Silence and Power: Silence in *Egils saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, and *Njáls saga*

By

Jeanine Elise Aune

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Kirsten Wolf, Professor, Scandinavian Studies
Susan Brantly, Professor, Scandinavian Studies
Julie Allen, Associate Professor, Scandinavian Studies
Thomas DuBois, Professor, Scandinavian Studies
Jordan Zweck, Assistant Professor, English

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of silence and its connection to the overall theme in *Egils saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, and *Njáls saga*. *Egils saga* employs silence to develop character and create suspense, but also to obfuscate characters. Egill Skallagrímsson is not entirely likeable, leaving room to consider two audiences—an Icelandic audience who can praise Egill's fierce independence and disdain for authority, but also a Norwegian audience who could criticize Egill's impudence and violent tendencies. Although *Laxdœla saga* also uses silence to develop character and create suspense, its primary use of silence is to show how forced silence of fellow freemen disrupts regional stability. The silences of *Njáls saga* reveal a legal system not out for justice, but for the few with the most knowledge. Silences and silencing illustrates national consequences in the silencing of individuals, both by and of *bændur* and *goðar.* Analysis of the three sagas thus reveals that silence is used strategically to support the theme of each individual narrative.

Introduction

> *"Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored."*[1]

Although oversimplified and tongue-in-cheek, the popular description of the Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) as *bændur flugust á,* "farmers fought," is not altogether far from the facts. These sagas deal with the complex conflicts between various classes of farmers for individual honor, family honor, or the limited resources of Iceland. The final scene of violence can be localized in a district, escalate throughout an entire region, or take place nationally at the Alþing; but the initial seed of conflict is between two individual Icelanders who cannot come to peaceful terms on their own.

Íslendingsögur are lengthy texts that fuse history, legend, and literature, yet they are without precursors and seem to have developed spontaneously. They are preserved as written texts without attributed authors or composers, and there is a significant time gap between the events of the sagas, around 930-1030 AD, and the date of extant manuscripts, anywhere from the 13th to the 17th. An aura of mystery surrounds *Íslendingsögur* and much effort has been put forth to address that mystery as scholars of *Íslendingsögur* have sought to uncover truth and meaning in the sagas.

The sudden appearance of *Íslendingsögur* as completed texts is an intriguing unknown, and many scholars have and continue to investigate saga origins. Scholars have investigated the sagas' source material, from oral narratives[2] to literary borrowings,[3] and in combination.[4]

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[1] Trinh T. Minh-ha, in "Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking," in *Longman Anthology of Women's Literature*, edited by Mary K. DeShazer, 2000, 929.

[2] Óskar Halldórsson, in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða.* Íslenzk úrvalsrit 1. Reykjavik: Skálholt, 1971. Jónas Kristjánsson, in "*Íslendingadrápa* and Oral Tradition." *Gripla* 1 (1975): 76-91. Dietrich Hofmann, in "Hrafnkels

Scholars have studied echos of poetry in the narratives.[5] They have also critically analyzed each saga on its own merits and developed a critical edition for each saga.[6] Scholars interested in the historical development of the broader corpus of *Íslendingsögur* have compared sagas with each other and potential source material to determine approximate dates and chronology.[7] The methodologies of dating and chronology include statistical analyses of linguistic elements and broader discussions of an evolution from the kings' sagas to individual Icelandic poets to family sagas. Source analysis scholars have also tried to determine authorship of the anonymous *Íslendingsögur*,[8] while debating the value of determining authorship and what authorship would have meant to medieval Icelanders.[9]

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und Hallfreðs Traum: Zur Verwendung mündlicher Tradition in der Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða." *Skandinavistik* 6 (1976): 19-36. Ólafur Halldórsson, in *Grænland í miðaldaritum*. Reykjavik: Sögufélag, 1978. Gísli Sigurðsson, in *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method.* Publications of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature 2. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univeristy Press, 2004.

[3] Robert J. Glendenning, in "*Grettis saga* and European Literature in the Late Middle Ages." *Mosaic* 4 (1979): 49-61. Bjarni Einarson, in *Litteræ forudsætninger for Egils saga.* Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi 8. Reykjvik: Stofnun Árna Magnúsonar, 1975. Carol J. Clover, in *The Medieval Saga.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

[4] Arnór Sigurjónsson, in "Um uppruna Íslendingasagna og Íslendingaþátta." *Andvari* 18 (1976): 98-113. Kristín Geirsdóttir, in "Fáein alþyðaleg orð." *Skírnir* 153 (1979): 5-41.

[5] John Lindow, in "A Mythic Model in *Bandamanna saga* and its Significance." *Michigan Germanic Studies* 3 (1977): 1-12.

[6] *Íslendingsögur* were published in the *Íslenzk fornrit* series, volumes 2-12, and 14.

[7] The introduction to each saga in the *Íslenzk fornrit* edition discusses manuscripts. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, in *Dating the Icelandic Sagas: an Essay on Method*. London: Viking Society, 1958. Jónas Kristjánsson, in *Um Fóstbræðrasögu.* Reykjavik: Árna Magnússonar, 1972. Vésteinn Ólason, in "Family Sagas." *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*. Ed. Rory McTurk. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, 101-118.

[8] Vésteinn Ólasson, in "Er Snorri höfundur Egils sögu?" *Skírnir* 142 (1968): 48-67. Ralph West, in "Snorri Sturluson and *Egils saga*: Statistics of Style." *Scandinavian Studies* 52 (1980): 163-193. Peter Hallberg, in *Ólafr Þórðarson hvítaskáld,* Knýtlinga saga *och* Laxdœla saga: *Ett försök till språklig författarbestämning*. Studia Islandica 22, 1963. Marina Meier Mundt, in "Til spørsmålet om Laxdœla sagas forfatter." *Maal og Minne* (1965): 45-62.

[9] I.M. Steblin-Kamenskij, in "An Attempt at a Semantic Approach to the Problem of Authorship in Old Icelandic Literature." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 81 (1966): 24-34.

The realistic and detailed accounts of character lives provided by the sagas give an air of historicity, and although scholars do not use the sagas as historical artifacts, they have attempted to glean facts about contempory society through analyses and comparsion of *Íslendingsögur* against the historical canon.[10] Such studies have covered, among others, governance,[11] the role of women,[12] relationships,[13] moral code,[14] and the law.[15] Studies of mental illness in Old Norse society have used the Icelandic Family sagas to make inferences about how mental illness was perceived by the population.[16] Much like source analysts question the value of their endeavors, like determining authorship, literary anthropology scholars question their attempts to draw comparisons and make connections between perceived historical sources and *Íslendingsögur*. Steblin-Kaminskij, for example, has argued

[10] The accepted historical canon includes a combination of several sources: 1. *Sturlunga saga,* a contemporary source valued by its proximity to described events ; 2. Laws; and 3. *Landnámabók*, *Íslendingabók, Biskupa sögur*, sources that use a more 'historical mode.'

[11] Jesse L. Byock, in *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

[12] Jenny Jochens has a couple of texts that showcase this approach. Her article, "The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland," *Journal of Medieval History* 6 (1980): 377-392, and her book, *Women in Old Norse Society,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995. Helga Kress, in "Ekki hǫfu vér kvennaskap: Nokkrar laustengdar athuganir um karlmennsku og kvenatur í Njálu." In *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20 júlí 1977. Eds. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1997.* 293-313.

[13] Ursula Dronke, in "The Role of Sexual Themes in *Njáls saga.*" The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture. London: Viking Society for Northern Research. Thomas Bredsdorff, in *Kaos og kærlighed: En studie i islændingesagaens livsbillede.* Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1971. Sverrir Jakóbsson, "Strangers in Icelandic Society 1100-1400." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007): 141-157.

[14] Kristján Kristjánsson, in "Liberating Moral Traditions: Saga Morality and Aristotle's 'Megalopsychia.'" *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 1.4 (1998): 397-442.

[15] William Ian Miller, in "Avoiding Legal Judgment: The Submission of Disputes to Arbitration in Medieval Iceland." *American Journal of Legal History* 27 (1984): 95-134.

[16] Jon Geir Høyersten, in "Madness in the Old Norse Society. Narratives and Ideas." *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry* 61 (2007): 324-331. K.T. Kanerva, in "Ógæfa as an Emotion in Thirteenth-Century Iceland." *Scandinavian Studies* 84.1 (2012): 1-27.

that pre-literate and literate societies perceive history and time differently,[17] which subverts efforts to understand sagas in modern terms. Some scholars do not attempt to verify historical elements with contemporary materials, but contemplate the importance of saga narratives to their original audiences.[18] These kinds of scholarship have referred to as rational as opposed to historical reconstruction, and the line of inquiry offered by the rational reconstruction of saga literature in order to reveal social or cultural truths has resulted in new insights that have added to the field.[19]

Literary analyses of *Íslendingsögur* have tended to study formal elements of saga structure, style, or language, often times within *Íslendingsögur* as a whole. Looking broadly across *Íslendingsögur* and *þættir*, or short stories, scholars have seen structural similarities and patterns in the Icelandic Family sagas.[20] Studies of saga components have explored the presence of common scenes, themes and motifs,[21] as well as recurrent character types across

[17] I. M. Steblin-Kamenskij, in *The Saga Mind.* Tr. Kenneth Ober. Odense: Odense University Press, 1973.

[18] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen. *Saga and Society: An Introduction to Old Norse Literature.* Studia Borealia, Nordic Studies Monograph Series 1. Trans. John Tucker. Odense: Odense University Press, 1993.

[19] Richard Rorty, "The Historiography of Philosophy," in *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*." Eds. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984. 49 – 75.

[20] Theodore M. Andersson, in *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading.* Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 28. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967. Joseph Harris, in "Genre and Narrative Structure in Some *Íslendinga þættir*." *Scandinvian Studies* 44 (1972): 1-27. Kathryn Hume, in "Beginnings and Endings in the Icelandic Family Sagas." *Modern Language Review* 58 (1973): 593-606.

[21] Carol J. Clover, in "Scene in Saga Composition." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 89 (1974): 57-83. William E. Judd, in "Valgerðr's Smile." *Scandinavian Studies* 56.3 (1984): 203-212. Jana K. Schulman, in "Make Me a Match: Motifs of Betrothal in the Sagas of the Icelanders." *Scandinavian Studies* 69.3 (1997): 296-321. John D. Martin, in "Svá lýkr hér hverju hestaðingi." *Scandinavian Studies* 75.1 (2003): 25-45. Zilmer Kristel, in "Scenes of Island Encounters in Icelandic Sagas: Reflections of Cultural Memory." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4 (2008): 227-248.

Íslendingsögur.[22] The language of the sagas has also been analyzed for patterns in efforts to elucidate saga style,[23] and analyses of saga narrative structure have argued that complex sagas are not compilations of multiple, smaller works, but sophisticated, cohesive literary works in their own rights.[24] Literary analyses have also made arguments that in *Laxdœla saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, it is the female characters that are the protagonists,[25] whereas other studies have questioned the presence of strong female characters in the public sphere.[26] Recent studies have re-evaluated previous understanding of literary motifs.[27] The wide range of literary investigations has revealed nuances of saga structure and style, as well as a great variety within *Íslendingsögur* corpus.

Gaps remain in our understanding of the sagas as literature, however, especially with regard to those nuances of characters' behavior that may easily go unnoticed because they are

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[22] Lars Lönnroth, in "The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas." *Scandinavian Studies* 41.1 (1969): 1-29. Aðalheður Guðmundsdóttir, in "The Werewolf in Medieval Icelandic Literature." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 106.3 (2007): 277-303. Jeremy Deangelo, in "The North and the Depiction of the "Finnar" in the Icelandic Sagas." *Scandinavian Studies* 82.3 (2010): 257-286.

[23] Otto Springer, in "The Style of the Old Icelandic Family Sagas." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 38.1 (1939): 107-128. Paul Schach, in "The Use of Simile in the Old Icelandic Family Sagas." *Scandinavian Studies* 24.4 (1952): 149-165. Ari Bouman, in *Observations on Syntax and Style of Some Icelandic Sagas. With Special Reference to the Relation between Viga-Glúms saga and Reykdoela saga*. Reykjavík: Leiftur, 1956. K.C. Kossuth, in "The Linguistic Basis of Saga Structure: Toward a Syntax of Narrative." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 95 (1980): 126-141.

[24] Margaret Arent Madelung, in *The Laxdœla Saga: Its Structural Patterns*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972.

[25] Helga Kress, in "Mjǫg mun þér samstaft þykkja: Um sagnahefð ok kvenlega reynslu í Laxdæla sögu." *Konur skrifa: Til heiðurs Önnu Sigurðardóttir*. Eds. Valborg Bentsdóttir, Guðrún Gísladóttir, and Svanlaug Baldursdóttir. Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1980. Patricia, in "*Laxdæla saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*: Narrative Structure." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 95 (1980), 116-125.

[26] Jenny Jochens, in "The Medieval Icelandic Heroine: Fact or Fiction?" *Viator* 117 (1986): 35-50. Zoe Borovsky, in "Never in Public: Women and Performance in Old Norse Literature." *Journal of Americal Folklore* 112 (1999): 6-39.

[27] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, in "Women's Weapons: A Re-Evaluation of Magic in the *Íslendingasögur." Scandinavian Studies* 81.4 (2009): 409-436. M. A. Jacobs, in "Hon stóð ok starði: Vision, Love, and Gender in Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu." *Scandinaivan Studies* 86.2 (2014): 148-168.

either too familiar or too transparent. If the best fiction asks us to reconsider what we have routinely taken for granted,[28] the sagas provide an interesting subject to investigate the meaning and purpose of characters and their behaviors to the overall theme. Helga in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstunga*, for example, has long been viewed as a passive character that exists to inspire Gunnlaugr's poetry, yet a recent analysis argues the opposite, that Helga's gaze propels the action.[29] Saga narratives describe action in seemingly objective terms, including what is done and what is said, and these actions and speech have been analyzed. Yet, saga characters are occasionally described as silent, saying nothing, or saying little. Characters tell half-lies or false truths, and in doing so, silence another character's message or truth. Other times characters force silence on others by denying them a voice or legal right, sometimes physically. Sagas employ both silence and silencing, but these silences have gone without methodical analysis of their connection to a saga's overall theme.

The following study interrogates the purpose of the silent and silenced characters within the *Egils saga*, *Laxdœla saga,* and *Njáls saga*, especially as these figures are seen in relation to their loquacious and typically powerful counterparts. This study will show that each saga uses silence differently and for its own end. Silences in *Egils saga* create a dual audience; an Icelandic audience could see a fiercely independent man with a serious dislike for authority, while Norwegians could dismiss Egill's lack of respect for authority and violent tendencies. However, both audiences could potentially agree that Norwegian kings progress from an emotion-driven autocrat to a well-tempered and reasoned ruler. *Laxdœla saga* employs silence to show how the forced silence of fellow freemen disrupts regional stability, and the

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[28] Azar Nafisi, in *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, (Random House: New York, 2003), 94.

[29] M. A. Jacobs, in "Hon stóð ok starði: Vision, Love, and Gender in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*." *Scandinaivan Studies* 86.2 (2014): 148-168.

silences of *Njáls saga* illustrate national consequences in the silencing of individuals, both by and of *bændur* and *goðar.* Strategic use of silence in *Egils saga*, *Laxdœla saga,* and *Njáls saga,* creates uncertainty in characters' behaviors and their interactions with others. Silence is subversive.

Approach

> *"Shakespeare realized that a silent character could communicate to an audience often as effectively as his verbal counterpart."*[30]

Iconic moments of silence are a striking component in *Íslendingasögur.* In *Gunnnlaugs saga ormstunga*, as Helga lies on her deathbed, she asks to see the king's cloak she received from Gunnlaugr. Helga gazes at the cloak in a silence of longing before dying and falling back into her husband's arms. Egill Skallagrímsson is broodingly silent for days when his son, Bǫðvarr, is drowned at sea and Egill cannot take revenge. Egill is also threatenly silent when King Æthalstan has not compensated Egill for the death of of his brother, Þorólfr, slain in the king's service. Egill sits across from the king in silence, sword in hand, raising his eyebrows—left, right, left, right—until the king concedes. Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir exhibits an injured silence when Bolli informs her of Kjartan's relationship with the king's sister in *Laxdœla saga*, and Njáll demonstrates an injured silence in *Njáls saga* when Flosi insults him at the Alþing.

But silence does more than add effect to individual scenes, it also changes moods at crucial moments in saga narratives. When a settlement has been reached for the killing of Hǫskuldr Hvítanesgoði, Njáll places a cloak on top of the collection. Flosi holds the cloak up and asks who put the cloak on the pile. Silence. He holds the cloak up a second time and asks. Silence. Flosi asks a third time, adding an insult for Njáll; the settlement is over and violence insues. Melkorka is purchased as a mute slave, but is actually a well-spoken Irish princess; and her son, Oláfr pái, receives the benefits of wealth and prestige from both sides, creating enmity with his half-siblings. When Þorólfr Skallgrimsson's gives his father an axe as a gift from the Norwegian king, there seems to be a possibility for improved

[30] Harvey Rovine, in *Silence in Shakespeare: Drama, Power, & Gender* (UMI Research Press: Ann Arbor, 1987).

relations, despite Skallagrím's skepticism; but when the axe breaks on first use, Skallagrím's silence seems to solidify impending doom.

Even though saga narratives contain dramatic moments of silence, there is a privilege placed on characters' speech in the field of Old Norse-Icelandic literature, where the action is prime fodder for cinema, the one-liners worthy of Clint Eastwood, the imagery concrete, and the tone tragic. The scenes leading up to Eyjólfr's death in *Hrafnkels saga* read like an action movie; the saga takes the audience back and forth between Eyjólfr's travelling party and Hrafnkell's attack with increasing tempo and tension. In *Grettis saga*, Atli Ásmundsson is slain by Þorbjǫrn with a broadaxe, and as he dies, Atli says, "þau tiðkast hin breiðu spjótin." As Skarphéðinn accompanies his family on rounds to gain supporters for the legal at the Alþing, he manages to insult their potential supporters with zingers. Interpretations of who Guðrún Ósvifursdóttir loved the most hinges on "Þeim var ék verst sem ék unni mest." The sharp wit and deliberate speech displayed by saga characters are very interesting, and casual audiences and scholars are both drawn to the excitement cultivated in the *Íslendingasögur*, yet silence, which also creates that excitement, is often down-played or even ignored.[31]

Stated silences

An early study of silence in *Íslendingasögur* examined discourse and silence as formal elements of saga narratives within the cultural context of Old Norse society.[32] Österberg's analysis began with an establishment of the types of dialogue in the *Íslendingasögur* (see

[31] Ibid, 9.

[32] Eva Österberg, in "Strategies of silence: Milieu and mentality in the Icelandic sagas." *Mentalities and other Realities: Essays in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian History*, (Lund: Lund UP, 1992), 10.

Table 2.1). Such dialogue includes everyday speech and *existential* speech, such as formal speeches to royalty, making verbal contracts, and speeches in times of conflict. Österberg did not find a gender bias in the *Íslendingasögur* as female characters are equally pointed and careful about their speech as the male characters are, even if seriously underrepresented. In addition, concerning speech both male and female characters are seen in a negative light if they gossip, slander, brag, or talk too much. Although some speech is connected to reputation, most dialogue also produces entertainment and moves the action along.

Table 2.1: The typology of discourse in the Icelandic sagas

Commonly occurring discourse not described in pejorative terms
Giving advice
Seeking advice
Accusing
Announcing legal proceedings
Introducing oneself
Telling stories and reciting poetry
Ridiculing enemies
Making brief comments
Discourse described in pejorative terms
Gossiping
Slandering a person behind his or her back
Discourse which is rare or absent
Small talk
Lively, Unserious conversation
Spirited exchange of ideas, for the sake of the ideas themselves

Source: Österberg, Eva. "Strategies of silence: Milieu and mentality in the Icelandic sagas." *Mentalities and Other Realities: Essays in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian History*. Lund: Lund UP 1992, 18.

Österberg's study also establishes the types of silence found in the *Íslendingasögur* (see Table 2.2). The study argues for silence as an action-delaying tool for the storyteller, a tool for avoiding verbal commitment, an indicator of a suspicion, character's

acknowledgement, and contemplation. Female charaters are much less present in the sagas than male characters, perhaps through their *enforced silence*, where women are without the power to be heard, much less speak, in the patriarchal and hierarchical society depicted in the sagas. Women's enforced silenced comes from their absence in the narrative, However, Österberg does not examine the power structure inherent in such silencing or interplay between silence of characters and overall saga theme, but focuses the analysis on characters using silence as a strategy to express emotion.[33]

Table 2.2: The typology of silence in the Icelandic sagas

Common types of silence
The silence of uncertainty
Expectant silence
Threatening silence
Cautious silence
Brooding silence
Injured silence
Non-existent or rare types of silence
The silence of tiredness
The simple silence of rest
Apathetic silence
Surprised or disconcerted silence

Source: Österberg, Eva. "Strategies of silence: Milieu and mentality in the Icelandic sagas." *Mentalities and Other Realities: Essays in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian History*. Lund: Lund UP 1992, 26.

Österberg's study of silence of the *Íslendingsögur* provides typologies of discourse and silence, and supports a purpose of silence in the world of the *Íslendingasögur*. The observation that silence had a purpose provided a strong motivation for an additional study of silence in *Íslendingasögur* to investigate the nature of that purpose. Perhaps more definitive and distinct patterns in the use of silence could be found.

[33] Ibid, 21.

A formalist study of silence in *Íslendingasögur* yields unclear patterns. Instances of stated silence found in *Íslendingasögur*—where a character is silent, says little, says nothing, does not answer, or pauses—were entered into a database with independent variables—type, gender, saga role, place in plot—and sorted based on one variable or combinations. No clear patterns in the use or location of the stated silence appear, and the reasons are multiple and interactive.

There is a large range in the number of instances and placement across sagas. Several sagas, like *Flóamanna saga* and *Eiríks saga him rauða*, have only one instance of stated silence, while others, like *Heiðarvíga saga* and *Fljótsdœla saga* have more than twenty. Two of the most highly regarded sagas, *Laxdœla saga* and *Njáls saga*, have the most instances of silences—thirty-six and seventy-nine respectively. This large range in the number of stated silences makes finding patterns across all sagas unlikely. In addition to a wide range in number, the stated silences occur fairly unpredicatably in the plot. They might appear only in character introduction or only in the lead-up to a conflict, and silences might appear in both places, or neither.

Male and female characters use silence in a similar manner. Both genders use silence to reveal uncertainty, to threaten, to brood, and to reflect injury. Characters described as silent were highly correlated with causing trouble later on in the narratives, whether male or female, but such a descriptor is not a guarantee of later actions. Female characters did use silence less often than male characters, but there are fewer of them. That male and female character use silence in the same manner and for the ends may contribute to the impression that saga women are just as strong as the saga men and that they had

some semblance of equality, but the sheer dominance of male characters in number seems to undercut such a conclusion.

When a character was introduced or described as *þögull* or *fámælt*, it was likely that that character would cause difficulties later, Þorleikr in *Laxdœla saga* and Mǫrðr in *Njáls saga* are a couple of high-profile examples. But it would go too far to say that silence as an adjective equaled negativity, for characters portrayed in a positive light throughout the saga, could also choose to be *þögull* or *fámælt*.

Characters can be silent in similar ways, but the meaning of that type of silence can be drastically different based on the larger context of the narrative. For example, Egill Skallagrímsson's silences tend to be threatening and intimidating, but King Hákon's silences reflect reasoned thought. Even though the typologies and words for silent or silence are the same across *Íslendingasögur*, the meanings depend on each saga's bigger picture. If silence is not used as part a pattern or a motif in saga narratives but is a more nuanced strategy to develop theme and influence audience perception, the search for meaning and patterns in saga use of silence needed to caste a wider net. Silence goes beyond stated silences to more subtle silences.

Beyond stated silence

Contemporary sources from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries describe the custom of the sagas being read aloud for entertainment during what is called *kvöldvaka*, an evening gathering of the entire household; and it is commonly accepted that this practice is a continuation of the original purpose, that is, that sagas were originally read aloud.[34] Two

[34] Ármann Jakóbsson, *A Sense of Belonging: Morkinskinna and Icelandic Identity, c. 1220*, (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2014), 176.

iconic images documenting this practice are a mid-nineteenth century painting by Heinrich August Georg Schiött (See Figure 2.1) and an early-twentieth century photograph by Bárður Sigurðsson (See Figure 2.2). Both images show the reading aloud aspect of *kvöldvaka,* and while what is being read is not apparent from the images, this has also been documented in written sources. For example, a 1907 article in which Brynjúlfr Jónsson describes life and customs in a nineteenth century rural community, and includes the following passage:

Figure 2.1: Heinrich August Georg Schiött (1823-1895)

> Fróðleikfýsn var þá allmikil og alment var lesið til skemtunar á vetrarkvöldum. Voru helzt lesnar Íslendingasögur, Norvegskonungasögur eða Fornaldarsögur. Voru ýmsar þerirra til á fáeinum bæjum í hreppnum og þaðan fengu aðrir þær að láni. Þær voru mjög eftirsóttar, enda alment vel meðhöndlaðar.[35]
>
> The thirst for knowledge was substantial and in general reading was done for entertainment on winternights. Primarily it was the Íslendingasögur, Norvegskonungasögur or Fornaldarsögur. Some of them were only owned in a few homes in the county and others borrowed them from there. They were very sought after, and well treated.

Figure 2.2: Bárður Sigurðsson (1872-1927)

As texts read aloud, sagas have parallels to other performance texts, like Shakespeare's plays. When

[35] Brynjúlfr Jónsson, "Fyr og nú í Gnúpvergjahreppi," in *Eimreiðin* Vol 13-14 (1907),181.

read aloud, sagas would have been influenced by a language of subtle silences, much like a play's use of silence would have affected an audience's understanding of the action.[36] Silence in performance texts is usually viewed as a tool of producing a performance; a non-verbal and visual indicator that a character is not visible to other characters. These indicators include such things as characters eavesdropping, characters watching the action from a distance, or when characters politely waiting their turn to speak. Saga characters exit scenes, overhear comments, hear about action elsewhere, and even exit from the saga narrative altogether. Each of these moments of character silences affects how the audience perceives that character and their relationship to other characters and overall narrative.

Silence affects audience perception when the silence is unexpected, the dramatic pause in Elizabethan drama, for example. Pauses were so uncommon that any hesitation or break in the rapid iambic pentameter would not have gone unnoticed. Change in rhythm meant something—editors of Shakespeare's work are keenly aware of this phenomenon—and the debate over what to do with Shakespeare's short lines and how, or if, they fit into an authentic text is ongoing. Comparisons of textual variants ofseveral plays and determines that the purpose of a rhythmical break in Shakespeare's iambic pentameter was threefold: a practical matter of stage movement, a motivational matter as a character shows reaction and thinks of a plan, and a transitional moment for action or topic. Saga characters are also occasionally said to pause before speaking, a moment that allows for a dramatic pause in the reading of the saga. These pauses are rare enough that they would have been noticed, especially in such well-spoken characters as Njáll.

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[36] Harvey Rovine, *Silence in Shakespeare: Drama, Power, & Gender*, (UMI Research Press: Ann Arbor, 1987), 5.

Unexpected silence in the face of expected speech or action is also an element of the sagas, one that affects audience perception. Egill Skallagrímsson expects to take revenge when a family member is killed, yet he can't when his son drowns at sea. Egill, the strong, independent warrior takes to bed, and the tone of the saga changes dramatically from action to intense, emotional grief. Njáll is expected to give sage legal advice, yet one year he seems to give bad advice on purpose in order to create an argument for an appeals court, an unexpectedly manipulative action from one of the wisest characters in the sagas. When Kjartan does not give Bolli a message for Guðrún when Bolli returns to Iceland, the audience knows something is amiss. To that point in the text, the foster-brothers are as close as anyone can be, but the unexpected silence at that moment is a harbinger of things to come in that relationship.

Forced silence

Saga narratives state that characters are silent and depict the characters as being silent, but sagas also depict characters forcing silence on others. These silences go beyond characters' speech and descriptions to their interactions.

While all land-owning freemen in medieval Iceland, as represented in the literature, were referred to as *bændur*, political and social power was centralized in the *goðar*, or chieftains. Each chieftain held a *goðorð*, an official position of power which could be inherited, bought, or given to anyone—a *goði* was not elected. The *goði's* followers included freemen, or *þingmenn*, and their allegiance to a *goði* was voluntary and could be changed at anytime;[37] not without repercussions, however, even if support was withdrawn because

[37] Einar's father leaves Hrafnkell in It seems that *goðar* could also refuse or expel a *þingmann* as Sturla Þórðarson did in *Sturlunga Saga*. A farmer, Bjarni, had hosted a cheiftain hostile to Sturla overnight ("Sturlu saga," in *Sturlunga Saga* I, 96).

the *goði* was neglectful of his duties. The *goði* was sworn to protect the interests and welfare of his followers, and the *þingmaðr* was sworn to support his *goði* whenever required. This support was most often necessary when legal cases were brought before the local *þing* or the national *Alþing*, or when punishment was exacted.

The government of the saga world had only legislative and judicial branches—the executive branch consisted of the privately organized *goði* as sheriff and the *þingmenn* as his deputies. Basically the *goði* with the most firepower won. The well-being of an individual and his family relied heavily on the character and power of his sworn *goði*, and if his *goði* did not perform as expected, the *þingmaðr* had few options. A *þingmaðr* had to trust that his *goði* had the *þingmaðr's* welfare in mind with all decisions—there was no room for doubt. The relationship only works if both voices, that of the *goði* and *þingmaðr*, are voiced, heard, and respected.

Silence is also at work in complicated power relationships such these *goði/þingmaðr* and servant/master relationships. Servants in Shakespeare can only remain silent as long as the master is ethical and just; but once the master has overstepped the parameters of acceptable behavior, it is the servant's duty to voice their concerns. Old Icelandic society had a similar sense of "mutual obligation, called *grið*, between the farmer and his wife on the one hand and their servants on the other,"[38] and this mutual obligation existed between a chieftain and his followers.

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[38] Helgi Þorláksson, "Stórbændur gegn goðum: Hugleiðingar um goðavald, konungsvald og sjálfræðishug bænda um miðbik 13. aldar." In *Söguslóðir: Afmælisrit helgað Ólafi Hanssyni sjötugum 18. september 1979*, ed. Bergsteinn Jónsson, Einar Laxness, and Heimir Þorleifsson, (Rekjavík, Sögufelag, 1979), pp. 227-250, esp p 143.

However the system was intended to work, it was not as self-sustaining or equitable in action. Saga society involved a complicated web of societal (origin, familial, secular, religious, economic) factors which conflagrated into feuds, not least the legal and geographical elements that contribute to "bændur flugust á."[39] In the narrative *Eyrbyggja saga*, for example, there is an ongoing local conflict between the ambitious Arnkell goði and the six sons of Þórbrandur, foster brothers and sworn þingmenn to Snorri goði. Arnkell and the Þórbrandsynir all live in the same area on the northern side of the peninsula Snæfellsnes. Arable land in the area is scarce and Arnkell's farm is too small to support his ambitious goals. Unfortunately for the Þórbrandsynir, they have the best farmland in the district and a goði who is geographically difficult to reach.

As Arnkell tries to increase his political and economical power throughout the area, the brothers feel increasingly uneasy. Then, through complicated legal turns of events, both feuding parties make legal claims for ownership of Kársstaðir, a valuable neighboring piece of land. Only Arnkell has the power to back up his claim and the brothers are powerless to do anything about it. The Þórbrandsynir make the arduous journey to their chieftain, Snorri goði, who refuses to support their cause as he sees little personal benefit for his efforts. He effectively silences his þingmenn on a valid case. Eventually, like Shakespeare's good servants in the face of a wrong, the brothers speak up for themselves by forcing Snorri to help them out of shame for his neglect and they all kill Arnkell. The audience is left wondering how the conflict would have ended had the concerns of the Þórbrandsynir been attended to by their *goði* from the very beginning.

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[39] Jesse L. Byock, in *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power*, (Berkeley, University of California Press: 1988).

The apparent contradiction between saga society's accepted wisdom of the laws and the increasing legal disasters is a theme that the silences help to create. The first question of interpreting silence in the sagas "is whether our use of silence is our choice (whether conscious or unconscious) or that of someone else."[40] In this case, the Þórbrandsynir do not choose to let their case go unprosecuted—they have to wait and prod their sworn protector into doing his job. Whereas Snorri goði can choose to remain silent over the Þórbrandsynir's case and wait until the right moment to prosecute their case, which is of great benefit to him personally, because when silence is a choice, it can be used "purposefully and effectively."[41] But the powerful only have power as long as they are enabled by those sworn to them.

The saga of Hrafnkell illustrates what can happen when a freeman cannot avenge his son. Hrafnkell Freysgoði was a young and powerful man who ruthlessly bent others to his will and never paid compensation for men he killed. Hrafnkell had a beautiful stallion which he named Freyfaxi after his favorite god, Freyr. Hrafnkell dedidated this stallion to the god and vowed to kill anyone who rode Freyfaxi. A poor farmer, Þorbjǫrn, lived across the river from Hrafnkell. Þorbjǫrn could not afford to feed his entire family and was forced to send his son Einar away to fend for himself. Einar goes directly to his goði Hrafnkell, who has only one job left, that of shepherd. Einar agrees to fill this lowly position with Hrafnkell's warning to never ride Freyfaxi. Well, circumstances work against Einar and he rides the stallion in order to find some lost sheep. Hrafnkell discovers this breach of contract and, true to his vow, kills Einar. Einar's father seeks compensation for the death of

[40] Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 13.

[41] Ibid,13.

his son from Hrafnkell, but Hrafnkell refuses. Although Hrafnkell offers great wealth to Þorbjǫrn —all daily necessities and a good start for the children (presumably set them up with their own households when they're of age)—Hrafnkell's refusal to give properly arbitrated compensation[42] denies Þorbjǫrn his familial and social obligation to revenge his son. The goði did not give his þingmann the support he should have, and thus, Hrafnkell broke his part of *grið*-contract with Þorbjǫrn.

In a society focused on honor, a society in which individuals are on their own to defend themselves, Þorbjǫrn's honor depends on how effective he is in defending his home and family. Even though Hrafnkell has offered compensation, his refusal to deal with Þorbjǫrn in the manner Þorbjǫrn requests means that Þorbjǫrn is silenced. Þorbjǫrn is left to live next to the man who killed his son, Einar. Þorbjǫrn becomes an honorless freeman living in poverty and without redress for the killing of his son. Characters like Þorbjǫrn, "silenced by power—whether overt or covert—are not people with nothing to say but are people without a public voice and space in which to say it,"[43] and as noted in an analysis of the master-servant relationship in Shakespearian drama, good speech of servants, although rare, includes the breaking of silence when a superior steps out of line.[44] Thus Þorbjǫrn, a good *þingmann*, must speak out against injustice. Eventually with the assistance of his cousin, Sámr, Þorbjǫrn enlists the help of a goði from another district to seek revenge on

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[42] In addition to not paying compensation, Hrafnkell does not want to be seen as Þorbjörn's equal, which is what arbitration implies. "Conversation continues to imply the equality among participants: no one interrupts, no one remains silent, everyone take turn," Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 6.

[43] Elshtain qtd. in Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 10.

[44] Harvey Rovine, in *Silence in Shakespeare: Drama, Power, & Gender*. (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987).

Hrafnkell through legal channels and several innocent men are killed in the aftermath. Þorbjǫrn makes his voice heard. The forced silencing of Þorbjǫrn by Hrafnkell, and Þorbjǫrn's subsequent fight for voice and justice a main these of the saga. Perhaps *Hrafnkels saga* is not a moralistic tale of defective chieftain or a political tale of a consummate chieftain, but a socio-economic tale of how the forced silence of a powerless þingmann results in bloodshed. Ethical silence in sagas seems to correspond to the silence of the powerless in the Shakespeare, where þingmenn can only remain silent in misery for so long before ethics, or honor, force them to speak.

Silence affects perceptions

Silence in saga narratives affects audience perceptions of the saga characters, their behaviors, and their interactions. Saga audiences expect characters to speak in a certain way and to speak in saga fashion; characters are expected to vocalize their plans, thoughts, and feelings. Audiences understand that "dialogue plays a vital role in identifying the latent forces driving the plot, and the reciprocal relationship between words and deeds is also an important key to character depection."[45] On the other side of dichotomy is silence, and any communication that does not fulfill speech expectations is unusual, is suspect; "the methods of discourse tell us as much as the content, once we learn to watch for what is left out, for the unspoken."[46] The world of saga narratives is disturbed when characters keep things to themselves—such silence is subversive and far-reaching.

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[45] Vésteinn Ólason, "Family Sagas" in *A Companion to Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, edited by Rory McTurk, (Maldon, MA: Blackwell, 2005), p 101-118.

[46] Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979).

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Silence as part of a characterization is an interesting concept, for how a character speaks or doesn't speak is integral to the characters' persona, how they will react to other characters, and how they will be understood by the audience. Changes in speech patterns, as part of characterization, are particularly interesting as a sign of internal conflict. In *Egils saga*, Egill Skallagrímsson goes silent when his brother is killed and again, most famously, when his son Bǫðvarr dies at sea. In *Gísla saga Súrsson*, Þorkell is silent when he overhears that his wife, Ásgerðr, has feelings for another man, and refuses to discuss it with Gísli. In sagas and Shakespeare's plays alike, characters almost always return to speech. Normally loquacious characters may temporarily fall silent, only to speak when they return to action. Egill regains his voice with poetry and Þorkell moves out to eventually kill Vésteinn, never proven but widely accepted.

Thus silence is often significant when a normally talkative character says nothing; changes in language patterns denote key changes in character or the approaching denouement of the plot. Audiences recognize the established and accepted speech patterns of Shakespeare's characters, for example, and understand that disruptions in these patterns are significant. However patterns of discourse and silence are regular enough in Shakspeare's plays that Rovine was able to establish patterns for both. There is no set discourse/silence pattern in the sagas as each *Íslendingasaga* appears to use silence in its own way. Saga audiences must interpret the significance of each silence in terms of the broader saga narrative.

Silence used as tool of power

Audience understanding of the relationship between silence and the broader narrative is especially important in the distinction between silence chosen by a character and silence forced on a character. The difference reflects a character's ability to self-determine, and self-determination within ethical limits is a foundational element of saga characters' lives. The silences of characters, the societal and political reasons for those silences, as well as individual character motivations, all connect to a saga's actions and theme.

In a society where slander is punishable by death, where insults become a record of an individual who spoke them, words are artifacts of a character as much as his sword or halberd. Eva Österberg's examination of silence in the *Íslendingasögur* sought to identify, categorize, and suggest patterns of use for both speech and silence. The author sees the said and unsaid as a socially constructed binary opposition, and one in which Old Icelandic society places privilege on speech—a privilege reflected in the relative absence of the female voice. Österberg's study of silence in the *Íslendingasögur* illustrates the significance of appreciating the sound/silence dichotomy in relation to each other and within the social context of the *Íslendingasögur*. However, Österberg's study is limited to speech acts and non-speech acts of those characters expected to speak; it does not delve into the said/unsaid as elements of characterizations, relationships, or power plays. The more nebulous silence—those *not* expected to speak (women, powerless farmers, children, etc) or those forced into silence—become an interesting element of study, as does the possible reasons behind all these types of silence.

This study builds on the prior work by further analyzing the use of silence within narratives and its potential purpose in the *Íslendingasögur*. More specifically, it aims to

examine the strategies of silence in the *Íslendingasögur* to determine how characters, their relationships, and their actions are developed by the absence of expected discourse. In fact, in a literature where the said is carefully recorded and the players themselves are painstakingly careful about what they say and how they say it, silence, or the absence of anticipated speech, is significant.

The relationship between silence and characterization is especially important in the major types of silence, imposed and chosen, and the gender of the character. Textual tradition expects women to be silent and that this expected silence directly contrasts with the disturbing, and unexpected, silence of men.[47] Much like the male characters in the sagas, men in Greek literature, with the exception of the new Odysseus model, are expected to aggressively vocalize their plans, thoughts, and feelings. In the *Íslendingasögur*, the voice of men is also the expectation: "[O]pinions expressed by the master of the house in his main hall or living room would soon be made known outside his home by passers-by."[48] What the men said and thought mattered, then, and the literary/dramatic world of the audience is disturbed when men keep things to themselves. In fact, silent men are suspect in both the ancient Greek world and Shakespearean drama. Men use silence as a weapon or tool of power in order to get their way, whereas women are silent because they lack options. Österberg discusses the silence of women as a result of the patriarchal hierarchy, but minimizes its significance because women are able to use language as forcefully as men, however rare these instances are. The observation that women *can* use language as

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[47] Silvio Montiglio, *Silence in the Land of Logos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Harvey Rovine, *Silence in Shakespeare: Drama, Power, & Gender* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987).

[48] Helgi Þórlákssson, "Stórbændur gegn goðum: Hugleiðingar um goðavald, konungsvald og sjálfræðishug bænda um miðbik 13. Aldar," in *Söguslóðir: Afmælisrit helgað Ólafi Hanssyni sjötugum 18. september 1979*, ed. Bergsteinn Jónsson, Einar Laxness, and Heimir Þorleifsson (Rekjavík, Sögufelag, 1979), 144.

aggressively and purposefully as men, begs the question why saga women don't use language more often and why women are underrepresented as purposeful speakers. It therefore becomes interesting to examine how this absence, or lack of voice, affects the action of the *Íslendingasögur*.

Saga characters are often placed in juxtaposition as primers in appropriate personal qualities and behavior. *Njáls saga*, for example, contrasts the modest Bergþóra with the vain Hallgerður, and *Laxdæla* contrasts Bolli with Kjartan and Guðrún with Hrefna. Such juxtapositions, where binaries are established for qualities and behaviors, make an intriguing line of inquiry into the oppositions of silence and sound. Österberg sees sound/silence as a binary opposition, one in which voice is privileged over voiceless. Montiglio's comprehensive analysis of non-verbal communication is based on the warrant that silence is a language that should be studied, an assumption that Rovine accepts and states that assumption explicitly and uses it as the basis for his entire investigation. These previous studies of silence in literature makes one wonder if the *Íslendingasögur*, like Shakespearean drama, are illustrating how opposites shed light on their counterparts. Might not the *Íslendingasögur* be doing the same contrasting sound and silence? Are the sagas illustrating the perceived cultural norms of sound by its use and absence? Are the sagas using the sound/silence contrast for other purposes?

This sound/silence binary could also viewed in connection with the male/female gender binary; enforced silence is connected with women and elected silence is connected with men. The power play of silence depends on who uses it and for what purpose:

> "Within the context of women's speech silence has many faces. Like the veiling of women [...], silence can only be subversive when it frees itself from the male-defined context of absence, lack and fear as feminine territories. On the one hand, we face the danger of inscribing femininity as absence, as lack and as black in rejecting the

> importance of the act of enunciation. On the other hand, we understand the necessity to place women on the side of negativity and to work in undertones, for example, in our attempts at undermining patriarchal systems of values. Silence is so uncommonly set in opposition with speech. Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored."[49]

This poses an interesting question of how to study silence on its own, separate from speech, and how silence can be both a tool of power and a signifier of submission at the same time.

> "Expected silences—those of females, children, servants, lesser beings of every kind—are just that: expected. But as Rich tells us, 'If we have learned anything in our coming to language out of silence, it is that what has been unspoken, therefore *unspeakable* in us, is what most threatening to the patriarchal order in which [some] men control, first women, then all who can be defined and exploited as 'other.'"[50]

Silence is much more than the absence of speech; it has a power all of its own and this study seeks to understand it how it is used to create meaning in the Sagas of the Icelanders. This studies considers such questions as how *Íslendingasögur* presents what happens when freeman are forced into silence; when the powerful ignore their fellow freemen, their women, their slaves, their children; and when expected silence is not delivered.

This study seeks to analyze silence in its broader literary context, that is, how silence works in relation to a saga's overall theme.

- Silence serves a function within an individual text.
- Silence/speech is a binary opposition, and silence is understood in the absence of speech.

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[49] Trinh Minh-ha, "Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking," in *Longman Anthology of Women's Literature*, edited by Mary K. DeShazer, (New York: Longman, 2000), 373.

[50] Glenn, Cheryl, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 11.

- Silence is used to develop character, and a change in language patterns may indicate a change in character.
- Silence is used for plot development and may indicate an approaching denouement.
- The meaning of silence is negotiated in that the audience has a say in how the characters' silence is interpreted
- Silence is a tool of power.

These points of agreement serve as motivation for the methodology of this dissertation.

Identifying texts for the study

General studies of structure and formal elements in *Íslendingasögur* are often conducted on this collection as a whole, and approaches to literary themes and topoi often examine the same group of texts (See Appendix A). Eva Österberg, for example, followed this convention of the field when she examined silence as a strategy.

Íslendingasögur tell of conflicts between individuals, their ability to protect their perceived rights within the judicial system, and the consequences of working outside the social system. The characters of the sagas are axes around which the complex narratives revolve. The saga world is one in which personalities, social guidelines, happenstances, familial and friendship bonds work collectively to create conflict and resolution. Characters do not exist in a vacuum; they exist in their relationships with others. This collective existence also relates to the sagas as a genre, despite differences in date, length, and perceived literary value.

Character complexity is an important component of saga literature in which the good vs. evil dilemma is not always clear. Each character has good and bad personality

traits, and good men sometimes create the disputes over which they are later killed. Much like the heroes of Greek literature, saga characters are imperfect. This aspect of the *Íslendingasögur* is less evident "in late sagas, where virtually flawless heroes often find themselves confronted by unmistakably wicked opponents. In these sagas characters are one-dimensional, and the worthy hero normally triumphs over his evil opponent."[51] Later sagas turn toward super-heroes performing feats and not the ethical dilemmas modern audiences associate with with *Íslendingasögur*. The importance of silence to characterization is a working assumption of Rovine's study, in which he views silence through relationships, which became a working assumption of this study as well. Silence exists between speech acts, and the complex intersection of speech/silence is an important element of character development in the sagas.

To begin such a close reading of a sampling of sagas, I needed to limit my study to a few substantial texts. The far right column of Table 2.3 shows the number of stated instances in the top eight sagas with the highest number of stated silences. While any selection criteria are subjective, it is appealing to select texts with many stated silences of those with only a handful. *Laxdœla saga* and *Njáls saga* had the greatest number of stated silences, so I chose those two first.

[51] Vésteinn Ólason, "Family Sagas." In *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture,* ed. Rory McTurk, (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 108.

Table 2.3: Approximate date of sagas

	Composition/ÍF	Oldest ms/fragment	Instances
Njáls saga	1275-85	c. 1300	79
Laxdœla	1230-60	c. 1300	36
Fljótsdœla	c. 1500-50	c. 1625	28
Þórðar saga	c. 1350	c. 1400	24
Heiðarviga saga	c. 1200-10	c. 1300	22
Egils saga	c. 1220-30	c. 1250	15
Svarfdœla saga	1350-1400	c. 1450	13
Eyrbyggja	c. 1220	c. 1300	13

Two sagas did not seem to be representative, so I looked to include at least one other saga in the attempt to represent the broad corpus of *Íslendingasögur* in a detailed study. After *Njáls* and *Laxdœla, Fljótsdœla saga, Þórðar saga, Heiðarviga saga*, *Egils saga*, *Svarfdœla*, and *Eyrbyggja saga* were the next options on the list with the highest numbers of stated silences. And while *Fljótsdœla saga* would be the next choice based on number of instances, I selected *Egils saga* insteast as it represents a different subtype of sagas than the first two.

Although *Íslendingasögur* are known as a collective unit, they are actually a collection of three majors sub-types based on content. *Laxdœla saga* is from the multi-general subtype and *Njáls saga* is from the power feud sub-type. *Egils saga* was chosen for the biographical sub-type.

1. Power feuds—This type of saga follows a couple of well-respected member of the saga community, usually chieftains, as they fight for power and prestige. Two of the most famous examples of this type are *Njáls saga* and *Hrafnkels saga*.

2. Biographical—This type of saga follows the life of a single character, from an ancestral introduction to his death. Two of the most famous examples of this type are *Egils saga* and *Grettis saga*.

3. Multi-generational—These sagas follow a family over several generations, where the first few generations life in relative peace, but where the seeds of discontent are sown. The conflict simmers until violence breaks out in the last generation and members of the family kill each other. The most famous example of this type is *Laxdœla saga.*

It therefore seemed appealing for this study of silence to closely examine *Egils saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, and *Njáls saga* as both representatives of three *Íslendingasögur* sub-types and as sagas containing substantial numbers of instances of silences. These three sagas also have the added distinction of being highly regarded in the scholarly community for their "stylistic mastery" of character descriptions and comments.[52] Perhaps silence in these texts helps account for their significance in Icelandic literary history.

[52] Þórir Óskarsson, "Rhetoric and Style," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 365.

Strategic Use of Silence

> *Silence—not the spoken word—is the only phenomenon that is always at our disposal. Silence permeates our every moment, its identity a stretch of time perforated by sound. Thus silence remains inescapably one form of speech and an element in every dialogue*.[53]

Old Norse-Icelandic narratives seem to have taken care to safeguard the accuracy of their information. They tend to describe only the action and not the thought processes of the characters, and when two characters step aside to converse in private, the impression is that their conversation is not relayed because no one could testify as to what was said. The author, it seems, is unwilling to creatively fill in the blanks. Sources of information are named, often with an explanation of their authority on the subject, which lends a sense of truthfulness and historicity to the narratives, and "deference to the integrity of the story is reinforced by the saga author's use of phrases such as 'as the story goes', or 'as it is said', or 'at this point it happened that'."[54] In addition, "the vocabularly of the sagas is modest, and on the surface there is little rhetorical ornament, words are used tellingly and incisively,"[55] in fact, the main characteristics of are objective narration, few adjectives or other ornmentations, and simple vocabulary and sentence structure. The resonance of saga style is truthfulness.

Saga tone does not seem to be drastically different from the tone in documents accepted as historical, where the emphasis is on the content, not the linguistic style.

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[53] Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence,* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 5.

[54] Heather O'Donoghue, "Women in *Njáls saga*.' In *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga,* eds. John Hines and Desmond Sla, (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 42.

[55] Vésteinn Ólason, "Family Sagas" in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture,* edited by Rory McTurk, (Maldon, MA: Blackwell, 2005), pages 101-118.

Authors of Old Icelandic literature were well aware of medieval Latin rhetorical theory and understood that purpose and context affected stylistic choices.[56] Ari Þorgilsson, when he wrote *Íslendingbók*, very clearly intended the text to be an early history of Iceland.

> …as he makes clear in his prologue, [Ari] means to be an historian; he not only repeatedly substantiates the information he gives us by naming his informant, but also explains that he has revised a previous version of the text 'as [the information] became better known to me', and enjoins us to continue in this vein: 'as for whatever is incorrectly stated in these historical records, it is one's duty to prefer what proves to be truer'.[57]

From this early text, the style of the Old Norse-Icelandic literature was set.[58] The no nonsence style[59] of the narratives seduces the audience into discussions of veracity, origins, or contemporary reality*;* the *Íslendingasögur* seem to resist a rhetorical analysis of their narrative artistry.

In the source analysis approach scholars have traditionally tried to determine which portions of the sagas really happened and how much of the sagas are derived from oral tradition, and in the literary anthropological approach, scholars use the sagas to glean information about contemporary society. Accepted historical documents with historical facts—genealogies, for example—offer places for scholars to draw correlations between literature and reality. The desire to find evidence of events and culture can also be partly

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[56] Þórir Óskarsson, in "Rhetoric and Style," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 357.

[57] Vésteinn Ólason, "Family Sagas" in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture,* edited by Rory McTurk, (Maldon, MA: Blackwell, 2005). 47.

[58] Gabriel Turville-Peter expands on this in *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), specifically chapter IV, "Ari and His Influence" (88-108), and chapter VII, "Historical Literature of the Late Twelfth Century" (166-212).

[59] Few adjectives and adverbs

attributed to modern understanding of linguistic expression, which holds that there are two type of expression:

> on the one hand, language that faithfully reflects or report on matters of fact uncolored by any personal or partisan agenda or desire; and on the other hand, language that is infected by partisan agendas and desires, and therefore colors and distorts the facts which it purports to reflect. It is the use of the second kind of language that makes one a rhetorician, while adherence to the first kind makes on a seeker after truth and an object observer of the way things are.[60]

In addition to a lack of general stylistic flourishes in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, there seems to be a lack of "what Wayne C. Booth called 'the rhetoric of fiction'—all those ways in which the novelist tell his or her reader more than simply 'what happened'—is almost completely lacking."[61] The perceived lack of fictional rhetoric in the sagas is interesting in that it reveals a highly nuanced use of such fictional elements and understanding of audience, social context, and language. The sagas are not historical chronicles, yet they seem to be written with the intent to create that impression—and it is intriguing to consider why.

Silence in context

Silence is at once commonplace and extraordinary. Silent moments are used every day for a variety of reasons, but interpreting these silences can be difficult. Silence can express both agreement and disagreement, or it can communicate a lack of knowledge or boredom. Silence can be used to give someone the silent treatment, to show empathy, or it may simply be that person's manner of thinking before speaking. A complicating factor with silence is that an audience, whether it is one person or a large group, must search beyond

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[60] Stanley Fish, quoted in Gross, Alan, *The Rhetoric of Science.* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990), 474.

[61] Quoted in Heather O'Donoghue, "Women in *Njáls saga*." In *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga*, eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 35.

the unspoken moment to determine the motivation behind the silence. The audience may consider the topic of previous speech, the tone in which it was delivered, the topic and context of (non)conversation, the relationships between speaker/listener, the facial expression and physical demeanor of the participants—among other interpretive cues.

Within literature, the study of silence is even more daunting because the reader may not have access to contextualizing elements that assist interpretation, especially when cues like facial expressions or body language are not provided. Lack of contextualization is the case with the *Íslendingasögur*, where there is a vast wealth of detail without authorial comment and the reader is left to interpret on their own. All a saga reader knows is that a character is silent on a particular topic, to a particular audience, in the middle of a particular point in the plot. It is up to the reader to interpret the silence, and the reader brings all previous experiences and cultural baggage to the interpretation.

Viewing components of Old Norse-Icelandic texts within context is not new. Taylor's analysis of lies and duplicitous comments within textual context argued "the lie in the sagas has an ontological status shaped by its performance in context and by its consequence."[62] For example, Hjalti Skeggjason's verse made before the Althing:

> Spari ek eigi goð geyja!
> Grey þykki mér Freyja;
> æ mun annat tveggja
> Ódinn grey eða Freyja.[63]

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[62] Paul Beekman Taylor, "Wielders and Wasters of Words: Bare Lies and Garnished Truths in *Njal's saga*," in *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson*, eds. Rudolf Simek, Jonas Kristjansson, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Philologica Germanica 8 (Vienna: Hermann Bohlaus Nachf., 1986), 296.

[63] ÍF XII 264. "In blaspheming the gods I am rich: Freyja strikes me as a bitch; one or the other must be: Odin's a dog, or else she," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol III, 124-125.

Hjalti's words were viewed as slander when stated, but just a few years later "Christianity was established, and no insult would have been noted in the verse."[64] Context matters. Even Egill Skallagrímsson's friend Arinbjǫrn understood that "Hvert mál, er maðr skal dæma, verðr at líta á tilgörðir."[65] In addition to the general textual context, the purpose behind many of the sagas has also been discussed in scholarly literature. It has been argued that *Egils saga* was written by Snorri Sturluson to justify his own acquisition of land. *Íslendingbók* was written for the bishops at Skálholt, perhaps to bolster their position of power. *Sturlunga saga* was a political saga written for Icelandic chieftains, and narrates their prototype as the noble and courageous son of a Viking king whose ancestry is recounted in one of the *fornaldarsögur*.[66]

Balance of speech and silence

Old Norse-Icelandic narrative conflicts are described in terse and compact language; every word mattered, and utterances were carefully weighed and measured. Speeches were well-planned with extensive forethought, careless words ended in feuds, and exact wording was parsed to determine its exact meaning. In *Laxdœla saga*, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir received revenge assistance for her husband Bolli through manipulations of words, when she promised "Nú skírskota ek því við vitni yðru, at ek heit Þorgils at giptask engum manni

[64] Paul Beekman Taylor, "Wielders and Wasters of Words: Bare Lies and Garnished Truths in *Njal's saga*," in *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson*, eds. Rudolf Simek, Jonas Kristjansson, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Philologica Germanica 8 (Vienna: Hermann Bohlaus Nachf., 1986), 292.

[65] ÍF II, 188. "Every case should be judged in light of the circumstances." My translation. Note that *mál* can also mean speech.

[66] Sigurður Nordal.

öðrum samlendum en honum; en ek ætla ekki at giptask í önnur lönd."[67] As narrated in *Gísla saga,* Gísli's ultimate downfall began with the uttering of the cryptic confessionary verse, and Njáll often helped his sons out of dubious situations with his intellectual acumen. The laws of the land were delivered orally at the Alþing by the elected lawspeaker and the exact wording was essential; the lawspeaker even had an advisory committee to guarantee his accuracy. Legal cases often hinged on words, such as whether the complainants had followed exact procedure when prosecuting or whether killers had announced the killings in the correct manner. Spoken insults were detrimental to a man's honor and could result in outlawry and subsequently death.

Speech and silence are both intentional. A considerable portion of the contents of the sagas—about 30% of the overall corpus—is dedicated to the characters' speech and its consequences, and yet silence is the natural state. Saga characters choose to speak—and when they don't or can't, readers take note.

The cataloging of stated silences identified over 400 instances of silence in the *Íslendingasögur*. These include stated silences, pauses, saying little, saying nothing, not answering. After the initial analysis failed to find clear patterns, the definition of silence was broadened to include information that is edited or not relayed by a character; facial expressions without speech; the silence of physical absence; the forced silence of the underclasses; and the commanding silence of the ruling class. Each silence serves an individual strategic purpose, and the silences as a whole contribute to the narrative of the saga.

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[67] Íslenzk fornrit 5, 181. "Now I declare in your presence as witnesses, that I promise Thorgils to marry no other man in this country than him; nor do I intend to marry abroad" (*The Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol. 5, 93*)*. She did, however, marry an Icelander, in Iceland, who was in Norway at the time she made the contact. Thorgils was killed for his efforts on Guðrún's behalf.

Saga silences appear against the backdrop of sound for words were so integral to the world of the saga Icelanders, that, once spoken, words become a public record of the person who uttered them. Old Icelandic poetry expressed this idea as well: "eyvitu leyna, megu ýta synir, því er gengr um guma"[68] and "einn vita né annarr skal; þjóð veit ef þrír ro."[69] Saga characters that speak well are respected, for example consider Njáll, Bergþóra, and Ólafr pái. Public opinion of such individuals runs high, and they are often consulted on personal and public matters. On the other hand, gossipers and slanderers circulate innuendo and influence the public's impression of a character, but such individuals damage their own character at the same time. Characters in the *Íslendingasögur* who participate in such verbal persuasions are not respected, and the sagas are careful to indicate their nature when presenting their words, consider Mǫrðr Valgarðsson, Hallgerðr, Sigmundr from *Njáls saga*, the Hildiriðarsons from *Egils saga*, Þengils in *Króka-refs saga*.

As noted above, while silence is the natural state, much of the sagas are dedicated to the characters' speech and its consequences. Breaking the natural state, the characters *choose* to speak, or their creators have made them speak, and these verbal choices have been the focus of many studies. However, the reverse is also true: when expected to speak, characters can choose to be silent and these silences are meaningful,[70] "Like the zero in mathematics, silence is an absence with a function, and a rhetorical one at that."[71] Gifts

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[68] *Hávamál* 28, "no one can hope to keep anthing concealed once it is heard in a hall," translated by Patricia Terry, *Poems of the Elder Edda*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 15.

[69] *Hávamál* 63, "one man can know something but two should not, the whole world knows if three do," translated by Patricia Terry, *Poems of the Elder Edda*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 19.

[70] There are over 390 non-speech acts in the *Íslendingasögur*.

[71] Glenn, Cheryl, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 4.

from royalty should be praised as valuable items, but Skalla-Grímr doesn't praise the fancy axe that King Eiríkr presents to him, because he is suspicious of the king's dealings with his son, and Egill hesitates to accept King Athelstan's compensation for Egill's brother Þórólfr, because he considers the compensation unworthy of his brother.[72] Guests to Icelandic homes were to be welcomed, but Þorleifr, suspicious of his visitor's purpose, doesn't say much when Hallfreðr introduces himself as a beggar. Hallfreðr is, in fact, on a mission to kill Þorleifr for King Haraldr Tryggvason, and due to his suspicions, Þorleifr quizzes Hallfreðr about his knowledge of the area.[73] For obvious reasons of hostility, in *Grettis saga*, Þorbjǫrn and Ásdís don't exchange greetings when Þorbjǫrn arrived with the salted head of her son, Grettir. Þorbjǫrn also confiscates her other son's belongings as Þorbjǫrn executed Illugi after he wouldn't promise to let Grettir's death go unavenged. In the sagas, important men are expected to speak when their followers or slaves are killed, but both Gunnarr and Njáll remain silent as their wives kill off men in a feud of their own. Gunnarr even remains silent when he learns he's been sentenced to full outlawry. Silences can also happen when portions of messages are not relayed as expected. In *Harðar saga*, Hǫrðr is being taken to court by his uncle, Torfi, for the killing of Auðr. Hǫrðr sends Helgi to ask for help from Hǫrðr's brother-in-law, Indriði, but Helgi only gives Hǫrðr half the message, and readers must determine the reasoning behind this half message themselves. These silences—when speech is expected—often carry heavy meaning.

Silence then serves a strategic purpose, and, "[l]ike speech, the meaning of silence depends on a power differential that exists in every rhetorical situation: who can speak,

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[72] Hermann Pálsson, "Gestr á að vita hvernig hann skuli þiggja það se er í boði," (11).

[73] Ibid, "Menn skyldu aldrei leita á aðra, allra síst gesti eða gamalmenni," (11).

who must remain silent, who listens, and what those listeners can do."[74] *Íslendingsögur* state the silences of the major characters, or at least those of more social value, and not the silences of background or minor characters. The silence of those individuals is overlooked: "Silence […] goes unnoticed (or, if noticed, then appreciated) in those whose words are not valued, which makes for a kind of communal silence."[75] What do the silences of the minor players do for the narratives of the *Íslendingasögur*?

So the question becomes, why do sagas specifically state that a character remained silent or did not speak. Does the meaning of that silence depend on what the audience would expect the character to say? Does the non-delivery of the expected speech affect the characters and their subsequent action? How much silence from characters is acceptable? Would the absence of expected speech make the audience uncomfortable, much like Shakespeare's audience when masculine characters refused to speak, for "[t]oo much silence is rarely tolerated from those who are expected so speak."[76] And perhaps more importantly, how does silence contribute to the sagas' overall theme?

Understanding silence across culture

Broad determinations about silence in textual context can be difficult because speech and silence are culturally specific,[77] not universal, and a complication of taking silences out of their cultural milieu is their loss of significance. The silence of Greek characters after committing serious crimes seems foreign to modern readers, as is the silence of many

[74] Glenn, Cheryl, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 9.

[75] Ibid,10.

[76] Ibid, 5.

[77] Silvio Montiglio, *Silence in the Land of Logos*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), 3.

Native American tribes upon their return home from a lengthy absence. Families and friends from European cultures expect lengthy verbal explanations of their experiences while absent; not silence during the expected period of re-acquaintance. "The personality, prior experiences, and cultural conditioning of an individual will influence how he perceives silence, what meaning he will attach to it."[78] It could be argued that speech and silence should ideally be considered in context, that is, the cultural and social context in which the speeches and silences were created, and an interpretation of silence from a 21st century perspective, without consideration of the cultural context of the sagas themselves, may do a disservice to saga silences.

The significance of viewing Old Norse-Icelandic literature within context, to the extent possible, is perhaps most evident within the field of skaldic poetry. This poetry is highly metrical, dense, and governed by strict rules, and the study of content must be accomplished through study of its form. In addition, its meaning is intimately connected to the poetic language, "all poets use periphrases, but the scalds developed these periphrases, or kennings as they are called, in ways of which other Germanic poets had not dreamed."[79] There are simple kennings, such as "the mead of Ygg" (*Yggs mjöðr*) for poetry. There are also more complicated kennings, such as "'the waterfall of Bestla's son' (*forsar Bestlu niðs*) and even 'the burden of Gunnlǫð's arms' (*farms Gunnlaðar arma horna fors*)," both of which refer to poetry.[80] Without knowledge, however, of Óðinn's genealogy and the varying versions of his acquisition of poetry, these phrases would be rendered meaningless and the

[78] Richard L. Johannessen, quoted in Glenn, Cheryl, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 16.

[79] Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 27.

[80] Ibid, 68.

significance of the poem would be lost.[81] "[P]oetry of this kind could not be understood unless the imagery were explained"[82] and the audience is expected to navigate the cultural background—the myths and how they functioned—in order to understand the poetry.[83] The knowledge behind the kennings is "a fundamental part of their conceptual framework (even after conversion to Christianity) it formed part of the means by which ideas were communicated—ideas that were themselves integral to their culture."[84] The context of Old Icelandic literature is important.

If the audience was accustomed, and even expected, to use their cultural knowledge to understand the poetry, it appears reasonable to postulate that they were also accustomed to understanding the sagas within cultural contexts. Some scholars have incorporated this assumption into their analysis, "An Icelandic audience well versed in traditional poetry and heroic legend would have seen the relationship between Gísli and Auðr in the context of changing patterns of loyalty in literature and society."[85] An analysis of silence in the *Íslendingasögur* would also benefit from being viewed within the cultural

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[81] Cultural context is considered by many to be an essential element for the understanding of any literature. To illustrate this point, I asked my recent Introduction to Literature class to speak only through metaphor. There were asked to prepare metaphors to introduce themselves and their interests to me and their classmates. The very first student pointed to himself and said, "Hearthrob from *Saved by the Bell*." *Saved by the Bell* was a television show for teenagers at the time, and because I didn't even know about the show, much less watch it, I had no clue. On the other hand, the American students were all familiar with the program and responded with "Hi, Zach!" The exercise was an excellent illustration of audience and lack of cultural context.

[82] Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 27. 39.

[83] Margaret Clunies Ross,"The Development of Old Norse Textual Worlds: Genealogical Structure as a Principle of Literary Organization in Early Iceland," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 92 (July 1993): 372-386.

[84] Anthony Winterbourne. *When the Norns Have Spoken: Time and Fate in Germanic Paganism.*, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2004), 13.

[85] Heather O'Donoghue, in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, (Maldon, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 26.

perimeters of medieval Icelandic culture, which is limited to extant documents and, of course, modern understanding and knowledge.

The difficulty in such a situation, where the culture that produced the text no longer exists, context must be gleaned from other sources, an unreliable process at best. The sagas themselves may indeed tell a great deal about expected speech and silence patterns through example and narrative, but they are one source. Modern audiences are separated from saga cultural context by time, more specifically 700-900 years from the written texts and at least 1000 years from the described events. Modern audiences are also separated from saga culture by religion. The events of the sagas took place mostly during pagan times; the written sagas after the conversion to Christianity. The extant of Christian emendations or additions to the sagas are topics of scholarly debate, but these discussions are limited to medieval Christianity and may not take the lens of current Christian theology into consideration. A modern western audience's reaction and understanding of the sagas will be affected by modern Christianity even if a particular member of the audience is non-Christian, as the tenets and theology of Christianity is so pervasive in contemporary western culture. In addition, traditions and technology have changed in the past eight centuries. Contemporary Iceland is an industrial nation, and its worldview is no longer that of the Vikings or Saga Age farmers. Despite the complications of reconciling culture of origin and surviving texts, Steblin-Kaminski argues: "the literature of remote ages is inseparable from the spiritual world of those among whom it has its origins."[86] Scholars do have limited options for gaining cultural knowledge.

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[86] M. I. Steblin-Kaminski quoted in Anthony Winterbourne, in *When the Norns Have Spoken: Time and Fate in Germanic Paganism,* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2004),14.

Viewing components in cultural context is exceedingly difficult to do. Scholars could use a wider range of Old Icelandic literature for cultural information, for not only are they are: "works embedding sophisticated and reflective manifestations of a recognizable philosophical impulse to grasp the meaning of the world around them."[87] But attempts to recreate context are hampered by ability to corroborate across sources, reliability of extant manuscriprs, and missing materials. Scholars are aware of texts and documents available to the contemporary audeinces that are not available today,[88] an idea that begs the question if a picture could be complete. The difficulties of comprehension lie not only in the obvious distances in time, religion, traditions, and technology, but also in the words themselves. Concrete concepts—such as *karl*, *kona*, *hestr*, *hundr*—remain relatively unchanged, but abstract concepts dealing with matters of beliefs, values, and ethics are not readily transparent at the distance modern scholars have from their objects of study.[89]

If using the sagas themselves is too problematic, scholars could opt to attempt a potential reconciliation of distant cultural context and extant text. One possible option is to approach the topic through a text that relays cultural information to its intended audience and whose core ideas could have remained relatively unchanged—the *Hávamál.* We could refer to the series of gnomic verses which give advice on how to behave, which is assumed to reflect the Viking philosophy of life. In his discussion in *Time and Fate in Germanic*

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[87] Ibid,13.

[88] For example, Gabriel Turville-Petre notes several times in his discussions in the *Myth and Religion of the North* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964) that Snorri Sturluson had more information at his fingertips than has survived through to our time.

[89] M. I. Steblin-Kamenski, in *The Saga Mind*, trans. Kenneth H. Ober (Odense: Odense UP, 1973), chapter "What is truth?" 21-48.

Paganism,[90] Winterbourne argues "Eddic poetry remains the closest we shall ever approach to the pre-Christian beliefs of the Germanic peoples,"[91] and concerning *Vǫluspá*, he maintains that foundational ideas survive even if specific details change, "that the *meanings* inherent in the poem must have a very long history indeed."[92] *Hávamál*, found in the mythological section of the Codex Regius manuscript, which is linguistically and materially distinct from surrounding texts, "was not transmitted in conjunction with any of the other poems in the Eddaic collection and joined them in the ms tradition only at a late stage, very possibly indeed only in CR itself."[93] The distinct character of this particular poem may also be an indication of its established nature. If we assume that those core ideas remained relatively unchanged and accurately recorded, we could transpose *Hávamál* onto the sagas to see how the values are enacted in the sagas. However, the sagas have many Christian elements; the distance is just too great.

If we cannot rely on the cultural content of *Hávamál* concretely, perhaps we could approach it more philosophically. Niles argues that a population's collective memories, the ones that include "values, ethics, hopes and fears" and which may said to be core ideas,

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[90] In his introduction to *When the Norns Have Spoken: Time and Fate in Germanic Paganism* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), Winterbourne explains his terminology, "Before proceeding any further, some justification for the terminology employed here would seem to be appropriate. I have already used different terms to refer to what is a broadly similar cultural phenomenon: I have used "Germanic" (given also in the book's title), or "Norse," and "Scandinavian," and we can easily add "Icelandic" or "Northern" to the list. It is a historical fact that most of what sustains our interest concerning the beliefs and mythology of the Northern European peoples comes to us in the form of Scandinavian and, even more precisely, Icelandic (Norse) literature" (12).

[91] Ibid, 30.

[92] Ibid, 33. Both Winterbourne and Turville-Petre give the example of the mistletoe.

[93] David A. H. Evans, ed. *Hávamál*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 7, eds. A. R. Faulkes and P. G. Foote (London: University College, 1986), 3.

exist at the core of a culture and are not extinguished by conversion to Christianity.[94] This is not to argue that *Hávamál* is a pure presentation of the pagan worldview, but rather to suggest a continuation of core cultural ideas of medieval Icelandic culture through a change in religion, across society, and throughout literature.[95] It might be argued that the appearance of specific stanzas or ideas from *Hávamál* in the *Islendingsögur* attest to an active connection between Viking philosophy and literature that persisted in the manuscript tradition. The first stanza of *Hávamál* appears at the beginning of *Gylfaginning,* "[t]he second half of st. 84 is cited in *Fóstbræðra saga* ch. 21 (ÍF VI 225)"[96] and is reminiscent of Kolfinna's warning in *Hallfreðar saga*.[97] And Chapters 6 and 7 of *Ynglinga saga* (in Snorri's *Heimskringla*) sound familiar to verse 148, but 'reminiscent' and 'familiar' do not equate a common core. The fact that the *Hávamál* material goes uncredited may be a reflection of the material's importance—it was so engrained in the social consciousness that audiences understood the reference and identified its source instinctively. These established and seemingly stable connections make it tempting for a scholar to work a literary interpretation into cultural evidence. However, continuation of core cultural ideas cannot guarantee their stability, nor can the continuation be used to support a cultural picture to be used in interpretation of silence in selected sagas.

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[94] John D. Niles, "Pagan Survivals and Popular Belief," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature,* eds. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 140.

[95] For a brief discussion of the pagan vs. Christian origin of *Hávamál*, see Evan's introduction to *Hávamál*.

[96] David A. H. Evans, *Hávamál*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 7, eds. A. R. Faulkes and P. G. Foote, (London: University College, 1986), 2.

[97] Pálsson 149.

All texts are situated in condition of their creation, which includes all the potential influences: social, cultural, historical, economic, geographical, linguistic, authorial intention, audience perceptions, and so forth.[98] Situational theory allows us to consider forces that affect an event and help shape its meaning over time, and we can examine the audience, purpose, and context of an Old Icelandic text to gain a better understanding of the literature and language and exist beyond the narrative."[99] However, without a reliable method of verifying cultural context for use in analyzing silence in context, any textual analysis can only suggest interpretations using existing contextualizing elements from a modern perspective. Much like Gisli Sigurðsson[100] and Tommy Danielsson[101] accept an oral tradition behind saga creation, yet share "a pessimistic assessment of our ability to draw conclusions about the nature of the traditions that preceded the written texts,"[102] Saga audiences understood their literature's silences, but this author is uncertain of our ability to accuractely recreate that understanding. This study, then, seeks to understand silence and its purpose in select *Íslendingasögur*, to view them as aesthetic works of art, each complete on its own.[103]

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[98] Lloyd F. Bitzer, in "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1 (1968).

[99] Kathleen Farrell and Marilyn Young, in "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action*, Ed. Jim A. Kuypers (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009), 36.

[100] Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method,* The Milman Perry Collection of Oral Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 326.

[101] Tommy Danielsson. *Om den islänska släktsagans uppbyggnad*, Skifter utgivna av Litteraturvetanskapliga institutionen vid Uppsala universitet, 22 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2002), 304.

[102] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey*, Yale Germanic Studies 1 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964), 5.

[103] Walter Baetke, in *Über die Entstehung der Isländersagas,* Berichte über die Verhandlungen der sächischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Liepzig: Philologisch-histroische Klasse II 5 (Berlin, 1956).

Influencing Perceptions in *Egils saga*

> *Listeners and observers will attach various and individualized meaning(s) to the silence, regardless of the silent person's intent.*[104]

Egils saga is, at its core, a generational biography of a warrior poet and family who have dealings with several kings, and it is the family's reactions to the actions of royal persons that propel the plot. The highlights of the saga are the death of Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson, the family's move to Iceland, the death of Þórólfr Skallagrímsson, and Egill's search for prestige and wealth.[105] It is also a saga that reached dual contemporary audiences, Icelandic and Norwegian, and reaches audiences even into modern times. *Egils saga* use silence aids in the process of creating ambiguous moments and engaging the two social groups. Such hazy moments are where the thoughts and intentions of the principal characters are unclear, and where the two potential audiences have the opportunity to make their own interpretations of the characters' action and intetions. The contrasting silences of Icelanders and the Norwegian kings in *Egils saga* create a theme of tension between independent Icelanders and Norwegian kings in search of order and security for their community.

Egils saga dispenses with the exegesis on character background, usually an essential component for understanding later conflicts in the family feud and regional sagas.[106] The narrative of *Egils saga* begins with Egill's grandfather, Kveldúlfr, whose parents, physical

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[104] Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 16.

[105] There is a hint of a love story in Egill's affection for his brother's wife.

[106] Other biographical sagas tend to have similar openings, where the narrative is focused on the individual family line and presents their perspective of the action.

description, Viking record, marriage, farming record, sons,[107] and the Viking raids of Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson are all explained in chapter one. Chapter two gives background on a couple of earls, and Ǫlvir Hump's marriage to an earl's daughter.[108] Chapter three narrates the beginning of the conflict between Egill's family and the royal family. The tension, highlighted by silence, between the kings and Egill's family is introduced at the end of chapter three and remains the underlying thread throughout the saga.

Saga readers and scholars interpret and perceive the narrative in different ways. Some interpret Egill's character as an independent hero while some can see Egill as destructive force. Egill is a protagonist fighting for his rights, but who is not entirely likeable in his use of brute force for his own ends. Hákon is king who does not yield Egill's demands because it's in the best interests of the country. This line of tension creates a narrative that both Egill and Hákon to be simultaneously be loved and loathed, depending on audience perspective. Therefore, both Egill and Hákon are extremely human characters with both good and bad character traits; this opacity allows potential interpretations for two audiences. Icelanders, who could be proud of their independent, rebellious ancestors, could celebrate Egill, and Norwegians, who could see Icelanders as quarrelsome, self-centered upstarts, could appreciate the wisdom and security provided by their king, King Hákon.

Egils saga has been critical in shaping Iceland's social memory of itself and its relationship with Norway. At first read, *Egils saga* does not seem to deal kindly with the

[107] The sons were Grímr, who was like his father in physical appearance, countenance, and dislike for the king, and Kveldúlfr's favorite, Þórólfr, who was like his mother. It was Þórolfr who voluntarily became a vassal of King Haraldr when the king demanded Kveldúlfr's presence in an upcoming battle.

[108] Ǫlvir is a friend and raiding companion of Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson.

Norwegian throne, and Kveldúlfr's decision to leave Norway for the king-free Iceland is seemingly reinforced with each problematic encounter Egill has with a king. It is the tension between the main character and royalty that establishes "categories of loyalty that separate Icelanders from Norwegians" and work to create social memory and solidify Icelandic identify as independent people,[109] and the Þórólfrs' deaths at the hands of kings create and support that memory. In addition, Egill Skallagrímsson is the hero of the narrative and his biography is framed within a narrative of the founding of Iceland. Therefore *Egils saga* becomes "'interpreted' public history."[110] In contemplating the idea of "saga as historical novel," Harris maintains that:

> "The most basic similarity, of course, is that both sagas and the early historical novels contain both real and fictional events and persons which are separated from and connected with author and reader by *historical distance* […] The lives of the private fictional characters wind in and out among those of historical characters, situations, and events and are made historically meaningful to us or at least to their original audiences by their association with an essentially liminal or transitional moment of historical significance, as if their presence at an important historical rite of passage sanctified them as witnesses. This assumes, of course, a consensus between author and audience about the historical process just described."[111]

The text of *Egils saga* is very focused on the experience of Icelanders at the hands of royalty—from the perspective of those who refused to submit to the king. With each reading, readers can feel justified in the original settlers' decision to leave Norway.

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[109] Jesse Byock, "Social Memory and the Sagas: the Case of *Egils Saga,*" *Scandinavian Studies* 76 (2004), 299-316, esp. p. 300.

[110] Joseph C. Harris, "Saga as Historical Novel," in *Speak Useful Words or Say Nothing: Old Norse Studies by Joseph Harris,* eds. Susan E. Deskis and Thomas D. Hill, (Islandica: Cornell University Library, 2009), 227-260, esp. p. 232.

[111] Ibid, 230.

Although the saga plays a definitive the cultural memories of the two communities, the saga does not take a clear stance. Egill may be the hero, but he has a selfish and greedy streak throughout the saga and ends his life as a *ójafnaðarmaðr* or tyrant in his own country. In contrast, King Hákon, with whom Egill has dealings, is a peaceful and fair-minded. *Egils saga* narratively compares and contrasts the medieval Iceland political system as represented by Egill and the medieval Norwegian system as represented by Hákon. Both systems rely on strength and integrity of individual persons, and the nuances and ambiguities create potential fodder for discussion about which political system is most effective. Such ambiguity is essential, since it could allow saga author and audience to connect with either side, especially knowing that medieval Icelanders and Norwegians shared literature.[112]

Andersson has suggested that the political ambiguity of *Egils saga* is due to a dual audience, and that the saga was written to entertain both Icelandic and Norwegian audiences.[113] Ambiguity maintains cultural tensions, enough to engage audiences, even into modern times. Harris' approach support the ambiguity in that he questions "to what extent the political theme in *Egils saga* and elsewhere is a conscious transposition into the past of a thirteenth-century issue, the Norwegian imperialism that increasingly encroached on the Iceland of the saga-writing period and at last led to the recognition of Norwegian

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[112] "Since the foundation of the archbishopric of Niðaróss in 1152, relations between Iceland and Norway had grown closer. The literature of Norway was not so rich as that of Iceland, but for a time the tow ran parallel, and they soon began to influence each other. Books written in Iceland were taken to Norway, and those written in Norway were brought to Iceland, where they were copied, and sometimes revised, while excerpts from them were included in the works of Icelandic historian." Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic* Literature, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1975), 169.

[113] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: Its Structural Patterns*, (Cornell UP: Ithaca, 2006), 116.

sovereignty in the years 1264-64."[114] In other words, sagas are contributing to social memory and have literary and historical elements that cannot be separated conclusively.[115] In fact, the saga does provide enough ambiguity that an Icelandic audience might have seen "ancestral pride and heroic resistance" whereas "the Norwegians may have seen inflated claims, ridicule, and patriotic self-delusion."[116] The language of *Egils saga* is perhaps infected by partisan agendas and desires, and is therefore coloring and distorting the facts that it purports to reflect.

The Mýramenn deliver Icelandic pride

The Mýramenn, the family to which Egill belongs, are a fiercely independent and proud people. They see others as means to glorify themselves and do not hesitate to do what they feel is right, no matter the consequences.

Skallagrímr Kveldúlfsson

The protagonist's father, Skallagrímr Kveldúlfsson, does not prevaricate; he says exactly what is on his mind to both king and commoners. After the killing of his brother Þórólfr, Skallagrímr's friend, Ǫlvir, tries to reconcile King Haraldr and Þórólfr's family. King Haraldr tells Skallagrímr that compensation will depend on his own service to the king:

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[114] Joseph C. Harris, in "Saga as Historical Novel," in *Speak Useful Words or Say Nothing: Old Norse Studies by Joseph Harris,* Eds. Susan E. Deskis and Thomas D. Hill, (Islandica: Cornell University Library, 2009, 255.

[115] "Attempting to determine what in the sagas is historical truth and what is artistic truth is tantamount to seeking a difference whose very absence constitutes the essence of the truth presented in the sagas. The fact that only one form of truth existed in the consciousness of people living in early Icelandic society is primarily attested by linguistic data. Such concepts as "historical truth", "artistic truth", and "artistic invention" or "fiction", which may be easily expressed in modern language, including Modern Icelandic, find no expression at all in Old Icelandic, and consequently did not exist for the people of that time," M. I. Steblin-Kamenski, in *The Saga Mind*, trans. Kennth H. Ober (Odense: Odense UP, 1973), 25.

[116] Theodore M. Andersson, in *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: Its Structural Patterns*, (Cornell UP: Ithaca, 2006), 116-117.

"Má mér svá vel líka þín þjónusta, at ek veita þér bœtr eptir bróður þinn eða aðra sœmð, eigi minni en ek veitta honum Þórólfi",[117] and he warns Skallagrímr to serve more carefully than his brother. Skallagrímr understands this "eigi minni" ("no less") as a veiled threat, for it was the king who had Þórólfr killed based on rumor alone, and a man who takes a chance on "bróðurbana sinum" is too trusting.[118] For Skallagrímr, the king's pleasure is fickle and the rewards unjust. Skallagrímr refuses to serve the king and issues a veiled threat of his own: "Eigi mun ek þjóna þér, því at ek veit, at ek mun eigi gæfu til bera at veita þér þá þjónustu, sem ek mynda vilja ok vert væri."[119] Skallagrímr is his own man and does not hesitate to speak his mind.

Skallagrímr understood and shared his father Kveldúlfr's concerns about their family's relationship with kings and their desire to remain independent freemen; yet despite his apprehension and family history of failure with royalty, both of his sons go on to seek the company and respect of kings. After Þórólfr develops a friendship with King Eiríkr, the young king sends an elaborate axe home with Þórólfr as a gift to his father. The saga reports that "Skalla-Grímr tók við øxinni, helt upp ok sá á um hríð ok rœddi ekki um; festi upp hjá rúmi sínu."[120] Skallagrímr, the man who wields words so well, is silent in the face of the king's gift. It may be tradition, and if *Hávamál* holds the key to contemporary

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[117] ÍF II 64, "I may be pleased enough with your service to give you compensation for your brother, Thorolf or no less honour than I showed him," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol I, 61.

[118] "Brother's murderer" (*Hávamál*, stanza 89). David A. H. Evans, ed *Hávamál*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 7, eds. A. R. Faulkes and P. G. Foote, (London: University College, 1986), 57.

[119] ÍF II, 64, "I shall not serve you, because I know I lack the good fortune to serve you the way I would like and that you deserve," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol I, 61.

[120] ÍF II, 95, "Skallagrim took the axe, held it up and inspected it for awhile without speaking, then hung it up above his bed," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol I, 75.

culture, that: "leyfa…mæki er reyndar er,"[121] but the silence could also be skepticism. In the fall, Skallagrímr uses the axe from King Eiríkr for the slaughter of cattle, but the axe breaks on its first strike—perhaps a reflection of a king's friendship breaking at the first sign of resistance. The saga tells that "Skalla-Grímr sá í eggina ok rœddi ekki um; gekk síðan inn í eldahús ok steig síðan á stokk upp ok skaut øxinni upp á hurðása; lá hon þar um vetrinn."[122] Skallagrímr's second silence, when the axe is inable to withstand use, seems to vindicate Skallagrímr's opinion of kings—the kings' royal façade is alluring, but they are not able to develop quality relationships. Skallagrímr hangs the broken axe above the entrance to the house, so every time a family member or guest passes through the doorway, they'll see the beautiful but flawed gift from the king.

However, the analogy between the axe and king reveals the Mýramenn's perspective of royalty—they are weapons to be wielded. Such a Mýramenn-centered interpretation of a king's role would not have appealed to an audience coming at the saga with the assumption that the Icelandic protagonists were heroic resisters of tyranny, but it may have appealed to those living with, and working for, the Norwegian crown.

Egill Skallagrímsson

The protagonist of *Egils saga*, Egill Skallagrímsson, is an "uncompromising, self-sufficient passionately aggressive character."[123] He is a warrior who loves his wife, a poet and a

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[121] "Praise a sword when proven" (*Hávamál*, stanza 81). David A. H. Evans, ed *Hávamál*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 7, eds. A. R. Faulkes and P. G. Foote, (London: University College, 1986), 55.

[122] ÍF II, 96, "Skallagrim inspected the edge without saying a word, then went into the *fire-room*, climbed up on a bench and put the axe on the rafters above the door, where it was left that winter," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol I, 75.

[123] John Hines, "Kingship in *Egils saga,*" in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga,* eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 15-32, esp. 23.

champion of the weak;[124] he is described as large, dark, and ugly; and the narrative portrays him as a greedy man. Egill has an unpredictable temperament (manic then depressed), and he is a hero associated with slander.[125] Egill is a devotee of Óðinn, "Áttak gótt/ við geirs dróttin/ gerðumk tryggr/ at trúa hónum,"[126] and man who composes poetry when unable to avenge the death of his sons. There is the connotation of animal characteristics when Egill bites the windpipe of his opponent, yet Egill grows so old and weak that women laugh at him when he stumbles, and the cook insults him when he huddles next to the fire. These extremes in Egill's portrayal have led Finlay to suggest a connection between the volatile nature of Egill's personality and the medieval understanding of melancholy.[127] Like his father before him, Egill Skallagrímsson is a force to be reckoned with both physically and verbally, although Egill has more of a dangerous edge. He is a complicated character, and his varied uses of silence supports that image, although they all also support his self-involvement, for Egill's silences have to do with his personal sense of justice and loss.

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[124] Arguably for his own financial ends.

[125] Alison Finlay, "*Egils saga* and the other poets' sagas," in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga,* eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay, (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 105. "He is prone to violent fits of aggression and cruelty, and, on the other hand, attacks of moodiness and depression; he is avaricious, a vice never mentioned in the other poets' saga, and suspicious and hostil even to those closest to him."

[126] ÍF II, 255, "I was in league/ with the lord of spears, pledge myself loyal/ to believe in him" (*Sonatorrek*, stanza 22).

[127] "The author of the Problem conceives of the melancholy temperament as governed not by particular characteristics, but rather by a tendency to violent extremes of somewhat contradictory states, " Alison Finlay, "*Egils saga* and the other poets' sagas," *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga,* eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay, (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 46.

Egill Skallagrímsson first employs silence by referring to it, when he buries his brother, perhaps feeling "inarticulate despite a desire to communicate; perhaps the topic lends itself more to intuitive sensing than to verbal discussion."[128]

> "[J]ǫrð grœr, en vér verðum,
> Vínu nær of mínum,
> Helnauð es þat, hylja
> Harm, ágætum barma."[129]

Egill is not silent per se, but he does indicate that there is something that he must keep to himself, something he cannot share in words. Even here, Egill's complexity surfaces, for at the same time as he says he cannot share, he expresses himself through poetry. Egill is unable to seek vengeance against his brother's slayer, so his attention turns elsewhere, to an indirect source of his brother's death.

Egill Skallagrímsson uses silence as intimidation. In a scene earlier in the saga, Egill is given the high seat opposite King Aðalsteinn. "[Egill] hafði hjálm á hǫfði ok lagði sverðit um kné sér ok dró annat skeið til hálfs, en þá skelldi hann aptr í slíðrin [...] ekki vildi hann drekka, þó at honum væri borit, en ýmsum hleypði hann brúnunum ofan eða upp."[130] Þórólfr had been separated from Egill—against Egill's better judgment—by the king's command and was subsequently killed. Egill non-verbally expresses his displeasure to the king and Egill's refusal to participate in the merriment, his behavior, and his lack of speech are all apparently threatening to the king, for he rewards Egill generously. In this

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[128] Richard L. Johannesen, "The Functions of Silence: A Plea for Communication Research," *Western Speech* 38 (1974), 25-35, esp. 29.

[129] ÍF II, 142, "The ground will grow over/ my great brother near Wen/ deep as my sorrow is/ I must keep it to myself" (99).

[130] ÍF II, 143, "He was wearing a helmet and laid his sword across his knees, and now and again he would drag it half-way out of the scabbard, then thrust it back in…He refused to drink even when served but just raised and lowered his eyebrows in turn," *The Complete Sagas of* Icelanders, Vol I, 100.

particular instance, it is Egill who uses the silence of the dominant party. The free Icelander is able to force his will on royalty through silence, and thus receive what he feels he is due.

In another saga episode mentioned previously, Egill hears that Berg-Ǫnundr has taken all his father-in-law's wealth for himself, leaving nothing for Egill's wife, Ásgerðr. Egill suspects that Berg-Ǫnundr has done so with the backing of powerful people and the saga reports that "honum var sagt, at Ǫnundr var kominn í vináttu mikla við Eiríkr konung, ok við Gunnhildi þó miklu kærra."[131] Egill, showing control, merely "lét þat kyrrt vera á því hausti."[132] This is not a silence reflecting lack of response, however; rather it shows some thoughtful planning on Egill's behalf, for the very next spring Egill takes action to retrieve his wife's property.

Egill also uses silence after his father's death to keep thoughts and feelings to himself. No record is made of his verbal response upon hearing the news of his father's death, and no additional material is provided, material that would allow the audience to interpret Egill's state of mind. The text simply explains that Egill went straight home from the party he was attending, prepared his father's body for burial, and put Skallagrímr in a mound on the promontory, "Var þar í lagðr Skalla-Grímr ok hestr hans ok vápn hans ok smíðartól."[133] These actions can be viewed as the actions of a loving son, but considering the lack of poetry in this instance, the passage seems cold for the warrior poet. Egill

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[131] ÍF II, 152, "He was told that Onund was a good friend of King Eirikr, and even closer to Queen Gunnhildr," *The Complete Sagas of* Icelanders, Vol I, 104.

[132] ÍF II, 152, "Egill let the matter rest for the autumn," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol I, 104.

[133] Icelandic Saga Database. "Where Skallagrim was laid to rest with his horse and weapons and tools," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol I, 115.

composed complimentary stanzas after the death of his brother, the touching poem *Arinbjarnarkviða* directly before the death of his friend, and a stanza after Arinbjǫrn's death. At his daughter's suggestion, Egill also composed the heart-wrenching poem *Sonatorrek* after the loss of both his sons instead of willing himself to die.[134] The absence of any poetry from the preeminent warrior poet after the death of his own father suggests that Egill's silence on this matter may not be entirely due to grief. After all the father and son had been at odds since Egill was born, and the absence of emotive verbal statements from Egill, in stark contrast to Egill's responses to the deaths of his brother, son, and friend, give way to more nebulous interpretations of Egill's response to his father's death.

In addition to using silence for grieving, intimidation, and contemplation, Egill Skallagrímsson's silence can reflect his anger. After Egill is refused his wife's inheritance from the king, the protagonist takes matters into his own hands. He kills Berg-Ǫnundr, the man who physically holds the land and property, but this is not enough and "Egill var nú allreiðr, svá at þá mátti ekki við hann mæla."[135] Egill must also take revenge on those who made Berg-Ǫnundr's unjust act possible. So Egill kills young Prince Rǫgnvaldr, the son of King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr, and erects a *niðstǫng*[136] inscribed with a curse that will force the nature spirits to drive the King and Queen from the land. Egill can not confront them directly and verbally, so he does so indirectly.

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[134] "*Arinbjarnarkviða* stands as a magnificent acknowledgement of a lifetime's friendship, demonstrating Egill's understanding of the social and public function of poetry, contrasting with the personal and psychological ends to which poetic activity is painfully directed in *Sonatorrek*" Carolyne Larrington, in "Egill's longer poems: *Arinbjarnarkviða* and *Sonatorrek*," in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga,* eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 49-63, esp. 56.

[135] Icelandic Saga Database. Egil was so furious that no one dared talk to him," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol I, 115.

[136] An insult pole, in this case a horse's head on a pole.

After his favorite son Þǫðvarr drowns at sea, Egill reacts with non-verbal actions. He searches until he finds his son's body, opens Skallagrímr's burial mound, and buries Þǫðvarr, the son whom he loved dearly,[137] with his grandfather. He then rides home and lays in the bedcloset and "engi þorði at krefja hann máls."[138] After Egill has gone three days without food or water in complete silence, Ásgerðr sends for their daughter, Þórgerðr. Upon her arrival, Þórgerðr announces her intention to join Egill in his mission to die, and Egill allows her to join him in a second bed in the bedcloset and it is told that, "siðan þǫgðu þau um hrið."[139] Their silence reflects an "empathic exchange, the companionship of shared mood or insight;"[140] they understand each other in their moment of sorrow. Eventually, Þórgerðr tricks Egill into drinking some milk and convinces him to write a poem for Þǫðvarr. The result is *Sonatorrek*, which clarifies the reason for Egill's melancholy. He cannot take revenge on the sea for Þǫðvarr's life, nor can he take revenge on the fever that took another son's life, Gunnarr. Egill Skallagrímsson is man accustomed to creating his own destiny—he can force kings to pay for a brother's death and kill a berserker to save others—but when his son is drowned by the sea, Egill is silenced by forces beyond his reach and powerless to take revenge to appease his grief.

Egill grows old, and eventually another of his sons, Þorsteinn, takes over the farm at Borg. "Þorsteinn var vitr maðr ok kyrrlátr, hógværr, stilltr mana bezt; Egill unni honum

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[137] ÍF I 243. "Egill unni honum mikit." "Egill loved him dearly," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol I, 149.

[138] ÍF II 244. "No one dared to speak to him," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 150.

[139] ÍF II, 245. "Then they were silent for a while," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 150.

[140] Richard L. Johannesen. "The Functions of Silence: A Plea for Communciation Research." *Western Speech* 38 (1974): 25-35, esp. 29.

lítit."[141] Þorsteinn ends up quarreling with a neighbor, Steinarr, over Steinarr's illegal use of Þorsteinn's pasture and eventually the matter goes to court. Þorsteinn sends men to seek advice from his brother-in-law, Grímr, who is married to Þórdís, Egill's step-daughter. While the men fill Grímr in on the details, "Egill lét sér fátt um finnask ok spurði þó at í hljóði vandiliga um skiðti þeira Þorsteins ok Steinars ok svá at þeim mǫnnum, er Steinar hǫfðu styrkt til þessa máls."[142] Þorsteinn is pleased with his brother-in-law's advice and follows it, although Egill has other plans. Egill rides to the *várþing* (Spring Assembly) with eighty men and convinces Ǫnundr sjóni, Steinarr's father, to give Egill self-judgment on Þorsteinn's behalf. But Egill does not just arrange a fair settlement between the two groups, he also takes the opportunity to further his family's power in the region. He evicts Steinarr from the farm Anabrekka, because Skallagrímr, the original landholder, gave the land to Ani, and that gift, in Egill's perspective, gives Skallagrímr's descendants the right to control the current owner. Compensation, whether by self-judgment or by the court, should resolve the conflict, but such decisions are only as good as the men who make the decision. The fault in this agreement lies with Egill as he reached too far, putting his own family's benefits before justice. Justice for Egill Skallagrímsson is apparently one-sided. Although there are some further skirmishes between Þorsteinn and Steinarrr, Steinarr eventually gives and moves away. Egill Skallgrímsson again gets his way.

Even when Egill is old and feeble, he still feels the need to control something and create some havoc with his fellow men, and so he decides to ride to the Alþing.

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[141] ÍF II 274, "Thorsteinn was a wise and peaceful man, a model of modesty and self-control. Egil was not very fond of him," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 164.

[142] ÍF II, 282, "Egill showed little interest, but asked secretly in detail about Thorsteinn's dealings with Steinar and about the men who had supported Steinar in the case," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol I, 168.

> "Ek ætla at hafa til þings með mér kistur þær tvær, er Aðalsteinn konungr gaf mér, er hvártveggja er full af ensku silfri. Ætla ek at láta bera kisturnar til Lǫgbergs, þá er þar er fjǫlmennast; síðan ætla ek at sá silfrinu, ok þykki mér undarligt, ef allir skipta vel sín í milli; ætla ek at þar myndi vera þá hrundningar eða þústrar, eða bærisk at um síðir, at allr þingheimrinn berðisk."[143]

Egill Skallagrímsson, now blind, wants to force those around him to respond to him once more and have the final say over his treasure, but his responsible son-in-law, Grímr, won't hear of it. To ensure that others' opinions on his treasure are silenced, Egill buries his treasure at an unknown location, kills the two slaves who went with him, and wanders the mountainside until he is brought home. A fitting end for the warrior poet. He takes issue with reasonable advice, takes an action of his own, kills those in his way, and needs the help of friends to safely come home.

Egill Skallagrímsson furthers his own personal sense of self-worth and justice. His relationships, his revenge, his accumulation of wealth, his heavy requirements of friends—all speak to his personal motivations and judgments. "Egill's sense of justice, monitoring and finely adjusting the exchange of favours and gifts which, as *Hávamál* tells us, is the method by which friendship is maintained,"[144] yet all Egill's friendships seem heavily favored in his direction. And whereas Skallagrímr's silences focus the audience's attention on the tension between his family and royalty, albeit selfishly, Egill's silences—no matter

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[143] ÍF II, 296-7, "I want to go to the Thing with the two chests full of English silver that King Athelstan gave to me. I'm going to have the chests carried to the Law Rock when the crowd there is at its biggest. Then I'll toss the silver at them and I'll be very much surprised if they all share it out fairly amongst themselves. I expect there'll be plenty of pushing and shoving. It might even end with the whole Thing breaking out in a brawl," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol I, 176.

[144] Carolyne Larrington, "Egill's longer poems: *Arinbjarnarkviða* and *Sonatorrek*," in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga,* eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 56.

their type—fixate on his personal loss and sense of justice. Egill is his own man despite the consequences.

Kingly silence reveals the nature of kings

The kings in *Egils saga* serve to immediately elevate the action and to increase the prestige of the main characters in that Skallagrímr, Þórólfr, and Egill interact and have working relationships with royalty. However, Hines sees the kings of *Egils saga* as part of a broader, medieval perspective, in that the "king as lawgiver has a crucial role in attempting to uphold such civilized *mores* as these and thus maintaining the good order and security of the community."[145] The amount of interaction between the main characters and various kings, then, may lead a reader to view *Egils saga* as a narrative in search for such order inherit in a good king. King Haraldr[146] and King Eiríkr[147] are clearly flawed individuals and kings, and the traditional interpretation of kingly quality holds that King Aethalstan is the most effective king. This interpretation is, however, from Egill Skallagrímsson's perspective. King Aethalstan does not stand in the way of Egill or his accumulation of wealth; in fact, the king seems to be intimidated by Egill and bows to his will. It is King Hákon,[148] however, who may be the most effective king overall as he protects his kingdom, refuses to yield to Egill's demands, and wields both speech and silence effectively. King Hákon's words and actions are for the needs of the country and not for his own goals.

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[145] John Hines, "Kingship in *Egils saga,*" in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga,* Eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 30.

[146] King Haraldr hárfagri, the son of Halfdan the Black and Ragnhildr Sigurðsdóttir, ruled from 872-930.

[147] King Eiríkr blóðøx, son of Haraldr hárfagri and Ragnhildr Eiríksdóttir, ruled from 921-933, when he was deposed.

[148] King Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, or King Hákon the Good, the son of King Haraldr hárfagri and Þóra Morsturstöng, ruled from 934-961.

King Haraldr

King Haraldr is an effective warrior and leader in battle, but he is an ineffective and unjust king: "he is ambitious, brooks no resistance, and is adamant about imposing his will."[149] King Haraldr is too easily swayed and manipulated by his subjects for their own ends;[150] he is "choleric, accessible to slander, and given to vindictive retaliation;"[151] and he is too narrowly focused on his own position and prestige.[152] King Haraldr uses silence to isolate himself from other voices and as a mechanism of control, and "when silence is a means for exerting control and managing the situation, silence originates with the dominant party, stimulating the subordinate party to explore options for breaking the silence, for rousing speech from the other."[153] After a dominant party utilizes silence, his subordinates have few options at their disposal. Haraldr is portrayed as an unambiguously bad king in *Egils saga* and his silences support a negative interpretation of his character.

King Haraldr forces his will on others, leaving his subjects and those he has yet to subject, powerless. King Haraldr does not gain power earning his followers' respect and treating his men fairly and generously; King Haraldr gains power by taking it:

> Þótt þetta vandræði hafi nú borit oss at hendi, þá mun eigi langt til, at sama vandræði mun til yðvar koma, því at Haraldr ætla ek at skjótt

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[149] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: Its Structural Patterns*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006), 104.

[150] John Hines, "Kingship in *Egils saga,*" in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga,* eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay,(London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 18-22.

[151] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: Its Structural Patterns* (Cornell UP: Ithaca, 2006), 104.

[152] After Haraldr inherited his father's title, he swore an oath that he wouldn't comb or cut his hair until he had control over all of Norway. For this, he was known as Haraldr lúfa (Tangle-Hair).

[153] Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 32.

> mun hér koma, þá er hann hefir alla menn þrælkat ok áþját, sem hann vill, á Norðmœri ok í Raumsdal. Munu þér inn sama kost fyrir hǫndum eiga, sem vér áttum, at verja fé yðvart ok frelsi ok kosta þar til allra þeira manna, er yðr er liðs at ván, ok vill ek bjóðask til með mínu liði móti þessum ofsa ok ójafnaði; en at ǫðrum kosti munu þér vilja taka upp þat ráð, sem Naumdœlir gerðu, at ganga með sjálfvilja í ánauð ok gerask þrælar Haralds.[154]

Haraldr tries to change the nature of his relationship with his followers from *grið* to that of pure loyalty.[155] His followers will not be allowed to change their allegiance if they are unsatisfied with his rule or decisions, as they have been in the past. King Haraldr's decisions will be final.

The first real glimpse of the King's ineffectiveness in dealing with his vassals on an individual level is in his relationship with Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson. Þórólfr is a good man, and King Haraldr is unable to deal with him fairly. Þórólfr is described in the text as:

> manna vænstr ok gørviligastr; hann var líkr móðurfrændum sínum, gleðimaðr mikill, ǫrr ok ákaframaðr mikill í ǫllu ok inn mesti kappsmaðr; var hann vinsæll af ǫllum mǫnnum.[156] (5).

Þórólfr is eager to volunteer his services to the king and proves to be quite valuable on the battlefield. He also takes his responsibilities as landowner very seriously: he treats his men with generosity, speaks respectfully with his father-in-law, and works hard to be a good

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[154] ÍF II, 8. "Although this misfortune has befallen us now," he said, "it will not be very long before the same happens to you, because I think Harald will be here soon, once he has brought slavery and suffering to eeryone he chooses in North More and Romsdal. You will face the same choice we had: either to defend your property and freedom by staking all the men you can hope to muster—and I shall provide my forces too against such aggression and injustice—or to follow the course taken by the people of Naumdal who voluntarily entered servitude and became Harald's slaves," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol I, 35.

[155] *Grið* is a negotiated give-and-take relationship between a leader and his þingmen. Jesse Byock, "Social Memory and the Sagas: the Case of *Egils Saga*," in *Scandinvian Studies* 76 (2004), 299-316, esp. p. 304.

[156] 'IF II, 5. "Thorolf was an attractive and highly accomplished man. He took after his mother's side of the family, cheerful, generous man, energetic and very eager to prove his worth," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol I, 34.

vassal to the king. During King Haraldr's royal visit, Þórólfr throws a lavish party and gives the king a great battleship. Although the king initially "roðnaði ok mælti ekki, ok þóttusk menn finna, at hann var reiðr,"[157] he eventually softened and became friendly toward Þórólfr again. The close proximity of the words describing the party and the description of the king's red face and anger in the text leave little room for other interpretations. The king's silence is a reflection of his irritation over the party, and rather than confronting Þórólfr and allowing him to explain himself, the king sulks.

Although the king and Þórólfr part in friendship, the Hildiríðarsons take advantage of both Þórólfr's success and King's Harald's personality flaws.[158] They invite the king to feast, and as there were "ekki fjǫlmenni fyri."[159] The Hildiríðarsons were able to make their accusations of treason and theft without any opposition from Þórólfr or those close to him. Þórólfr is forced into silence. The narrative clearly states that the king "reiðisk mjǫg við rœður þessar", but he still "mælti þó stilliliga."[160] The king obviously doesn't like what he hears, but he does not seek out any further information or other sources before making a decision about Þórólfr, going against advice provided by *Hávamál*:

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[157] ÍF II, 29. The king was "very red in the face. He did not speak a word, but it seemed obvious he was angry," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol I, 44.

[158] Bjǫrgólfr went with a force of men to visit a man named Hǫgni. During this unannounced visit, Bjǫrgólfr forced Hǫgni to allow Bjǫrgólf's immediate marriage to Hildiríðr Hǫgnadóttir—a marriage that did not follow any of the legal proceedings or traditional customs. Bjǫrgólf's son, Brynólfr, did not approve. After Bjǫrgólfr died, Brynólfr forced Hildiríðr and her two sons to leave without any inheritance. After Brynólfr's death, his son Barðr, who was the same age as Hildiriðr's sons, inherited both land and possessions and was made a landholder by King Haraldr. As Barðr Brynolfsson lay dying, he asked that King Haraldr allow Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson to inherit his lands and title—without any consideration for his two half cousins the Hildiriðarssons. Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson continued to deny the Hildiriðarssons any inheritance.

[159] ÍF II, 30. "There were not many other people there," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol I, 44.

[160] ÍF II, 32. "The king was furious at hearing these words, but spoke calmly," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol I, 45.

> "Sá er sæll
> er sjálfr um á
> lof ok vit meðan lifir,
> því at ill ráð
> hefir maðr opt þegit
> annars brjóstum ór."[161]

The Hildiriðarson's slander has been heard heard by the king and gone unanswered by Þórólfr, and the accusations weigh heavily on the king's mind: "Konungr rœddi fátt um þessi tíðendi fyrir mǫnnum, en fannsk þat á, at hann myndi trúnað á festa þessa orðrœðu, er honum var sagt."[162] The king's malleability in such feuding matters is reflected in his few words on the matter.

While Þórólfr is away, he puts his friend Þorgils gjallandi in charge of delivering the tribute Þórólfr had collected for the king. When Þorgils arrives at court and announces the delivery of the tribute, "[k]onungr sá til hans ok svarar engu, ok sá menn, at hann var reiðr."[163] The slander has continued to stew without opposition, and the king's position of dominance allows him to use silence as "a means of punishing others, of annihilating others symbolically by excluding them from verbal communication."[164] Þorgils will not be allowed to speak to the king for any reason, much less to discuss Þórólfr and the tribute.

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[161] *Hávamál*, stanza 9. "Lucky the man who can look to himself/ to provide his praise and wisdom;/ evil counself has often come out of another man's mind." David A. H. Evans, ed. *Hávamál*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 7, eds. A. R. Faulkes and P. G. Foote, (London: University College, 1986), 40.

[162] ÍF II, 33. "The king was furious at hearing these words, but spoke calmly as he always did when hearing important news," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol I, 45.

[163] ÍF II, 34. "The king noticed him there but said nothing, and it was obvious he was angry," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol I, 46.

[164] Richard L. Johannesen, "The Functions of Silence: A Plea for Communication Research," *Western Speech* 38 (1974), 25-35, esp. p. 9.

There is little that Þorgils can do at this point. Þórólfr's friend, Ǫlvir hnúfa, warns Þorgils about the slander bandied around at court:

> "'Eigi veit ek þat,' sagði hann, 'hitt hefi ek fundit, at konungr þagnar hvert sinn, er Þórólfs er getit, síðan er vér várum í Leku, ok grunar mik af því, at hann muni rœgðr vera. At veit ek um Hildiríðarsonu, at þeir eru lǫngum á einmælum við konung, en þar er auðfundit á orðum þeira, at þeir eru óvinir Þórólfs."[165]

Ǫlvir decides to intervene on Þorgils' behalf and meets with the king about the arrival of the tribute, and the saga reports that: "[k]onungr svarar engu ok gekk þó þar, er skipit lá."[166] Once the king sees the amount and quality of the tribute Þórólfr has collected for him, the king is open to talking with Þorgils about Þórólfr. In other words, by playing in the King's desire for prestige and wealth, the subordinate party, Þórólfr, has found other means of breaking the dominant party's silence. This king is not as interested in fairness and justice for his vassals than he is in what is best of him. Despite the protestations of Þórólfr's supporters, however, "konungr kvezk því mundu heldr af trúa."[167] This statement does not absolve Þórólfr in the king's mind, and once the king's mind is set, Þórólfr is powerless. Subjects only have a voice when the king allows them to have a voice.

The Hildiríðarsons continue to spin their own interpretations and lies about Þórólfr's motivations and movements, until finally King Haraldr decides to take action. He does not want to meet Þórólfr in battle, so he has his men surround Þórólfr and set fire to

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[165] ÍF II, 35. "I don't know,' Ǫlvir said, 'but I have noticed that the king falls silent every time Thorolf is mentioned, ever since we were at Leka together, which makes me suspect that people have been slandering him. I know Hildirid's sons talk at great length with the king in private, and it's obvious from the things they say that they are Thorolf's enemies," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 46.

[166] ÍF II, 34. "Without saying anything, the king went to where the ship was moored," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol I, 46.

[167] ÍF II, 47. "Eventually the king said he was inclined to believe them," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 47.

his house. This act increases the king's infamy, for he has denied a good man a voice and then condemned him to death by burning, silenced in his own home. Fortunately for Þórólfr, he and others break out of the burning building:

> Þá hljóp Þórólfr fram ok hjó til beggja handa, sótti þangat at, er merki konungs var. Þá fell Þorgils gjallandi. En er Þórólfr kom fram at skjaldborginni, lagði hann sverdi í gegnum þann mann, er merkit bar. Þá mælti Þórólfr: "Nú gekk ek þremr fótum til skammt." Þá stóðu á honum bæði sverð ok spjót, en sjálfr konungr veitti honum banasár, ok fell Þórólfr fram á fœtr konungi.[168]

King Haraldr has sealed his fate as a king. He has listened to and believed slander, not allowed Þórólfr to defend himself against that slander, tried to burn Þórólfr to death in his home rather than meet him in battle, and personally dealt Þórólfr his death wound, the final silencing of a good man.

Later on, King Haraldr, at Ǫlvir Hump's request, agrees to meet with Kveldúlfr and Skallagrímr to discuss compensation, and Skallagrímr goes to the meeting.

> "Ek vil þá," sagði konungr, "ef þú beiðisk bóta fyrir Þórólfi, at þú gerisk minn maðr ok gangir hér í hirðlǫg ok þjónir mér. Má mér svá vel líka þín þjónusta, at ek veita þér bœtr eptir bróður þinn eða aðra sœmd, eigi minni en ek veitta honum Þórólfi, bróður þínum, ok skyldir þú betr kunna at gæta en hann, ef ek gerða þik at svá milkum manni sem hann var orðinn."[169]

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[168] ÍF II, 54. "Thorolf ran forward, hewing to both sides, towards the kings' standard. Then Thorgils Boomer was killed. When Thorolf reached the wall of shields around the king, he thrust his sword through the standard-bearer. Thorolf said, "Now I took three steps too few." He was attacked with both swords and spears, and the king himself delivered the mortal blow, and Thorolf fell at his feet," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 56.

[169] ÍF II, 64. "If you are seeking compensation for Thorolf," said the king, "I want you to become one of my men, join their company and enter my service. I may be pleased enough with your service to give you compensation for your brother Thorolf or no less honour than I showed him. But you should make sure to act more carefully than he did, if I make you a man of his stature," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 61.

This is a one-sided compensation offer—not the traditional self-judgement offered to a free man—and only the king can decide if and when Þórólfr's death will be compensated. Kveldúlfr and Skallagrímr will not get the revenge due to them through familial and cultural norms, but they will have to earn compensation for their kinsman on terms the king can alter or change at any moment. Skallagrímr refuses, and the saga states that: "Konungr þagði, ok setti hann dreyrrauðan á at sjá."[170] Again, the text leaves little room for an interpretation other than anger, for immediately following Skallagrímr's departure, the king sends men with orders to kill them.

Silence has many meanings, but King Haraldr only uses two: 1) The person's silence is a means of punishing others, of annihilating others symbolically by excluding then from verbal communication, and 2) The silence marks sulking anger. Both of these are negative meanings for silence and their use by the character King Haraldr bolsters his negative portrayal in *Egils saga*. This king is interested in keeping his power and not willing to work with others to maintain it. The king puts his own agenda ahead of the general welfare of his subordinates, and he wields silence as a tool of suppression. "As it turns out, however, later encounters between Egill's family and royalty tell a less one-sided story,"[171] which is supported by their silences in the narrative.

King Eiríkr

King Eiríkr is an interesting king, because he seems to have the ability to reason logically, but the king is easily manipulated by his wife, Gunnhildr, who is described as: "fjǫlkunni

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[170] ÍF II, 64. "The king fell silent and his face turned blood-red," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*), Vol I, 61.

[171] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: Its Structural Patterns*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006), 105.

mjǫk."[172] When the king's words are attributed to him alone, he listens and speaks plainly, that is until Queen Gunnhildr gets involved, "In general, he appears to be a rather weak character that leaves the real initiative to Gunnhild."[173] Gunnhildr's involvement in royal decisions leaves its mark on his rule, for a man who cannot control his wife does not appear to be a man, much less a king. Whereas King Haraldr was a king focused on obtaining and maintaining power, his son, King Eiríkr, has moments where he seems to have the potential to be an effective king. King Eiríkr uses silence only once, and this is a positive type of silence. Hines labels King Eiríkr as "a relatively weak king," in that he cannot keep rule of law in his own country and that he unjustly denies Egill his wife's inheritance,[174] but King Eiríkr's core potential is good. His weakness as a king is his willingness to be manipulated by his queen, and compounded by the fact that he doesn't give the saga's hero what he deserves.

As a young man, Prince Eiríkr forms a friendship with Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson against the advice of his father, King Haraldr. Everything goes well between the two men until Þórólfr's younger brother, Egill, attends a party and kills a favorite steward of King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr.[175] Þórir, the king's foster-father and a friend of Egill's family, is forced to make a shaky conciliation between the two parties. And although the king is "in

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[172] ÍF II, 94. "Well versed in the magic arts," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 75.

[173] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: Its Structural Patterns*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006), 107.

[174] John Hines, "Kingship in *Egils saga,*" in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga,* Eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 23-4.

[175] Gunnhildr is also a close friend of Þórólfr. In fact, the text implies much more than mere friendhip, "kærleikar miklir váru með þeim Þórólfi ok Gunnhildi" (ÍF II, 94), which may help to explain why she is so venemous against him later in the saga.

reiðasti, ok var óhægt ráðum við hann at koma,"[176] he accepts the compensation Þórir proposes out of loyalty to his foster-father. This is an admirable action in other circumstances.

After a summer raiding, Þórólfr and Egill return to Norway—it is against the king's edict for Egill to do so—but Þórir again intercedes with King Eiríkr, who gives his consent. Queen Gunnhildr is not pleased that the king will not go back on his word and punish Egill, so she sends her brothers to kill "báðir annanhváran þeira sona Skalla-Gríms, ok bazt, at báðir væri."[177] This action, although unsuccessful, increases the hostilities felt by both sides and strengthens the reader's impression that the king doesn't really have control over his kingdom. Queen Gunnhildr silences the king's power by taking matters into her own hands. King Eiríkr does not counter her command, and his lack of voice in this matter gives the queen power to make such decisions in his stead.

Perhaps the most intriguing moment in King Eiríkr's career is when Egill returns to Norway from Iceland in order to claim his wife's inheritance from her brother-in-law Berg-Ǫnundr.[178] Berg-Ǫnundr refuses Egill's claim, so Egill summons him to the Gulaþing. There, the two men argue their case before the court and King Eiríkr. Egill maintains that his wife, Ásgerðr, deserves to inherit equally from her father, and Arinbjǫrn offers witnesses to prove that her parent's marriage was settled through agreement and her father intended her to inherit. Berg-Ǫnundr argues that his wife, Gunnhildr, is the only

[176] ÍF II, 114. "King Eirik was so furious that it was virtually impossible to talk to him," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 84.

[177] ÍF II, 124. "Either of Skallgrim's sons, or preferably both," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 90.

[178] Egill married Ásgerðr, the daugther of Bjǫrn and his kidnapped bride, Þóra. Berg-Ǫnundr married Gunnhildr, the daughter of Bjǫrn and his second wife, Ólǫf. Bjǫrn's first marriage was made under auspicious circumstances, although they were later made legal through negotiations.

legal heir and he calls Þóra a slave-woman because she was kidnapped:[179] "fór hon þá af landi –á braut með víkingum ok útlǫgum konungs, ok í þeiri útlegð gátu þau Bjǫrn dóttur þessa."[180] Berg-Ǫnundr also accuses Egill of ignoring the king's rulings and insinuates that Egill is of low intelligence because " þótt þú hafir fengit ambáttar, at kalla hana arfgengja."[181] To complete his argument, Berg-Ǫnundr argues that "Eiríkr konungur ok Gunnhildr dróttning hafa mér því heitit, at ek skal rétt hafa af hverju máli, þar er þeira ríki stendr yfir."[182] Egill offers logic and evidence, whereas Berg-Ǫnundr offers slander and pronouncements of the King's injustice.

After the opening arguments are made, "konungr svarar ekki skjǫtt máli hans."[183] This delay in the king's response is not accompanied by an observation of physical features, like the redness often associated with King Haraldr's silence, or by an observation of emotion such as anger. This silence is in direct response to the speeches and seems to indicate that King Eiríkr is carefully considering the logic of the arguments. This interpretation is further enhanced by the reaction of Queen Gunnhildr, for after the witnesses testify on behalf of Egill, she is clearly worried that her husband may judge in favor of Egill.

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[179] Although appropriate, the word "kidnapped" is too mild for it doesn't explain the motivations behind it. Berg-Ǫnundr is saying the Þóra was "tekin frillutaki"(taken for sexual pleasure).

[180] ÍF II, 155. "She traveled from one country to the next with Bjorn and some vikings and outlaws who had been exiled by the king, and while she was away she became pregnant with Asgerd by Bjorn," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 106.

[181] ÍF II, 155. "Even though you have married a slave-woman, you claim she has a right to an inheritance," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 106.

[182] "King Eirik and Queen Gunnhild have promised me that every case of mine in their realm will be ruled in my favour," Ibid. Note that this promise of court victory is made by the king and queen jointly, and not the king alone.

[183] ÍF II, 155. "The king took a long time answering his speech," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 106.

> "Þetta er undarligt, konungr, hvernig þú lætr Egil þenna inn mikla vefja mál ǫll fyrir þér; eða hvárt myndir þú eigi móti honum mæla, þótt hann kallaði til konungdómsins í hendr þér. En þótt þú vilir enga órskurði veita, þá er Ǫnundi sé lið at, þá skal ek þat eigi þola, at Egill troði svá undir fótum vini mína, at hann taki með rangendi sín fé þetta af Ǫnundi."[184]

Not only does the queen subvert the king's justice by not allowing him to make a ruling—she silences him by breaking up the court—but she lays the blame on Egill. Although Egill has made a clear and logical argument for why the king should rule in his favor, the queen accuses Egill of manipulating the king and feigns her concern about protecting his throne.

King Eiríkr does nothing to mediate his wife's actions and, in fact, sends men after Egill with orders to kill him. His silence in response to the arguments made by Egill and Berg-Ǫnundr illustrates his ability to analyze arguments objectively, while his silence in face of Queen Gunnhildr's disruption of his court shows his weakness as the defender of law. King Eiríkr allows another person, a woman, to silence him as lawgiver and maintainer of order and security. The reader is left to wonder what kind of king Eiríkr could have been, had it not been for his willingness to be manipulated by his queen.

Egils saga paints a very negative picture of King Eiríkr who, after Norwegian free farmers join forces with his brother King Hákon, is forced into exile. It is interesting to note that while in England, Eiríkr becomes more kingly in his last encounter with Egill,[185] as evidenced by the non-affect Queen Gunnhildr has on him, as well as his direct, short speeches.

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[184] Íf II, 157. "How peculiar of you, king, to let this big man Egil run circles around you. Would you raise an objection if he claimed the throne out of your hands? You might refuse to make any ruling in Onund's favour, but I shall not tolerate Egil trampling over our friends and wrongly taking this money from Onund," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 107.

[185] John Hines, "Kingship in *Egils saga,*" in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga*, eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 26.

> "Gunnhildr mælti: "Hví skal eigi þegar drepa Egil, eða mantu eigi nú konungr, hvat Egill hefir gǫrt, drepit vini þína ok frændr ok þar á ofan son þinn, en nítt sjálfan þik; eða hvar viti menn slíku bellt við konungmann?" Arinbjǫrn segir, "Ef Egill hefir mælt illa til konungs, þá má hann þat bœta í lofsorðum þeim, er allan aldr megi uppi vera." Gunnhildr mælti: "Vér viljum ekki lof hans heyra; láttu, konungr, leiða Egil út ok hǫggva hann; vill ek eigi heyra orð hans ok eigi sjá hann." Þá mæti Arinbjǫrn; "Eigi mun konungr láta at eggjask um ǫll níðingsverk þín; eigi mun hann láta Egil drepa í nótt, því at náttvíg eru morðvíg." Konungr segir: "Svá skal vera, Arinbjǫrn, sem þú biðr, at Egill skal lifa í nótt; hafðu hann heim með þér ok fœr mér hann á morgin."[186]

Whereas in Norway, Egill's friends were unable to sway this king's mind, in England they are.

King Aðalsteinn

If *Egils saga* is a search for the good king, the narrative certainly gives the impression, at least from Egill Skallagrímsson's perspective, that King Aðalsteinn, who ruled from 925-940, may be that king. King Aðalsteinn is from the House of Essex—his geneology extends back to Alfred the Great—an ancestry that embodies intelligence, fairness, and strength. King Athelstan is an effective king both in battle—he successfully defeats three kings in the Battle of Brunanburh (937 AD)—and in his dealings with his retainers, as evidenced by his

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[186] ÍF II, 181. "Gunnhild said, "Why not have Egill killed at once? Don't you remember, king, what Egil has done: killed your friends and kinsmen and eve your own son, and heaped scorn upon you yourself. Where would anyone dare to treat royalty in such a way?"

"If Egil has spoken badly of the king," Arinbjorn said, "he can make recompense with words of praise that will live forever."

Gunnhild said, "We do not want to hear his praise. Have Egil taken outside and executed, king. I neither want to hear his words nor see him.

Then Arinbjorn replied, "The king will not be urged to do all your scornful biddings. He will not have Egil killed by night, because killing at night is murder."

The king said, "Let it be as you ask, Arinbjorn: Egill shall live tonight. Take him home with you and bring him back to me in the morning," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 118.

compensation for Þórolfr.[187] His portrayal in *Egils saga* as a good and effective king, however, is colored by the narrative's perspective.

The hero and warrior poet seems to have the dominant position over this particular king, for he is the one king in the saga who praises Egill Skallagrímsson and gives him what he wants. After the battle in which Þórólfr was killed, Egill is given the high seat opposite the king. "Hann hafði hjálm á hǫfði ok lagði sverðit um kné sér ok dró annat skeið til hálfs, en þá skelldi hann aptr í slíðrin...ekki vildi hann drekka, þó at honum væri borit, en ýmsum hleypði hann brúnunum ofan eða upp."[188] Egill's refusal to participate in the merriment, his behavior, and his lack of speech are all apparently threatening to the king. King Athelstan "is not oblivious to this and sets his own sword on his knees, but deflects the Icelander's anger by offering him gold."[189]

> Aðalsteinn kongungr sat í hásæti; hann lagði ok sverð um kné sér, ok er þeir sátu svá um hríð, þá dró konungr sverðit ór slíðrum ok tók gullhring af hendi sér, mikinn ok góðan, ok dró á blóðrefilinn, stóð upp ok brá sverðinu ok gekk á gólfit ok réttir yfir eldinn til Egils.[190]

Egill wields silence as a tool, and through his silence, he gets what he wants from the English king. The king actually gets up and physically takes the ring of gold *to* Egill. From the audience's perspective, Egill Skallagrímsson finally receives the respect he is due; Egill

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[187] John Hines, "Kingship in *Egils saga,*" in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga*, eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 26.

[188] ÍF II, 144. "He was wearing a helmet and laid his sword across his knees, and now and again he would drag it half-way out of the scabbard, then thrust it back in…He refused to drink even when served but just raised and lowered his eyebrows in turn," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 110.

[189] Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century English,* Trans. Randi C. Eldevik (Odense: Odense UP, 2002), 255.

[190] Íf II, 144. "After they had been sitting there like that for a while, the king unsheathed his sword, took a fine, large ring from his arm and slipped it over the point of the sword, then stood up and walked across the floor and handed it over the fire to Egil,"*Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 100.

has power in this king-vassal relationship. Despite Egill threatening the king with violence, King Athelstan bestows on Egill the power to name his own terms: "En þú skalt taka hér bróðurgjǫld hjá mér, lǫnd eða lausa aura, hvárt er þú vill heldr, ok ef þú vill með mér kveljask lengðar, þá skal ek hér fá þér sœmð ok virðing, þá er þú kannt mér sjálfr til segja."[191] And when Egill announces his plans to leave England for home, the king says: "en hinn veg þykki mér bezt, at þú takir hér staðfestu með mér ok skíka kosti, sem þú vill beiðask."[192] Egill Skallagrímsson has finally met a king who values Egill for what Egill believes he is worth.

King Athelstan is a king who is well spoken in that he treats the hero with respect and refers judgment to him. Here is a king who respects the freedom and autonomy of the Icelanders, and King Athelstan has traditionally been viewed as the epitome of a good king by Old Norse-Icelandic scholars.[193] However, not only does King Aðalsteinn lavish the hero with praise and allow the hero to determine his own worth, the king also refrains from using silence as a rhetorical tool of power, perhaps an indication that he goes too far in his acquiescence to the hero. It would be difficult for an intimidated king to maintain good order and security.

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[191] ÍF II, 145. "Take compensation for your brother from me here, land or wealth, whichever you prefer, and if you wish to stay with me for longer I shall grant you any honour and respect that you care to name yourself," Ibid.

[192] ÍF II, 147. "I would prefer you […] stay here permanently and accept anything you care to name," Ibid 101.

[193] See John Hines, "Kingship in *Egils saga*," *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga*, Eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay, (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992).

King Hákon

King Hákon Haraldsson[194] (934-961) is presented as "an astute king" in his dealings with Egill and friends.[195] In fact, "[t]his final encounter with royalty reveals a king, perhaps benefiting from the fact that he was a Christian before his time, who is both perceptive and reasonable, although he is not infinitely complaisant."[196] King Hákon speaks well, is not manipulated by others, and appears above all else to be concerned with "maintaining the good order and security of the community."[197] King Hákon's concern for his role as lawgiver is stated by Egill in his appeal for justice: "Eg hefi spurt, at þér setið lǫg hér í landi ok rétt hverjum manni."[198] This appeal to the king's sense of justice seems to work because King Hákon allows Egill to pursue his wife's inheritance.[199] However, for the good of his country and its people, the king warns Egill to stay away: "Miklu hafi þér frændr meira skarð hǫggvit í ætt vára en þér muni guga at staðfestask hér í landi."[200] King Hákon seems to understand that a peaceful country has a king at peace. The king is also familiar with the breaches Egill has caused between his friends and their sworn king. Even though Arinbjǫrn

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[194] Also known as Hákon the Good and Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri.

[195] John Hines, "Kingship in *Egils saga,*" in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga*, eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 29.

[196] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: Its Structural Patterns*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006), 108.

[197] John Hines, "Kingship in *Egils saga,*" in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga*, eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 30.

[198] IF II, 198. "I have been told that you are establishing a code of law and rights for every man in this country," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 126.

[199] This is in part because King Hákon is the foster-son of King Athelstan, who is also the protector of Egill Skallagrímsson.

[200] ÍF II, 198-9. "You and your kinsmen have carved too deep a breach in my family for you to be able to settle down in this country," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 127.

is on shaky ground with King Hákon, Egill convinces him to intercede with the king.[201] After a long pause, a silence illustrating the king's careful thought, Hákon refuses Arinbjǫrn's request that the king give Egill the property of Ljǫtr.[202] In going to the king on Egill's behalf—after King Hákon warned Egill away from Norway—Arinbjǫrn reveals the priority of his loyalties. The conflict of interest between loyalty to friends and king is unacceptable, and it indicates that Arinbjǫrn may be a liability to the King.

> "En þér, Arinbjǫrn, er þat at segja, at þú svá megir vera hér í landi, at þú metir eigi meira útlenda menn en mik eða mín orð, því at ek veit, at hugir þínir standa þar til, er Haraldr er Eiríksson, fóstrson þinn, ok er þér sá kostr beztr, at fara til fundar við þá brœðr ok ver með þeim, því at mér er mikill grunr á, at mér muni slíkir menn illir tiltaks, ef þat þarf, at reyna um skipti vár sona Eiríks."[203]

King Hákon foresees the potential conflicts with his blood relatives and is worried that they may ty to take back the country. Such an action would require men to take sides and fight, a sitation that is not conducive to: "setið lǫg hér í landi ok rétt hverjum manni."[204] King Hákon is thoughtful, careful, focused on justice and peace, and cannot be unduly influenced by outside sources. So if *Egils saga* is a search for a lawgiver king who upholds "such

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[201] This is not the first time. Arinbjǫrn negotiated between Egill and both kings Haraldr and Eiríkr on several occasions.

[202] Egill wants to claim the lands and property of Ljǫtr the Pale, whom Egill slew in battle on behalf of a young man named Friðgeirr.

[203] ÍF II, 215-6. "And I shall tell you one thing, Arinbjorn: you may only stay in this country on condition that you do not value foreigners more highly than myself or my words. I know your loyalty lies with you foster-son, my nephew Harald Eiriksson. The best course for you would be to go abroad to stay with him and his brothers, because I have strong suspicion that men like you will prove unreliable if a confrontation arises between me and Eirik's sons," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 135.

[204] ÍF II, 198. "Establishing a code of law and rights for every man in this country," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol I, 126.

civilized *mores*" and maintains "the good order and security of the community,"[205] King Hákon is that king.[206]

The text "*Egils saga* is overtly about an important Icelandic family and its most celebrated scion but also centrally about a series of Norwegian kings and how they interact with Iceland."[207] As noted above, the silences in *Egils saga* develop an Icelandic protagonist, a "celebrated scion", that is unyielding, selfish, and irascible, and a series of kings that go from bad to good. The final king with whom Egill deals, King Hákon, has his country's best interests at heart and does not back down from warning Egill Skallagrímsson about returning to Norway in the future. It is interesting that King Hákon, the last king, who is the most effective king of *Egils saga*, as his fair dealings with Egill would imply other Icelanders would also have fair treatment in Norway. Perhaps there was a political purpose behind the text's composition.

The suggested composition date of *Egils saga*, 1220-1230, immediately follows a period of tense political conflict between Norway and Iceland and at the same time "Norwegian aspirations to annex Iceland resurface."[208] All of these events occur during the

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[205] John Hines, "Kingship in *Egils saga,*" in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njals saga*, eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 30.

[206] Others have viewed King Hákon as the king of justice and law. "At a time when scholars were more optimistic than we are now about the possibility of discovering the history of pre-Christian Scandinavia, the Norwegian historian Absalon Taranger suggested that the representative assembly had been invented for use in the extensive and impassable area of western Norway in the tenth century by King Hákon the Good (c.935-c.960)." Gunnar Karlsson, "Social Institutions," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture,* edited by Rory McTurk, (Maldon, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 504.

[207] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: Its Structural Patterns*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006), 1086.

[208] Ibid, 110.

rule of King Hákon IV (ruled 1217-1263), the king under whom medieval Norway prospered. King Hákon IV has been described as the king who transformed Norway from a disorganized, war-ravaged country to one of peace and prosperity,[209] just as King Hákon of *Egils saga* transformed Norway from a conflicted county, under King Haraldr and King Eiríkr, to a country of peace. This parallel narrative could be purposeful, for although King Hákon IV was not the king with whom Egill Skallagrímsson had dealings, he was king contemporary to the composition of the saga, and his namesake was the most politically effective king in *Egils saga*. The Kings Hákon are the kings who can balance personal gain with the security of their kingdoms.

A foundational concept in rhetorical studies is context affects interpretation; that culture, social structure, economics, history, values, geography, and linguistics play a significant role in how audiences understand texts. Cultural context also affects interpretation of textual elements like silence, making interpretation a complicated endeavor intimately connected to its counterpart, verbalizations, and the cultural context of both the intended audience and the real audience. Silences can be interpreted differently between members of the same audience, but perhaps more so by different audiences entirely. An astute author could use cultural context and audience perceptions to his or her advantage.

[209] In his analysis of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla,* Bagge says that"Hákon góði was the great legislator, who issed the Gulaþingslög and Frostuþingslog" (132), Hákon góði was an ideal king (75 and 156) and a popular king, mixing warrior and lover of peace, and one who managed "keep to internal peace" (156). Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

It has been suggested that Snorri Sturluson was the author of *Egils saga*;[210] the claim for his authorship is based on stylistic and rhetorical reasoning, and perhaps also to strengthen his claim to land, based on how much land Skallagrímr settles when he arrives in Iceland. However, Snorri was a politically ambitious Icelander who lived with Jarl Skúli in Norway and was a spokesman and *skutilsveinn* (knight) for King Hákon IV of Norway. Snorri returns to Iceland in 1220, the earliest scholars suggest the saga was written, with the tasks of creating peace between the two countries and bringing Iceland under King Hákon's jurisdiction (*Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* 70-71). Snorri became lawspeaker of the *Alþing* again in 1222 and supported a union with Norway, and, it has been argued, was actively seeking a political unification of Iceland, not only for his own glorification, but also to deliver the country to the king. It is intriguing to consider the possibility that *Egils saga* may have had a rhetorical purpose in working towards unification, and that the author used silence as a narrative tool in the process.

> It might in fact be argued that there is a gradual improvement in the Norwegian kings and a compensatory decline in Egil's disposition, from early recklessness to relentless self-interest. If these lines of development are to be seen in the context of outstanding political issues between Iceland and Norway, it is not at all certain that Iceland has the better of it. (Andersson 2006, 110-111).

The silences in *Egils saga* support the "gradual improvement in the Norwegian kings" from King Haraldr to King Hákon, and "a compensatory decline in Egil's disposition" from demanding justice for his family to justice for his greed.

Snorri the historical man was not successful in his personal political efforts to consolidate power in Iceland, but it is intriguing to consider that his text, *Egils saga*, may

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[210] Torfi Tulinius, *Skáldið í skriftinni. Snorri Sturluson og Egils saga*. Rekjavik: Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag, 2004, p. 12. Vésteinn Ólason. "Er Snorri höfundur Egils sögu?" *Skírnir* 142 (1968): 48-67.

have been successul in affecting popular opinion. In 1262, Icelandic chieftains, with the guidance of Gissur Þorvaldsson, made an agreement[211] with King Hákon and his son, Magnus, that Iceland would come under the Norwegian throne. Icelanders agreed to pay taxes to the Norwegian throne in return for guaranteed peace, a code of laws, and dependable transportation to and from the continent.

[211] Gissurarsáttmáli [Gissur's covenant]

Social organization, silence, and consequences in *Laxdœla saga*

> *Svo það var bara best að þegja og vonast til þess að einhver lausn kæmi af sjálfu sér áður en eitthvað alvarlegt gerðist.*[212]
>
> *The meaning of silence depends on a power differential that exists in every rhetorical situation: who can speak, who must remain silent, who listens, and what those listeners can do.*[213]

Silence serves many functions in communication. It is an active and functional part of communication, a linguistic element that makes speech understandable. It is those moments of silence in spontaneous speech between words, sentences, and ideas, all of which can be measured and quantified.[214] Silence is an active part of conversations, where speakers take turns by pausing at the end of their speeches. Such silences are stillness or pauses, which are "exterior to the communicative interaction,"[215] and thus, non-communicative. In addition to silence's more mechanical part of meaning-making, silence can also be communicative in that a speaker is silent by choice; it is an active means, purposefully chosen, to convey meaning. Purposeful silence can be both indirect and direct speech acts, and provides linguistic or emotional meaning. Mazzei calls them "strategic" silences,"[216] Kurzon calls them "intentional,"[217] and Ephratt calls them *eloquent*,[218] and they

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[212] The character, Eyjólfur, in Einar Kárason's *Ofsi*, (Reykjvík: Mál og Menning, 2008). "So it was just best to remain silent and hope that some solution would present itself before something serious happened," my translation.

[213] Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence,* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 9.

[214] Cynthia L. Crown and Stanley Feldstein, in "The Perception of Speech Rate from the Sound-Silence Patterns of Monologues." *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 20.1 (1991).

[215] Michal Ephratt, in "The Functions of Silence." *The Journal of Pragmatics* 40.11 (2008): 1911.

[216] Lisa A. Mazzei, in "Toward a Problematic of Silence in Action Research." *Educational Action Research* 14.4 (2007): 633.

[217] Dennis Kurzon, in "The Right of Silence: A Socio-Pragmatic Model of Interpretation." *Journal of Pragmatics* 23:1 (1995): 60.

were the silences of *Egils saga*. However, just as an individual can choose to be silent, he can also silence others. Such "[s]ilencing, unlike eloquent silence, is not a way chosen by the speaker to express himself or herself; on the contrary, it is an act depriving a person (or a group of persons) of expression."[219] In *Laxdœla saga*, it is the silencing of freemen and women that leads to a break in social structure.

Silence in *Laxdœla saga*, as in *Egils saga*, is a purposeful narrative tool that serves several functions. It contributes to the narrative ethos, creates tension, and builds suspense, but silence in *Laxdœla saga* also provides a subversive element to the narrative's social structure. The silences are a critical component of the determined construction of characters and theme. From the very beginning of *Laxdœla saga*, silence is either indicative of a character flaw, in which case the silent character will be a negative participant in a conflict, or silence foreshadows a conflict, even building tension until the climax of the narrative. But *Laxdœla* also illustrates that the silencing of others, whether by choice or place in the clan hierarchy, has serious social consequences.

Silence in a clan structure

Individuals in a liberal society, where the government is weak or where the state is in decline, tend to align themselves into groups that support their interests. So a saga society with a strong legal system and plenty of wealth (first one or two generations in the saga), could begin evolving towards a contract state, where "law is oriented toward the individual

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[218] Michal Ephratt, in "The Functions of Silence." *The Journal of Pragmatics* 40.11 (2008): 1913.

[219] Ibid.

rather than the group."[220] Individual is who he is because of his own merits; not because of his place in an inescapable group. "The law makes you responsible for meeting your financial obligations and it also enables you to contract for them yourself"; "that hold individual self-fulfillment and personal development as a central moral value."[221] But as resources dwindle, and the state does not support individual rights no matter their affiliation, the move back to a status society, where "the rights and obligations of individuals are fundamentally influenced by their places within the kin groups to which they inescapably belong."[222] As time passes and resource continue to dwindle, class groups "consolidate their power, becoming more important to the social order than the individuals the liberal state once nurtured."[223] The individual is weakened and subsumed in the kin group, and when that kin group does not function as expected or required, social order is seriously disrupted.

Saga society is a clan society; family connections are essential. The sagas begin with genealogies and narratives of ancestors' past deeds, and characters are often introduces with brief genealogies. Such connections are essential to the context of the narrative; a character cannot be fully comprehended without the family background, "individuals were known and assessed not simply in themselves but in relation to their *ætt*."[224] It is from the opening of *Egils saga* that audiences knows every generation has a fair-haired, good

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[220] Mark S. Weiner, in *The Rule of the Clan: What an Ancient Form of Social Organization Reveals about the Future of Individual Freedom*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013), 13.

[221] Ibid, 4.

[222] Ibid, 9.

[223] Ibid, 16.

[224] Ibid, 76.

humored son and a swarthy, ill-tempered one; that Egil's abrupt mood swings are generations old; that characters from Borg are a solid, capable, foundation family. It is from the opening of *Laxdœla saga* that the proud, noble beginning of Kjartan's family is established. Family geneaology is why Þórleikr seeks Þórgerðr Egilsdóttir as a wife for Ólafr, and why Ólafr is initially snubbed by his future wife. Family connctions and location in the clan hierarchy is also why Bolli, with his inferior blood, can never be Kjartan's equal.

Although family connections are clearly important, saga society, as established in the *Laxdoela*, seems egalitarian. Every freeman has rights and a voice in the law; he can choose his own *goði*, freely changing allegiance to best suit his needs. However, despite such perceived equality, it is not exercised in the clan hierarchy, where, the rule of the clan:

> [P]ossess a markedly diminished concept of individual freedom. This is because under their legal principles people are valued less as individuals per se than as members of their extended families. The rights and obligations of individuals are fundamentally influenced by their places within the kin groups to which they inescapably belong.[225]

This privileging of family or kin groups is perhaps best illustrated by deferred decision-making, where a character sets aside his or her own wishes and desires to acquiesce to the family leader's plans. Such deference is not limited to the men, as women also defer important life decisions to their families.

In any society, but perhaps especially in clan societies, dominant groups force silence on others, "the dominant group in a social hierarchy renders "inarticulate" subordinate or muted groups (any of the traditionally disenfranchised) and excludes them from the formulation, validation, and circulation of meaning."[226] Poor, unconnected

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[225] Ibid, 9.

[226] Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 25.

þingmenn are silenced by their *goðar*, the very men sworn to protect them and their rights. In *Hrafnkels* saga Hrafnkell refuses to pay Þorbjǫrn compensation for the death of Þorbjǫrn's son, Einarr, denying Þorbjörn validation as a father and Hrafnkel's sworn freeman. Þorbjǫrn refuses to stay silent, however, and goes to a neighboring chieftain for legal help. Bredsdorff has argued that when Gísli chastises his sister, Þórdís, for outing him as her husband's killer, it never occurred to him that she did not approve.[227] Þórdís' thoughts and feelings are not voiced because they do not reflect the nature of the patriarchal society, and if they are voiced, they cannot help formulate meaning.

Silencing voices does not remove them, rather, it sends them underground. For example, female voices are traditionally absent, silenced by fellow characters and/or author. Fishman observed that wives are silenced when husbands choose whether topics appropriate for discussion,[228] or when they interrupt their wife's speech or go silent to avoid a topic becoming well-developed.[229] Examples of stated silences are within the power group, in saga terms the men, but is perhaps the expected silence—and unexpected speech—of the subordinate group that deserves more attention.[230] When Gísli kills his sister's husband without consulting her,[231] what power does this have over the narrative

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[227] Thomas Bredsdorff, in *Chaos & love: the philosophy of the Icelandic family sagas,* Trans. John Tucker, (University of Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2001), 67.

[228] Pamela Fishman, in "Interaction: The Work Women Do." *Social Problems* 25 (1978): 397-406. Rpt. in *Language, Gender, and Society*, Eds. Barrie Thorne, Cheris Kramarae, and Nancy Henley, (Rowley: Newbury, 1983): 98-99.

[229] Victoria Leto DeFrancisco, in "The Sounds of Silence: How Men Silence Women in Marital Relations." *Discourse and Society* 2 (1991): 417.

[230] Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 30.

[231] In addition to killing Þorgrimr, Þordis' husband and Þorkell's (Gisli's brother) best friend, Gisli also killed Þordís' suitor, Barðr (also a friend of Þorkell), in Norway. Gisli also "crippled a second, and brought to an end her relationship with a third. He is puzzled that she is not so grateful" (Thomas Bredsdorff, in *Chaos and Love:*

events? When Ósvífr marries Guðrún off against her wishes, what power does it have over the narrative events? Women's concerns are rare in the sagas, and when they appear, they are significant yet often dismissed. Consider Guðrún asking Kjartan to take her with when he leaves for Norway because, "ekki ann ek Íslandi," he refuses and tells her to stay home and take care of her family. When those individuals in traditional positions of authority ignore the voices around them, bad things can happen. Consider the modern day example of surgeons and surgical residents dismissing or ignoring the voices and concerns of experienced nurses.[232]

An exception to rare occurrence of female voices in the sagas is the active role of the female inciter, but they are heard because they fit into the cultural capital of the blood revenge code. Characters who bend to the will of the dominant group through acquiescence are not voiceless and their silence, or muteness, speaks in subversive ways, "Members of these muted groups thus continue to find themselves in situations in which they are—in a practical sense—adapting, mediating, and subordinating their own ideas and forms of expression to that of the dominant discourse and in the dominant idiom."[233]

Literary background

The structure of *Laxdœla saga* and its potential underlying organizing theme has been a source of scholarly discussion, but none of the studies has looked at the saga's rhetorical elements for clues as to literary cohesion. Bååth does not see a cohesive text at all, but

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The Philosophy of the Icelandic Family Sagas, Translated by John Tucker (University of Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2001), 67.

[232] See Fauzia Gardezi, Lorelei Lingard, Sherry Espin, Sarah Whyte, Beverley Orser and G. Ross Baker in "Silence, Power, and Communication in the Operating Room." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* (2009): 1390-1399.

[233] Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 28.

rather a collection of traditions thrust together inartistically,[234] and the editor of the Íslenzk fornrit edition reports on the potential sources and influences of *Laxdœla saga*, but makes no argument for an organizing theme.[235] Andersson[236] and Magnusson and Pálsson[237] also see the saga as lacking overall cohesion; they interpret the saga as centered on the character, Kjartan Ólafsson, and see the first third of the saga, although seemingly disconnected from Kjartan's narrative, as establishing the glory and wealth of Kjartan's family. Hume sees the perceived lack of unity as an issue with modern readers because Old Norse-Icelandic saga construction "does not conform to our expectations" as modern, western readers.[238]

Other scholars have seen unity in *Laxdœla saga*, but a unity developed by analyzing the saga's overall structure; not by examining its rhetorical elements. Arent Madelung views *Laxdœla saga* as a cohesive narrative in which the author repeats patterns and phrases intra-generationally in order to show decline in the structure of Icelandic society, which may have been quite meaningful for readers in 13th century.[239] Conroy, through a comparison with *Eiríks saga rauða*, interprets *Laxdœla* as a cohesive narrative about

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[234] Albert Ulrik Bååth, in *Studier öfver kompositionen i några isländkska ätsagor,* (Lund: Berling, 1885).

[235] Einar Ól Sveinsson, in "Formáli." *Laxdœla saga,* (Íslenzk Fornrit V. Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1943).

[236] In *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey*, Yale Germanic Studies 1, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964).

[237] Magnússon Magnús and Hermann Pálsson, in *Laxdœla saga*, (New York: Penquin, 1969).

[238] Kathryn Hume, in "Beginnings and Endings in the Icelandic Family Sagas." *The Modern Language Review* 68.3 (1973): 593.

[239] Margarent Arent Madelung, in *The Laxdœla Saga: Its Structural Patterns,* University of North Carolina Studies in Germanic Languages and Literatures, 74, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. 173-183. "*Laxdoela saga* is judged to have been composed about 1250; the Commonwealth came under Norwegian control in 1262. Contemporary events in many ways must have appeared like the disastrous result of the code of vengeance and the fulfillment of a fateful destiny" (173).

Guðrún Ósvífsdóttir and her marriages,[240] an argument later furthered by Conroy and Langen,[241] that the sagaman's main concern is "the breaking down of the traditional morality based on clan loyalty, a breakdown which leads to the moral chaos into which Kjartan, Bolli, and Guðrún are born."[242] In fact, they see a steady decline from the exemplum of Unnr djúpúðga to the saga's end, [243]a decline composed with the "aid of intricate ring-compositions" and "cohesiveness at both the conceptual and mechanical levels."[244] Meulengract Sørensen also interprets a social warning for the saga audience, that when society is affected by non-Icelandic elements, the country's inner balance is disrupted.[245]

Regardless of their conclusions as to the cohesion of *Laxdœla saga*, scholars' methodology has concentrated on overall structure, which is a complicated endeavor considering the sheer amount of detail provided by each text. All details connect to the main storyline in some manner, so all details seem necessary and purposeful, which is especially valid about characters' actions and speech, and add to the tapestry of the saga. All details seem to be provided by an objective narrator who is just relaying as much information as possible.

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[240] Patricia Conroy, in "*Laxdœla saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*: Narrative Structure." *Arkiv for nordisk filologi* 95 (1980): 116-125.

[241] Patricia Conroy and T. C. S. Langen, in "Laxdœla saga: Theme and Structure." *Arkiv for nordisk filologi* 103 (1988): 118-141.

[242] Ibid, 120.

[243] Ibid, 121.

[244] Ibid, 140.

[245] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, in *Saga and Society: An Introduction to Old Norse Literature*, Trans. John Tucker, (Odense: Odense UP, 1983), 15.

The authors of the *Íslendingasögur*, it seems, tried to include all the material that a reader will need to intuit and interpret the events and characters described in the sagas, and this comprehensive inclusion of necessary detail begins with that very first phrase, "Þá var maðr…" ("There was a man…"). Saga introductions are often quite lengthy and can include narratives of multiple generations and relevant subplots before a saga settles on the protagonists themselves. These introductions, or pre-plot material, were often organized "genetically rather than logically,"[246] which is often difficult for the modern reader who expects what Hume calls "organic unity,"[247] but these introductions served the purpose of creating sufficient context for the audience to interpret the social and political undercurrents. The result is highly determined progression of plot and characters ruled by their predetermined fates, as woven by the *nornir*, and illustrated from the beginning of each narrative.

Laxdœla saga is no exception as it follows the descendants of Unnr djúpúðga and its narrative focus on three generations of half-brothers and sworn-brothers. Each of these generational pairs overlaps one another, and each pair has its own conflict—the first generation quarrels over inheritance (Hǫskuldr and Hrútr); the second over wealth and prestige (Óláfr and Þórleikr); the third over a woman, wealth, and prestige (Kjartan and Bolli). The saga narrates how the conflict of each generation threatens the family as well as society itself, and silence, in all its forms, is an intimate part of the theme. In the first two generations, most silences concentrate in side plots, which allude to thematic issues,

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[246] Kathryn Hume, in "Beginnings and Endings in the Icelandic Family Sagas." *The Modern Language Review* 68.3 (1973), 605.

[247] Ibid, 593.

however, in the third generation, silences become concentrated in the main storyline and at the same time they turn viscerally negative and connect to power struggles.

Narrative ethos

The presentation of *Laxdœla saga* is purposeful as "every detail in the saga can be seen as a strand in the pattern, and with each detail the pattern is strengthened and given depth."[248] As in other sagas, the character descriptions, actions, and speech in *Laxdœla* are carefully and dutifully recorded by the author, and "such deference to the integrity of the story is reinforced by the saga author's use of phrase such as 'as the story goes', or 'as it is said', or 'at this point it happened that'."[249] The verisimilitude of the sagas is further enhanced by a narrator's inability, or unwillingness, to relate private conversations of characters, such as when Óláfr Hǫskuldsson woos Þorgerðr Egilsdóttir at the Alþing. The text and details of *Laxdœla saga* are every bit as important to analyzing theme and unity as is overall saga structure.

The withholding of information gives readers the impression that the author is being ethical and truthful by not imagining conversations, yet the author does provide information about private conversations elsewhere in the saga. Hǫskuldr is often given sage advice by his wife and Guðrún is advised by Snorri goði—and these conversations are written so completely as to read like a playscript. Readers can only read and interpret characters' thoughts and actions with material the narrator chooses to share; saga characters speak, are silent, or silence others, but they can only do so at the direction of the

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[248] Dronke, Ursula. "Narrative Insight into *Laxdœlasaga." Saga-Book of the Viking Society* (1979) 12: 107-118.

[249] Heather O'Donoghue, in "Women in *Njáls saga*,' in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njáls saga,* Eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay, (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 42.

saga author. However, readers need to question why the author chooses to share some information, such as the tiniest detail of Snorri goði's manipulations, yet "Kjartan is grandly secretive."[250] Characters' speech and silence is complicated by the narrator's ability to speak through the text, "þá var sagt..." ("It was said..."), be silent about what was said, "ekki heyra aðrir menn til tals þeira,"[251] or omit available material contrary to the chosen purpose of the narrative—and there is no way of knowing when or why this has happened. Readers can only question and theorize as to authorial intention.

The characters of *Laxdœla saga*, and in all the *Íslendingasögur* in fact, whether introduced in bulk in one chapter, individually over several chapters, or by generations over multiple chapters, have purposeful parts to play in their saga's conflict, and their purpose is implied through their descriptions, actions, and speech as they are "an anticipation of the conflict to follow."[252] The saga's conflict is predicted and sustained through "dreams, curses, premonitions, and prophecies," which create apprehension on behalf of the characters and readers alike,[253] and the conflict's complexity is deepened through repeated patterns and details.[254] Thus the typical *Íslendingasaga* is reverse engineered; it works its way backwards from the conclusion, as "[t]he story is seen only in terms of the climax. Everything that precedes the climax is conceived as preparation for it

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[250] Dronke, Ursula. "Narrative Insight into *Laxdœlasaga." Saga-Book of the Viking Society* (1979) 12: 107-118.

[251] ÍF V, 65. "Other men did not hear their speech," my translation.

[252] Theodore M. Andersson, in *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey*, Yale Germanic Studies 1, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964), 7.

[253] Margarent Arent Madelung, in *The Laxdœla Saga: Its Sturctural Patterns,* University of North Carolina Studies in Germanic Languages and Literatures, 74, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 18-26.

[254] Dronke, Ursula. "Narrative Insight into *Laxdœlasaga." Saga-Book of the Viking Society* (1979) 12: 107-118.

and everything that follows is conceived as a logical consequence…All the episodes are linked in a sequence leading up to the climax of a saga or leading down from it."[255]

In addition to having a purposeful plot and characters, the well-designed saga provides its own context through a unifying theme, created through what some have called lapses in focus, a collection of traditions, or side plots, but what will here be referred to as tangential conflicts. These conflicts may be slightly relevant, but not directly connected to, the conflicts of the main plot, and they take the readers thoughts away from the immediate action. Consider the conflict between Melkorka and Jórunn, which forces Melkorka out on her own to make decisions for her and her son, Óláfr; the divorce of Vigdís and Þórðr, allowing Þórðr all their property and to leave everything to Óláfr, who will end up wealthier than his half-brothers; or the conflict between Geirmundr and Þuríðr, which results in the sword Fótbitr being cursed and given to Bolli. When we read these tangential narratives, it may seem like the saga has lost focus on the main story, but in hindsight these perceived lapses are actually essential and decisively created to provide nuance to the main plot—these stories "supply moral direction" in much the same way Dickens used fog in *Bleak House* to develop a morality theme.[256] *Laxdœla* uses these tangential conflicts, in addendum to the main conflicts—both employing silence—to create a theme of declining social morality.

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[255] Margarent Arent Madelung, in *The Laxdœla Saga: Its Sturctural Patterns,* University of North Carolina Studies in Germanic Languages and Literatures, 74, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 33.

[256] Patricia Conroy and T. C. S. Langen, in "Laxdœla saga: Theme and Structure." *Arkiv for nordisk filologi* 103 (1988): 121.

Propel plot, increase tension, build suspense

We the audience "are so thoroughly used to negotiating power in verbal interaction that we become aware of doing so only when things go wrong, and it is at such points of imbalance in the interaction that silence becomes significant."[257] In other words, we take notice when characters don't talk as we would expect, don't react to each other as we would expect, or don't do things as we would expect. Readers and scholars of *Íslendingasögur* read and interpret the sagas, often as representations of medieval Icelandic culture, under the assumption that characters' verbalization is key to understanding. We research the linguistic history of words, parse and analyze individual words or phrases, compare their use in other texts, and contextualize with the few physical description allowed to us. But "[t]here were indeed things other than words in the medieval Icelandic commonwealth. There was a harsh, nonverbal, and coercive power" at work,[258] and characters are forced into action or inaction because of family. That power is apparent in *Laxdœla saga* and it goes from opaque to crystal clear as we experience each generation's conflict through the saga's point of view.

Reading through *Laxdœla saga*, our instinct may be to feel that the number of silences increases the closer we get to Bolli's killing of Kjartan (See Table 5.1), because that is where we, as readers, focus our attention.

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[257] Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 31.

[258] Thomas Bredsdorff, in "Speech ActTheory and Saga Studies." *Representations* 100 (2007): 38.

Table 5.1: Silences directly related to the conflicts of the three generations

Conflict	**Number of Conflict-Related Silences**		
	Total	By Speaker	
Generation 1: Inheritance	7	Hǫskuldr	4
		Hrútr	3
Generation 2: Wealth & Prestige	4	Oli	3
		Þorleikr	1
Generation 3: Woman, wealth, and prestige	23	Kjartan	9
		Bolli	5[259]
		Guðrún	8

We intuitively understand that the silences and forced power differentials between the main characters in these generational conflicts are causing trouble and becoming more frequent.

But our perceptions fool us, because unlike the silences in *Egils saga*, the silences in *Laxdœla saga* do not become more frequent as the dénouement approaches. The silences actually remain at a fairly consistent ratio from the introduction, through the climax, and to the revenge (see Table 5.2). As the saga develops its methodical and predetermined move to its ultimate conflict between Kjartan and Bolli, it addresses multiple seemingly unrelated, or tangential, disputes along the way. These tangential conflicts also employ

[259] Two of these five times, Bolli's silence is when when he hears others speak badly of Kjartan. "Óspakr svara fá ok heldr til áleitni við Kjartan, sem jafnan var vant. Bolli lét sem hann heyrði eigi, sem jafnan, er Kjartani var hallmælt, því at hann var vanr at þegja eða mæla í móti," (ÍF V, 148). "Ospak and his brothers gave little answer but a few scornful words about Kjartan as usual, but Bolli acted as if he had not heard, as was his custom. As a rule, if anyone criticized Kjartan, he kept silent or argued in his defence," *Complete Saga of Icelanders*, Vol V, 76.

silence to propel their plots, but because they are, by definition, tangential, these silences do not resonate as strongly with the reader.

Table 5.2: Silences in *Laxdœla saga* broken down by Andersson's structure

	Pages of text	# of silences	Ratio
Everything leading up to the conflict	52	55	1.057
The conflict, climax, and revenge	30	33	1.1
The aftermath	32	5	.16

These conflicts and their silences provide nuance to the saga's theme and complications to the main plot. Whether or not these conflicts are reflective of an author stringing together a variety of traditions,[260] a saga mostly well-constructed but with narrative lapses,[261] or an author who "thinks in more universal terms about national trajectory and historical alternatives,"[262] their effect is clear. Tension builds as the silences of the tangential conflicts lesson in frequency while the silences of the generational conflict increase in frequency—a movie analogy would be a series of overlapping storylines that gradually end as more and more screen time is dedicated to the main characters and their plight. Magnusson and Pálsson interpret the increased focus on the main conflict as a series of tributaries link into the main river,[263] and Conroy and Langen argue that, "pace of the

[260] Alert Ulrik Bååth, in *Studier öfver kompositionen i några isländkska ätsagor,* (Lund: Berling, 1885).

[261] Carol J. Clover, in *The Medieval Saga*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1982), 27.

[262] Theodore M. Andersson, in *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: Its Structural Patterns*, (Cornell UP: Ithaca, 2006),149.

[263] Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson, in *Laxdæla saga*, (New York: Penquin, 1969), 13.

plot may now quicken, since it need not be any longer interrupted by the establishment of theme."[264] However it is described or interpreted, the effect of the change in silence use is to create a series of actions and reactions ultimately leading to Kjartan's death.

Alongside the increasing action, there is a fundamental shift in the tone of *Laxdœla saga* as it moves from the introductory set up and background, Unnr djúpúðga's narrative, during which there is only one silence, to the main story line. While living at Caithness in Scotland, her son Þorsteinn, ruler of half of Scotland, was killed. In order to save all of those with her, family, servants, and slaves alike, "gera knǫrr í skógi á laun."[265] It isn't until the first and second generational conflict that silence begins to create tension, when Hǫskuldr bring home a silent slave woman. The appearance of Melkorka, who only pretended to be silent and illustrated to her son how be silent, seems to coincide with an increase in silence powerplays. It is her son, Ólafr pái, and grandson, Kjartan, who use silence to deny others their voice most prominently in this saga. Hoskuldr refuses to give his half-brother Hrútr inheritance and makes a secret deal with Þórðr, Melkorka arranges a secret marriage, Þórleikr refuses to share inheritance with his illegimate half brother Óláfr—but tension truly increases before Kjartan leaves Iceland, where Kjartan's grand secretiveness and a whole series of silencing those who should be allowed to be heard creates a serious rift in societal health.

The tonal shift is not only reflected in the narrative's use of silence in character description and interaction, but also in the contextual cultural change illustrated in the

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[264] Patricia Conroy and T. C. S. Langen, in "Laxdœla saga: Theme and Structure." *Arkiv for nordisk filologi* 103 (1988): 131.

[265] ÍF V, 7. "She had a *knǫrr* built secretly in the forest," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol V, 3.

main plot and in the tangential conflicts—Iceland in this part of the narrative is not the same Iceland in which the narrative began. Family loyalty is no longer respected,[266] foster relationships are no longer valued and are, in fact, inverted in that it is "the *weak clients* or disinherited offspring who prove morally superior to the noble foster-kin."[267]

> Instead of the unquestioning recognition conferred on traveling Icelanders, we find an atmosphere poisoned by suspicion and bitter resentment. In place of perfectly arranged and perfectly successful society matches, we find only marital dissension. Substituted for the priceless gifts of earlier generation are ill-fated gifts that carry a curse: a magnificent headdress intended for Gudrún but given to Hrefna instead; a splendid sword bestowed on Kjartan but later stolen and thrust into a swamp. Instead of the unbreachable family solidarity we encounter hostility and death, notably the rift between Kjartan and Bolli. In lieu of the legendary feasts of yore we are treated to a wedding feast for Kjartan and Hrefna rent by quarrels and hard words. The sumptuous attire and ostentatious display of Olaf Peacock and his ancestors in replaced by a regal headdress that is never worn at all.[268]

The theme of the deterioration of Icelandic society is developed in part by the narrative's use of silence. Instances of silence switch from appearing less often in the main conflicts in the generations of Hǫskuldr & Hrútr and Óláfr pái & Þorleikr than in the tangential conflicts, to more often in the Kjartan, Bolli, and Guðrún's generation and conflict than in the tangential conflicts. Note the ratio of tangential/direct silence in the first two generations and the third (see Table 5.3). At this point in the narrative, it is the main characters that are wielding silence as a primary tool. Simultaneously, silences seem to change from the non-verbal responses or reactions of main characters to the predominant forced silencing of main characters as they attempt to expand their wealth and power over

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[266] Patricia Conroy and T. C. S. Langen, in "Laxdœla saga: Theme and Structure." *Arkiv for nordisk filologi* 103 (1988): 118-141.

[267] Peter Parkes, "Fosterage, Kinship, and Legend: When Milk was Thicker than Blood?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24 (2004): 604.

[268] Theodore M. Andersson, in *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: Its Structural Patterns*, (Cornell UP: Ithaca, 2006), 136-7.

the well-being of their own families, blood and foster, as well as other Icelanders living around them.

Table 5.3: Silences in *Laxdœla saga* broken down by relevance to main plot

Generation	Total # of silences	# of silences tangential to generation's conflict	# of silences direct to generation's conflict	Ratio of direct silences
Unnr djúpúðga	1	No conflict	No conflict	
Hǫskuldr & Hrútr	29	22	7	.3
Olafr & Þórleikr	17	13	4	.3
Kjartan, Bolli & Guðrún	40	12	23	1.9

Towards a social commentary

At the same time as the ratio of direct/tangential silences increases, the conflict of each generation increases in seriousness as the saga's theme becomes even clearer. The relationship difficulties of the brotherly pairing in each generational conflict build as uncomfortable silences, which seem to go hand-in-hand with those quarrels increase in frequency and intensity. "Who can speak and who must remain silent are basic rhetorical features of the dominant discourse,"[269] and in saga society, free men were theoretically equal and expected to express themselves well and freely. However, when social power came into play—as in who has a better family lineage, more honor, more money—not all men were actually allowed to be equal in practice. Such inequities in practice were

[269] Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 27.

reflected in speech, "social power, language power, access to the dominant discourse can make many people appear supremely excellent and others appear to be profoundly inferior."[270] Social inequities were also reflected in silences, whether a character choses to stay silent in the hopes that "some solution would present itself before anything serious happened/einhver lausn kæmi af sjálfu sér áður en eitthvað alvarlegt gerðist,"[271] or a character is deprived of expression.[272]

Dominate groups or individuals force silence on others and render "'inarticulate' subordinate or muted groups (any of the traditionally disenfranchised) and excludes them from the formulation, validation, and circulation of meaning."[273] In saga terms, if a character can't participate in decision-making, he is not free. Those who bend to the will of the dominant group through acquiescent silence are considered inferior, and such silence can be a sign of legal subordinate or servant, and those who refuse to be silenced and speak out, or who go to the chieftain in the next district for assistance denied them at home, are considered troublemakers. Rovine's study of silence in Shakespeare reveals that loyal service requires good silence, that is, the silence of love, respect, and acceptance of one's master, over and above good speech. Although rare, good speech is the breaking of silence when a superior steps out of line.

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[270] Ibid, 28.

[271] The character, Eyjólfur, in Einar Kárason's *Ofsi*, (Reykjvík: Mál og Menning, 2008). "So it was just best to remain silent and hope that some solution would present itself before something serious happened," my translation.

[272] Michal Ephratt, in "The Functions of Silence." *The Journal of Pragmatics* 40.11 (2008): 1913.

[273] Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 2.

In the first generational conflict, Hǫskuldr Dala-Kollsson silences his half-brother and legal equal, Hrútr Hérólfsson, by denying him his fair share of their mother's inheritance, as the saga reports: "Fám vetrum síðar tók Þorgerðr banasótt ok andaðisk, ok var hon í haug sett, en Hǫskuldr tók fé allt, en Hrútr, bróðir hans, átti hálft."[274] The saga describes both men positively. Not only that "Hǫskuldr var vænn maðr ok gørviligr,"[275] but he is well-liked by other farmers in his district and gives generously to his mother, Þorgerðr, when she wishes to return to Norway. She remarries there and has a second son whom she names Hrútr. Hǫskuldr's half-brother "var snimmendis mikill ok sterkr, er hann óx upp; var hann ok hverjum manni betr í vexti, hár ok herðibreiðr, miðmjór ok limaðr vel með hǫndum ok fótum. Hrútr var allra manna fríðastr sýnum...inn mesti var hann atgørvimaðr fyrir allra hluta sakar."[276]

As both men are described by the saga as good, well-liked, and of equal standing, it is not their descriptions but their actions that create conflict. Contrary to the dignifiedly actions of his ancestors, Hǫskuldr forces himself into a higher social position than his brother, excluding Hrútr from a decision about Hrútr's own life, which inarticulates and invalidates him as a free man. Saga men take pride in their legal position and wealth, so a subversion of both is a particular insult. In the saga, Hrútr Herjólfsson "is presented as guardian of family values: his very presence in Iceland is an accusation against his brother,

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[274] ÍF V, 16. "A few years later she fell ill and died, and was buried in a mound. Hoskuld took over all her wealth, although his brother Hrut was entitled to half," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol V, 7.

[275] ÍF V, 14. "Hoskuld was a handsome and accomplished youth," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol V, 6.

[276] ÍF V, 16. "Was both big and strong for his age, and no man cut a better figure: tall broad-shouldered and narrow at the waist, with well-formed arms and legs. Hrut was also very handsome…he was highly accomplished in all respects," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol V, 7.

who has not upheld those values,"[277] an accusation the silence creates and supports. After what could be labeled a series of light quarrels, Hǫskuldr's wife counsels him to do the right thing and the conflict ends peacefully when Hǫskuldr gives Hrútr his fair share of their mother's inheritance. It may have ended well, but the stage has been set for the next generation conflict between half-brothers.

The level of animosity increases in the second major conflict of the narrative, where there are two significant silences in the main storyline: a denial of inheritance and a denial of decision-making. Here the half-brothers Óláfr pái Hǫskuldsson and Þorleikr Hǫskuldsson struggle over wealth and prestige, but unlike the first generational conflict, this conflict is clearly forecast by the descriptions of the major players. Þorleikr, Hǫskuldr's eldest son, is introduced as follows: "Þorleikr var mikill maðr ok sterkr ok inn sýniligsti, fálátr ok óþýðr; þótti mǫnnum sá sviðr á um hans skaplyndi, sem hann myndi verða engi jafnaðarmaðr."[278] Þorleik's illegitimate younger brother Óláfr, born of a slave-woman, who was actually an Irish princess, is described much differently. Hǫskuldr "þóttisk eigi sét hafa vænna barn né stórmannligra."[279] Elsewhere Óláfr is described as "exceptionally handsome and well-mannered,"[280] and as he grew up, the superlatives continue—Óláfr is the best mannered, the most handsome, the most well-liked, the most athletic. Clearly Óláfr has the upper

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[277] Patricia Conroy and T. C. S. Langen, in "Laxdœla saga: Theme and Structure." *Arkiv for nordisk filologi* 103 (1988): 118-141.

[278] ÍF V, 18. "Thorleik was a big, strong man with striking features, who spoke little and was unruly. Judging from his character as a youngster people felt he would hardly prove to be easy to get along with," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol V, 8.

[279] ÍF V, 27. "Had never seen a handsomer or more distinguished-looking child," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol V, 12.

[280] Ibid.

hand here: looks, smarts, communication skills, and their father's approval. Þorleikr never had a chance.

It should not come as a surprise, then, when Þorleikr refuses Hǫskuldr's dying request that his illegitimate brother, Óláfr, share inheritance with his legitimate children. Þorleikr, who was not a peaceable man but a great warrior, takes the only route possible for him to gain the upper hand over his half-brother Óláfr—the legal rules for inheritance. It again becomes clear that each generation is going farther and farther from the Icelandic ideal with which the narrative began, "Unnr in her day was able to cleanly take on obligations far beyond the immediate family, because family loyalty took precedence over self-interest. They atrophy of loyalties that has gone on since her death means that Hǫskuldr now cannot do the right by one son without seeming to injure the other."[281]

Óláfr, by force of his royal ancestry and desire to do the right thing as demonstrated by Unnr, is the dominant person in this generational conflict, so it does not matter that he is not a legal heir, he can still deny others a say, forcing their silence. Óláfr does this when Hǫskuldr dies too late in the autumn to hold a funeral feast. Óláfr suggested they, the brothers, announce the feast at the Alþing, and he promised to pay 1/3 of the cost. At the Alþing, however, Óláfr takes it upon himself to up the ante on the lavishness of the funeral feast without consulting his brothers. The saga relates how he address the Alþing about his father's death and:

> [E]ru hér nú margir menn, frændr hans ok vinir. Nú er þat vili brœðra minna, at ek bjóða yðr til erfis eptir Hǫskuld, fǫðr várn, ǫllum boðorðsmǫnnum, því at þeir munu flestir inir gildari menn, er í tengðum váru bundir við hann; skal ok því lýsa, at engi

[281] Patricia Conroy and T. C. S. Langen, in "Laxdœla saga: Theme and Structure." *Arkiv for nordisk filologi* 103 (1988): 118-141.

> skal gjafalaust á brott fara inna meiri manna. Þar með vilju vér bjóða bœndum ok hverjum, er þiggja vill, sælum ok veslum; skal sœkja hálfsmánaðar veizlu á Hǫskuldstaði, þá er tíu vikur er til vetrar."[282]

Although his brothers, Barðr and Þorleikr, had agreed to share the costs of the party, they had not agreed to the lavishness of the party Óláfr announced and they felt he had taken advantage of their agreement; they had been silenced. To ameliate Þorleikr's feelings, Óláfr offers to foster his son, Bolli. And although things improve for some time, Þorleikr eventually gets into a conflict with Hrútr Hérjólfsson, his uncle, the paragon of family loyalty. At the age of eighty, Hrútr killed a man attempting to steal Þorleikr's horses, and upon hearing the news, Þorleikr "brásk reiðr við ok þóttisk vera mjǫk svívirðr í þessu tilbragði."[283] Hrútr, being the loyal family member, tries to help out his nephew, but the nephew selfishly feels that he has been denied his own chance to kill the horse thief, so Þorleikr asks his magician friends to make a spell to shame Hrútr. This "favor" results in the death of Hrútr's 12-year-old son, and Óláfr suggests that Þorleikr leave Iceland. Despite everything that happened, the half-brothers parted well, and Þorleikr eventually settles in Gotland, thus ending this generation's conflict.

The third generational pair consists of Þórleikr Bollason and Kjartan Óláfsson. Þórleik's son, Bolli, was a promising child, who from the age of three was raised by Óláfr, who with his wife Þorgerðr, "unnu þau honum eigi minna en sínum bǫrnum."[284] Bolli, it

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[282] ÍF V, 74. "As many of his kinsmen and friends are here today, my brothers and I would like to invite all of you *godis* to a feast in honour of our father, Hoskuld, as most of you leading men were connected to him by marriage. I can also promise you that no man of influence will leave empty handed. In addition, we invite farmers and any others who care to come, whether beggars or their betters, to attend this fortnight's feast at Hoskuldsstadir when ten weeks of summer remain, "*Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 37.

[283] ÍF V, 105. "Responded angrily and felt that he had been put to shame," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 53.

[284] ÍF V, 75. "Loved him no less than their own children," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 38.

seems, is going to do well. Until Ólaf's son, Kjartan, is introduced. Kjartan is the most gloriously described person in the entire saga.

> Kjartan Ólafsson vex upp heima í Hjarðarholti. Hann var allra manna friðastr, þeira er fœzk hafa á Íslandi; hann var mikilleitr ok vel farinn í andliti, manna bezt eygðr ok ljóslitaðr; mikit hár hafði hann ok fagurt sem silki, ok fell með lokkum, mikill mapr ok sterkr, eptir sem verit hafði Egill, móðurfaðir hans, eða Þórólfr. Kjartan var hverjum manni betr á sik kominn, svá at allir undruðusk, þeir er sá hann; betur var hann ok vígr en flestir menn aðrir; vel var hann hagr ok syndr manna bezt; allar íþrottir hafði hann mjǫk umfram aðra menn; hverjum manni var han lítillátari ok vinsæll, svá at hvert barn unni honum; hann var léttúðigr ok mildr of fé. Óláfr unni mest Kjartani allra barna sinna. [285]

Bolli's position as a good man, but yet inferior, is clinched with a follow-up description. "Bolli fóstbróðir hans var mikill maðr; hann gekk næst Kjartani um allar iþróttir ok atgørvi."[286] It is Kjartan who becomes the leader, "Kjartan var mjǫk fyrir sonum Óláfs. Þeir Kjartan ok Bolli unnusk mest."[287] Although both characters here are introduced in positive terms, as in the first generational conflict, the relative difference in quality of character foreshadows difficulties, something that Gestr Oddleifsson foresaw as he predicts "ekki kemr mér at óvǫrum, þótt Bolli standi yfir hǫfuðbana Kjartans, ok hann vinni sér þá ok

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[285] ÍF V, 77. "Kjartan Olafsson grew up with his parents at Hjardarholt. No fairer or more handsome man has ever been born in Iceland. He has a broad face and regular features, the beautiful eyes and a fair complexion. His hair was thick and as shiny as silk, and fell in waves. He was a big, strong man, much like his grandfather, Egil or Thorolf. No man cut a better figure than Kjartan, and people were always taken aback when they saw him. He was a better fighter than most, skilled with his hands, and a top swimmer. He was superior to other men in all skills, and yet he was the humblest of men, and so popular that every child loved him. He also had a generous and cheerful disposition. Of all his children, Kjartan was Olaf's favorite," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 38.

[286] ÍF V, 77. "His foster-brother, Bolli, grew into a large man. Next to Kjartan, he was the best at all skills an in other accomplishments," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol V, 38.

[287] ÍF V, 112. "The leader of Olaf's sons, and he and Bolli are very close. Kjartan never went anywhere without Bolli at his side," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol V, 57.

hǫfuðbana."[288] All that is left now is for the narrative to explain how, an explanation that relies heavily on the use of silence.

Kjartan eventually develops an understanding with a beautiful young widow named Guðrún Ósvifursdóttir, but they are not as plain spoken as Hǫskuldr and Jórunn, who avoided trouble by saying what was on their minds and treating each other fairly as belied their stations. Guðrún "var kvenna vænst, er upp óxu á Íslandi, bæði at ásjánu ok vitsmunum."[289] At some point Kjartan decides to go abroad and make a name for himself. Guðrún was not pleased with his hasty decision. Kjartan says that "ek skal gera annan hlut, svá at þér þykki vel,"[290] so she asks to accompany him. Kjartan denies her request and asks her to wait for him for three years, but "Guðrún kvazk um þat mundu engu hetia, ok þótti sinn veg hváru þeira, ok skilðu með því."[291]

The ambiguous discourse permeates through more members of the third generation. Kjartan and Bolli travel to Norway together, where Kjartan impresses the King in a swimming contest, is the de-facto leader of the Icelanders, eventually converts to Christianity, and becomes involved with the King's sister. When Bolli tells Kjartan that he's decided to return to Iceland, Bolli baits Kjartan and provides an opportunity for clarity:

> Nú em ek búinn til ferðar, ok mynda ek bíða þín inn næsta vetr, ef at sumri væri lausligra um þína ferð en nú; en vér þykkjumsk hitt skilja, at konugr vill fyrir engan

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[288] ÍF V, 92."I wouldn't be surprised if Bolli should one day stoop over Kjartan's corpse and in slaying him bring about his own death," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 46.

[289] ÍF V, 86). "The most beautiful woman ever to have grown up in Iceland, and no less clever that she was good-looking," *Complete Saga of Icelanders,* Vol V, 43.

[290] ÍF V, 115. "I'll make it up to you by doing anything you ask that would please you," *Complete Saga of Icelanders*, Vol V, 58.

[291] ÍF V, 115. "Gudrun said she would promise nothing of the sort, and they parted in disagreement," *Complete Saga of Icelanders,* Vol V, 58.

> mun þik lausan láta, en hǫfum þat fyrir satt, at þú munir fátt þat, er á Íslandi er til skemmtanar, þá er þú sitr á tali bið Ingibjǫrgu konungsystur. [292]

Kjartan does not respond to the baiting, but says, "haf ekki slíkt við, en bera skaltu frændum várum kveðju mína ok svá vinum."[293] So Kjartan decides his fate without consulting others, Guðrún has been denied a voice in her first marriage, Kjartan has refused Guðrún's request despite saying he would give her whatever she wants, Guðrún refused to promise to wait three years but Kjartan assumes that she will, Bolli has been Kjartan's quietly faithful sidekick, and now, yet again, Kjartan has failed to explain himself and make his intentions clear with words.

So Bolli Þorleiksson returns home to Iceland. Bolli, every saga reader remembers, was the son of the great warrior Þorleikr, who "var mikill maðr ok sterkr ok inn sýniligsti, fálátr ok óþýpr"[294]—all of which automatically make Bolli suspect and someone from whom the audience should anticipate something bad, even if it had not been predicted by Gestr Oddleifsson. Bolli has a foster brother who was his boyhood friend and companion, who was the best man in Iceland. Bolli followed Kjartan as he woed Guðrún, visited Borg, went abroad, and changed religions. Bolli is clearly next best at everything, and quietly acquiesces to Kjartan, almost like a servant. However, loyal service requires good silence,

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[292] ÍF V, 126. "I've made preparations to leave now. I'd wait for you over the winter, if there was much chance you'd be freer to travel then than now, but I'm fairly sure that the king is determined to keep you here. I also take for granted that you remember little that might entertain you in Iceland when you're conversing with the king's sister Ingibjorg," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 64.

[293] ÍF V, 126. "Don't go saying anything like that, but do give my regards to our kinsmen and friends," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol V, 64.

[294] ÍF V,18. "Was a big strong man with striking features, who spoke little and was unruly," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 8.

that is, the silence of love, respect, and acceptance of one's master, over and above good speech.

It is this Bolli Þórleiksson, who after a short time, "reið til Lauga at skemmta sér ... var honum þar vel fagnat."[295] It is this Bolli Þórleiksson who talks with Guðrún and "leysti ofléttliga ór því ǫllu, er Guðrún spurði."[296] And it is this subordinated Bolli, son of Þórleikr, described as *fálátr*,[297] who tells Guðrún about Kjartan's royal relationship, against Kjartan's request, and to which "Guðrún kvað þat góð tíðendi, -- "en því at eins er Kjartani fullboðit, ef hann fær góða konu," ok lét þá þegar falla niðr talit, gekk á brott ok var allrauð."[298] Until this point in the narrative, Bolli has been a subordinate, "members of these muted groups thus continue to find themselves in situations in which they are—in a practical sense—adapting, mediating, and subordinating their own ideas and forms of expression to that of the dominant discourse and in the dominant idiom. Sometimes they speak and are heard; sometimes they speak and are ignored; sometimes they remain silent."[299] Bolli is no longer subordinate and creates his own destiny.

Bolli approaches Guðrún about marriage, but she turns him down, "ekki þarftu slíkt at rœða, Bolli; engum manni mun ek giptask, meðan ek spyr Kjartan á lífi."[300] So against

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[295] ÍF V, 127. "Rode to Laugar for a visit, and was given a good welcome," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol V, 65.

[296] ÍF V, 127. "Answers all her questions readily," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 65.

[297] Speaking little.

[298] ÍF V, 127. "Gudrun said that this was good news, "as only the best of wives if a fair match for Kjartan," and ended the conversation. She walked away blushing. Other people suspected that she hardly thought the news as good as she implied," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 65.

[299] Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 28.

[300] ÍF V, 128. "There's no point in even discussing that, Bolli; I'll marry no man as long as I know Kjartan is still alive," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 65.

Guðrún's own wishes, Bolli continues to pursue the matter and convinces his uncle, Kjartan's father, to speak to Guðrún's father about it. Bolli and Guðrún are married at her father's request, "Þá munu margir menn mæla, at þetta sé meir af ofsa mælt en mikilli fyrirhyggju, ef þú neitar slíkum manni, sem Bolli er; en meðan ek em uppi, þá skal ek hafa forsjá fyrir yðr bǫrnum mínum um þá hluti, er ek kann gørr at sjá en þér."[301] Guðrún is silenced yet again. When Kjartan returns to Iceland and hears of the marriage, he "brá sér ekki við þat: en mǫrgum var á því kvíðustaðr áðr."[302] And when Guðrún heard that Kjartan had returned to Iceland, although she "Guðrún talaði fátt til þessa efnis, en þat var auðfynt, at henni líkaði illa, því at þat ætluðu flestir menn, at henni væri en mikil eftirsjá at um Kjartan, þó at hon hylði yfir."[303] Unnr's generation spoke clearly, forcefully, purposefully, and with the family's and society's greater good in mind. This third generation does none of that.

The relationships deteriorate from this point onward; the silences are condensed in the main storyline, and the silences relate to social power. Bolli tries to make things right with Kjartan, but Kjartan refuses to accept Bolli's gift of a stud[304] of horses of equal but unusual color—all white with red ears and forelock. All four horses, one stallion and three mares, were of the same markings, which is highly unusual. The horses' coloring may have

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[301] ÍF V, 129. "If you refuse a man like Bolli many people will say that your answer shows more recklessness than foresight. But as long as I'm alive, I intend to direct my children's actions in matters where I can see more clearly than they," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 66.

[302] ÍF V, 132. "Showed no sign of response, although many people had been dreading his reaction," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 68.

[303] ÍF V, 134. "Hardly spoke of the matter, it was obvious that she was anything but happy, and most people assumed that she regretted having lost Kjartan, though she tried to conceal it," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 68-9.

[304] A group of animals, especially horses, kept primarily for breeding.

supernatural implications. The *Cŵn Annwn.*[305] "The hounds of Arawn in Pwyll, if they are correctly identified as a type of 'black dog', were shining white with red ears, also otherworldly colours."[306] White was connected to the supernatural and red to death, and animals with such colorings were commonly owned by gods or otherworldly inhabitants.[307] The refusal of such a magnificent gift was a great insult to Bolli.

Kjartan marries a woman named Hrefna and gives her the high seat, where "Guðrún hafði þó áðr ávallt skipat ǫndvegi í Hjarðarholti ok annars staðar. Guðrún heyrði þetta ok leit til Kjartans ok brá lit, en svarar engu."[308] Shortly thereafter Kjartan's sword vanishes, and later Hrefna's headdress disappears at a visit to Laugar; both disappearances are connected to Guðrún and her brothers. So after jól that winter Kjartan takes a large number of men "ekki sagði Kjartan fǫðr sínum, hversu af stózk um ferð þessa"[309] and humiliatingly locks the inhabitants of Laugar in the farmhouse, forcing them to relieve themselves inside. "Guðrún talaði hér fæst um."[310] Then Kjartan destroys a land deal that Bolli and Guðrún had made, and when Guðrún tried to whet Bolli into taking action, "Bolli svarar engu ok gekk

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[305] "Cŵn Annwn (the hounds of Annwn) is the Welsch name for the supernatural dogs documented in the folklore of all the Celtic Countries." John Koch, in "Cŵn Annwn," *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1. (2006) E-book: www.abc-clio.com, 529.

[306] John Koch, in "Cŵn Annwn," *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1. (2006) E-book: www.abc-clio.com, 524.

[307] Fergus Fleming, Shahrukh Husain, Scott C. Littleton, and Linda A. Malcor, in *Celtic Myth: Heroes of the Dawn*, (Duncan Baird Publishers, 1996), 29.

[308] ÍF V, 139. "It had always been Gudrun who had enjoyed the privilege of sitting in the seat of honour at Hjardarholt as elsewhere. Gudrun heard his words, looked at Kjartan and changed colour but said nothing," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol V, 71.

[309] ÍF V, 144. "Without saying anything to his father of his plans," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol V, 74.

[310] ÍF V, 144."Guðrún spoke little of this," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol V, 74.

þegar af þessu tali."[311] This portion of the saga contains a great deal of action without much explanation or discussion between characters, and without much authorial revelation of what people were saying, but the actions reflect "a harsh, nonverbal, and coercive power."[312] With every humiliation, the characters are forcing the others to act. And without discourse to mitigate or negotiate what those actions, Gestr's prediction is impending.

Bolli, for his part, tries to avoid taking any action against Kjartan. He attempts to exert silence as control when words are needed, but he does not have the authority to wield silence in that manner. "Þeir Óspakr svara fá ok heldr til áletini við Kjartan, sem jafnan var vant. Bolli lét sem hann heyrði eigi, sem jafnan, er Kjartani var hallmælt, því at hann var vanr at þegja eða mæla í móti."[313]

However, his wife Guðrún finally will be heard, "the anti-individualsim of the rule of the clan burdens each and every member of society, but most of all it burdens women."[314] Guðrún has been married against her preference twice, her love denied her request to leave Iceland with him, her place as the highest-ranking woman has been revoked. She convinces Bolli and her brothers to attack Kjartan and they all lay in wait, "Bolli var hljóðr um daginn ok lá uppi hjá gilsþreminum."[315]

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[311] ÍF V, 147. "Bolli made no answer, but walked away at once," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol V, 75.

[312] Thomas Bredsdorff, in *Chaos & Love: The Philosophy of the Icelandic Family Sagas,* Trans. John Tucker, (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2001), 38.

[313] ÍF V, 148. "Ospak and his brothers gave little answer apart from a few scornful words about Kjartan as usual, Bolli acted as if he had not heard, as was his custom. As a rule, if anyone criticized Kjartan, he kept silent or argued in his defence," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 76.

[314] Mark S. Weiner, in *The Rule of the Clan: What an Ancient Form of Social Organization Reveals about the Future of Individual Freedom,* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013), 39.

[315] ÍF V, 151. "Bolli was silent all day and lay up near the top of the ravine," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 77.

After the fighting begins, Bolli does not participate, perhaps because he knows no one can best Kjartan. Even as Kjartan taunts him, "Bolli lét, sem hann heyrði ekki."[316] But after his brother-in-law taunts him, Bolli stands up to face Kjartan. And when Kjartan refuses to fight him, "Engi veitti Bolli svǫr máli Kjartans, en þó veitti hann honum banasár."[317] Bolli is a subordinate character in the clan of the Laxdœlir; his attempt to become more than society can allow has drastic social consequences.

Although heartbroken at his biological son's death at the hands of his foster son, Óláfr does not allow his remaining sons to kill Bolli in revenge for Kjartan's killing as social code requires. The sons themselves are silenced; their revenge, and honor, must wait until after Óláfr's death.

After Kjartan's death the few silences that occur are non-power related—characters say little, but no one is denied a voice—and after the revenge, the silences almost disappear from the saga altogether (see Table 5.2). The theme of degradation of Icelandic society and social unrest has been made clear.

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that silence in *Laxdœla saga* serves several functions. Silence is a purposeful narrative tool that creates tension, builds suspense, and provides a unifying theme. Most, if not all, the information that a saga audience needs for interpreting a saga is present from the beginning, and saga structure and rhetoric lead the characters and audience to the predestined end. The rhetorical tool of silence contributes

[316]ÍF V, 153. "Bolli acted as if he had not heard," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 79.

[317]ÍF V, 154. "Bolli made no response to Kjartan's words, but dealt him a death blow, then took up his body and held him in his arms when he died," *Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol V, 79.

to the tight construction and the predetermined end in that it propels the plot, focuses attention on the storyline, and changes in frequency and type build conflict. From the very beginning of *Laxdœla saga*, silence is either indicative of a character flaw, in which case the silent character will be a negative participant in a conflict, or silence foreshadows a conflict, or perhaps most destructive, is forced silence, where due to one character's silence, another is unable to respond.

However, silence in *Laxdœla saga* goes beyond narrative functions in that it also works to create a social commentary. *Laxdœla saga* "does not care about quiet languishment; what the saga cares about are social consequence,"[318] and it shows the beginning of the end. A clan- or kinship-based governance can only sustain itself if members of that society put others first; not themselves or their own families. There is a significant cost when an individual gives "to one's impulses and disregards the social order"[319] by silencing or denying others' expression of wants, needs, and desires. Perhaps *Laxdœla saga* is a subversive commentary on the destructiveness of a kinship-based society, where the lack of individual value and executive power results in social instability. A commentary that foreshadows the "civil war of the Sturlung era … when the country divided into a handful of warring families, with no central authority to put an end to their violence. The civil war ended with the ceding of Icelandic independence to other powers for almost seven hundred years." [320]

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[318] Thomas Bredsdorff, in *Chaos & love: the philosophy of the Icelandic family sagas,* Trans. John Tucker, (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2001), 49.

[319] Ibid, 50.

[320] Mark S. Weiner, in *The Rule of the Clan: What an Ancient Form of Social Organization Reveals about the Future of Individual Freedom,* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013), 77.

Subversion and Disillusion in *Njáls saga*

> *As it appears in the beginning of the saga, the law is ambivalent: on the one hand, it is a useful and necessary principle of order; on the other, it is inadequate, since it can not only be perverted by a clever lawyer but also over-ridden by brute force, as in the cases of Hrut's and Gunnar's challenges to single combat.*[321]

> *Njál's penchant for legal history (albeit subject to authorial license in the details), its fondness for complicate legal procedures, its lengthy quotations of passages from the law texts, and its lawyer heroes (and villains) all contribute to its author's exploration of the Commonwealth-period legal system and its downfall.*[322]

A rhetorical frame is a powerful construct that allows audiences to filter out extraneous information and focus on the essential meaning; frames "induce us to filter our perceptions of the world in particular ways, essentially making some aspects of our multidimensional reality more noticeable than other aspects. They operate by making some information more *salient* than other information."[323] What is included and excluded in a text develops the frame in how it is similar and dissimilar to other texts in its genre, and by examining these details, we can determine a text's frame. The authors of *Íslendingasögur*, like any communicators, "consciously or unconsciously, act to construct a point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be interpreted by others in a particular manner."[324] They constructed their sagas purposefully in order to guide their audience's interpretation and *Njáls saga* in no exception.

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[321] Denton Fox, in "Njáls Saga and the Western Literary Tradition." *Comparative Literature* 15.4 (1963): 296.

[322] Hannah Burrows, in "Cold Cases: Law and Legal Detail in the Islendingasögur." *Parergon* 26.1 (2009): 37.

[323] Jim A. Kuypers, in "Framing Analysis, *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2009), 181.

[324] Jim A. Kuypers, *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2009), 182. The author goes further in his explanation of framing, "When highlighting some aspect of reality over other aspects, frames act to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. They

Legalities are a hallmark of saga conflicts—laws, the lawyers, witnesses, procedures—are in fact, "characteristic of the sagas about early Icelanders."[325] However, the saga just analyzed, *Laxdœla saga*, does not dwell on legal particulars. The lack of legalities "concentrates attention on the social themes that *Laxdœla* explores, on the perennial saga problems of vengeance and the passing of the old heroic code, and on kinship ties and the resolution and disputes within them."[326] When combined with the saga's use of silence to identify and highlight power differentials within a clan, *Laxdœla saga* comments on the state of Iceland's social structure.

Njáls saga, on the other hand, which opens by emphasizing the first character's law prowess, is a saga known for its depth and volume of legalities, which "create a courtroom atmosphere."[327] If a saga is about conflict, and legal and judicial matter are stock components, then *Njáls saga* is the most 'saga' of them all for it contains the largest amount of legal matter, "lawsuits and other legal elements are central to the saga, and there is little argument on the overall significance of law for the work as a whole."[328] The internal frame of *Njáls saga* is legalisms and their far-reaching, disastrous effects. Bredsdorff notes that the saga-writer, in *Njáls saga,* uses the legal institution "to demonstrate its imperfection.

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are located in the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture at large. Frames are central organizing ideas within a narrative account of an issue or event; they provie the interpretive cues for otherwise neutral facts. Framing is, however, a normal part of the communication process" (182).

[325] Theodore M. Andersson, in *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: Its Structural Patterns*, (Cornell UP: Ithaca, 2006), 21.

[326] Hannah Burrows, in "Cold Cases: Law and Legal Detail in the Islendingasögur." *Parergon* 16.1 (2009): 47).

[327] Ibid, 53.

[328] Henry Ordower, in "Exploring the Literary Function of Law and Litigation in 'Njal's Saga." *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 3.1 (1991): 42.

Apparently, with laws our land cannot be built up,"[329], [330] and the saga-writer employs the silence to create this argument.

The external frame of *Njáls saga*, the one through which scholars view the saga, is as the pinnacle of saga tradition;[331] perfection of the form. However, the saga's use of silence indicates a subversion of the form to make a grander point. In *Laxdœla saga* silence propels the plot by increasing in frequency until the climax, then tapering off or disappearing altogether. Silences in *Njáls saga* occur steadily until the very end. In *Egils saga* and *Laxdœla saga* silence is used to create character, particularly nepharious ones. In *Njáls saga*, major characters, both villians and heros, make use of silence. In *Laxdœla saga*, silence is used petulantly by the younger generation to deny a voice to fellow freeman, but in *Njáls saga*, silence is used with great care and forethought by the older generation, entrusted with the community's culture and tradition, for its own ends and means. Much like a baroque fugue where the inverted melody reveals the beauty, a subversive use of silence reveals the meaning of the saga—disillusionment.

Silence is an element of power, and conflicts ensue when silence is used, or misused, in any relationship. When *Njáls saga* opens, Gunnarr is the most powerful man in the district and he maintained his influence through his own character, his kinsmen, and his *vinátta* with Njáll. Njál and his sons have a large voice because of their close relationship with him, and the two men do not compete for power. After Gunnarr's death, however,

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[329] Thomas Bredsdorff, in *Chaos and Love: The Philosophy of the Icelandic Family Sagas.* Translated by John Tucker (Unversity of Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2001) 82.

[330] "Með lǫgum skal land vort byggja, en eigi með ólǫgum eyða" (ÍF XII 172).

[331] See Andreas Heusler, in "Einleitung," in *Die Geschichte vom weisen Njal,* (1922, 1-20); Sveinnon 1971; and Carol J. Clover, in *The Medieval Saga*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1982).

there is a power vaccuum and "Njáll and Skarpheðinn move immediately to eliminate possible competitors."[332] But whereas Gunnarr had a large sphere of influence and was straightforward in his relationships with others, Njáll and his sons employ silence, which, in the second half of *Njáls saga*, can be the seed of conflict and the mechanism by which the conflict is continued.

Non-conflict and conflict silences in *Njáls saga*

Characters in *Njáls saga* use silences in ways that do not create conflict. Hrútr employs the silence of uncertainty when Gunnhildr puts a spell on him, as does Ásgrimr when Skarphéðinn insults potential supporters at the Alþing. Brýnólfr is injured silent when Hallgerðr chastised him into killing Atli as is Helgi when his mother, Bergþóra, whets him into killing over insults. Flosi is broodingly silent when he hears of the slaying of Höskuldr and cautiously silent at the court of Jarl Sigurðr Hlǫðvisson. Helgi Njálsson is also cautiously silent with the earl of Orkney. These silences are all inward; the characters use silence to process for themselves, and they do not result in or further conflict.

There are outward silences, which do contribute to conflict or a culture of conflict. Hallgerðr uses silence in a threatening manner to exclude others from conversation or knowledge, as well as to help devise secret plans. Þjóstólfr grins with a threatening silence when Hallgerðr tells him not to seek vengeance against Glum on her behalf, and Skarphéðinn grins with a similar silence while Ásgrimr is trying to round up support for their court case at the Alþing. The narrative states that Ásgrimr is silent six times while planning revenge of the burning—all cautious silences—and Flosi is equally cautious when

[332] William Ian Milller, in "Justifying Skarphedinn: Of Pretext and Politics in the Icelandic Bloodfeud." *Scandinavian Studies* 55 (1983): 334.

planning the burning, his defense, and going abroad. Gunnar and Njáll are also cautiously silent, if you will, when they ignore their wives' killing of slaves and freemen as well as ignoring their complaints.

Admittedly, Österberg's classifications are problematic in that the reasons for character silences are never clearly stated by the narrator, and any labeling relies on the reader's interpretation of the character's intent within the context. The heavy reliance on interpretation, which vary greatly depending on cultural and temporal perspectives, may result in discussions about which label this particular instance of silence should have or shouldn't have, but accurate labeling is not my intent. I would merely like to point out that for the most part, the characters of *Njáls saga* use silence in ways that correspond with silences of sagas in *Íslendingasögur* in general, as listed by Österberg. Most of the *Njáls saga* silences fit with audience expectations for what a character would do is a given situation, that is, most of the silences mesh with the recognized and accepted patterns. However, this analysis also examines the variations—the unexpected.

What *Njáls saga* does differently than other sagas is subvert the use of silence and connect the negative use of silence to its heroes. The strong, silent type is not the typical saga hero, in fact, *Íslendingasögur* seem to prefer the plain-spoken character, and characters described as "silent" are negative: Eiríkr, Skammkell, Þórkleikr. The audience would not expect that the main character, Njáll Þórgeirsson, considered the wisest character of *Íslendinagsögur,* to be the most silent of all the characters in his saga (See Table 6.1). Nor does the audience expect that Njáll, through knowledge and power and in his own attempts to retain power in the district, will force his will over others, including his own sons, to the detriment of them all.

Table 6.1: Main characters' silences

Character	# of silences
Ásgrimr Elliða-Grímsson	7
Eyjólfr Bólverksson	4
Flosi Þorðarson	8
Gunnar Hámundarson	8
Hallgerðr Hǫskuldsdóttir	5
Helgi Njálsson	3
Kári Sólmundarson	2
Njáll Þórgeirsson	14
Skarphéðinn Njálsson	3

Njáll can use silence as a straightforward means of deliberation and as methodology. Early in the saga, Unnr asks Gunnarr to help her get her dowery back from Hrútr Herjólfsson decades after he received it. Njáll is silent while devising a plan. Saga characters and audience alike are unaware of his thought process. Njáll eventually advises Gunnarr to trick Hrútr into stating how to get a claim for Unn's dowery, which Gunnarr does. When Gunnarr returns, Njáll calls for silence and using the secretly gained information, Njáll advises Gunnarr on how to summons Hrútr to court. This is the audience's first glimpse at Njáll's work as an advisor, and keeps his own counsel and creates a legal plan in secret. Njáll is one of the best lawyers in Iceland and few would have the ability to counter his mechanations, especially when his plans or approach are unknown. There is no discovery on behalf of the opposition and the law is not transparent

as the audience would expect. When the time comes, however, Gunnarr prefers to challenge Hrútr to a duel for the dowery, and Hrútr chooses to return the dowery rather than fight a much younger man.

Njáll also uses silence to get his own way. When his sons' foster-father, Þorðr, is killed by Hallgerðr's men, Njáll makes a deal for compensation without consulting them, "eigi munu þeir rjúfa þá sætt, er ek geri; en ef þeir eru við staddir, þá munu þeir ekki saman draga,"[333] When Hǫskuldr Njálsson (not Hvítanesgoði) is killed by Lýtingr, Hǫskuldr's half-brothers Skarðhéðinn, Helgi, and Grímr attempt vengeance. Lýtingr gets away and goes to Hǫskuldr Hvítanesgoði, who meets with Njáll and arranges peaceful compensation. Again, Njáll does this without consulting his sons, because if they were present, "Ekki mun þá nær sættum, en halda munu þeir þat, sem ek geri,"[334] When Njáll informs his sons of the agreement, they complain, but he chastises them, "Ekki mundi Hǫskuldr hafa skotit skildi fyrir hann, ef þú hefðir drepit hann, er þér var þat ætlat,"[335] Clearly he does not want to consult his grown sons, free men, about what to do, but relies upon his own advice.

An interesting addition to the Þráinn episode is the length of time, the complications involved in Skarphéðinn gaining vengeance for his foster father, and the *choice* of Þráinn for vengeance. The killing of Þráinn was, in fact, a feat of legal nimbyism:

> [W]hat is especially interesting is that we see how the astute avenging party looked ahead to provide specific and sufficient legal justification for the killing, even though the justification had to be contrived and might be purest

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[333] ÍF XII, 110. "They will not break the settlement that I make, but if they are present when we make it they will not join in," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 50.

[334] IF XII, 254. "We would not get close to a settlement. But they'll keep to whatever I decide," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 120.

[335] ÍF XII, 254. "Hoskuld wouldn't have been able to shield Lyting if you had killed him, as you were meant to," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 121.

> pretext. The Þráinn episode also shows how a party might test out a possible justification and, when its sufficiency appeared doubtful, abandon it and change strategies.[336]

Rather than accept the deal developed according to law, the Njálssons actively seek and try for vengeance until they land on the appropriate legal detail, coldly provoking slander. The Njálsson's choice of vengeance, Þráinn, is interesting in that he was not party to Þórðr's death and a reason had to be manufactured. However, most interesting is that Þráinn was killed precisely when "he is aggressively competing with the Njálssons for power and prestige in the district."[337] Þráinn had become the leader of the Sigfússons, the enemy of Bergþórshváll.

In arbitrating another hostile action, Skarphéðinn's killing of Þráinn, Njáll secretly arranges to foster Höskuldr Þráinsson, perhaps in an effort to keep power in his family. Þráinn was killed by Skarphéðinn when he, Þráinn, participated in an ambush on the Njálssons. After arbitration was reached and things were again peaceful, Njáll and Ketill talked for a whole day and "vissi engi maðr, hvat í ráðagerð hafði verit,"[338] Next Ketill goes to Grjóta to arrange his fostering of Hǫskuldr Þráinsson, "Gera skal þér kost á þessu. Þú skalt veita þessum sveini, þá er hann er roskinn, allt þat, sem þú mátt, ok hefna hans, ef hann er með vápnum beginn, ok leggja fé til kvánarmundar honum, ok skalt þú þó sverja þess,"[339] Shortly thereafter Njáll asks Hǫskuldr to become his foster son.

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[336] William Ian Milller, in "Justifying Skarphedinn: Of Pretext and Politics in the Icelandic Bloodfeud." *Scandinavian Studies* 55 (1983), 325.

[337] Ibid.

[338] ÍF XII, 236. "No one knew what plans had been made," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 114.

[339] ÍF XII, 236. "I'll grant you this," she said, "but you must do everything you can for him when he is grown, and avenge him if he is slain, and contribute to his morning gift when he marries—and you are to swear to this," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 114.

In addition to manipulating individuals and using silence in those maneuverings, Njáll manipulates the legal system for his own ends. When Hǫskuldr is ready to marry, Njáll suggests Hildigunnr, but her father will only marry her to a *goði.* Njáll tries to purchase a *goðorð* for his foster-son to no avail. At the following year's Alþing, "gerði þa margr sem vant var at fara til fundar við Njál, en hann lagði þat til mála manna, sem ekki þótti líklegt, at eyddusk sóknir ok svá varnir, ok varð af því þræta mikil, er málin máttu eigi lúkas."[340] It would seem that Njáll, the wisest man in Iceland, is not ethical. He purposefully obstructs justice on behalf of those who consulted with him in order to create an impasse, an entire year without justice in that Quarter and time to allow feelings to fester.

A year later, men are despondant over the legal system and express the opinion that it would be better to fight things out; strongest man wins. However, Njáll has a peaceful suggestion—the creation of a Fifth Court. This court would handle violations of procedure, perjury, false verdict, no agreements, offering or acceptance of payment for legal assistance, and giving shelter to slaves or debtors. There will be a creation of new *goðorð* and appointments of the best men from each district. This new policy was accepted, and Njáll arranges for a new *goðorð* for Hǫskuldr at Hvítanes. An entire year's of court cases were delayed and men were denied justice so that Njáll's foster son could marry Hildigunnr Starkaðardóttir.

The unintended consequences of Njáll's false coup de grace, the Fifth Court, will be, of course, a shift in the balance of power both inside the family and without. The new *goðar* will acquire followers from existing *goðar*, and it probably won't be the *þingmenn* pleased

[340] ÍF XII, 242. "Many people came to consult Njal, but he gave advice which, unlikely as it seemed, ruined both prosecution and defence and led to much wrangling when cases could not be settled," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 116.

with their *goði* who change allegiances, and it probably won't be the pleasant and ethical *goðar* who will loose their *þingmenn*, and thus their base of power. A group of unpleasant, unethical, *goðar* who are upset with their loss of power, will likely not let things go peacefully. Njáll and his sons are accustomed to having great influence in the district, even if they do not have a *goðorð* themselves. Order is maintained as long as Hǫskuldr Hvítanesgoði remains a member of Bergþórshváll.

It is Mǫrðr Valgarðsson who becomes the representive *goði* of the newly disenfranchised group. The creation of the Fifth Court under Hǫskuldr, creates a shift in the balance of power as *þingmenn* leave Mǫrðr Valgarðsson to follow Hǫskuldr Hvítanesgoði. Mǫrðr's loss of *þingmenn* diminishes his standing as a *goði*; he has fewer followers, less manpower, and less support. Mǫrðr is entirely dissatisfied and his father is livid, "Illa hefir þú launat mér goðorðit, er ek fekk þér í hendr, at fara svá ómannliga með. Vill ek nú, at þú launir þeim því, at þeim dragi ǫllum til bana. En þat er til þess, at þú rœgir þá saman ok drepi synir Njáls Hǫskuld."[341] The son follows his father's advice.

Mǫrðr allies himself with the Njálssons, whose minds, the saga suggests are slowly poisoned against their foster-brother, whom their father, Njáll, has favored since he arrived. Njáll provided Hǫskuldr with a goðorð and a prestigious marriage, yet he doesn't trust the judgment of his own sons and subverts their authority in matters of compensation.

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[341] ÍF XII, 275. "You've repaid me poorly, with your unmanly handling of the *goðorð* I turned over to you. Now I want you to repay them in a way that will drag them all to the deaths. The way to do this is to turn them against each other with slander, so that the Njalssons kill Hoskuld," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 129.

However, Miller argues that the Njálssons are also losing prestige when Hǫskuldr moves to Ossabær.[342] Njáll and his sons understood that Hǫskuldr's goðorð would be tied to Bergþórshváll, "on at least one occasion, Skarphéðinn took up Hǫskuldr's *goðorð* when Hǫskuldr failed to attend the Fifth Court. Skarphéðinn could have been authorized to act in Hǫskuldr's place in two ways: either by Hǫskuldr directly, or by the *goðar* of Hǫskuldr's district who had the power to appoint a replacement for the *goði* who failed to arrive at the Althing at the proper time."[343] In either case, there is an expectation of collaboration and understanding between Hǫskuldr Hvítanesgoði and the people of Bergþórshváll. But when Hǫskuldr moves to Ossabær, he makes decisions that are not entirely in the interests of Njáll and sons, and he appears to be the new leader of the Sigfússons.

Mǫrðr and the Njálssons, both desiring more power and influence, develop a *vinátta*. But unlike the *vinátta* between Gunnarr and Njáll, which went beyond politics to mutual friendship and understanding, the *vinátta* between Mǫrðr and the Njálsson was a temporary, practical alliance to get rid of a common obstacle. Gunnarr and Njáll's open and straightforward *vinátta*, fostered calmly for years, created a sense of stability in the district. Mǫrðr and the Njálsson's *vinátta* was developed with a secretive and singular purpose.

Mǫrðr and the Njálssons eventually kill Hǫskuldr. Mǫrðr announces the killing and identifies all but one wound—the one that he himself gave. This is a premeditated withholding of evidence, a subverted silencing of justice, which eventually invalidates the

[342] See William Ian Milller, in "Justifying Skarphedinn: Of Pretext and Politics in the Icelandic Bloodfeud." *Scandinavian Studies* 55 (1983): 314-44.

[343] William Ian Milller, in "Justifying Skarphedinn: Of Pretext and Politics in the Icelandic Bloodfeud." *Scandinavian Studies* 55 (1983): 336.

case.[344] The seed of Hǫskuldr's destruction was sown by the hand of his perceived protector, Njáll. And it is the people of Bergþórshváll who shall pay the higher price for their deception. Not because they are more guilty than Mǫrðr, but because they are more formiddable. They are the new obstacles to power in the district.

After much dissension and legal wrangling, the killing of Hǫskuldr is successully arbitrated and payment decided—it appears that violence could be ended and the balance of power restored—yet Njáll's silence undoes it all again. Not in secret, nor among friends; this time Njáll does it publicly. As the payment for the most recent round of killing is collected into a pile, Njáll adds a silk cloak and boots to the to the top. Flosi, aware of the feminine accusations, is insulted. Flosi "tók hann upp sloeðurnar ok spurði,"[345] but no one answers. A great chieftain is being ignored, publicly. "Í annt sinn veifði hann sloeðunum ok spurði, hverr til mundi hafa gefit, ok hló at,"[346] This is a second silence; a second public humiliation. Njáll's silence is personal, publicly committed, and done with communal acquiesence.

The third time Flosi asks, he adds a taunt, "eða þorið þér eigi at segja mér?"[347] Skarphéðinn can no longer contain himself. He and Flosi exchange words, and Skarðhéðinn insults Flosi in public by throwing a pair of breeches at him and calls him the bride of the Svínfellsáss, who uses Flosi like a woman. The reader is left to ask if Njáll did not mean for Flosi to be insulted, why didn't Njáll just say that he was the one who added the cloak to the

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[344] Chapter 22.

[345] ÍF XII, 313. "Picks up the cloak and asked who had given it," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 148.

[346] ÍF XII, 313. "He waved the cloak a second time and asked who had fiven it, and laughed," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 148.

[347] ÍF XII, 313. "Or don't you dare tell me?" *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 148.

pile? What is Njáll's purpose in this public silence following a public insult? Could Njáll have planned to sacrifice his family's lives as compensation for Hǫskuldr's death?

Njáll and his sons' use of silence and secret mechanations highlight a legal system more concerned with legalisms than justice. No longer is the leglislative system used to maintain a balance of individual rights and power for all freeman, rather, the legal system seems to be there for the more powerful and knowledgeable to use for their own ends. Perhaps this saga reflects contemporary reality, "For good economic reasons that equilibrium was on the wane in the thirteenth century. Power was consolidated in ever fewer hands, towards the end in the hands of just two families who could disregard the legal procedures that the earlier, more multicentered society relied on for its legal health."[348] For the saga's original audience, the lack of justice for Hǫskuldr Hvítanesgoði in the court system must have been disturbing. And when justice cannot be obtained for a man of his caliber within the legal system, what is the chance that justice could be obtained for a *bóndi*? The audience might also have been concerned about the general manipulations of *bændur* for personal gain. And if *bændur* cannot rely on a fair playing field or justice for themselves within the very legal system relies on them for support and efficacy, the sustainability of the entire system comes into question.

Silenced voices of women add complications

Women in the saga are holders of the values, "notably stereotyped portrayals of women in the Norse sagas, particularly in Njál's saga, where wives, sisters, and mothers incite men to vengeance despite male attempts to impose the judgments of the Althing as resolutions of

[348] Thomas Bredsdorff, in *Chaos & love: the philosophy of the Icelandic family sagas,* Trans. John Tucker, (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2001), 39.

blood feuds."[349] Yet in *Njáls saga*, when women try to obtain honor through the straightforward and culturally accepted means, they are undercut in their efforts. This creates an interesting counterpoint for the methods used by the men.

The public presence of women in the sagas are just enough of a rarity that their presence is duly noted, but present enough to create havoc. The female voice is not heard very often in *Íslendingsögur*, despite the immediate importance of their work:

> The situation of a woman being in charge in the home, for example, was an instance of the public sphere. Such matters as the seating order at tables for feasts, the food and drink provided, and the gifts presented to guests were of the utmost political importance, since they raised questions of social honour, rank and prestige among males that were constantly being debated and revised. In the political context, respect and popularity were matters of life and death for ambitious males, and it was women who dealt with such matters.[350]

However, with the exception of the female incitor, women are most often in the background. They tend to exist quietly, effectively doing their jobs so the men can fulfill their lives' ambition. Rovine argued that the silence of women indicates an acceptance of circumstances and a scarcity of options, and Glenn notes that such "[s]ilence is rewarded only when signifying obedience or proper subordination."[351] The silence and speech acts of women who are actively voiced, such as Hallgerður, Bergþóra, and Guðrún Ósvífsdóttir, cause physical and social problems for their men, especially when the women feel their voices are not being respected.

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[349] Carolyn Anderson, in"No Fixed Point: Gender and Blood Feuds in Njal's Saga." *Philological Quarterly* 81.4 (2002): 2.

[350] Þorláksson 141.

[351] Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004), 5.

Free women, like freemen, have honor that must be respected. During Njáll and Gunnarr's annual winter feast, Bergþóra makes Hallgerðr move seats, a move designed to humiliate Hallgerðr. In his discussions of clan systems, Weiner noted that an individual's place within the clan and between clans is essential to his/her identity and worth.[352] Much like Guðrún's forced move for Hrefna, Hallgerðr's forced move begins a fatal rivalry, "Mun þú þat, Bergþóra, at vit skulum eigi skilðar."[353] Hallgerðr sends her overseer, Kolr, to kill Bergþóra's servant, Svartr. When Gunnarr tells Njáll of this, Njáll is initially silent, but then advises Gunnarr to not let Hallgerðr have her way in everything. Hallgerðr is upset when Gunnarr settles things peacefully and refuses to take her side against Bergþóra and Njáll. Bergþóra arranges for the killing of Kolr in revenge, and both Gunnarr and Njáll take this news silently and again arrange for compensation. Hallgerðr's concerns and honor have not been met, and Gunnarr subverts her as she attempts to do it for herself.

Hallgerðr sends for her kinsman, a brawler named Brynólfr and has him kill Atli, whom Njáll had made a free man. Gunnarr pays full compensation and Hallgerðr is quite upset. Bergþóra has Þórðr kill Brynólfr. Þórðr is her sons' foster-father and had never killed before. Njáll pays full compensation and Hallgerðr is furious that a peaceful settlement is made. Again, her attempt to create her own honor is subverted.

After secret conversations, Hallgerðr gets Sigmundr and Skjǫldr, guests at Hlíðarendi, to kill Þorðr, and gets her son-in-law, Þráinn Sigfússon, to observe. Njáll is silent when he hears the news, but accepts Gunnarr's apology and offer of compensation.

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[352] See Mark S. Weiner, in *The Rule of the Clan: What an Ancient Form of Social Organization Reveals about the Future of Individual Freedom,* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013).

[353] ÍF XII, 91. "'Keep this in mind, Bergþora,' said Hallgerðr: 'we're not finished yet'" *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III.

He does this purposefully without his sons as he knows they would not accept the deal; he denies them the opportunity to voice their opinions because he knows they would not accept it. He forces them to accept his arrangements. Hallgerðr is even angrier.

With the help of some beggar women, Bergþóra successfully whets her sons into revenge. Skarphéðinn kills Sigmundr, Helgi and Grímr kill Skjǫldr. Gunnarr does nothing about the slayings, even though Sigmundr was a distant kinsman of his wife, for three years. When he does broach the subject with Njáll, they make an agreement for peaceful compensation.

Some audience members may laugh at the deadly female feud and commend Gunnarr and Njáll for remaining calm and cleaning up after their wives' mess, but the feud between Hallgerðr and Bergþóra leads to the hostility of the second half of the saga, more specifically the killing of Þórðr leysingjason, foster father to the Njálssons. Þórðr's death, and "the composition of the opposing groups is […] ascertained and the groups bear an identifiable continuity of membership for the duration of the saga."[354] The feud is the critical event of the saga's first half, which illustrates a shift in the saga's ethical culture,[355] a shift that is reinforced by the change in nature of relationships in the second half.

A failing legal system

Njáls saga reveals a system not out for justice, but for the few with the most knowledge. The saga "create[s] a courtroom atmosphere, while their sheer excessiveness and

[354] William Ian Milller, in "Justifying Skarphedinn: Of Pretext and Politics in the Icelandic Bloodfeud." *Scandinavian Studies* 55 (1983), 321.

[355] Lars Lönnroth, in *Njals Saga: A Critical Introduction*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 29.

complexity represented the obstruction of true justice by legal technicalities."[356] A few knowledgeable and powerful men, manipulate law and procedures for their own purposes. "*Njáls saga's* penchant for legal history (albeit subject to authorial license in the details), its fondness for complicated legal procedures, its lengthy quotations of passages from the law texts, and its lawyer heroes (and villains) all contribute to its author's exploration of the Commonwealth-period legal system and its downfall."[357]

Medieval Iceland is often presented as the world's oldest democracy where every man lived with equal footing, a perception that may affect our interpretations of the sagas. Over time, however, power concentrated among the ruling elite, a process which seem to be depicted in *Njáls saga*. However, "[i]t is evident from *Sturlunga saga* that Iceland was a rigorously class-divided society in the thirteenth century. The gap and the possible interaction between the illiterate and powerless majority on the one hand, and the group which controlled the growing textual culture and held positions of power in the thirteenth century (the ruling class and the clergy) on the other, is difficult to measure."[358] In other words, the questions become about who is creating the message of a failing legal system and why is this message being created. One possible interpretation could be that when chieftains start sending their sons to the church for learning and new opportunities for

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[356] Hannah Burrows, in "Cold Cases: Law and Legal Detail in the Islendingasögur." *Parergon* 26.1 (2009): 53.

[357] Ibid, 37.

[358] Guðrún Nordal, in *Tools of literacy: the Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 9.

power in the community,[359] that texts start to reflect the new world view of the literate minority.

When texts work as part of the public memory and contemporary society, they can send messages. "If too large a section of a population too often spots a discrepancy between what is perceived as the honest pursuit of truth and the trial procedures, then people will think of their society as a morally decaying one—which I think is what the author of *Njáls saga* did, judging from the statement that can be elicited from the totality of the text, including the finale, where the rule of law falls short and divine mercy takes over the task the law is no longer able to perform."[360] The laws as represented in the sagas were not delivering justice as promised; the vision of an independent Iceland, organized and ruled collectively by equals was flawed.

If scholars are correct, *Njáls saga* was composed sometime between 1275 and 1285 and the oldest extant manuscript dates to 1300. The saga's composition would have been shortly after Icelanders agreed to become part of the Norwegian crown in exchange for peace and a law code. In his analysis of the law as presented in the saga, Ordower states that: "*Njáls saga* exposes the futility of relying on a paralyzed legal system that ultimately forces adversaries to resort to revenge. It is easy to see why a segment of the Icelandic Commonwealth's populace would be more attracted to the Norwegian Crown's functional rule of law than to the dysfunctional democratic one already in place. Perhaps the author is observing that Iceland compromised its freedom for the rule of law Norway seemed to

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[359] Orri Vésteinsson, in *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change, 1000-1300*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[360] Thomas Bredsdorff, in *Chaos & love: the philosophy of the Icelandic family sagas,* Trans. John Tucker, (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2001), 40.

offer."[361] Maybe *Njáls saga* was conceived by the author as a justification or perceived by the intended audience as an explanation for why Iceland's original legal system failed. As much as we might like to reconstruct the saga's original purpose and meaning, we can't. Nor can we reconstruct what the saga meant to contemporaneous Icelandic audience. We can, however, analyze *Njáls saga* as literature. We can enjoy its intricate organization and how the seemingly unrelated storylines affect the main action. We can empathize with the human failings of the characters and appreciate their motivations, even if selfish and counter-intuitive to social fairness. There is a reason that *Njáls saga* still resonates with readers so long after its composition and that reason is not because of the saga's historical rendering of events, formulaic structure, or authentic representation of culture. *Njáls saga* still resonates because of its literary artistry.

[361] Henry Ordower, in "Exploring the Literary Function of Law and Litigation in 'Njal's Saga." *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 3.1 (1991): 54.

Conclusion

As shown in the analyses of silence in *Egils saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, and *Njáls saga*, each saga uses silence differently to support its own theme. Analysis of the three sagas reveals that silence is not a formulaic element used consistently for the same purpose, but rather a rhetorical tool used to frame the purpose of each individual narrative. For example, *Egils saga* employs silence to develop character and create suspense, but also to obfuscate the protagonist. Egill Skallagrímsson is not entirely likeable, leaving room to consider two audiences—an Icelandic audience who can praise Egill's fierce independence and disdain for authority, but also a Norwegian audience who could shake their heads at Egill's impudence and violent tendencies. Both intended audiences may have appreciated King Hákon's reasoned mind, and, considering the suggested author's political connections, such dualism may have been used to pave the way for unification.[362] Although *Laxdœla saga* also uses silence to develop character and create suspense, its primary use of silence is to show how forced silence of fellow freemen disrupts regional stability. In contrast, the silences of *Njáls saga* illustrate national consequences in the silencing of individuals, both by and of *bændur* and *goðar.*

The intimate connection between a saga's use of silence and its message seem to indicate nuanced and sophisticated texts, that their authors used literary devices with great ability.[363] However, readers can find themselves focusing on the similarity of the sagas to each other, the seemingly simple style of expression, and the intriguing question of why these sagas, written in the vernacular, suddenly appeared on a northern island so far from

[362] In addition to supporting land claims.

[363] Þórir Óskarsson, in "Rhetoric and Style," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 364,

mainland Europe. None of the extant versions of *Egils saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, and *Njáls saga* are the originals, and modern readers can only speculate as to how those originals looked, how they originally developed, what their sources were, who the author(s) were, or how much of the sagas and characters are true. Such questions can limit questions of literary form, and if readers avoid viewing *Íslendingasögur* as literature, sagas "cannot be an outlet for artistic expression, and they cannot symbolize an author's artistic ideas."[364] If we read *Íslendingasögur* with the sole intent of reconstructing saga society, language, or culture, we limit our imagination and appreciation of their literary value and their ongoing enjoyment and meaning for modern audiences. *Íslendingasögur*, when analyzed as fiction, allow for rich and varied interpretations, including how to "better recognize a saga's structure and underlying message."[365]

Viewing *Íslendingasögur* from a literary lens can be difficult as the anonymous, third person narrators of the sagas, who seem to only report events, give readers the impression of an accurate portrayal of history events. The actual structure of the sagas themselves also helps to create this perspective. A recent network analysis of saga social network shows it to be indistinguishable from real social networks.[366] The characters' relationships are congruous to the style, and together solifidy the perception of reality. The content of *Íslendingasögur* focuses on the action from the nine and tenth centuries; Österberg argues that, because Icelanders understood the sagas as their near history, the reality presented in

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[364] Yoav Tirosh, in "Víga-Njáll: A New Approach Towards *Njáls saga*?" *Scandinavian Studies* 86.2 (2014): 209.

[365] Torfi H. Tulinius, in *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century English,* (2002), 234.

[366] See Pádraig Mac Carron and Ralph Kenna, in "Viking sagas: Six Degrees of Icelandic Separation Social Networks from the Viking Era." *Significance* 10.6 (2013): 12-17.

the sagas would not have been accepted by the audience if the style and social network presented in the sagas were drastically different than their own social reality.[367] While we can confirm that sagas hold accurate portrayels of social networks in a clan culture, they do not confirm accurate rendering of historical events. Some scholarship maintains that the world of the *Íslendingasögur* is more a reflection of contemporary 12th and 13th century society than an accurate historical rendering of events. In other words, the events may not be historically accurate, but they remain true to the social ideals that shaped the interactions of the characters in the sagas. The lens of historicity has been so strong within literary saga scholarship, that it is difficult as a researcher to avoid making inferences about society and saga, including the current analysis of silence in the *Íslendingasögur*.

A benefit to looking at the saga through a historic lens has been that, although the sagas may not be historically accurate, they could provide identity for the ethnic community who relate to the sagas and their charaters. Browne states that public memory is a "shared sense of the past that fashions from symbolic resources of the community and subject to its particularly history, hierarchies, and aspirations."[368] Therefore the use of the sagas in current scholarship of literary anthropology supports that this shared cultural memory persists to modern-day and affects analysis of a discourse about the *Íslendingasögur*. Speaking more broadly in terms of saga purpose, if we accept that saga authors were recording Icelandic history rather than creating messages and themes, we are likely to analyze *Íslendingasögur* in terms of recovering some truth and deny the artistry

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[367] Eva Österberg, in *Mentalities and other Realities: Essays in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian History*, (Lund UP: Lund, Sweden, 1991), 13.

[368] Stephen H. Browne, in "Reading, Rhetoric and the Texture of Public Memory." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 248.

that continues to fascinate us long after the intended audiences have died. For example, as present-day readers, we are affected by our own context, and when it comes to interpreting the *Íslendingasögur*, our socio-political-economic-cultural lenses frame our undestanding. Therefore, it is essential for scholars to interpret sagas through new literary lenses and tropes, and move beyond structuralist thinking because these added nuances and complexities would only enrich saga studies.

Instead of researching potential author(s) or verifying saga elements with anthropological records or secondary literary sources, another area of research could be examining how the use of silence connects to religious writing and monastic culture. Perhaps connections could be made between saga themes and ideas coming from the church. For example, if *Njáls saga* is indeed questioning the wisdom and effectiveness of the contemporary clan structures and contemplating an alternative, it could also be subsersively suggesting the heralding of a Christian ideology.

The saga contains multiple positive Christian references. In chapter 18, Kolskeggr has a dream to become a knight of God. The Viking chief, Bróðir, who decapitated the Irish King Brian after the battle of Clontarf, is eviscerated as a motif "wide associated in patristic and medieval Christian Latin literature with the punishment of heretics, apostates, and traitors."[369] The Christian motif of evisceration for traitors goes even further when "Bróðir's hideous death immediately preceds the miraculous healing of the body of King Brian, whose severed head is rejoined to his body,"[370] highlighing that the king was metaphorical figurehead for Christianity. In addition, Njáll sacrifices himself and his family,

[369] Thomas D. Hill, in "The Evisceration of Bróðir in 'Brennu-Njáls Saga,'" *Tradito* 37 (1981): 443.

[370] Ibid, 439.

and his body does not burn because the oxhide protected. Hǫskuldr Hvítanesgoði, in an atypical manner, refuses to raise family against his foster brothers, even though they attack him with the intend to kill him. This refusal is reminiscent of both Abel refusing to fight Cain and Jesus' admonition to turn the other cheek.

Two characters are seemingly martyred. Njáll can be viewed as sacrificing himself and his family in repentence for his manipulations; it seems un-saga-like to lay down and give up. As the house starts burning and air fills with smoke, he says, "Verðið vel við ok mælið eigi æðru, því at él eitt mun vera, en þó skyldi langt til annars slíks. Trúið þér ok þbí, at guð er miskunnsamr, ok mun hann oss eigi bæði láta brenna þessa heims ok annars."[371] There are very strong Christian references here with God being merciful and bearing the cross. The Christian references continue and Njáll requests that an ox hide be lain over him, Bergþóra, and their grandson, "Þá signdu þau sik bæði ok sveininn ok fálu ǫnd sína guði á hendi."[372] Such references present faith as a motif of surrender to God rather than glorious battle to death. Njáll's body pristine after burning. Hǫskuldr Hvítanesgoði "dies as a Christian martyr asking forgiveness for his killers,"[373] similar to Jesus on the cross saying, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." Early in the saga, Hǫskuldr had demonstrated acceptance when he decided to accept the death of his father at Skarphéðinn's hands, "ok þurfu vit ekki á þat at minnask, er sætzk hefir á verit ok fuller

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[371] ÍF XII, 328. "Bear this bravely and don't express any fear, for it's only a brief storm, and it will be a long time before we have another like it. Have faith that God is merciful, and that he will not let us burn both in this world and in the next," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 155.

[372] ÍF XII, 331. "Then they crossed themselves and the boy and turned their souls over to God's hands," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders,* Vol III, 156.

[373] Henry Ordower, in "Exploring the Literary Function of Law and Litigation in 'Njal's Saga." *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 3.1 (1991): 50.

bœtur hafa fyrir komit."[374] As the young Hǫskuldr illustrates,"sometimes, then, blood can be settled without death, through Christianity's new dispensation and the Law."[375] We are not talking about interpretation or markers, but linguistic artifacts in the text.

Perhaps these Christian elements, in combination with the message showing the ineffectiveness of the current political system could be suggesting that the Icelanders should change to a new rule of law. At the time our extant manuscript was written, the Christian church was a growing instititution of power and influence.

> "It is particularly striking that in the 1250s when the political conflict in the country was beginning to seem unsolvable and unwinnable, many of the heads of the families […] who had previously actively supported one chieftain or another began to take a more neutral stance and act as mediators and arbitrators between the warring overlords. At this point it seems that many of these men had chosen to adopt an ecclesiastical identity instead of a secular one […] In the political turmoil of the 1250s this was probably, first and foremost, a welcome way for the heads of these families to distance themselves from political alliances and ties which were becoming increasingly uncomfortable. They had already begun to discard the old way of making politics, where power was measured in brute economic and military strength, and had adopted the new one where appointment to an office became the basis for power."[376]

The powerful, learned families were turning to the church and away from the traditional clan structure. In addition, "when relations with the Church and with the Norwegian monarchy became more complex, local and personal settlements became overwhelmed by

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[374] ÍF XII, 236. "But we don't have to remind ourselves of that, since the matter was settled and full compensation was paid," *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, Vol III, 114.

[375] Carolyn Anderson, in"No Fixed Point: Gender and Blood Feuds in Njal's Saga." *Philological Quarterly* 81.4 (2002): 428.

[376] Orri Vesteinsson, in "The Church and the Increase in Social Complexity,"(1983), 3.

the growing power of the rule of a few families, and an institutionalized written law"[377] needed to be established.

In addition it would be kairotic to analyze *Njáls saga* more broadly with literary eye on a persuasive message of social change, especially towards individual freedom, "The individual freedom that citizens of liberal societies rightly cherish, even our very concept of the individual, is impossible without a robust state."[378] The sagas subversively demonstrate the virtues of individual freedom by highlighting the negatives of the clan structure. For example, Njáls' sons attempt to establish their freedom by making decisions without their father, but their efforts fail disastrously. The saga's silences show the failing of the legal system in latter half of the saga, the positive Christian details provide an alternative social structure through the use of saga narratives.

By analyzing literary tropes, like silence, and theorizing on intended textual purposes, we could also investigate character development and their relations to the narrative. *Njáls saga* is known by its *Íslenzsk fornrit* version, which is based on one extant manuscript, the version with less skaldic poetry by Gunnar and Skarphéðinn. Poetry put into the mouths of the characters, especially the memorable ones, changes the way readers perceive the characters and the narratives. It would enrich the scholarship to consider how the characterization of Gunnar and Skarphéðinn differs without the poetry, and what affect that has on the overall narrative—how the versions differ, not just structurally, but artistically, and how the textual trope of poetry changes the overall message.

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[377] Carolyn Anderson, in"No Fixed Point: Gender and Blood Feuds in Njal's Saga." *Philological Quarterly* 81.4 (2002): 429.

[378] Mark S. Weiner, in *The Rule of the Clan: What an Ancient Form of Social Organization Reveals about the Future of Individual Freedom,* (2013), 6.

Silence is used to influence audience perspective, and it is interesting to consider its effects. Bredsdorff argues that *Laxdœla saga* "is the Icelandic myth of creation, fall and redemption. And the most dangerous is to give in to one's impulses and disregard the social order."[379] Indeed, silences in the saga reveal a larger social instability of obligations to kin over law. *Laxdœla saga's* social network is "strongly assortative" in that it "has an exponential degree distribution possibly indicating that the higher degree characters are less important in terms of the overall properties of the network as compared to the others."[380] In other words, the saga's social network reflects a realistic network, and as such, men as distant relatives are drawn into feuds out of familial obligation, yet the "disinherited offspring … prove morally superior to the noble foster-kin."[381] This dissonance creates questions within the saga's narrative and seems to suggest that sagas could be more socially subversive texts than revered keepers of social culture.

Perhaps Bolli and Kjartan are meant to carve a path away from clan social structure to individual focus. Bolli, Kjartan, and Guðrún are limited by their clan positions, their birth positions, by the social collective. No matter what they may do to try change or emend their positions, they cannot change. Bolli in particular cannot be successful outside of his birth-given position because he is born to an inescapable group, the Laxdœlir, and because of saga society's legal principles that people are valued less as individuals than as members of their extended families.

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[379] Thomas Bredsdorff in *Chaos & love: the philosophy of the Icelandic family sagas,* trans. John Tucker. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, (2001), 50.

[380] Pádraig mac Carron and Ralph Kenna, in "Viking Sagas: Six Degrees of Icelandic Separation Social Networks from the Viking Era." *Significance* 10.6 (2013): 415.

[381] Peter Parkes, "Fosterage, Kinship, and Legend: When Milk was Thicker than Blood?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46 (2004): 604.

In *Laxdœla saga*, the inequality inherent in saga society comes to the top tier, to the freemen, "[y]our ability to obtain redress for injury, to enter into contracts on your own terms, to use land and other property, to dispose of your wealth, to be protected from crime, and to access a range of goods and services all depend on the state treating the individual—*you*—as a member of a community of legal equals."[382] