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Presenting traditions in *Orkneyinga saga*

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In the introduction to his edition of *Orkneyinga saga*, Sigurður Nordal drew attention to the detailed and precise account of events in its second half which suggested to him that it had been written down not long after those twelfth-century events.¹ The two most memorable characters in this latter part of the saga are Rognvaldr kali Kolsson, Earl of Orkney, and Sveinn Ásleifarson, variously his friend and his enemy. Nordal was not surprised at the detailed treatment accorded Rognvaldr, surmising that his poems, quoted liberally in the saga, helped to preserve the events of his life in memory. However, he thought that the saga was unreasonably preoccupied with Sveinn Ásleifarson, concluding that this was because its author had been unduly influenced by traditions originating from Sveinn himself, which had reached him through no more than a couple of intermediate links. Nordal noted three characteristics of the saga which suggest that much of its latter part derived from Sveinn's own account of events:

- (1) there are two references to such an account (in Chapters 75 and 99)
- (2) there is a preoccupation with Sveinn's point of view
- (3) there is a mass of colourful detail in the parts of the narrative dealing with Sveinn

Nordal's brief comments formed part of his discussion of the saga's date of composition and he did not explore the ways in which these Sveinian traditions were incorporated into or modified in the saga, except to suggest that the author's relative independence of Sveinn shows he had not known him personally.²

The text and the traditions

Orkneyinga saga is a long saga with a complicated textual history.³ There is no one medieval manuscript that contains a complete text of the saga and the most complete version, found in a dismembered state in the late fourteenth-century compilation *Flateyjarbók*, is not the best: where we have parallel texts in the fragmentary manuscripts, they may preserve alternative, and often better, readings. My starting-point for this paper is partly a recognition of the idealised nature of the reconstructed text as presented by editors such as Sigurður Nordal and Finnþogi Guðmundsson, and partly a hypothesis that the disjointed and unfinished quality of the saga is a characteristic of the text from the start, even before its more mechanical fragmentation in the manuscript tradition. This is a saga which lays bare its skeleton more clearly than most, and in which it is possible to study the processes by which a variety of source materials were turned into saga. The shifts of narrative mood within the text reflect this variety of sources, and it is my contention that such shifts are 'effects of the actual genesis of the work'.⁴ Borrowing an idea from Gérard Genette, I would therefore like to explore what might be called the 'polymodality' of *Orkneyinga saga*, in which a multiple 'narrative position' contrasts with 'the simple omniscience of the classical novel', and to some extent of other sagas.⁵

The second half of the saga (from Chapter 58) is a particularly fascinating example of a sequence of narrative shifts which suggests the intertwining of two more-or-less clearly-identifiable traditions, the Sveinian account recognised by Nordal and an account based possibly on 'an annotated collection of poetry associated with Rognvaldr Kali'.⁶ The saga also attracted a supplementary account of Haraldr Maddaðarson.⁷ A full study of this second half of the saga still remains to be written, but as a preliminary I will concentrate on Chapters 90-104 to explore the implications of Nordal's view of *Orkneyinga saga* as an account of events that took place within living memory (if we accept the scholarly consensus that the saga was first written ca. 1200),⁸ deriving at least in part from the account of people who were involved in those events.

The cast of characters

Chapters 90-104 show the final shakedown (in the years 1151-8) which established Haraldr Maddaðarson as sole Earl of Orkney (he went on to rule for a further 48 years and died in 1206). There are four main players in this section, Haraldr

himself, his two rival earls, Rognvaldr kali Kolsson and Erlendr Haraldsson, and that great earlmaker, Sveinn Ásleifarson. Sveinn had smoothed Rognvaldr's path by kidnapping his earlier rival Páll Hákonarson (Chapters 74-6), and two years later an agreement was made that also gave the then five-year-old Haraldr the title of earl (Chapter 77). Erlendr, a grandson of Hákon Pálsson (father of the deposed Páll), took advantage of Rognvaldr's absence in the Holy Land to make his own claim to be an earl. The final act of this drama is precipitated when Rognvaldr returns from his pilgrimage and the earldom is clearly too small to hold all three of them.

The three earls and Sveinn are presented successively in Chapters 90-92. Chapter 90 shows Rognvaldr returning to Orkney from Norway after his pilgrimage. Even before his return he hears of the 'ófriðr mikill' [great dissension] at home, with everyone flocking to one of two opposing factions, that of Haraldr, and that of Erlendr backed by Sveinn. The stage for conflict is set. Just as a play might begin with an exposition, so Chapter 91 begins analeptically: 'Nú skal frá því segja, hvat til tíðenda varð í Orkneyjum, meðan Rognvaldr jarl var í útforinni' [Now it shall be told, what happened in the Orkneys while Earl Rognvaldr was abroad]. Chapter 91 then relates how Haraldr was kidnapped by the marauding Norwegian king Eysteinn Haraldsson and forced to ransom himself by acknowledging Norwegian overlordship. Chapter 92 relates how Erlendr sees his opportunity when Rognvaldr is abroad and enlists the support of both the Scottish and Norwegian kings in his claim on the earldom (or part of it). Sveinn joins Erlendr, having come to a settlement with him in the matter of a long-standing feud.

