousness about writing in the Icelandic language is one of the best examples of his voice within the saga and the influence he may have thus had on the audience.⁶³⁹

The descriptions of the triple wedding ceremony's splendour immediately preceding the narrator's aside are especially telling, and prove the usefulness of Icelandic

⁶³⁵ Sverrir Jakobsson, 'Centre and Periphery', p. 918.

⁶³⁶ Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', p. 272; Barnes, 'Travel and *translatio studii* in the Icelandic riddarasögur', pp. 138–39.

⁶³⁷ Barnes, 'Margin vs. Centre', p. 111.

⁶³⁸ Braunmüller, 'Language Contacts in the Late Middle Ages and in Early Modern Times'.

⁶³⁹ Fleischman, 'On the Representation of History and Fiction', pp 295–96.

for the purposes of storytelling, and of stories set in particular *í miðjum heiminum* [the centre of the world; here, France]. Immediately preceding this statement, the saga says that ‘þar var allskins skemtun framinn i burtreidumm og hliodfæraslætte, enn þar sem kongarner geingu var nidurbreidt pell og purpure og heidurleg klæde’ [There were all kinds of entertainment consisting of bohout and musical concerts, and where the kings went was spread down costly raiment, and purple- and honour-cloth].⁶⁴⁰ Not only is this a rich depiction of the wedding festivities, but it contains foreign words and courtly activities like tournaments among knights that a truly simple language on the edge of the world may not necessarily be expected to contain, but which are all part of an Icelandic romance vocabulary. The word *burtreið* [bohout, or team tourney, distinct from and not to be confused with ‘joust’]⁶⁴¹ entered Icelandic through medieval French, possibly via German, and is first attested in the thirteenth century; the word and concept likely entered Old Norse through the French romances translated at that time,⁶⁴² although the form of the word, containing the element *reið* [ride] also suggests a degree of folk etymologization: the population must have been actively using and contemplating the word and its meanings for it eventually to have taken such a form,⁶⁴³ considering that tournaments were not something taken up in Iceland, but existed solely in literature. The word *pell* [costly raiment] comes from Latin *pallium* [blanket, bed cover], via either Old English or Middle Low German,⁶⁴⁴ and *purpuri* [purple fabric] also comes from Latin.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴⁰ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 36.

⁶⁴¹ See also footnote 125 in Chapter One, which explains the decision to translate *burtreið* in this way, at the suggestion of my examiners.

⁶⁴² de Vries, p. 65.

⁶⁴³ In arguing for a reconsideration of the dates of early Norse romance translations, Suzanne Marti recently discussed this and other loan words in her recent presentation at the International Saga Conference: ‘Hvenær var Tristrams saga snúið? The Origin and Transmission of the *Riddarasögur*’, paper presented at the Fifteenth International Saga Conference, Aarhus, Denmark, 7 August 2012.

⁶⁴⁴ de Vries, p. 424.

The pair ‘pell og purpuri’ appears in other Icelandic romances including *Sigurðar saga þøgla*,⁶⁴⁶ and so may also be a formulaic way of denoting expensive, beautiful, foreign cloth; in each case, ‘pell og purpuri’ is said to be found, geographically, nowhere near Iceland. The denotations of these words thus show that the narrator has in the Icelandic language the raw materials with which to describe in adequate terms the events of the story; furthermore, other loaned words, as well as many Latinate-looking names appear regularly throughout the saga.⁶⁴⁷ Additionally, the narrator’s protestation itself juxtaposes not only Icelandic and foreign languages like French or Latin, but also native and imported words to refer to ‘the world’ on the edge of which Iceland is supposed to be and of which France is supposed to be the centre: *veröld* and *heimur* both, in this context, mean ‘world’. Only the latter, however, is a native Icelandic word; *veröld* possibly entered Icelandic in the late Middle Ages, perhaps through Old English *weorold*.⁶⁴⁸

A very similar assertion to *Nítíða saga*’s narrator’s false modesty also appears in *Adonias saga*, when the narrator speaks of one of that saga’s many battles: ‘Nu er yfer farit med ofroðligum ordum at s(egia) fra orrostum og efni þess ofridar er gerdizt j milli

⁶⁴⁵ de Vries, p. 429.

