

The King in Disguise: An International Popular Tale in Two Old Icelandic Adaptations*

For Professor Albert Bates Lord on his sixtieth birthday
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One of Professor Lord's continuing concerns and an interest he has instilled in his students is the importance of relations between oral and literary traditions. The problem is controversial in many fields and nowhere more so than in the study of the saga literature where it is not always recognized how intimate are the connections between the oral-literary question and the problem of European influence, the problem of the uniqueness of the saga literature. The following essay is intended as a contribution to the current reassessment of the relationship of Old Icelandic saga literature to the European mainstream and of the ways of literary tradition in dealing with oral sources. Part I discusses the assimilation of a widely known international tale to its place in the saga histories of Norway, while Part II shows how the same tale is adapted in a different genre. In Part III the thematic contents of the story in the two adaptations are compared with each other and with the meanings attached to a similar tale in Old Icelandic, and Part IV briefly draws some conclusions for the comparative study of saga literature.

*My thanks to the Society for the Humanities, Cornell University, where this article was first written in 1971. In the meantime, a new survey of the international tale by Elizabeth Walsh (to which the original version of the present article contributed [cf. her n. 30]) has appeared in print: "The King in Disguise," *Folklore* 86 (1975), 3-24; Walsh's survey should be added to the works cited in my notes 6 and 7.

I

Snorri Sturluson’s account of the Battle of the Nissa (9 August 1062) follows the actions of the Norwegian earl Hákon Ívarsson more closely than those of Hákon’s sovereign Haraldr Sigurðarson.

Battle was joined late in the day and continued all night with Hákon fighting fiercely and directing his ships to whatever part of the fleet was at the moment hard pressed by the superior Danish force. However, when the ship of the Danish king, Sveinn Úlfsson, had been cleared of men so that all were dead or overboard and the rout of the Danish fleet began, Hákon’s ships were blocked from the pursuit and had to stay behind. A stranger dressed in a hood came rowing up to Hákon’s ship in a small boat and called out to the earl; the stranger identified himself as Vandráðr and asked quarter of the earl. Hákon sent two men to row with Vandráðr in to the coast of Halland and to escort him to Karl, a farmer, who would speed him on his way. The refugee Vandráðr and his companions arrived just as the farmer and his wife were rising for the day. Karl invited them to breakfast, and the wife scolded Vandráðr for drying his hands on the middle of the towel. Karl’s son accompanied Vandráðr as his guide in the forest. Later it was learned that King Sveinn had escaped from the battle, and soon a message came to Karl and his wife to come to the Danish court. At court it became clear that Vandráðr was none other than the king himself, and Karl was now rewarded with lands in Zealand and eventually with extensive power. However, King Sveinn sent the old wife back to Halland and married Karl to a nobler woman.¹

Lest the reader wonder how this little Danish success story was known to Snorri, he assures us, “The story spread far and wide, and news of it reached Norway”; and there were other stories attached to the Nissa encounter: “That autumn, when the army came back from Denmark, there was a tremendous amount of talk and story-telling about the battle, for everyone who had taken part in it felt he had something worth telling about it.”² However, Snorri’s source here is

1. *Heimskringla*, III, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit (=ÍF) 28 (Reykjavík, 1951), esp. ch. 64 and 67, pp. 152–54, 155–56 (*Harald’s saga Sigurðarsonar*).

2. Translated passages from Snorri’s *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* are from *King Harold’s Saga*, tr. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (Baltimore, 1966), pp. 115–20; other translations are my own.

not an oral one but the now-fragmentary *Hákonar saga Ívarsson*, the only extant example of a saga about a non-royal Norwegian.³ The first part of the story of Vandráðr and Karl is lost in the source, but from the summons to court to the end of the tale Snorri remains closely true to *Hákonar saga* while steadily simplifying and condensing; for example, Snorri excised most of the references to the providential nature of Karl's aid and omitted all reference to the conferral of the office of steward (*ármenning*), to the son's reward, and the didactic and proverbial close of the episode in *Hákonar saga*. This last element, in particular, gives the tale in *Hákonar saga* the flavor of fable, and one result of Snorri's alterations is to increase the historical plausibility of the tale.

However, the story of Vandráðr and Karl possesses but a tenuous claim to historicity, for the ultimate source of *Hákonar saga* for this episode is the tale somewhat inaptly called the King in Disguise. Tales of this type tell how a king accidentally comes to benefit from the hospitality of one of his poorer subjects and how the hospitality is later rewarded; the king is unrecognized but not always in disguise. The tale embodies the *Allerweltsmotiv* of an incognito king or god among his people⁴ but is itself not merely a common "motif" or "theme" but an articulated narrative that maintains much of its structural identity and many details from one version to another, in short, an international popular tale.⁵

3. *Hákonar saga Ívarssonar*, ed. Jón Helgason and Jakob Benediktsson (Copenhagen, 1952), pp. 29–30; all the following quotations and translations from *Hákonar saga* refer to these pages. Cf. Gustav Storm, *Snorri Sturlassøns historieskrivning* (Copenhagen, 1873), pp. 236–59.

4. The motif of major concern in this paper is (Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, rev. ed. [Bloomington, Ind., 1955]) K1812 *King in disguise* or K1812.1 *Incognito king helped by humble man. Gives reward*; the first of the Icelandic versions discussed here has not been noticed, but the second is entered in Inger Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana 27 (Copenhagen, 1966) as K1812.19 *King in disguise as one of his own men rescued in fighting alone against four*. Also see Thompson, K1816.9, K1812.4, K1812.9, K1812.10, K1811, Q1, Q1.1, and Boberg, P322.2, P324.1, P336.2, and Q45.4.

5. With this term I mean essentially the same as Kenneth H. Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1961), esp. ch. 1 and 2. The distinction from "folktale," which is freed to mean not a class of literature but one mode of existence (oral) of the "international popular tale," seems to me particularly useful in dealing with the complex relations between oral tradition and writing one finds in Old Icelandic.

Probably the best known version is preserved in the first part of the Scottish romance *The Taill of Rauf Coilzear*:

Rauf, a humble collier, gives a night's lodging to Charlemagne, whom he finds straying through a snowstorm in the mountains surrounding Paris. He does not recognize his royal guest, and while showering him with bounteous hospitality treats him with rough-handed familiarity. Charlemagne, who takes all in good part, describes himself as a servant of the queen—"Wymond of the Wardrobe"—and promises his host that if he will bring a load of coals to court, he shall be guaranteed an excellent market for them. The next morning the king is directed on his way; he soon meets Roland, Oliver, Turpin, and many others, who congratulate him on his safe return. Rauf sets about preparing his load of charcoal, despite the forebodings of his wife that Wymond's intentions may not be amicable. In Paris, Rauf gains admission, with some difficulty, to the royal hall, where he learns the identity of his late guest. He is considerably alarmed to recall the violence of his hospitality, but the Emperor forgives him his offenses and rewards his bounty with knighthood.⁶

The second part of the romance, which begins with Rauf's quarrel with Roland on the way to Paris, concerns Rauf's mock heroic exploits as a peasant-knight.

No geographic-historic study of the King in Disguise has been attempted, but enough versions have been reported to show that it was international property in the later Middle Ages. Among analogues of the whole story of Karl and Vandráðr, five medieval versions, four extant in English and one in Latin, are well known; the oldest of these is Giraldus Cambrensis' tale of Henry II and the Cistercian abbot.⁷ Older than Giraldus and probably from the late

6. Summary adapted from that of H. M. Smyser, "'The Taill of Rauf Coilzear' and its Sources," *Harvard Studies and Notes* 14 (1932), 137–38. Besides this article (pp. 135–50), still the most complete account of the tale, the King in Disguise is discussed by F. J. Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, V (Boston, 1894), 67–75; by E. K. Chambers, *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1945), pp. 128–29, 223–24; by Max Tonndorf, *Rauf Coilyear* . . . (Halle, 1893), and earlier by Percy and Hazlitt.

7. Giraldus Cambrensis, *Speculum Ecclesiæ*, ed. S. Brewer, Opera, IV, Rolls Series (London, 1873), pp. 213–15 (cf. pp. xxxix–xli); "King Edward and the Shepherd" in

eleventh or early twelfth century is the story of King Alfred and the cakes, which, however, is only a partial analogue in its oldest forms.⁸ Other partial analogues in Western literature date back to