The staging

The stage is set, the characters have been marshalled. As in a drama, the actors in this story make moves that are controlled by someone else's interpretation of the action. In chapters 92-93 it gradually becomes clear that the action as it appears to the audience is being controlled by Sveinn Ásleifarson. This character's control of the moves is revealed in several aspects of the narrative: a precise chronology, an increased use of numerical detail and a preoccupation with Sveinn's 'point of view'.

Frequent references to exact dates and periods of time provide a backbone for the narration. Thus, after preliminaries, the action in Chapter 92 takes us from 'Óðinsdag í efstu viku' [the Wednesday before Easter], through Easter itself to 'Míkálmessumorgin' [Michaelmas morning], and up to just before Christmas. Along the way, we are told that Sveinn spent a month with Malcolm, King of Scots, and

that Árni Hrafnsson's shipmates 'leituðu hans tvá daga⁹ [searched for him for two days]. Chapter 93 extends from 'inn tíunda dag jóla' [the tenth day of Christmas] through the spring, summer and autumn of the following year, and up to Christmas, when Earl Rognvaldr returned to Orkney.

There are regular references to the numbers of ships and men involved in the action, and exact details are given of payments. Chapter 93 is particularly rich in such details, as the following examples demonstrate:

Haraldr jarl . . . hafði fjögur skip ok tíu tigi manna
[Earl Haraldr . . . had four ships and one hundred men]

Þeir Haraldr jarl drápu þar tvá menn . . . en þeir tóku höndum fjóra menn
[Earl Haraldr and his men killed two men there . . . and they captured four men]

Þeir Anakol ok Þorsteinn Rognuson fóru yfir á Nes með tuttugu menn á skútu
[Anakol and Þorsteinn Rognuson crossed over to Caithness with twenty men on a light ship]

Þá skiptu þeir Anakol liði sínu ok gengu tíu til sævar . . . en aðrir tíu gengu á bæinn
[Anakol and his men divided their troop so that ten went to the shore . . . and the other ten went to the farmstead]

hann keypti at Beruvíkrmönnum hundraði marka silfrs
[he paid the men of Berwick 120 marks of silver]

Þeir fóru fjórtán skipum at leita þeira
[They sailed in fourteen ships to look for them]

skip váru fjórtán saman
[there were fourteen ships altogether]

riðu tólf menn í móti þeim
[there were twelve men riding towards them]

Many of the above details are associated with Sveinn's actions and movements. Some details that appear at first to derive from an omniscient narrator turn out to have come from Sveinn. Thus, the references to fourteen ships, above, come when Sveinn robs Knútr, a wealthy merchant of Berwick, who sends fourteen ships to chase him. Later, we are told that 'Sveinn var allra manna skyggnastr, ok er hann hugði at, sá hann, at skip váru fjórtán saman' [Sveinn had keener sight than anyone, and when he looked, he saw that there were fourteen ships altogether]. The number of ships involved in this chase must in fact come from the observant Sveinn himself, and this is underscored by the immediately preceding anecdote of the watchmen who could not work out what it was they were seeing. Another event which is, literally, seen through Sveinn's eyes is the attack in Chapter 92 by Sveinn and his men on Harald's tax collectors: 'Þá sá þeir, at byrðingr fór austan of Pétlandsfjörð; þóttisk Sveinn vita, at þat myndi vera menn Haralds jarls' [Then they saw that there was a cargo ship sailing west through the Pentland Firth; Sveinn was quite sure that it was Earl Harald's men]. Sveinn's clear sight extends to prophetic powers: Chapter 93 begins with his statement at a Christmas feast that 'Þat er ætlun mín, at nú sé Haraldr jarl á för til eyjanna' [I believe that Earl Haraldr is now on his way to the islands], and he is proved right, despite the protestations of his followers that the weather is too bad for this to be true.