⁶⁴⁶ Loth, ed., ‘*Sigurðar saga þøgla*’, pp. 156, 183.

⁶⁴⁷ Latinate personal names include *Alduria*, *Blebarnius* (*Februarius* in most other manuscripts), *Egidia*, *Liforinus*, *Nítíða*, *Virgilius*, and *Ypolitus*. Two of these, *Liforinus* and *Egidia*, occasionally inflect according to Latin grammar: *Liforinus* becomes *Liforino* (Loth, ed., ‘*Nitida saga*’, p. 21), appearing as a second declension masculine dative noun following the Icelandic preposition *af*, which takes the dative; similarly *Liforinus* becomes *Liforini* in the genitive (Loth, ed., ‘*Nitida saga*’, p. 28). The same form *Liforini* elsewhere declines according to Icelandic grammar, as a strong masculine noun in the dative (Loth, ed., ‘*Nitida saga*’, p. 22), where the verb phrase *vita fyrir* takes this case. *Egidia* becomes *Egidiam* (Loth, ed., ‘*Nitida saga*’, p. 35), as a Latin first declension feminine accusative noun, likely because the preposition *eftir* takes that case in Icelandic. The name *Nítíða*, however, never inflects according to Latin grammar, possibly because it is only actually mentioned four times (Loth, ed., ‘*Nitida saga*’, pp. 3, 9, 11, 37). Many place names take Latinate forms as well, as noted in Chapter Three.

⁶⁴⁸ de Vries, p. 657. Interestingly, this word is used in modern Icelandic most often in ecclesiastical writings (Cleasby-Vigfússon, p. 699), as I noted in discussing the saga’s relationship with *Nikulás saga leikara* in Chapter Two.

Palestini og Galicie med Spanis' [Now an account has been given, with unlearned words, to tell about battles and the materials of this warfare which is carried out between Palestine and Galicia against Spain].⁶⁴⁹ It is especially the use of the phrases *ofrodligum ordum* and *j milli Palestini*, compared with *Nítíða saga's ófróðri tungu* and *í miðjum beiminum* that suggests this passage may echo that in *Nítíða saga* (or vice versa). These two texts do seem to be unique in using the adjectives *ófróðr* and *ófróðligr* in this way.⁶⁵⁰ In both cases, the primary concern rests on the adequacy of the words with which the stories have been crafted, and not necessarily the abilities of the author or narrator to work with those words himself. In both sagas, each narrator displays simultaneous confidence—in their own narrating abilities—and doubt—about the words available to them in Icelandic. And just as in *Nítíða saga*, the narrator of *Adonias saga* appeals to the idea that the happenings *í milli*, at the centre of the world,⁶⁵¹ are that much less accessible when related in Icelandic.

Following the narrator's complaint about the difficulty he has describing the wedding scene, we see further evidence of the narrator's voice in a brief reference to the transitory nature of mundane treasures and even, by extension, of life itself. After carefully taking the time to describe the provisions, entertainment, and general festivities, the narrator ends the scene by declaring that 'og nu með því að öll þessa heims dyrd kann skíott að lida, þá voru brudkaupinn utdrúckinn, og hófðingiarnar utleiddar með fögrum fíegiófum' [and because all of this world's splendour can quickly pass away, the wedding

⁶⁴⁹ Agnete Loth, ed., 'Adonias saga', in *LMIR*, III (1963), p. 223.

⁶⁵⁰ See the *DONP*, where across twenty-seven entries *ófróðr* usually modifies *maðr* [man], and there is no apparent pattern for *ófróðligr*. The ten entries for the related adverb *ófróðliga* see it most commonly paired with *spyrja* [to ask].

⁶⁵¹ While Palestine is not explicitly said to be near the centre of the world, it could have been seen as such by a medieval audience on account of its proximity to Jerusalem.

then was over, and the nobles were led out with wonderful gifts].⁶⁵² This seemingly casual statement is concise but telling. It momentarily draws the audience's attention away from the wedding, and even away from the saga itself, to dwell briefly on the transience of life. The key phrase is *öll þessa heims dýrð kann skjótt að líða*, and this is stated as unquestionable fact. It draws almost the entire story preceding it into question, as the text itself is merely fleeting worldly entertainment; yet by presenting the text now in this light, its potential to edify its readers through reflection on the nature of the world and its treasures and entertainments is laid out before the audience, however subtly. The message is so brief, though, that that before the audience has time to dwell on it and fully understand its significance, the story is back in full swing again, with worldly gifts 'i gulle og gimsteinum og gödum vefium' (of gold and gemstones and good woven cloth),⁶⁵³ but the moment has passed—the wedding is over and the guests are parting. The fleeting nature of the message—its brevity—strongly reinforces the message it seeks to convey, that life is transitory. The form of the statement mirrors its function. Through this quotation we see, through the voice of the narrator, an awareness of Christian moralizing diction, and its willingness to employ it, but without actually making any Christian references; this somewhat ironically highlights the saga's lack of religious material, suggesting this to be a conscious and significant choice.

Moving now to the very end of the text, the narrator closes the story in a similar way to its beginning: 'og lykur so þessu æfentyre af hinne frægu Nitida og Livorio konge' [And so ends this adventure of the famous Nítíða and King Liforinus].⁶⁵⁴ While this ending is formulaic, the narrator uses convention to bring the story full-circle and reminds the audience of the saga's main character and the type of story he has presented.

⁶⁵² Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 36.

⁶⁵³ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 36.

⁶⁵⁴ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 37.

The narrator points back at ‘hinne frægu Nitida’, repeating the character tag first applied at the beginning—that she is famous. But the saga does not end exactly as it began: Liforinus has the last word, as he has now joined with Nítíða, not only in marriage, but also politically. Furthermore, the narrator notes again that *Nítíða saga* is an *ævintýr*. In adventure story and fairy-tale fashion, the closing is also conventional and formulaic, just as is the opening, fulfilling the expectations of the genre.⁶⁵⁵ The saga is thus symmetrical, and the audience is here reminded that the saga was called an *ævintýr* at its opening (the word is significantly not used elsewhere in the saga), and prompted to consider whether the story has fulfilled the narrator’s promises in opening and reflect on just what kind of story it has been.

III: THE NARRATOR THROUGHOUT THE SAGA

I now move back to the first section of *Nítíða saga* to consider how the narrator emerges as characteristically self-conscious. The narrator’s first interjection is a remark on Nítíða’s journey: ‘hef eg ei heyrð sagt frá þeirra ferð ne farleingd fyrr en þau taka eyna Visio’ [I have not heard it said about their journey, nor their journey’s length, before they reached the island of Visio].⁶⁵⁶ This forceful aside brings the saga’s action to an abrupt halt and draws attention to the narrator,⁶⁵⁷ although it could also be seen as the narrator deliberately glossing over the action and fast-forwarding it to the destination. The narrator claims complete ignorance of this sea-journey, which though inessential, might have been expected by the audience either to have been included, or else skipped over completely, without any comment. Rather, we have a first-person admission that the narrator knows nothing about its circumstances, and specifically, that nobody has told

⁶⁵⁵ van Nahl, pp. 22–23.

⁶⁵⁶ Loth, ed., ‘Nitida saga’, p. 6.

⁶⁵⁷ van Nahl, p. 191.

him about it.⁶⁵⁸ These specific words suggest three important things. First, that the saga's plot has been *told* to the narrator by a certain source, that is, the narrator has not *read* it anywhere. This may be a useful fiction created to sustain the idea of audience participation and transmission suggested by the text's opening words in the same way that the written sources of other romances are fictive, but these are still important, purposeful fictions. Second, the words suggest that the narrator is setting up a fiction of meticulous adherence to the available facts, refusing to fabricate details he cannot confirm. The third and perhaps most important point is that the narrator is concerned with his reliability and perhaps hopes to gain credibility and thus the confidence of his audience. The emphasis on the aural rather than the written connects this remark to the saga's prologue-less opening, while also complementing another method of validation, through mention that young people have heard. That there should be any eagerness to convey a source for the saga independent of the narrator is further significant. Despite not participating in the tradition of authentication through a prologue, here it nevertheless seems unacceptable simply to have made up the story: it is still assumed, and important, that the narrator has a source.⁶⁵⁹ *Nítíða saga's* narrator may feel uneasy about the saga's truth-value thus far, especially after having related Nítíða's description of Visio's location 'vt vnder heims skautid. þeirra landa er menn hafa spurn af [out past the corner of the world of these lands which people have report of], not to mention the magical objects she expects to find there. Further, considering that romances like *Nítíða saga* have been called *lygisögur* [lie-sagas] in modern scholarship,⁶⁶⁰ as well as medieval writings,⁶⁶¹ the narrator (or author)

⁶⁵⁸ See Schach, pp. 138–40: 'Occasionally saga writers state that they have or have not heard reports of certain information, or that they can or cannot truthfully make certain assertions' (p. 138).

⁶⁵⁹ Fleischman, 'On the Representation of History and Fiction', pp 295–96.

⁶⁶⁰ Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction', pp. 190–204; Glauser, 'Lygisaga', p. 398; Jakob Benediktsson, 'Lygisögur'.

may have here had this in mind. While not imploring readers to believe that everything related so far as well as what lies ahead is *true* in the sense of its being *real* or *historical*, the narrator here seems at least to desire that his story be taken seriously, and enjoyed regardless of its fictionality, moving away from a black and white distinction between fact and fiction, truth and falsehood, that some readers might wish to employ.⁶⁶² The saga is asking to be embraced for what it is: fiction.

However, for most of the saga the narrator is relatively quiet, and only punctuates his story with the set phrase ‘Nu er at seigia’ [Now it is to be said] every now and then. This interjection directs the plot and marks its phases, reminding the audience of the narrator’s presence. The phrase works primarily as a means of transition from one scene to another, no matter how unrelated the scenes may be, thus minimizing narrative disruption. That the interjection is an impersonal construction simultaneously draws attention to the narrator and distances him from the act of personally telling the story. However, the phrase also highlights the narrator’s control. While audiences can only very minimally shape the story they read or hear—for example (if reading) by choosing to skip over a sentence, paragraph, or section, or (if listening) by leaving the room or choosing not to pay attention—the story still exists in full, in the form decided on by the narrator (and scribe). Further, that this transitional phrase is in the present tense and begins with *nú* [now] rather than *þá* [then] also demonstrates the narrator’s voice surfacing in the text, for even though the saga switches rather freely from past to present tenses throughout the text, as is normal in medieval Icelandic prose, the immediacy of *nú* and present tense *er* [is] suggests a narrative urgency. The phrase *nú er að segja* appears ten

⁶⁶¹ The term appears in *Sturlunga saga*, where the sense is clearly that of ‘fictional tales’, or romances; on this see Foote, pp. 65–83. The term also in *Jómsvíkinga saga*, as preserved in AM 291 4to (c. 1275–1300), where the sense is rather ‘false reports’ or ‘rumours’.

⁶⁶² Fleischman, ‘On the Representation of History and Fiction’, pp. 305–06.

times over the course of the saga, and at each instance, the narrator's presence comes crisply back into focus. When used, the phrase also reminds silent readers that the saga might be performed or read aloud in a lively manner, and it reminds reader and listening audience alike of the narrative form of the tale. The saga is alive, revived and renewed at each reading, yet it has also been crafted by an author, whose hand becomes present here in the voice of the narrator.⁶⁶³ The saga could be told or written without such transitional phrases, for they are not a *part* of the story, but of the narrative art used to *compose* the story, signalling the involvement of an outside force—author, scribe, or narrator—on the tale. O'Connor notes that in these types of brief asides a 'typical saga-narrator speaks as if carrying the authority of a tradition from the past, and he usually expresses himself in passive or impersonal constructions [...] or, less frequently, in the first person plural'.⁶⁶⁴ In such asides the first person plural is, notably, much more common than the first person singular, and the former is sometimes also used for the latter in *Nítíða saga*. In the middle of the saga's third section, the narrator addresses the reader in order to make the transition from the present scene to the next: 'látum Jn(ga) kong nu huilast vm tima. Enn vendum sogunni j annan stad og seigium af sonum Solldans kongs' [let us now leave King Ingi for a while, and we turn the saga to another place and tell of King Soldán's sons].⁶⁶⁵ Here, instead of the singular, ostensibly referring to himself only, the narrator now either includes his audience by using the first person plural *látum* [we leave] and *vendum* [we turn], or is using it as an alternative for the first person singular. Either reading is plausible, but I favour the first for its inclusiveness and emphasis on interaction. Such use of the first person plural not only provides a sense of immediacy for the audience and the feeling that the saga is directed at each individual reader or listener, but also

⁶⁶³ Schach, pp. 132–36, 150–51.

⁶⁶⁴ O'Connor, 'History or Fiction?', p. 120.

⁶⁶⁵ Loth, ed., 'Nitida saga', p. 18.

allows the narrator to involve his audience in the crafting of the saga. By including readers in this way, emphasis is also placed on the idea that the reading of the saga is a collective experience involving interaction with others. Simultaneously individual and collective, saga reading is an active experience by which individual appreciation is validated, as well as collective enjoyment. It is not the narrator alone who turns from one scene to the next, but also each reader, whose active involvement in the saga—reading or listening, that is, engaging—allows the story to unfold. Without having to prove anything to his audience anymore (considering his earlier arguable unease regarding his reliability), the narrator can now, in one sense, show his appreciation towards his audience by including them in the saga's unfolding.⁶⁶⁶

III: CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have considered the characterization of *Nítíða saga's* anonymous narrator by looking at the asides and comments he makes throughout the text in the first person. These discussions thus complete my consideration of the saga's characters in this second part of the thesis, which began with my analyses of the hero and other characters in Chapters Four and Five. Having seen the narrator's interventions in the opening and closing of the saga, and having compared these with the prologues and endings of other Icelandic romances, I have shown how *Nítíða saga's* narrator is characterized as the teller of this version of the tale, one with his own personality, opinions, and doubts, through comments on the truth-value and usefulness of this story. He reinforces the fact that his saga is centred on the maiden-king Nítíða, and while his confidence in the tale seems, overall, greater than that of many other narrators of Icelandic romance (as seen in their prologues), we have seen that there is still in *Nítíða saga's* narrator a desire to portray the

⁶⁶⁶ Schach, pp. 132–33.

text as a real and worthy story, if not necessarily a true, historical one. The use of the first person plural, especially, both includes the saga's audience in the story's creation and also reminds the reader that the saga-telling or -writing process is an active and living process. No matter what the saga's plot, at a deeper level, the saga shows, by means of its process of composition alone, the mindset of the Icelandic individual who chose to record either what he envisioned in his own mind as an interesting and entertaining story or what he had already read or heard told by another. The saga only comes into being through the actions of individuals; it is brought to life and lives at each reading and retelling, and so it also requires the participation of audiences, as I first discussed in Chapter One's consideration of different manuscript versions of the saga. Further, not only do such transitional phrases ease the shift from one scene to the next, but they are deliberate statements that characterize the narrator, from thanks to his audience and their inclusion in the creative process of shaping the journey through the saga to comments on the saga's nature itself. Whether coercive or not, proud or humble, the narrator's words display his confidence, and maintain credibility with his audience. This discussion thus rounds out the final section of the thesis. The narrator's confidence in the story he relates, along with the saga's lack of a prologue demonstrates one further aspect of *Nítíða saga's* unconventional nature as a late medieval Icelandic romance.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the course of this thesis I have considered the late medieval Icelandic romance *Nítíða saga* from a variety of perspectives, with an overall aim to demonstrate how the saga challenges and plays with some of the norms of the Icelandic romance genre in which it finds itself. From the saga's unconventional portrayal of geography to its strong female hero and other important female characters, *Nítíða saga* approaches romance from a unique point of view and asks its audience to reconsider not only what it means to be a romance in Iceland but also what it means to be an Icelander in Scandinavia and Europe in the later Middle Ages and into the post-Reformation era. In the first two chapters of Part One, I discussed *Nítíða saga* in terms of what I called its 'external contexts', that is, the physical manuscripts preserving the saga over hundreds of years and the intertextual connections demonstrating some of the relationships the saga has with other Icelandic romances. In Chapter One, I grouped *Nítíða saga*'s manuscripts into six textual versions and highlighted the value of textual variation in manuscripts from different times and in some cases different parts of Iceland (notably the case for Group A in Western Iceland and Group E in the Eastfjords), and the diversity of scribal attitudes towards and interpretations of the medieval saga through case studies of three post-medieval manuscript versions. In Chapter Two, I considered some of the intertextual relationships evident in *Nítíða saga* through case studies of *Clári saga*, which likely influenced *Nítíða saga*'s author; and *Nikulás saga leikara*, which was in turn likely influenced by *Nítíða saga*. I demonstrated how *Nítíða saga* relates to these and other texts—both romance and religious—in the Christian literary-cultural milieu in which the saga was produced and from which its author drew inspiration.