Ancient Metrical Tales, ed. C. H. Hartshorne (London, 1829), pp. 35–80; “John de Reeve,” in *Bishop Percy’s Folio Manuscript*, ed. J. W. Hales and F. J. Furnival, II (London, 1868), 559–94; “The King and the Hermyt” in *Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of England*, ed. W. C. Hazlitt, I (London, 1864), 11–34; and “Rauf Coilzear” in *The Taill of Rauf Coilzear, with Fragments of Roland and Vernagu and Otuel*, ed. S. J. H. Herrtage, EETS, ES 39 (London, 1882). Among the later relatively close analogues are “The King and the Barker,” Hazlitt, I, 1–10; “The King and the Miller,” Percy Folio MS, II, 147–57; “King Alfred and the Shepherd,” *The Roxburghe Ballads*, III (Hertford, 1880), ed. W. Chappell, 210–19; “The History of the King and the Cobbler” (“First Part”), a summary in *Descriptive Notices of Popular English Histories*, by J. O. Halliwell Phillips, Percy Society 23 (London, 1848), 48–50, doubled in “Second Part”; “King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth,” Child, V, 67–87; “King James V and the Tinker,” a ballad in Andrew Small, *Interesting Roman Antiquities Recently Discovered in Fife ...* (Edinburgh, 1823), pp. 283–85 (summary in Child, V, 73–74); a story of King James V (the Guidman of Ballangeich) and a miller, Small, pp. 277–80; a story of James V and a shepherd, Small, pp. 280–82 (cf. also the other stories of the disguisings of James V, Small, pp. 285–91); “The King and the Forrester,” *Roxburghe Ballads*, VII (Hertford, 1893), ed. J. W. Ebsworth, 763–64; “Der Köhler und Kaiser Maximilian II,” in *Westslawischer Märchenschatz*, ed. Joseph Wenzig (Leipzig, 1857), pp. 179–81; “Grand Nez,” in *Contes populaires de la Haute-Bretagne*, ed. Paul Sébillot, II (Paris, 1881), 149–50 (also told of Henri IV in *Guirlandes des Marguerites* [Nérac et Bordeaux, 1876], a text I have not seen [now cf. Walsh, n. 39]); No. 160 in *Danske sagn*, ed. E. T. Kristensen, IV (Aarhus, 1896), 41; “Brot und Salz segnet Gott” (No. 572) in *Deutsche Sagen*, by J. and W. Grimm, ed. H. Grimm (Berlin, 1891), p. 190; a story of Charlemagne and a shoemaker in *Die Sagen Belgiens*, ed. Maria von Ploennies (Cologne, 1846), pp. 242–45; a story of Charlemagne and a farmer, *Sagen Belgiens*, pp. 246–47; and esp. a story of Charlemagne and a farmer, *Sagen Belgiens*, pp. 249–53 (cf. also pp. 245–46). More distant analogues of the whole tale are “Christian den Fjerde og bonden” in J. M. Thiele, *Danmarks folkesagn*, ed. Per Skar, I (Copenhagen, 1968), 57–58; “Kongen og bonden,” Thiele, I, 58–59; Fit VII of “The Little Gest of Robin Hood,” Child, III, 73–75; and perhaps the adventures of Haroun-al-Rashid in the *1001 Nights* (for references see Victor Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux arabes*, VI [Leipzig and Liège, 1902], 44–45); “The Royal Frolic ...,” *Roxburghe Ballads*, VII, 756–57, also 758–60, 761–62; Nos. 157 and 158 in *Danske sagn*, IV (cf. Small, p. 287); D. D. Cardonne, *Mélanges de littérature orientale ...* (Paris, 1770), I, 104–16. Among the partial analogues, cf. Nos. 556 and 569 in *Deutsche Sagen*, pp. 176–77, 187 (other versions of No. 556 discussed in Kinderling, “Nähere Erläuterung über den in der Schmiede zu Ruhla hart geschmiedeten Landgrafen Ludwig den Eisernen,” *Odina und Teutona*, ed. F. D. Gräter, I [Breslau, 1812], 140–51); *Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Hermann Oesterley (Berlin, 1872), pp. 315–19 (Cap. 20), and with a few variations in the early modern German *Gesta Romanorum ...*, ed. J. G. T. Grässe (Dresden and Leipzig, 1842), II, 198–206; “La Princesse du palais enchanté” in *Contes populaires de la Basse-Bretagne*, ed. François Luzel, I (Paris, 1887), 259–88. This list of analogues is a revised and supplemented version of that given by Smyser; among the omissions here are all late literary versions, for which see Smyser and Child.

8. W. H. Stevenson, ed., *Asser’s Life of Alfred* (Oxford, 1904), pp. 41–42, 256–61; the story makes its appearance in the brief familiar form in the lost *Life of St. Neot* (probably late 11th or early 12th century) used in the *Annals of St. Neot’s* (early 12th century);

the tenth century,⁹ and the widely disseminated folktale of the King and the Soldier (Type 952) is comparable to the two Icelandic tales discussed here.¹⁰ None of the early versions is close enough to those in Old Icelandic to raise the question of a "source," and we must rest content with a discussion of the probable adaptation of the Old Icelandic forms based on a comparison with the analogues.

The opening of the story in *Heimskringla* (in all probability very close to its source in *Hákonar saga*) is fully adapted to the historical setting. In the analogues we find the king is regularly identified,¹¹ but often the setting is very vague while the story of Vandráðr is linked to a firmly historical battle. Hákon Ívarsson's action is also plausible: he had experienced kindness at the hands of King Sveinn, and his real life-long enemy was King Haraldr. Thus our episode is much better motivated than the analogues, in which, typically, the king becomes separated from his courtiers and lost on a hunt or is brought in contact with the peasant by some even more adventitious device.¹²

As in most of the analogues King Sveinn conceals his identity by his less than regal clothing; however, the disguise is not a vital element in these stories, and Sveinn's "broad cowl" is the conven-

the later (12th and 13th century) lives of St. Neot, various medieval chronical versions, and the early English homily on St. Neot derive ultimately from the lost *Life*; much later (17th century) we find a fuller version that is a complete analogue to the Icelandic stories ("King Alfred and the Shepherd," cited above). Walsh, p. 8, probably gives too much credence to the possible early existence of the anecdote; cf. Stevenson's summary: "... we have no evidence of this story of Alfred and the cakes before the Norman Conquest" (p. 261).

9. Liutprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis*, Lib. I, Cap. XI (MGH V, Scriptorum III [Hannover, 1839], 277-78); and telling the same story: No. 159, *Danske sagn*, IV, 40; No. 571, *Deutsche Sagen*, pp. 189-90.

10. Stith Thompson and Antti Aarne, *Types of the Folktale*, FFC No. 184 (Helsinki, 1964): Type 952 (=Grimm No. 199; cf. J. Bolte and G. Polívka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, III [Leipzig, 1918], 450-55); cf. also Types 750A, B, C, 750*, 751, 752A, 753, 768, 791, 951A, C. The tales of the King in Disguise have not usually been considered by folktale taxonomists, though one folklorist (Katherine M. Briggs, *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language*, Part A, vol. 2 [Bloomington, Ind., 1970], 418-23, 433-37, 437-38; also Pt. A, vol. 1, Index of Types) classifies them as "distant variants" of Type 921 The King and the Peasant's Son; this tale type also belongs to the novella group (Types 850-999), but the tales of the King in Disguise normally appear as historical legends. The Type that seems closest to me is 952.

11. E.g., Henry II, Charlemagne, Edward III, Edward IV, Christian IV, but also "a king of France," "a prince," etc.

12. E.g., Maximilian II and Christian IV are out for a walk.

tional, minimal disguise of Old Icelandic literature. The false names used in the analogues tend to the mildly humorous; perhaps the best in this respect is a continental folktale that tells how an emperor met a collier at work in the forest. Asked his name the emperor answered "Maximilian," but the collier did not understand the strange name and assimilated it to a more familiar word, dubbing the emperor "Herr Marzipan."¹³ Sveinn's alias is found elsewhere in the saga literature; like "Grímr" ("Masked One") for anyone in disguise, "Vandráðr" ("One in Trouble") for any fugitive gives a more conventional impression than the aliases encountered in the analogues.¹⁴ *Hákonar saga's* garrulous Karl comments at length on the aptness of the name—comments omitted by Snorri: "... you called yourself Vandráðr. And that was aptly invented since at that time you had sufficient 'trouble' [*vandræði*] to deal with." This accords with the convention of self-conscious use of meaningful names found frequently in the saga literature.¹⁵

In many of the analogues the king requires shelter for the night,¹⁶ but the story of Karl is given a realistic touch as Vandráðr spends

13. Cf. "Jolly Robin," "Wymonde of the Wardrobe," "Harry Tudor," "Pierce Pay-for-all," "Jack Fletcher," "a gentleman of King Alfred's court."

14. *Víglundar saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson, *ÍF* 14 (Reykjavík, 1949), 101: Vandráðr and Torráðr = Víglundr and Trausti (note, however, that Vandráðr and Torráðr are the real names of Guðrún's brothers in *Laxdæla saga*, *ÍF* 5). Cf., e.g., "Grímr" for the disguised men in *Völsa þáttur* (*Flateyjarbók: en Samling af norske Konge-Sagaer* ..., eds. C. R. Unger and G. Vigfússon, II [Christiania, 1862], 331–36).

15. Cf., for example, *Gísels þáttur Illugasonar* (*ÍF* 3:333): "hét ek Vígfúss í morgin, en í kveld væni ek, at ek heita Ófeigr"; *Víga-Glums saga* (*ÍF* 9:54): "Ek heiti Margr í Mývatns-hverfi, en Fár í Fiskilækjarhverfi" (of Skúta, punning on *skúti* "cave"); *Fóstrbræðra saga* (*ÍF* 6:233–41) Ch. 23: Þormóðr=Ótryggur Tótryggsson, Vígfúss, and Torráðr; Ch. 24: Þormóðr=Ósvífr (cf. the comment: "Svá er hverr sem heitir," p. 249); *Þorleifs þáttur jarls-skalds* (*ÍF* 9:220–22): Þorleifr = Niðungur Gjallandason; *Kormaks saga* (*ÍF* 8:247): Steinarr = Glúmr or Skúma (cf. n. 3); and cf. the wordplay on "Stúfr," "Kǫttr," and "Sigurðr syr" in *Stúfs þáttur* (*ÍF* 5). Many other aliases are apparently without secondary meanings, e.g., *Þorsteins saga hvíta* (*ÍF* 11:12): Þorsteinn = Sigurðr; and *Víglundar saga* (*ÍF* 14:103, 115): Helgi Eiríksson = Þórðr í Gautavík; but "Qrn and Hrafn" for Víglundr and Trausti (pp. 103–15) is suggestive. "Þjófr" for Friðþjófr (*Die Friðþjófs saga*, ed. G. Wenz [Halle, 1914], pp. 28–30) and "Óli" for "Óláfr" (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *ÍF* 26:266–68) seem to belong in another tradition; cf. "Tantris" for Tristan. With the explication of "Vandráðr" in *Hákonar saga*, cf. *Víglundar saga* (*ÍF* 14:101): "... spurði Gunnlaugr inn mikla mann, hví hann nefndist Vandráðr. Því nefndumst ek Vandráðr, segir hann, 'at þar eru til nóg vandræði mín, en ek heitir Víglundr ...'"

16. E.g., "Rauf Coilgear" and "Grand Nez"; *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* (cited below) explain that the king went "til kotbeiar nocquers firir þa savcc at Norþmenn ransaucdo of þorpit oc stong beina" (*Msk*, p. 214).

the night in battle and in the escape to arrive at the farm just as Karl and his wife are rising. The givers of hospitality in the analogues are of a low social class, though not all are the poorest of peasants; Karl seems to be a yeoman farmer of modest means (the farm is referred to as a *búkot*). His name, of course, suggests the free peasantry and usually also a man who is no longer young.¹⁷ Like most of the peasants in the analogues, Karl insists on a meal for his guests, but it is with the humorous interchanges between the king and the farmer's wife that the folktale foundation of the story shines through most clearly.

First the woman complains that the noise of the fighting had kept her awake all night; then she observes that "our king," Sveinn, will have fled from battle again:

"What a wretched king we have," said the woman. "He not only walks with a limp, but he's a coward as well."

Then Vandrad said, "I don't think the king is a coward; but he hasn't much victory luck."

Similarly some of the kings in the analogues learn unpleasant truths about themselves or their administration from the unsuspecting mouths of the folk, and in some related tales the king's purpose in going about in disguise is to listen to the *vox populi*.¹⁸ Some versions, however, turn the tables and expose instead the easy ways of the peasantry in dealing with the law and especially with the king's venison, and in the best of them this glimpse of peasant life is accorded an enthusiastic development comparable to genre painting.¹⁹

Next Vandráðr gets a rude lesson in lower class courtesy:

17. Cf. esp. the use of "Karl" as representative of the franklin class in "Rígsþula" and the description of Karl's life there.

18. Personal criticism of the ruler in *Deutsche Sagen*, No. 556; oppression and taxes in "King Edward and the Shepherd," "John de Reeve," "Christian den Fjerde og bonden," and *Danske sagn*, No. 157; praise of the king in "The Royal Frolic," and so on. The king wishes to sample public opinion in "The King and the Barker," "Grand Nez," and *Danske sagn*, Nos. 157 and 158; cf. Thompson motifs J21.43 *A country not examined in disguise will always be ruined*, N467 *King in disguise learns secrets of his subjects*, P14.19, and K1812.17.

19. E.g., most of the English versions, "Grand Nez," and "La Princesse."

Vandrad was the last to wash his hands, and afterwards he dried them on the middle part of the towel. The woman of the house snatched the towel away from him and said, "How uncouth you are! It's boorish to wet the towel all over at the same time."

The courtesy lesson is found in a number of the analogues; for example, Rauf the collier clouts Charlemagne soundly to teach him obedience to his host, and a shepherd's wife scolds and threatens King Alfred for letting the cakes burn.²⁰ Probably to be considered variants of the courtesy lesson are the silly drinking customs taught the king in other analogues, as when Henry II learns "Pril" and "Wril" instead of "Wesheil" and "Drincheil" as toast and response.²¹

Finally, Karl aids the king's journey back to court, and the farmer's son accompanies him. Snorri does not mention the son again, but *Hákonar saga* informs us that King Sveinn later took the boy in at court and made a *hirðmaðr* of him. This is paralleled in at least one extant analogue where the peasant's son has a considerable role.²²

Back at court, Sveinn sends for Karl and his family. The analogues are divided between the motifs of a royal summons and a pre-arranged trip to court for commercial purposes. The saga version has nothing corresponding to the fears of Rauf's wife²³ and none of the comedy of the spectacle of a boorish peasant at court, and its recognition scene is not quite like that of any other version:

When they arrived at the royal court, the king summoned Karl to his presence, and asked whether he recognized him or thought he had seen him before.

Karl said, "I recognize you now, sire, and I recognized you then, as soon as I saw you. May God be praised that the little help I gave you was of some use to you."

20. Also in "John de Reeve," "King and the Miller," "La Princesse," and perhaps in others.

21. Giraldus; cf. "King Edward and the Shepherd" and "King Edward and the Hermyt."

22. "John de Reeve"; cf. the tale cited from *Gesta Romanorum* (Cap. 20) and "La Princesse."

23. Similar fears in "John de Reeve," "The King and the Miller," "King Alfred and the Shepherd," "Grand Nez," and "Christian den Fjerde og bonden."

In some of the analogues this and associated scenes at court are the occasion for a great deal of fun at the peasant's expense, and in some there follows an incongruous application of the rustic courtesy to court life, as when Henry II insists on drinking to "Pril-Wril." King Sveinn now expresses his obligation to Karl and confers on him the lands of his choice in Zealand along with the office of *ármaðr*; similar rewards are found in the analogues.

Most of the differences between the tale of Karl and Vandráðr and its analogues contribute to realism and historical plausibility, and this adaptation involved suppression of most of the comedy of the popular versions. The adaptation entailed no important structural changes except at the beginning of the tale, but the two most striking differences of detail between our story and its analogues may be explained as products of the adaptation to sober "history": Karl, unlike all his confreres, claims to have recognized the king from the beginning, and the old wife is punished for speaking her mind, while Karl is to receive "a much wiser and better woman for a wife."²⁴

In *Hákonar saga* the story closes with the author's pointing a moral, partly through proverbs: "It's always important that a man take much care to make friends, for he who has good friends will always have support." This produces a clear end to the tale and an effect close to that of the simplistically didactic oral tale, while Snorri has endeavored to create an apparent continuity with the following chapter by leaving out this epilogue and thus emphasizing the themes of "story" and "talk" in both chapters. Similar proverbial associations are found in some of the analogues;²⁵ however, the proverbial ending of the episode in *Hákonar saga* will be a reflection not of a particular source-tale or a particular tradition but of the oral folktale style in general.

How historical, then, is the episode of Karl and Vandráðr? Most of the elements of the episode are paralleled not as scattered "motifs" in assorted folklore but as parts of a single, well-attested, independent

24. The differential reward and initial recognition or near recognition may, however, be traditional; cf. the Thompson motifs under Q1 *Hospitality rewarded—opposite punished* and pp. 119–121 below.

25. "Le Bûcheron est maître dans sa hutte ... comme le roi dans son palais" ("La Princesse"); cf. "Chacun est roy en sa maison, comme respondit le charbonnier [to a king of France]" (*Commentaires de Blaise de Monluc*, ed. Paul Courteault, III [Paris, 1925], 395) and the discussion in Smyser, pp. 141–43 and references cited, p. 143, n. 2.

international tale. Most of the remainder of the tale can be explained as adaptations to the historical format or to the Scandinavian context. Nevertheless, there may be, in the well-worn phrase, a “historical kernel” in the tale.

Morkinskinna and *Fagrskinna* present the career of Hákon Ívarsson and the events of the first half of the 1060's in a very different way from that of *Heimskringla-Hákonar saga*; and in following chiefly *Hákonar saga* against *Morkinskinna*, Snorri seems to have chosen the more fabulous alternative.²⁶ Nevertheless, the story we are concerned with is present in *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* though in a much briefer form. There we are told that King Sveinn and one follower fled to land and arrived at a cotter's farm (*kotbær*) in the morning. They were met by an old woman (*kerling*) who asked who they were; the follower answered that they were travelers in need of help. The woman comments suspiciously on their appearance.²⁷ She asks the news and whether a battle between the kings caused the noise that kept her from sleeping during the night, and the dialogue continues almost as in *Heimskringla*. The washing scene and breakfast follow, but the anecdote ends with the king's memorable *réplique*: “‘It may yet be’, he said, ‘if God wills it, that we shall receive so much esteem that we may dry our hands in the middle of the towel’” (*Msk*).

It would be tempting to regard the incident as presented by the *Morkinskinna-Fagrskinna* tradition as an only slightly embellished attestation of the “historical kernel.” In that case the historical incident would have attracted to itself the folktale, which bore a real similarity to the truth in several of its motifs; then a mutual assimilation would have gone on in the oral tradition. Such an escape and encounter and such a sentiment on the part of the king appear not improbable when the incident is considered in isolation. However, at the beginning of Snorri's *Haralds saga* we hear of a very similar escape and a similar quip:

26. *Morkinskinna* ... (=Msk), ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1932), pp. 214–15; *Fagrskinna: kortfattet norsk Konge-Saga* ... (=Fsk), eds. P. A. Munch and C. R. Unger (Christiania, 1847), pp. 131–32; Edvard Bull, “Håkon Ivarsons saga,” *Edda* 27 (1927), 33–44.