There is also a preoccupation with the reaction of other characters to Sveinn that amounts to giving us his point of view. Sveinn is well-received by the King of Scots, and all meetings seem to end with Sveinn having his way, e.g.:

þá fór Sveinn heim til bús síns, en bað jarl vera eigi at óvarara,
þótt þeir skilði. Ok svá gerði jarl
[then Sveinn went home to his estate, telling the earl to keep up
his vigilance even after they parted. And the earl did so]

Once we become aware how much of these events is filtered through Sveinn's consciousness, it becomes possible to link to him even those events which are not obviously told through his eyes. Events involving Erlendr and his followers are naturally linked to Sveinn because of his support for Erlendr's power-play at this point. A case in point (in Chapter 93) is Anakol's rescue of his brother Arnfinnr from the clutches of Haraldr by taking a hostage Eiríkr, whom he said 'myndi eigi fyrr lauss látinn en þeir Arnfinnr kæmi heilir til Erlends jarls; ok þat gekk eptir því, sem mælt var' [would not be released before Arnfinnr and his men returned to Earl Erlendr in one piece; and it was done as he said]. This same Arnfinnr may indeed have been the

source of the account of Haraldr and his men taking shelter in Orkahaugr during a storm and how two of them went mad there. The account in Chapter 92 of how Haraldr and his men saw the approaching attack of Sveinn and Erlendr leads into a reference to an otherwise unknown eyewitness (Þorgeirr, in the church) which counterbalances the impression that we are experiencing the attack from Haraldr's point of view.¹⁰ Even Chapter 91, which appears to give information that could only have been known to Haraldr and King Eysteinn of Norway (and an omniscient narrator), could be traced to the Sveinn/Erlendr camp, through Erlendr himself, who also approached King Eysteinn (Chapter 92) and was granted Haraldr's portion of the islands, a fact which he lost no time in telling Sveinn.

Thus it is possible, though not necessary, to trace all the events of Chapters 91-93 back to a tradition ultimately deriving from Sveinn, and seemingly filtered through his consciousness. Conversely, it would not be possible to trace all of the events in these chapters back to any one of the other three main characters. If these chapters are based on a single tradition, it must be both a Sveinian one and an Orcadian one. This link is made clear at the end of Chapter 92, when Haraldr, defeated, retires to Scotland with 'fátt Orkneyinga' [few Orcadians], while Erlendr and Sveinn hold an assembly in Kirkwall, attended by 'böendr . . . of allar Eyjar' [freemen from all the (Orkney) Isles].

The drama

With the end of Chapter 93 the analepsis is completed, as is indicated by the narrative marker 'sem fyrr var ritat' [as was written previously] referring back to Chapter 90. Thus the exposition is finished and the drama can begin. Chapters 94-104 describe how first Erlendr and then Rǫgnvaldr are picked off, leaving Haraldr in sole power in Orkney and Caithness. The complicated and shifting alliances and enmities (involving minor characters as well as the four major ones) do not allow a straightforward, single-strand narrative. Nevertheless, it can be shown that the action continues to be interpreted by Sveinn up to chapter 101. It is most useful to consider the action chapter by chapter, not least because of Sveinn's shifting role in the events.

Chapter 94 begins with attempts to reach an agreement between Rǫgnvaldr and Erlendr to divide the earldom and oppose Haraldr. Then Rǫgnvaldr and Haraldr reach agreement despite an attack by Haraldr's supporter Þorbjörn klerkr. Sveinn and Erlendr attack the other two earls, but Rǫgnvaldr is hidden by an Icelandic poet so only

Haraldr suffers. Sveinn again warns Erlendr to take care, but despite this he is killed in an attack by Rognvaldr and Haraldr and his men swear their allegiance to them.

As usual, the narrative alternates between an apparently panoramic and omniscient perspective, and an orientation closely associated with Sveinn, and we can find that what appears to be the former is in fact the latter. Thus, when Haraldr returns from Norway with seven ships, we are told that three of them were driven off course to Shetland. But when they are captured there by Erlendr, it becomes clear that the detail is significant from Sveinn and Erlendr's point of view. And when Sveinn and Erlendr sail south to meet Haraldr, they are similarly affected by the weather, but this is only significant to them and not to the other side (or even to the plot). The scene contains detailed description of the weather, and the focus stays with Sveinn rather than Erlendr when they are separated:¹¹

Heldu þeir þá þegar suðr í Eyjar á fimm skipum ok fengu í Dynrøst straua váðvæna ok storm veðrs, ok skilði þar með þeim . . . ok hugðu þeir jarl tyndan. Heldu þeir þaðan suðr undir Sandey, ok lá þar fyrir Erlendr jarl með þrjú skip, ok var þar fagnafundur mikill.

[They at once sailed south to the (Orkney) Isles on five ships. They encountered perilous currents and stormy weather at Sumburgh Roost, where they parted . . . and they thought the earl was lost. Then they sailed south from there below Sanday, where Earl Erlendr lay at anchor with three ships: they were delighted to meet again.]

And when there is a shift to give us some detail about Haraldr, this is clearly marked in the narrative: 'En þat er at segja frá ferðum Haralds jarls, at hann kom í Þórsá ok hafði sex skip' [It can be told about Earl Harald's journeys, that he came into Thurso with six ships]. It is characteristic that when Rognvaldr and Haraldr meet in the castle at Thurso, to talk alone, we never really find out what transpired between them, suggesting that the narrator is not omniscient, but dependent on the information available (to Sveinn and Erlendr?) by eyewitness report (such as the immediately following attack by Þorbjorn klerkr). We are told that Sveinn and Erlendr left Thurso with seven ships, and that Rognvaldr and Haraldr 'lögðu þá skipum sínum til Skálpeiðs' [directed their ships towards Scapa Flow], but not how many ships they had until Sveinn and Erlendr hear about it: 'Par spurðu þeir, at jarlar lágu við Skálpeið fjórtán skipum' [There they heard that the earls were lying at anchor in Scapa Flow

with fourteen ships]. There are frequent references to Sveinn's decisions made on behalf of Erlendr, underscoring the latter's foolishness which leads to his death, despite Sveinn's last-minute attempt to avert it: 'sendi hann Margað Grímsson til jarls ok tvá menn aðra ok bað hann gaum gefa at ráðum hans' [he sent Margaðr Grímsson and two other men to the earl and told him to pay attention to his advice], but he knows it is futile. His comment anticipates the transfer of his allegiance to another earl: 'en þat þykki mér uggligt, at ek þurfa skamma stund at gera ráð fyrir jarli þessum' [and I fear that I will not long be needing to advise this earl]. Although Sveinn was not present at the attack on Erlendr, we are left in no doubt, at the beginning of Chapter 95, that he was fully informed about it:

Eptir fall Erlends jarls fór Sveinn Ásleifarson til Rennudals ok fann þar þá Margað, ok kunnu þeir honum gørla at segja frá þeim tíðendum, er gørzk høfðu í Daminsey.

[After the death of Earl Erlendr, Sveinn Ásleifarson went to Rendall where he found Margaðr and his men, who were able to tell him accurately about those events which had happened in Damsay.]

Chapter 95 begins with Sveinn's revenge on a man who boasts of having killed Erlendr. He is reconciled with the two surviving earls, but it is immediately clear that Røgnvaldr goes out of his way not to provoke Sveinn, while Haraldr and Sveinn quickly get embroiled in a dispute. The chapter ends with a scene in which Sveinn attempts to kill Jón vængr, Haraldr's steward.

It is in this chapter that the Sveinian perspective on events is clearest. The chapter makes extensive use of focalisation, with references to Sveinn's sensory perceptions showing him as the 'character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective',¹² despite the consistently anonymous and apparently omniscient third-person narration. Thus, Sveinn and his companions hide on a farm in the dark, where they hear a certain Erlendr boasting of having killed Earl Erlendr, 'Ok er Sveinn heyrði þetta, hleypr hann inn í húsit at þeim' [And when Sveinn heard this, he ran into the house to attack them]. When Sveinn confronts Haraldr at his own farm on Gairsay, it is clear that he does not quite know what he is coming to, and the truth is revealed to us as it is to him:

kómu síð um kveldit. Þeir sá eld í bakhúsi; fór Sveinn þagat til. Vildi hann, at þeir tæki eldinn ok bæri at skálanum ok brenndi

bœinn ok jarl inni. Sveinn Blákarason . . . latti þessa mest ok kallaði vera mega, at jarl væri eigi á bœnum. . . . Hljópu þeir menn þá upp, er í skálanum váru, ok kómu aprt hurðu. Urðu þeir Sveinn þá varir, at jarl var eigi á bœnum.

[they arrived late in the evening. They saw a fire in the bake-house; Sveinn went to investigate. He wanted them to get the fire and carry it to the farmhouse and burn the farm with the earl in it. Sveinn Blákarason . . . tried hardest to prevent this and said it was possible that the earl was not at the farm. . . . Then the men who were in the farmhouse jumped up and shut the door. Then Sveinn and his men became aware that the earl was not at the farm.]

Sveinn is prevented from burning his own house with his own wife and daughters in it.

A more complex scene occurs in the confrontation between Haraldr and Sveinn around *Hellisey*, starting with their mutual recognition: 'ok sá þá hvárir aðra ok kenndu' [and each group saw and recognised the other]. When Sveinn sees Haraldr following him, he hides in the cave from which the island took its name. Then we temporarily see things through Haraldr's eyes:

Þeir Haraldr jarl fóru at leita þeira um daginn um eyrna ok fundu þá eigi; þeir sá ok skipafarar engar frá eyjunni. Þetta undruðusk þeir mjök; þótti þeim ólíkligt, at Sveinn myndi hafa sokkit niðr. [Earl Haraldr and his men went to search for them around the island during the day, but did not find them; neither did they see any ships leave the island. They were amazed at this; they thought it unlikely that Sveinn had gone down.]

But this shift of focalisation is illusory for it turns out that even the reactions of Haraldr and his men are filtered through Sveinn: 'Þeir Sveinn höfðu heyrð viðræðu þeira jarls ok hans manna' [Sveinn and his men had heard the conversation of the earl and his men]. This last sentence (which comes after Haraldr has gone away, still puzzled) has no function other than to remind us who is interpreting the story.

The final scene in this chapter also involves Sveinn once again concealing himself on a farm, and hearing the insults of Jón vængr through a thin wall: 'Ok er Sveinn heyrði þetta, þá mátti hann eigi standask ok þreif til vápna sinna ok hljóp at

laundurum' [And when Sveinn heard this, then he was not able to restrain himself, and grabbed his weapons and ran at the secret door].

Chapter 96 follows the shifting visual perceptions of Sveinn and Rognvaldr in their encounter on South Ronaldsay (there are six occurrences of the verb *sjá* [see] and one of *kenna* [recognise] in this short chapter). But the encounter is framed by Sveinn's perceptions: he sees the arrival of Rognvaldr's ship at the beginning of the scene, and he sees Rognvaldr raise the shield of peace at the end of it. And Rognvaldr's seeing is as observed by Sveinn from his vantage point:

en þeir Sveinn váru á hæð nokkurri ok gryttu þaðan á menn jarls.
Ok er þeir sá þat af skipinu, brutu menn upp vápn sín. En er
þeir Sveinn sá þat, hljópu þeir af hæðinni
[and Sveinn and his men were on a certain hill from which they
threw stones at the earl's men. And when they (Rognvaldr and
his men) saw that from their ship, they brought out their
weapons. And when Sveinn and his men saw that, they ran
down from the hill]

Chapter 97 shows Sveinn making peace with both Rognvaldr and Haraldr, and the scene showing his encounter with the latter is almost a repeat of the narrative technique of Chapter 96, with alternating references to what Sveinn saw and what Haraldr saw, ending in a storm that forces them to share a bed that night. The scene is not quite so clearly visualised from Sveinn's standpoint as in Chapter 96, but coming immediately after it, there can be no doubt that the main character in all this is Sveinn, and that he is the link between all these episodes. Sveinn's control of events is reflected in his dismissive reaction to rumours that Haraldr did not plan to keep their agreement, and Rognvaldr's final comment in the chapter to Jón vængr that he would have no peace from either Sveinn or Kolbeinn hrúga if he harmed a hair of Óláfr Sveinsson's head.

Chapters 98-99 tell of renewed efforts to make peace between Sveinn and Haraldr, encouraged by Rognvaldr. Sveinn is still clearly the central character and the narrative follows him closely, but this is not intensified by revealing events through his eyes, indeed the narrator provides a rare external view of him: 'Þeir Rognvaldr jarl ok Sveinn stóðu hjá kirkjudurunum, meðan seglit var út borit . . . ok var Sveinn heldr ófrynligr, er þeir báru út seglit' [Earl Rognvaldr and Sveinn were standing by the

church door as the sail was carried out . . . and Sveinn was frowning rather as they carried out the sail].

This external view indicates that we are moving away from a narrative focalised through Sveinn. Although he still has a part to play in some of the remaining chapters, he is no longer a central character, except in the accounts of his viking voyages in Chapters 100 and 101, which are told briefly and without any special narrative characteristics.

Polymodality: 'Rognvalds saga'

So far, it may have seemed as if the purpose of this paper was to substantiate J. Storer Clouston's claim that *Orkneyinga saga* 'is practically the story of Sweyn's adventures.' However, Clouston qualified this statement by excepting from it 'the chapters dealing with Rognvald's crusade and its preliminaries, and then again the dramatic episode of his murder', and these are both important qualifications, though for different reasons.¹³

There is no doubt that Sveinn Ásleifarson dominates much of the latter half of *Orkneyinga saga*. The examples given above of perspective, emphasis and detail pointing to Sveinn could be multiplied from earlier chapters of the saga. Yet Sveinn does not have it all his own way, for substantial parts of the saga concentrate on Rognvaldr. He is dominant enough, in some parts of the saga at least, for some scholars to feel that he overshadows Sveinn: Alexander Taylor thought that an 'oral Saga of Earl Rognvald Kali . . . that has survived two generations' telling unusually well' was the main source for Chapters 58-108, and scarcely mentions Sveinn.¹⁴ Finnbogi Gudmundsson inclined to the Taylorian view, noting that Rognvaldr's story is the 'main strand' of *Orkneyinga saga*,¹⁵ and giving Rognvaldr's crusade the bulk of his attention in discussing the second half of the saga. For Paul Bibire, too, 'Earl Rognvaldr Kali of Orkney . . . is the central figure of the latter part of *Orkneyinga saga*'.¹⁶

It is likely that the parts of the saga dealing with Rognvaldr are derived from 'an annotated collection of poetry associated with Earl Rognvaldr Kali'.¹⁷ This use of a different type of source is reflected in the narrative technique. Despite the interest in Rognvaldr, there is not the same kind of detail in the sections dealing with him as there is in the Sveinian accounts. Apart from Chapter 67, which is quite detailed in both chronology and numbers, we get such details in the Rognvaldian sections either when his actions are closely entwined with those of Sveinn (Chapters 84, 94), or

when the narrative is clearly based on verses (Chapters 85-86). We rarely get a sense of seeing things through Rognvaldr's eyes. When we do, it is either because Sveinn is seeing the same thing (Chapter 97: 'þá sá þeir sigling Haralds' [then they saw Haraldr sail]) or because it is clearly derived from a verse, as in the beginning of Chapter 72:

Sunnudag hlyddi Rognvaldr jarl tíðum þar í þorpinu, ok stóðu þeir úti hjá kirkjunni. Þá sá þeir, hvar gengu sextán menn, slyppir ok kollóttir; þeim þóttu þeir undarliga búnir. Jarlsmenn ræddu um, hverir vera myndi. Þá kvað jarl vísu:

[On Sunday, Earl Rognvaldr attended the service there in the hamlet, and they were standing outdoors by the church. Then they saw sixteen men pass by, unarmed and bald; they thought they were strangely attired. The earl's men discussed who they could be. Then the earl recited a verse:]

Chapter 77 also begins with Rognvaldr observing some curious-looking clerics:

Þat var inn sétta dag jóla, at skip var sét fara sunnan af Pétlandsfirði. Veðr var gott, ok stóð jarl úti ok mart manna hjá honum ok hugðu at skipinu.

[It was on the sixth day of Christmas that they saw a ship sailing north from the Pentland Firth. The weather was good, and the earl was standing outdoors with many men and they watched the ship.]

The ship contains 15 or 16 men, including a Bishop John from Athole. This apparent focalisation through Rognvaldr can be explained in one of two ways. Either it is in fact the same episode as that recounted in Chapter 72, and therefore depends on the same (or a similar) verse,¹⁸ or it could even be another example of a scene observed by Sveinn, since he turns out at the end of the chapter to have been involved in the bishop's negotiations to promote Haraldr.

Thus, while the 'Sveinian' traditions cannot always be kept apart from the 'Rognvaldian' ones, in general it is fair to say that they are intertwined rather than fused. The differences in the narrative techniques of these two strands arise from their very different status as sources, one a prose eyewitness account by a participant in events, who gives his own interpretation of those events, the other a much more

neutral narrative reconstructed from a set of verses. Current writers on narrative, influenced by their study of more recent (and generally 'literary') texts like to assert that 'the ultimate source of everything in the narrative is the narrator', and like to distinguish the 'author' from the 'narrator' without showing much interest in the former.¹⁹ For *Orkneyinga saga* (and possibly for other sagas), it is methodologically neatest to equate 'narrator' and 'author' precisely because the narratorial activity in the text appears to reflect the 'actual genesis of the work'. Since this narratorial activity did not aim at a complete transformation, or narrativisation, of the source materials, these differences of narrative technique reflect the difference of the sources.

This can be demonstrated by a clearly visible join between the two sources in Chapter 94. In the context of a section of the saga that is clearly dominated by a Sveinian perspective, we can see how an element from the narrative based on verses associated with Rognvaldr has been introduced. The incident is the attack by Sveinn and Erlendr on Haraldr and Rognvaldr, who are both supposed to be at Knarston. The attack on Haraldr is successful, with many men killed on his side, but few on the attackers' side: 'Fátt fell af þeim Erlendi jarli; en jarl tók þar fjórtán skip, er jarlar áttu, ok allt fé, þat er á var' [Few died on Earl Erlendr's side; but the earl captured fourteen ships there, which had belonged to the earls, and all the property on them]. This statement is repeated later in the chapter: 'Peir Erlendr ok Sveinn tóku 9ll skip jarla ok ófamikit fé annat' [Erlendr and Sveinn captured all the ships of the earls and much other property]. This shows the author picking up the Sveinian strand again, after having told an anecdote which describes how Rognvaldr escaped the attack by being sheltered by the Icelandic poet Bótólfr begla, centring on a verse by Bótólfr himself. This basis in a verse links this anecdote to the Rognvaldian strand in the saga, here embedded in the Sveinian strand.