In Chapter Three I considered the saga's setting and the worldviews it exhibits—what I termed its 'internal contexts'—in which *Nítíða saga*'s challenging of some of the norms of romance first comes to the forefront. I discussed how *Nítíða saga*'s portrayal of geography shifts the world's centre closer to Iceland, along with the text's presentation of public and private space on a smaller scale. I therefore provided examples of *Nítíða saga* challenging certain romance norms so as to call into question the validity of its genre and, more broadly, to engage with the wider European cultural community from and with which this and other romances emerge and engage. In the first section of the thesis I thus focused on the contexts that would enrich later literary-analytical chapters.

In Part Two I considered *Nítíða saga*'s characters and their relationships with one another. In Chapter Four I discussed the portrayal of the saga's female hero, whose negotiations and manoeuvres through the world of bridal-quest allow her to emerge in marriage as an equal with her husband. In Chapter Five I showed how the characterization of minor figures works alongside the depiction of the protagonist further to overturn the conventional understanding of an Icelandic romance hero. In Chapter Six I discussed the characterization of the narrator, whose confidence as well as the saga's lack of a prologue demonstrated two final aspects of *Nítíða saga*'s challenging attitudes towards late medieval Icelandic romance. In this second part of the thesis I thus focused on the way the characters propel the story forward and how each character's place in the text is significant and purposefully developed by the saga's author in the first instance, and by its many scribes subsequently.

Both parts of this thesis have in turn uncovered aspects of the text, its composition, reception, and reconfiguration across time and space in medieval and early modern Iceland. It is *Nítíða saga*'s questioning of romance norms and challenging of its place in the genres of maiden-king and bridal-quest romance that arguably have allowed

this medieval tale to endure generation after generation among a society whose place in the world was often questioned and lacked stability under the rule of others during the later Middle Ages, the Reformation, and afterwards. The appropriation of a European identity through what could be called the cultural colonization of European romance can be said to have reached its apex in *Nítíða saga*, which reinvents both Icelandic romance in its early feminist outlook and also European romance in its uniquely nordic attitudes. The value of *Nítíða*'s story spoke to Icelanders long after its composition, and with each reworking of the text—from the shifts in perspective and focus seen in many of the different versions of the saga instigated by largely anonymous early modern scribes to its radical rewriting in one of the youngest surviving manuscripts penned by the extremely prolific scribe Magnús Jónsson í Tjaldanesi—appreciation of this saga arguably grew and inspired further reworkings, many of which (particularly the poetic *rímur*) I have not been able to consider in this thesis. *Nítíða saga* is evidently a timeless story that speaks to new audiences despite, or perhaps sometimes because of, its medieval Icelandic composition; its unique representations of female relationships and the hero *Nítíða* as well as its continual challenging of other romance norms and conventions ensured its survival and popularity up to the present day.

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