27. *Msk*: “Þit latið ouenliga” or possibly (editor's note) “miceliga”; *Fsk* would support the latter: “Munn þit vera svá miklir menn, sem þit látið ríkliga.” Further minor differences among the Icelandic texts will not be noticed here.

The young Haraldr Sigurðarson escaped from the defeat at Stiklastaðir with one man (Rognvaldr Brúsason), who brought him wounded to an unnamed farmer on an isolated farm in a forest. When Haraldr was well again, the *bondi*’s son guided him east over the Kjølen. “The farmer’s son had no idea who his companion was; and as they were riding across from one wild forest to another, Harald composed this stanza:

Now I go creeping from forest
To forest with little honour;
Who knows, my name may yet become
Renowned far and wide in the end (pp. 45–46).

In view of this and similar escapes²⁸ and in view of the international tales of the King in Disguise, the events as told in *Morkinskinna-Fagrskinna* appear more conventional. Moreover, the differences between the narrative (or at least longer) version in *Heimskringla-Hákonar saga* and the anecdotal (or shorter) version in *Morkinskinna-Fagrskinna* seem easier to account for as the reduction of a full-fledged oral tale to its comic core than as accretion of the legendary narrative to a historical central incident.²⁹

Finally, *Morkinskinna-Fagrskinna* openly cautions us that this incident is fabulous: “Petta er gamans frasaugn oc eigi sauguligt eins-

28. Cf. the escapes of Óláfr Tryggvason and Harold, Godwin’s son, after their defeats at Svöldr and Hastings (references and discussion in Lars Lönnroth, “Studier i Olaf Tryggvasons saga,” *Samlaren* 84 [1963], 77–83).

29. Admittedly this conjecture is unprovable and contradicts the very tentative speculation of Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ÍF 28: XXVI; cf. *Om de norske kongers sagaer* [Oslo, 1937], pp. 153–54) about the relationship between *Hákonar saga* and *Msk*. That brief anecdotes bound to a quip (as in *Msk-Fsk*) do live in tradition unsupported by rounded tales is well known. In the present instance, however, I find it easier to believe that *Msk* is condensing for the following (inconclusive) reasons: (1) the comment about “speki ok óvizka” that concludes the *Msk* anecdote seems to be the reduction of a moral such as we find in the developed tale in *Hákonar saga*; (2) since “speki” is not, in fact, rewarded or “óvizka” punished in the *Msk* anecdote as it stands, a fuller version probably lies behind the text, and the phrase may be an allusion, specifically, to differential rewards for hospitality and inhospitality (cf. n. 24 above); (3) that the *kerling* is hostess and speaks in the plural could be because she is a widow and herself head of the farm, but an equally satisfactory explanation is that her *karl* has been dropped from the anecdote. However, I should point out the counter-example of Alfred and the cakes, which first appears in a very similar anecdotal form and only later is found as a developed tale (see n. 8 above).

costar nema fyr þa sauc at her er lyst grein speci oc ovizco" (*Msk*). In other words, the "truth" of the incident is of a moral or ethical, not a historical kind. Surely this is a reference to an oral tale (*frásögn*) with historical setting and didactic function—just such a tale as we suspect, on the basis of the comparative evidence, beneath the full story of Karl and Vandráðr in *Heimskringla* and *Hákonar saga*.

II

Our second Icelandic adaptation of the King in Disguise has still less claim to historical truth but is less easily recognizable as a version of the international popular tale. Nevertheless, *Þorsteins þáttr Austfirðings* (or *suðrfara*), an independent short story found in two paper manuscripts, can tell us still more about the adaptation of international narrative material in Old Icelandic literature:

Þorsteinn, a young Icelander, met and saved the life of a man who gave his name as "Styrbjörn" and claimed to be a retainer of King Magnús Ólafsson. He invited Þorsteinn to court; and after completing his pilgrimage to Rome, Þorsteinn arrives at court. At the door he asks for "Styrbjörn" and is mocked by the retainers until the king himself goes to the door, leads Þorsteinn in, and presents him with his own robe. "Styrbjörn" is identified as the king. On a bivouac in the north (of Norway), Þorsteinn is mocked by the retainers for his manners, but the king defends him. Later Magnús offers Þorsteinn a wife and position in Norway, but the Icelander knows that he would have to live with the hostility of those who would envy the king's protégé and instead chooses to sail back to Iceland with rich rewards. Back home he settled and was thought a very lucky man.³⁰

Even in this bare outline Þorsteinn's story bears a definite family resemblance to that of Karl and the tribe of Rauf the collier. The initial encounter takes place in Denmark, and in a gesture toward historical coloring the author explains that it was the time when King Magnús was having great campaigns there. In a scene set "one day" in "a wood"

30. *ÍF* 11 (Reykjavík, 1950), pp. 330–33; page references to this short work will be unnecessary.

Þorsteinn discovers Magnús, deserted by his men, his back to a tree, being attacked by four of the enemy—a heroic opening that contrasts with the extant non-Scandinavian analogues. During the interview in the forest, Þorsteinn speaks plainly about his sovereign, unaware that he is addressing the king himself; unlike Karl's wife, however, Þorsteinn speaks in purest praise. The motif of the incognito king learning home truths from a commoner is here presented in a polite form.

Some of the disjointed quality of *Þorsteins þáttr* emanates from unskillful strokes associated with Magnús' false name:

When Þorsteinn returns from Rome and seeks "Styrbjörn" at court, he is first refused admission by the porters. Þorsteinn then asks that "Styrbjörn" be sent out, and this occasions enormous malicious merriment which the king puts an end to. He then welcomes the Iclander, and Þorsteinn settles down among the retinue. Some time later, the king asked, "Now which of us do you think might be 'Styrbjörn?'" And Þorsteinn rightly identified the king as the bearer of that alias.

Many of the analogues depict the peasant as under some difficulty in recognizing his former guest or as slow to understand that his former guest and present host is the king,³¹ but the length of time implied and the whole situation involved in this recognition in the *þáttr* taxes the limits of logic.³² Some of the analogues portray a good deal of merriment over the alias, but this is because it amuses the courtiers to see the still unenlightened peasant addressing their king as "Jolly Robin," etc. In *Þorsteins þáttr* the laughter is caused by the fact that no one by the name of "Styrbjörn" belongs to the court, and anyone who appreciates humor will agree with King Magnús: "This is not very funny..." Finally, the *þáttr* implies that, as with "Vandráðr," there is a special significance in the name "Styrbjörn": "The king took the floor and said: '... men's names can be compared in many ways. And you must no longer mock that name.'" This suggests a pun or other play on the name or that it is a recombination or anagram of

31. Cf., e.g., "King Edward and the Shepherd," "Maximilian II und der Köhler," and the rather different group of recognitions in "Kongen og bonden," "King James and the Tinker," "The King and the Barker," "King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth."

32. A considerable delay before recognition is implicit: "Síðan var hann með hirðinni... Konungr mælti við hann eitt sinn..."

the king's real name; but apparently no such wordplay is present, and the whole incident is to be explained as an imperfect adaptation from a source similar to the tale of Vandráðr.³³

A further infelicity is found in connection with the þátrr's only verse.

King and retinue journeyed north; one day in camp, they cooked porridge (*grautr*), "and when the (communal) bowl was passed to Þorsteinn, he ate up everything in the bowl." The courtiers laughed at this breach of etiquette and mocked: "You really know what to do with porridge, you hick (*landi*)." The king smiled and extemporized a poem: "This warrior alone quickly felled three men in battle; he excels men. But, good with his hands, he ate porridge prepared on the journey north equal to those three; he excels them." Then the king explained to the company that "this man gave me aid when you were nowhere near" and goes on to praise Þorsteinn.

This speech cannot have been a revelation to the retainers since earlier, before the journey north, the king had told "all the true story and told everything from the beginning when they met in Denmark." While the repetition is not, strictly speaking, inconsistent, it seems that the author has, at least, not managed to dispose the ingredients of his tale in an effective way. The international tale, to judge by the analogues, required the revelation about "Styrbjörn" and the encounter in the Danish wood to be made at court, but the verse mentioned a "norðrför" together with the heroic porridge eating. To accommodate the verse the author has created a second revelation scene in connection with Þorsteinn's rustic manners (a motif in agreement with the international tale).

33. The verb *saman bera* should mean "agree with, coincide with, be comparable to" and possibly "bring together, recombine." (The textual variant from 6SP [cited below], "megu manna nöfn marga saman bera," is no help.) Perhaps the author had in mind a comparison between Magnús - "brought to bay" alone, his back to a tree, attacked by a "pack" of enemies—and an "Embattled Bear" or, perhaps, "Styr-björn," "Battle-Bear," as a periphrasis for "warrior." The metaphorical use of "bear" for "man" occurs often (e.g., *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ÍF 26:278: "Væri yðr meiri veiðr at taka björninn, er nú er nær kominn á bjarnbásinn"; the bear *fylgjur* of *Njáls saga*, ch. 23, and of *Þorsteins þátrr uxafóts*; and *Helga kviða Hundingsbana II*, 8); for "Styrr" in names cf. the change of "Arngrím" to "(Viga-)Styrr" in *Eyrbyggja saga*.

The verse itself can hardly stem from the time of Magnús the Good (ÍF 11: CXI), but it seems safe to assume that it is older than the prose and that the imperfect assimilation of the verse has caused some of the narrative infelicities of the þátrr. If these assumptions hold, the verse originally referred to an unknown situation and had no connection with the international popular tale; rather its incorporation in such a story was an act of “interpretation” by the þátrr’s author.

Thus (to elaborate this hypothesis), the author was in possession of a verse supposedly composed by King Magnús; the verse contained two motifs: (1) a fight in which the hero kills three men; and (2) an incident on a “norðrför” in which the hero eats the porridge of three. The author interpreted the verse in terms of a tale that sometimes contains, among others, the following motifs: (1) initial encounter afield between disguised king and poor subject; (2) subject’s hospitality to unrecognized king; (3) false name given; (4) king’s return to court; (5) subject comes to court as agreed (or is summoned); (6) by-play with the porter; (7) amusement over the name; (8) revelation of the truth; (9) amusement over the rustic’s manners at court; (10) the subject rewarded. The author has been able to preserve all these motifs in essence, but the hard fact of the “norðrför” split motif (8) from (9) and caused (8) to be doubled.

Even if this explanation of the composition of *Þorsteins þátrr* is acceptable, it does not reveal the þátrr’s literary models or the patterns used in adaptation of the tale. One of these patterns is to be found, I believe, in a particular group of Old Icelandic short stories with distinctive generic features.³⁴ These stories chart the course of the relationship of an Icelander with a Norwegian king in a story that begins with an Introduction and Journey In from Iceland and ends with a return to Iceland (Journey Out) and concluding remarks (Conclusion). The kernel of these stories can be described as an Alienation section followed by a Reconciliation; an uncomplicated example, *Þorsteins þátrr forvitna*, may be summarized and its structure outlined as follows:³⁵

34. See the author’s “Genre and Narrative Structure in Some *Íslendinga Þættir*,” *SS* 44 (1972), 1–27; “Theme and Genre in Some *Íslendinga Þættir*,” *SS* 48 (1976), 1–28; and “*Ögmundar þátrr dytts ok Gunnars helmings*: Unity and Literary Relations,” *ANF* 90 (1975), 156–82. [The latter two articles are reprinted in this volume, Eds.]

35. *Íslendinga þættir* (=ÍP), ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík, 1935), pp. 353–55.

INTRODUCTION. There was a poor but valiant Icelander named Þorsteinn.

JOURNEY IN. He sailed in to Norway and joined King Haraldr Sigurðarson at court.

ALIENATION. Once when the king was bathing, Þorsteinn rummaged in his kit and saw a knife handle of wood that resembled gold. The king berated Þorsteinn for his curiosity and was angry with him. Later Haraldr offered Þorsteinn one chance to regain his friendship: he must bring the king another handle of the same kind. Þorsteinn's hard quest led far afield.

RECONCILIATION. But by the help of St. Óláfr and a hermit he came to a lake-isle where a dragon guarded a tree with golden wood. Þorsteinn narrowly escaped with a piece of wood which he brought back to Norway. Haraldr accepted the wood, praised Þorsteinn, and rewarded him with trading goods.

JOURNEY OUT. Þorsteinn returned to Iceland.

CONCLUSION. Þorsteinn (later) died in Haraldr's invasion of England.

The stories of this group have a limited cast of characters; the protagonists are an Icelander and a king (usually Norwegian), and the few secondary characters are either friends or enemies of the Icelandic hero whose function is to cause or heal his estrangement from the king. Characterization is similar to that of the sagas, except that the brevity of the stories imposes stricter limitations. The ethos of these þættir is comic, and a number end in social promotion for the hero.

Viewed against this background, it is clear that the author of *Þorsteins þáttur Austfirðings* has adopted a number of features, including some formal conventions, from this short story genre and that those conventions further explain his fundamental modifications of the international popular tale of the King in Disguise. Thus, for example, the tale is attached to King Magnús, but the hero, instead of being a Norwegian peasant or *bondi*, becomes an Icelander. However, though the beginning and ending of the story, the cast of characters, and many of the relationships among them were amenable to treatment in terms of the genre, the core of the generic narrative structure, the Alienation-Reconciliation relationship between king and Icelander, could not really be adapted to the folktale material even though both

patterns have a first meeting, a separation, and a reunion. Consequently *Þorsteins þáttur Austfirðings* differs from other members of its genre in having a geographical alienation only, followed by reunion and advancement of the Icelander over the hostility of the retinue, which functions here to supply the tension that is lacking between king and Icelander.

The possible influence of specific members of the genre and of other texts on *Þorsteins þáttur Austfirðings* should also be considered here in spite of the unlikelihood of establishing any such specific influence as proven to everyone’s satisfaction. We may begin with the main character. Þorsteinn is not said to be a poor man, but he is dealt with as if he were. He encounters hostility at court, and his reasons for declining the king’s offer of an establishment in Norway are that he will have earned enemies through his preferment. We might compare *Gull-Ásu-Pórðar þáttur*, a story of social and economic success of an Icelander against general opposition in Norway; but there is little beyond the home and poverty of the hero (“austfirzkr at ætt ok félítill . . . gørviligr maðr ok fǫðurbetringr”) and the envy he incurs in Norway to link Þorsteinn with Pórðr.³⁶ The ending of *Þorsteins þáttur* resembles more that of *Hreiðars þáttur* where the king (here also Magnús the Good) prefers to reward the Icelander and send him home rather than settle him in Norway, giving as his reason: “I think I see how King Haraldr would like to dispose of your future if he had the power—as he will have if you stay longer in Norway” (*ÍF* 10:260). Þorsteinn’s porridge eating seems pale by comparison to the porridge episode in the story of the irrepressible *Sneglu-Halli*, otherwise known as *Grautar-Halli*; and rather than being a borrowing from *Sneglu-Halla þáttur*, the prose of *Þorsteins þáttur* seems at this point to be a timid interpretation of the information in the verse (*ÍF* 9:263–95). Thus, detailed similarities with *Gull-Ásu-Pórðar þáttur*, *Hreiðars þáttur*, and *Sneglu-Halla þáttur*, similarities that extend beyond what is common to the genre, are very slight; however, a more extensive comparison is possible between *Þorsteins þáttur* and *Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka* (*ÍF* 6:361–68).

Besides the generic formal features of *dramatis personae*, struc-

36. *ÍF* 11:339–49; cf. also Þorsteinn sǫgufróði, likewise a poor man from the East Fjords who wins the king’s favor (*ÍF* 11:335–36).

ture, and style, both *Auðunar þáttir* and *Þorsteins þáttir* connect the generic structure with a pilgrimage to Rome, and in both the action is located partly in Norway, partly in Denmark. Nothing in Þorsteinn's tale resembles Auðunn's relationship to King Haraldr or the box-within-box effect of that story's doubled plot, but Þorsteinn's dealings with Magnús (involving geographical separation, reunion, and final reluctant parting) resemble Auðunn's with Sveinn more than is the case with any other þáttir. In both þættir the pilgrim is abused by officers of the king (Áki the *ármaðr* of King Sveinn; the *duraverðir* of King Magnús), though Auðunn was travelling to Rome, Þorsteinn returning from Rome when the incident occurred; and both pilgrims are ridiculed by the retinues and defended by the kings. These general parallels seem to warrant a closer, point-by-point comparison:

<i>Auðunar þáttir</i>	<i>Þorsteins þáttir</i>
1. Maðr hét Auðunn, vestfirzkr at kyni ok félítill.	Þorsteinn hét maðr, austfirzkr at ætt, ungr at aldri ok fráligr....

This kind of Introduction (often in the order here: name, home, condition in life, personal qualities) is a generic feature and, beyond that, is extremely common in all types of saga literature.³⁷

2. Hann fór útan ... fara þeir aptr til Nóregs ... ok ætlar nú at fara suðr til Danmerkr.	Hann fór útan ok ætlaði til Nóregs ok svá til Róms. Hann fór til Danmerkr (a variant text). ³⁸
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The phrases used in the Journey In in most of the stories of the genre and, indeed, throughout the saga literature are largely stereotyped.³⁹ Further, *Þorsteins þáttir* is much simpler at this point than *Auðunar*

37. "Genre and Narrative Structure," pp. 9–10; cf., e.g., *Gull-Ásu-Þórðar þáttir*, *Þorsteins (Íslendings) þáttir sögufróða*, *Þorvarðar þáttir krákunefs*, *Hrafns þáttir Hrútfirðings (Guðrúnarsonar)*, and *Þorsteins þáttir forvitna* (ÍF: 11:339; 335; 6:317; ÍP, p. 353).

38. The main text (ÍF 11:329) has "ætlaði til Róms, en fór til Danmerkr." The text cited is from *Sex sögu-þættir (=6SP)*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson (Reykjavík, 1855), p. 13, based on a paper manuscript (in private possession at that time, p. VII); this text has little or no authority (cf. the discussion of MSS, ÍF 11: CXI and XII–XIII) but is interesting in the present connection.

39. "Genre and Narrative Structure," p. 10.

páttr, which tells how Auðunn came into possession of his bear and other details; what seems significant here is not the normal progression from Norway to Denmark (which is also based on a doubtful text) but the general fact that both pilgrim stories are set in the two countries.⁴⁰

At his first meeting with the king (Sveinn/Magnús) the Icelander identifies himself:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 3. Konungr ... mælti síðan til | Hann [the king] svarar: “... |
| Auðunar: ”Hverr ertu?” segir | Eða hvat er ráðs þíns?” Þorsteinn |
| hann. Hann svarar: “Ek em | mælti: “Ek em íslenzkr |
| íslenzkr maðr....” | maðr....” |

The verbal resemblance here is due to a commonplace formula that depends on the situation depicted. Both Icelanders are pilgrims:

4. Hann segir: “Suðr vil ek ganga.” “...ok ætla ek suðr at ganga.”

Again, the expression is formulaistic; what is, perhaps, significant is the general similarity of the two interviews, both taking place in Denmark.

Both kings are reluctant to see the Icelanders go but understand the value of the pilgrimage:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 5. “Braut fýsir mik nú, herra.” | |
| Konungr svarar heldr seint: | Styrbjörn [King Magnús] mælti: |
| “Hvat villtu þá,” segir hann, | “Mantu eigi hafa saltat |
| “ef þú vill eigi með oss | suðrferðina?” ... |
| vera?” Hann segir: “Suðr | Styrbjörn mælti: |
| vil ek ganga.” “Ef þú | “Ek kalla ráðligt, at þú |
| vildir eigi svá gott ráð | haldir fram ferðinni, því at |
| taka,” segir konungr, “þá | hér var nauðsyn til.” |
| myndi mer fyr þykkja í, er | |
| þú fýsisk í brott.” | |

40. This is a safe inference even though the text in *ÍF* II only mentions a *norðrför* without stating explicitly that this occurs in Norway.

The kings invite the Icelanders to visit them at court upon their return from Rome:

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|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 6. ... ok skipaði konungr | “En vitja mín, þá er þú kemr |
| til um ferð hans, það hann | aptr, því at ek em jafnan með |
| koma til sín, er hann kæmi aptr. | hirð Magnúss konungs.” |

And the pilgrimage itself is of little interest to either author:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 7. Nú fór hann ferðar sinnar, | Síðan skilðu þeir, ok fór |
| unz hann kœmr suðr í | Þorsteinn til Róms ok kom |
| Rómaborg. Ok er hann hefir | sunnan um várit. |
| þar dvalizk sem hann tíðir, | |
| þá ferr hann aptr. ... | |

However, in accord with its superior style and complexity, *Auðunar þátttr* adds a few (functional) details about the hero's condition on the journey.

It is a striking coincidence, in view of all the other agreements between the two stories, that both pilgrims return at Easter time:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 8. Hann kœmr aptr í Danmörk | ... ok kom sunnan um várit. |
| at páskum, þangat sem | Hann kom þar, sem Magnús |
| konungr er þá staddr. ... | konungr var at veizlu. ... |

Both heroes experience difficulties at this point in the narrative (9) in gaining access to the kings. Auðunn is held back by his own modesty and fear of being ridiculed for his ragged and sickly condition; Þorsteinn is denied admission by the porters. There are no verbal resemblances.

As soon as they learn of the Icelandic's presence, both kings hasten personally to welcome them back and bring them in:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 10. Ok þegar er konungr veit, | Síðan stóð konungr upp ór |
| hverr hann er, tók konungr | sæti sínu ok gengr út ... |
| í hõnd honum Auðuni ok það | ok mælti: “Vel þú kominn, |
| hann vel kominn ... | Íslendingr ... |
| leiðir hann eptir sér inn. | ok gakk inn.” |

At this point in *Auðunar þáttir* the returning pilgrim is ridiculed by the retainers; in *Þorsteins þáttir* the laughter precedes the king’s welcome:

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|--|---|
| 11. Ok er hirðin sá hann,
hlógu þeir at honum ... | ... með hlátri ... slógu þeir
í spott ok mikinn dáruskap, hverr
í sínu rúmi.... |
|--|---|

The cause of the laughter is different in the two þættir; Auðunn is thin, bald, wasted by illness, and dressed as a beggar, while Þorsteinn made the mistake of asking for the fictional “Styrbjörn.”

The King silences the laughter and defends the pilgrim before the court:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 12. ... en konungr sagði:
“Eigi þurfu þér at honum
at hlæja, því at betr hefir
hann sét fyrir sinni sál
heldr en ér.” | Konungr tók til orða ok mælti:
“Lítit gaman er þetta ...
ok skulu þér ekki spotta nafn
þetta lengr.” |
|---|---|

These words of Magnús’ do correspond in position in the narrative to Sveinn’s defence of Auðunn but are not of the same purport and are tied to the name motif in *Þorsteins þáttir*; a few sentences later Magnús is more direct: “... ok engin skal svá djarfr, at þér geri nokkut mein.” But *Þorsteins þáttir* repeats the motif of the king’s defence a little later, and this time Magnús, like Auðunn’s King Sveinn, compares the listening courtiers unfavorably with the Iclander whom they have been mocking:

Konungsmenn hlógu enn at þessu ...
Konungr brosti at ok kvað þetta:
“... Sjá inn sami maðr veitti mér
mikit lið, þá er þér váruð hvergi
í nánd....”

Now the kings serve the pilgrims with bath and clothing; and the Icelanders join the retinue:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 13. Þá lét konungr gera honum
laug ok gaf honum síðan
klæði, ok er hann nú með
honum. ⁴¹ | “... ok tak yfir þik skikkju þessa
ok gakk inn. Skal þér búa laug,
ok ver vel kominn með hirðinni ...”
Síðan var hann með hirðinni. |
|--|--|

At this point the stories both comment on the Icelander's general conduct at court. The passage in *Auðunar þáttr* is, however, present only in a minor manuscript, *Hulda* (AM 66 fol.):

- | | |
|--|---|
| 14. ... var hann þar um hríð.
Auðun kunni vel at hafa sik
í fjölmenni; var hann maðr
ótyrrinn, orðgætinn ok ekki
margtalaðr. | Síðan var hann með hirðinni.
Hann var einlyndr ok fálátr.
(Text of 6SP: Hann var
lítillátr ok fálátr.) |
|--|---|

In *Hulda* (only) there follows immediately a statement of Auðunn's general popularity. We infer that Þorsteinn was never popular with the court (or at least with some persons in Norway), but Magnús's affection for him is comparable with Sveinn's for Auðunn, though coming a little later in the narrative:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 15. ... líkaði öllum mönnum vel
við hann. Sveinn konungr var
ok hinn blíðasti til hans. ⁴² | Konungr var vel við hann. ⁴³ |
|---|---|

Later both kings offer the Icelanders a chance to settle in the Kingdom with the royal favor:

⁴¹ I. The *Flateyjarbók* text (III, 413) makes it clear that the king gives his *own* robe as in *Þorsteins þáttr*.

⁴² *Fornmanna sögur* (=Fms) VI (Copenhagen, 1831), 303–04. Some confusion has been created by the fact that the *Fornrit* editors (ÍF 6:365, n. 3) attribute these two passages to *Flateyjarbók* when, in fact, they stem from *Hulda* (AM 66 fol.). *Hulda* is the base text of the story as printed in *Fms* VI; the conflated text in *Fjörutíu Íslendinga-þættir*, ed. Þorleifr Jónsson (Reykjavík, 1904) also contains the *Hulda* passage. *Hulda* is much more discursive at this point than the oldest text, that of *Msk*; *Flateyjarbók* usually offers fuller texts than *Msk* but here is actually the briefest; thus both major texts agree against *Hulda*.

⁴³ Cf. ÍF 9:280 (*Sneglu-Halla þáttr*).

- | | |
|---|---|
| 16. Þat er nú sagt einhverju
sinni of várit, at konungr
býðr Auðuni at vera með sér
á lengðar ok kvezk mundu gera
hann skutilsvein sinn ok
leggja til hans góða virðing. | Ok eitt sinn mælti konungr
við hann: “Hversu er þá við
þik búit, er þér þykkir bezt ok
þér má helzt líka? Viltu hér
staðfestask ok kvángask?” |
|---|---|

The Icelanders reply with gratitude but decline, giving their reasons for now wishing to return to Iceland. The reasons are unlike—Auðunn must return to care for his aged mother while Þorsteinn fears the envy his preferment has stirred—and there are no verbal resemblances except the commonplaces of thanks:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 17. Auðun svarar: “Guð þakki
yðr, herra, ágætt boð, ok
alla þá sæmd, sem þér
veiti mér... (<i>Hulda</i>) ⁴⁴ | Þorsteinn svaraði: “Þat er boðit
ágætliga. En á meðan þér lifið,
mun minn frami hér mestr vera.”
(6SP: “Ágætliga er þetta boðit,
herra...”) |
|---|---|

The kings, though anxious to have the Icelanders stay, must approve their reason for returning home:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 18. Konungr svarar: “Vel er
mælt,” segir hann, “ok
mannliga ok muntu verða
giptumaðr; sjá einn var sá
hlutrinn, at mér myndi eigi
mislíka, at þú færir í braut
heðan...” | Konungr mælti: “Vitrliga er
þetta mælt.” |
|--|---|

Then the kings prepare the Icelanders’ journey home:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 19. “... ok ver nú með mér, þar
til er skip búask.” Hann
gerir svá. | Síðan bjó konungr hann til Íslands
ágætliga vel með miklu fé ... |
|---|---|

44. *Msk* (*ÍF* 6:366): “Auðunn segir: ‘Guð þakki yðr, herra, sóma þann allan, er þér vilit til mín leggja...’”; *Flatayjarbók*: “Hann mællti. þat er vel bodit herra....”

Following this, *Auðunar þáttur* describes Sveinn's magnificent gifts in detail. Journey Out and Conclusion:

20. Auðunn ... fór út þegar um sumarit til Íslands ok	Síðan bjó konungr hann til Íslands ... ok staðfestisk þar síðan ok
þótti vera inn mesti gæfumaðr.	þótti vera inn mesti gæfumaðr.
Frá þessum manni, Auðuni, var kominn Þorsteinn Gyðuson.	Ok lýksk þar frá honum at segja.

To a large extent common genre accounts for the similarities here, and many þættir offer parallels for the final evaluation of the hero, including some of the formulas used.⁴⁵ No doubt there are also many *gæfumenn* in the saga literature, but only in these two stories is the phrase “ok þótti vera inn mesti gæfumaðr” used as the *explicit* of such similar tales.

Such a series of parallels is difficult to evaluate. Some are explainable through the requisites of genre (such as the Introduction and Conclusion); some may be too general to bear much weight or dependent on ordinary customs (such as the kings' inquiry and the Icelanders' answer “I am an Icelander,” etc.). The agreement of the motifs associated with the pilgrimage is striking, but we also find some of those motifs paralleled in *Mána þáttur Íslendings* and *Þórarins þáttur stuttfeldar*. Máni came to the court of the Norwegian king Magnús Erlingsson from Rome, like Auðunn a “stafkarl ... ekki féligr ... kollóttir ok magr ok nær klæðlauss”; when the king asked “hverr hann væri, ... [h]ann kvezk heita Máni ok vera Íslenzkr ok þá kominn frá Rómi sunnan” (*ÍP*, p. 157).

Þórarins þáttur begins with a scene outside church that reminds somewhat of Auðunn's reunion with the Danish king:

<i>Auðunar þáttur</i>	<i>Þórarins þáttur</i>
Ok nú of aptanin, er konungr gekk til kveldsongs, ætlaði	Svá barsk at eitt sinn, at Sigurðr konungr [Jórsalafari] gekk frá
Auðunn at hitta hann, ok svá	skytningi til aptansöngs; váru
mikit sem honum þótti fyrr	menn drukknir mjök ok kátir. Sat

45. “Genre and Narrative Structure,” pp. 13–14.

fyr, jók nú miklu á, er þeir
váru drukknir hirðmennir.
Ok er þeir gengu inn aptr,
þá þekkði konungr mann ok
þóttisk finna, at eigi hafði
frama til at ganga at hitta
hann. Ok nú er hirðin gekk
inn, þá veik konungr út ok
mælti: “Gangi sá nú fram,
er mik vill finna; mik grunar,
at sá muni vera maðrinn.”

konungr ok hirðin úti fyrir kirkju
ok lásu aptansönginn, ok varð
söngurinn eigi greiðligur. Þá mælti
Sigurðr konungr: “Hvat karla er
þat, er ek sé þar hjá kirkjunni í
feldi nökkurum stuttum.” ... Karl
gekk fram ok mælti... Konungr
mælti: “Kom til mín á morgin þar
sem ek drekk” (*ÍP*, p. 308).

When Þórarinn comes to court next day, a trick is played on him by one of the retainers who meets him at the door; the scene is a little reminiscent of Þorsteinn Austfirðingr's entry, and like Þorsteinn, Þórarinn incurs the enmity of some retainers and must be protected. Þórarinn then wins the king's friendship with a praise poem:

En er lokit var kvæðinu, spurði konungr, hvat hann vildi ráða sinna.
Hann kvezk hafa ætlat ferð sína til Róms. Þá fekk konungr honum fé
mikit ok bað hann vitja sín, er hann kæmi aptr, ok kvazk þá mundu
gera sóma hans. En hér er eigi greint, hvárt þeir fundusk síðan (*ÍP*,
pp. 309–10).

Here we have several more parallels in both motifs and diction. It is not clear what the relationships among these þættir are, but the parallels from *Mána þáttir* and *Þórarins þáttir* should restrain us from seeing too much in the agreements between *Þorsteins þáttir* and *Auðunar þáttir*.

Nevertheless, those agreements are not isolated but systematic, and they must be pursued a bit further. *Auðunar þáttir* can be dated with some confidence to the years 1190–1220; and the Þorsteinn Gyðuson mentioned at the end of the story was the father of Gellir, who married Vigdís, daughter of Hvamm-Sturla, and became the brother-in-law of Snorri, Sighvatr, and Þórðr. If Snorri Sturluson wrote the þáttir, an explanation for the resemblances with *Mána þáttir* is offered: Máni's story is preserved in one manuscript of

Sverris saga, and Snorri knew *Sverris saga*.⁴⁶ There is much less external evidence to pin down *Þorsteins þátrr*; it is extant in paper manuscripts only, and no traceable Icelanders are mentioned in it. The verse attributed to King Magnús cannot be from the eleventh century, but comparison with other tales of the King in Disguise and the internal awkwardness of the narrative make it unlikely that the verse was composed by the author of the þátrr. The editor's (Jón Jóhannesson's) guess of "sometime in the thirteenth century" may be as close as we can come in dating the story; however, the fact that, so far as is known, it existed only in independent form—that is, was never brought into (or taken out of) a king's saga as were the majority of the þættir—suggests not only that the þátrr was little known (as the editor points out [*ÍF* 11: CXI]), but also that it is very late. It may well belong to the fourteenth century, a period that also accords well with the probable time of the greatest popularity of the international tale of the King in Disguise. (Cf. *6SP*, p. VII: *Þorsteins þátrr* is "ekki yngri en frá 14. öld.") As literary works the two þættir stand at opposite poles, *Auðunar þátrr* being one of the great short stories in European literature, and *Þorsteins þátrr* an ill-executed outline. There can be no doubt in which direction the putative influence flowed.⁴⁷

46. *ÍF* 6: CV–CVII; cf. Régis Boyer, *Trois sagas islandaises du XIIIe siècle et un "thátrr"* (Paris, 1964), pp. 229–34.

47. The hypothesis of influence from *Auðunar þátrr* could explain the inconsistency that develops when "Styrbjörn" asks if Þorsteinn could postpone his pilgrimage and the Icelandic answers that he could for the sake of King Magnús or his men. "Styrbjörn" then replies illogically: "Ek held ráðligt, at þú haldir fram ferðinni, því at hér var nauðsyn til, en vitja mín, þá er þú kemr aptr...." Nothing in the story prepares for or explains this "necessity" that changes the king's mind so quickly. However, in *Auðunar þátrr* there is a necessity in the journey that grows out of the hero's patient, uncompromising and resourceful character (see *ÍF* 6: CIV–CV for one of many appreciations of Auðunn's character; the dissenting analysis of Stig Wikander, "Frán indisk djurfabel till isländsk saga," *Vetenskaps-societeten i Lund: Årsbok*, 1964, pp. 87–114, seems eccentric), and the word *nauðsyn* is used by King Haraldr in connection with the journey south (once in *Msk* [*ÍF* 6:362] and twice in *Hulda* [*Fms* VI, 299, 306]; not in *Flateyjarbók*). Thus a flaw in *Þorsteins þátrr* is, perhaps, to be explained by the tug of incompatible models: "Styrbjörn's" question follows the model of *Auðunar þátrr*; the Icelandic's answer and praise of the king derives from the international tale; and "Styrbjörn's" reply switches back to the model of *Auðunar þátrr*, producing a logical non-sequitur and motivating it with an unexplained "necessity." Similarly the robe and bath with which the king greets the Icelandic, though commonplace, is better motivated in *Auðunar þátrr* since we are never told explicitly that Þorsteinn was poor and ill-clothed like the returning Auðunn.

III

Section II has argued that the constituents of *Þorsteins þáttr* are (1) an international popular tale, adapted to (2) an unrelated poem and cast in (3) a generic mold. Since the mold could be known to an author only through specific þættir, we examined the surviving members of the genre for evidence of direct connections with *Þorsteins þáttr* and found that (4) *Auðunar þáttr* is a possible source of such influence. These are formal and content features, but the story is not an objective report of events, historical or fictional; despite its brevity it possesses distinct themes, the dimension of meaning. The thematic content of *Þorsteins þáttr* is more conspicuous than in most sagas and þættir since the author highlights it by means of what is very nearly a "moral," delivered, however, not in the narrator's words but dramatically by the king and the Iclander:

[Magnús said:] "This same man gave me important aid when you [the retainers] were nowhere near, and he did that for a man whose identity he did not know, and he is a good warrior. And it is wiser to make no mockery of an unknown man, for it may turn out that he is a more vigorous and more courageous man. And it will also appear to some people as if it were Fate that brought him to me."

Þorsteinn answered: "It is easy to see, my lord, that God sent me to your aid. For I was much more impressed by your appearance than if you had been an ordinary man, and it came into my mind to help you."

In secular terms: do not mock a stranger, he may prove to be a better man than you suppose; and conversely, help a stranger, he may prove a powerful friend. And this simple theme is given a numinous quality by attributing Þorsteinn's arrival to Fortune and a divine sanction through the mysterious way in which Þorsteinn sees more than is apparent in the embattled stranger.

The story of Karl and Vandráðr points its moral in a way quite comparable to *Þorsteins þáttr*, though in *Hákonar saga* no dramatic spokesman for the narrator is employed:

This now became very famous both in Norway and in Denmark: such was the lot that father and son drew from Earl Hákon. And the saying

proved true that one always gets a good deal from good men. It is always very important that a man take great pains to make friends; for the man who has good friends will always have support.

The two proverbial points here are reduceable to the injunction to make friends for the good one derives from them.⁴⁸ Thus *Porsteins þáttr* and the episode from *Hákonar saga* tell structurally similar versions of the same international popular tale and use the story as the vehicle of similar didactic points, the one being interpreted in terms of the value of friends, the other in terms of the potential friend in every stranger.

The tone of *Porsteins þáttr* as well as its specific message is in harmony with the tone and thematic content of its genre as a whole.⁴⁹ But what is of interest here is the possible source of this theme in the þáttr, and we must consider the possibility that the international tale came to the author of *Porsteins þáttr* in the form of the story of Karl and Vandráðr, that there is a direct connection between the two. Six points of similarity between the Old Icelandic adaptations contrast with the general tradition represented by the analogues:

1. The king and commoner are brought together as a result of battle.
2. The identity of the king is concealed (though thinly and conventionally) from the reader until it is revealed to the commoner in a scene at court:

Hákonar saga

Enn er þau komu fyrri konung
s(pýrr) konungr karll ef
[hann hafði sield] hann fyrr
eda huort hann kendi hann.

Porsteins þáttr

Konungr mælti við hann eitt
sinn: “Hverr hyggr þú nú
várr Styrbjörn sé?”

3. Karl’s story differs from all its analogues in asserting that Karl *did* in fact recognize the king at their first meeting. Something similar

48. The moral seems to apply most naturally to Sveinn and Karl or both, and the somewhat strained reference to Jarl Hákon may be due to the author of his saga.

49. “Theme and Genre.”

is found in *Þorsteins þáttr*, where Þorsteinn did not recognize “Styrbjörn” as the king but did see something extraordinary in him:

Kenni ek þik nu konungr s(eiger) kall enda kenda ek yður fyrr [þá er] þier komut til min þo at þu nefndizt Wandradr.	Hann svarar: “Yðr sé ek vænstan til at hafa svá kallazk ... miklu fannsk mér meira um yðra ásjónu en þú værir alþýðligr maðr, ok brá mér þessu í skap at duga þér.”
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4. The commoner’s aid is placed against a background of divine providence or Fortune:

[Karl said:] enn þat er guð at þacka er yður kom til gagns sa [litli for] beine sem ek gioda yður kom þar miog til goðuilld yður ok audna.	[Magnús said:] “Ok svá mun ok sumum sýnask, at þat væri happ, er honum bar til handa.” Þorsteinn svaraði: “Auðsét er þat, herra, at guð sendi mik yðr til hlíðar....”
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5. Both kings emphasize that they owe their lives to the commoner:

Þat er satt ath [seigia seiger] konungr at ek aa þier alla mina lifdaga at launa med gudi þa ek lifi hedan fra mun ... þat vilia er mik sendi til þin enn nu mun þier litlu launad uerda. bondi s(eiger) konungr epter þui sem [uerdu] ueri.	Konungr mælti: “Rétt muntu þetta kalla, at þú sér lífsgjafi minn, ok skyldi þér þat vel launa.”
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6. The stories bear similar “morals,” as set out above.

These parallels between Karl’s story and Þorsteinn’s are somewhat easier to judge than those that involve *Auðunar þáttr*. There is little here to speak for direct contact, and an adequate hypothesis for explaining their relationship will be the assumption that oral versions of the King in Disguise current in medieval Scandinavia had a martial

setting and were equipped with a moral.⁵⁰ The six specific points of congruency over against the analogues might have arisen independently in stories that are, after all, analogues of each other or may have inhered in the oral tradition on which both stories drew. Point (5) is the consequence of point (1) and thus may have belonged to the Scandinavian oral redaction (loosely “oicotype”), and the “morals” (point 6) are in the last analysis not exactly identical. Points (2) and (4) might simply be due to common literary fashion. However, point (3) is impressive enough to give pause, and a seventh agreement already discussed should probably be added: wordplay on the alias “Vandráðr” is explicit, while the context in *Porsteins þáttr* seems to call for similar wordplay which is apparently lacking. However, these two telling details fail of full agreement, and finally in the absence of striking verbal similarities there does not seem to be enough detailed evidence to warrant the assumption of direct dependence of the þáttr on the version of the King in Disguise recorded in *Hákonar saga* though its source must have been quite similar.

This negative conclusion is supported by the existence of at least one other anecdote in which an incognito king encounters some of his subjects and at a later meeting reveals himself; the anecdote is also used as an *exemplum* to teach a lesson similar to that of *Porsteins þáttr*:

Some men molest an unknown pilgrim, accosting him as “félagi.” Next day King Óláfr Haraldsson summons them before him and asks: “huat er nu vm felag vort þat er ek aa hia yckr?” Óláfr is punning on *félagi* as “business partner” and as “fellow” (a familiar term) and is in effect demanding his money back from a non-existent partnership. The men are dismayed, but the king cheers them and gives them no more punishment than a piece of advice: “... enn þat raad vil ek gefa yckr. makit þeim einum haadung er þit vitid huerr er.”⁵¹

50. Smyser, p. 145, assumed an original continental folktale with Charlemagne as the king in disguise; cf. Walsh, p. 18. Charlemagne lore was, of course, very popular in Scandinavia as the name of Magnús himself testifies.

51. *Flateyjarbók*, III, 239 (= *Óláfs saga hins helga*, ed. O. A. Johnsen [Kristiania, 1922], pp. 55–56); cf. the humorous use of a proverb of similar import in *Jóns saga helga* (*Byskupa sögur*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, 2nd ed. [Akureyri, 1953], II, 21); also *ÍF* 9:10 (*Víga-Glúms saga*).

Thus it seems likely that tales of disguise and morals of this kind are so natural a combination that we need seek no source for the combination in *Þorsteins þáttr* other than the common source of both Karl's tale and Þorsteinn's in the international popular tale.

IV

The relationship of the sagas to the mainstream of European medieval literature has rightly become one of the principal themes in current saga scholarship.⁵² However, this interest builds on a considerable amount of earlier comparative work, some of which has recently been accorded an able survey.⁵³ Reviewing this scholarship, I am left with the impression that its main fault lies in a superficial conception of the goals of this kind of investigation; it is not sufficient to demonstrate a similarity between a European story, motif, or literary device and an Icelandic parallel and to trace their respective histories to discover where coincidence might have occurred. Exact sources are almost never to be found; and while source-hunting is a worthy enterprise, the information derived from a source—or more frequently analogue—study should yield increased understanding of how authors worked, the creative process; of what is distinctively Icelandic, as well as what is foreign; of what interpretation or function different authors saw in the common material; and of the ways of oral tradition.

A pattern worthy of imitation was provided by Dag Strömbäck in his study of *Hróa þáttr*, a story which is easily traceable to French or English and ultimately to oriental sources, probably oral.⁵⁴ Strömbäck shows how *Hróa þáttr* is composed from native elements and a foreign source and comments: "... ett främmande stoff växer vanligen fram på ett inhemskt substrat och får sin specifika utgestaltung i den nya

52. A good example among the more recent is Robert J. Glendinning, "Grettis Saga and European Literature in the Late Middle Ages," *Mosaic* 4 (1970), 49–61.

53. Mattias Tveitane, "Europeisk påvirkning på den norrøne sagalitteraturen," *Edda* 69 (1969), 73–95.

54. "En orientalisk saga i fornnordisk dräkt," in *Donum Grapeanum: Festschrift ... Anders Grape* (Uppsala, 1945), pp. 408–44; also "Uppsala, Iceland and the Orient," in *Early English and Norse Studies Presented to Hugh Smith*, edd. Arthur Brown and Peter Foote (London, 1963), pp. 178–90; the source of *Hróa þáttr* had been noted previously. Cf. also Dag Strömbäck, "Some Remarks on Learned and Novelistic Elements in the Icelandic Sagas," in *Nordica et Anglica ... Stefán Einarsson* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), pp. 140–47.

miljön under där rådande förutsättningar” (p. 431). Much of what he wrote about the tale of Hrói applies also to the two Icelandic adaptations of the King in Disguise: “*Hróa þáttr* visar som så många andra ‘småsagor’ Islands öppenhet för vandrande sagomotiv och islänningarnas överlägsna konst att kunna inarbeta internationellt gods i sin historiska sagoskatt” (p. 425). With *Hróa þáttr* one might go farther than Strömbäck and show the possible influence of the story pattern discussed above, the distinctively Scandinavian concept of *gæfumaðr*, as found especially in these short stories, a literary convention of nicknames used to mark stages in Hrói’s career, and so on.

It may seem that *Porsteins þáttr* and *Hróa þáttr* are frail vessels for this kind of scrutiny, but the complexity of the compositional history of even such simple tales has been underestimated. It has been justly pointed out by a recent writer that it is a circular error to dismiss everything that seems dissonant in a saga as a failure of the author to reconcile divergent sources,⁵⁵ but it is equally circular and erroneous to begin with the assumption that every work of art is a perfect work of art. We should continue to seek sources and analogues, including foreign ones, to observe their adaptation in Old Icelandic, and to draw every possible conclusion about the composition of the saga literature, even if we can only go part way down the road to Xanadu.

55. Robert G. Cook, “The Character of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue,” *SS* 43 (1971), 1–21.