Thus the latter half of *Orkneyinga saga* is mainly based on the one hand on a poetic, and probably Icelandic, tradition about Rognvaldr and his fellow poets, and on the other hand on an Orcadian eyewitness tradition probably deriving from Sveinn Ásleifarson himself. Yet both these strands are abandoned in Chapters 100-104 of the saga which describe the murder of Rognvaldr.

The final act

In these chapters, there is nothing that can obviously be traced to a particular source of the type just described, and precious little focalisation, circumstantial detail

or emphasis to hint at a controlling orientation behind the narrative of this tragic climax. In this section, *Orkneyinga saga* approaches the state most commonly associated with *Íslendingasögur*, but also with other sagas, in which 'no persona of a storyteller intervenes between the events and the hearer or reader'.²⁰ It could be said that this climactic section of *Orkneyinga saga* has been fully narrativised.

This 'most dramatic point in the whole saga'²¹ is presented in terms of a classic feud narrative. The situation is set up in Chapter 100: after a brief reference to Sveinn a shift is indicated by the narrative marker 'Pat var mælt' [It was said] and the events concern a dispute between a follower of Rognvaldr and a follower of Porbjörn klerkr (himself in Haraldr's camp). The episode has its fair share of killings, attempts at settlement and compensation, disguise and outlawry. Chapter 102 has the function of bringing both Rognvaldr and Haraldr to Caithness, where the exiled Porbjörn klerkr (who had been outlawed by Rognvaldr) is also lurking. His murder of Rognvaldr is told in true saga style in Chapter 103: there is copious use of direct speech, including long and rhetorical speeches by Porbjörn and Magnús Hávarðsson; there are ominous and/or fatal events (Rognvaldr's sneeze and his foot caught in his stirrup) and homely, pastoral detail (a farmer stacking hay); there is Porbjörn's flight and heroic nine-ell jump across the ditch; and there is the final revenge on Porbjörn by Magnús, in which he is burnt in a deserted shieling, after which it is discovered that his guts had spilled out of the wound given to him just after he killed Rognvaldr.

Chapter 104 adheres to another convention, for Rognvaldr is venerated as a saint after his death and this chapter describes the removal of his body to St Magnus' Cathedral, Kirkwall, and the taking up of his relics there. The chapter includes a eulogy of the saint which consciously harks back to his own verse self-presentation in Chapter 58 in which he had enumerated his talents: 'Hann hafði verit hjálparmaðr mikill mǫrgum mǫnnum, qrr af fé, hógværr ok vinholtr, íþróttamaðr mikill ok skáld gott' [He had been a helper in need to many men, generous with money, gentle and loyal to his friends, a talented man and a good poet]. This not only brings Rognvaldr's story full circle, but also harks back to the hagiographical pattern of the first half of the saga, in the story of St Magnús.

Thus the 'narrativisation' (using both secular and Christian conventions) of chapters 100-04 is closely linked with Rognvaldr's story, even though this section is not based on verse as the rest of that story is. The feud in Chapter 100 that precipitates Rognvaldr's murder has similarities to that told in Chapter 61, both involving a dispute in their cups between a follower of Rognvaldr and of another man. In Chapter 61, the feud marks the beginning of Rognvaldr's career as earl, when Kali is renamed Rognvaldr by King Sigurðr of Norway, while the feud of Chapter 100

leads to the end of his career. Rognvaldr's own death and his burial recall his uncle and saintly predecessor, St Magnús, whose church he and his father built and he was buried in.

Sveinn is not mentioned in Chapter 103, but the attentive reader will note his contribution. The chapter begins by parenthetically recalling the events which put Rognvaldr in power, and in which Sveinn was very much concerned (see Chapters 74-76):²² 'Pá er Rognvaldr hafði jarl verit tvá vetr ok tuttugu, síðan er Páll jarl var handtekinn, þá fóru þeir jarlar yfir á Katanes' [When Rognvaldr had been earl for twenty-two years after the kidnapping of Earl Páll, then the earls crossed over to Caithness]. Thus, Rognvaldr lost the earldom as he had gained it, by the reduction of two earls to one. And, in the same way as Rognvaldr kept a low profile, and could not be blamed for the death of Páll Hákonarson, so Haraldr is also carefully absolved of blame for the death of Rognvaldr: the two earls go to Caithness together, and together hear of the threat posed by Þorbjörn klerkr, and we are told that Haraldr was not aware of Rognvaldr's death till long after it happened. Yet, just as Rognvaldr was not averse to profiting from Sveinn's actions, so Haraldr is happy to benefit from the death of Rognvaldr and would have let Þorbjörn go: it is Magnús Hávarðsson who chases him and exacts revenge.

Writing recent history

Despite, or possibly because of, its fragmentary and unsatisfactory state of preservation, *Orkneyinga saga* enables us to see how recent events were translated into saga. We have, on the one hand, clear evidence of local, oral traditions based on an eyewitness account, with a precise chronology which may suggest that these traditions underwent a written, almost annalistic, phase before being incorporated into the saga (the 'Sveinian' strand). On the other hand, we have a tradition clearly deriving from Icelandic interest in skaldic verse, and showing how such verse could be turned into narrative (the 'Rognvaldian' strand). Bringing these two strands together, we have a narrative or authorial presence. This presence is not necessarily an author in the sense of the book-prose school of saga studies, completely transforming (or even abandoning) his source materials and creating a 'literary' saga in the classical style, anticipating the last word of his saga when writing the first. But neither is this authorial presence a mere scribal linker of disparate traditions. It is true that some of the linkage is quite mechanical, and that we can trace the different traditions because they are not fully homogenised in the narrative. But Chapters 100-04 show how such

disparate traditions could be transcended, to create the narrative art (with its self-effacing narrator) more familiar to us from the *Íslendingasögur*. In these chapters, we can no longer distinguish the source material that was transformed in this way, and we also see the architectonic activities of the author/narrator, linking events to the larger framework of the saga, in which the story of Rognvaldr provides the shape of the second half of the saga.

Thus, *Orkneyinga saga* is an appropriate laboratory in which to study the mechanisms by which history and fiction were combined to produce saga.

NOTES

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¹ *Orkneyinga saga*, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 40 (Copenhagen, 1913-16), pp. ii-iii.

² Nordal, pp. iii-v.

³ The saga is cited (by chapter number in the text) from the edition of Finnogi Guðmundsson, *Orkneyinga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit, 34 (Reykjavík, 1965), although reference is occasionally made to variant manuscript readings which are given more fully in Nordal's edition (see note 1, above). All translations are my own.

⁴ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY, 1980), p. 225.

⁵ Genette, p. 210.

⁶ Paul Bibire, 'The Poetry of Earl Rognvaldr's Court', in *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (Aberdeen, 1988), pp. 208-40 (p. 211).

⁷ Michael Chesnutt, '*Haralds saga Maddaðarsonar*', in *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke and others (Odense, 1981), pp. 33-55.

⁸ e.g. Peter Foote, 'Observations on *Orkneyinga saga*', in *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (Aberdeen, 1988), pp. 192-207 (p. 192).

⁹ This passage is not in the *Flateyjarbók* text, see Nordal, p. 270n.

¹⁰ *Orkneyinga saga*, p. 245 n. 4. See also previous note.

¹¹ Sveinn and Erlendr are similarly affected by weather (described in detail) during a brief sojourn in Caithness later in this chapter.

¹² Genette, p. 186.

¹³ *A History of Orkney* (Kirkwall, 1932), p. 119.

¹⁴ *The Orkneyinga Saga* (Edinburgh and London, 1938), p. 78.

¹⁵ *Orkneyinga saga*, p. lxii.

¹⁶ 'Few Know an Earl in Fishing-Clothes', in *Essays in Shetland History: Heiðursrit to T. M. Y. Manson*, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (Lerwick, 1984), pp. 82-98 (p. 82).

¹⁷ Bibire, 'The Poetry of Earl Rognvaldr's Court', p. 211. See also Judith Jesch, 'History in the "Political Sagas"', *Medium Ævum*, 62 (1993), 210-20 (pp. 211-13) and

Alison Finlay, 'Skalds, Troubadours and Sagas', *Saga-Book*, 24/2-3 (1995), 105-53.

¹⁸ As suggested by Taylor, pp. 386, 388.

¹⁹ Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: a Critical Linguistic Introduction* (London, 1988), pp. 76-78.

²⁰ Quoted from Paul Bibire's review of the Hermann Pálsson / Paul Edwards translation of *Orkneyinga saga* in *Saga-Book*, 20 (1978-81), 236-37.

²¹ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 'On the Writing of *Orkneyinga saga*', in *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*, ed. Colleen E. Batey, Judith Jesch and Christopher D. Morris (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 204-11 (p. 205).

²² These chapters are discussed in Judith Jesch, 'Narrating *Orkneyinga saga*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 64 (1992), 336-55.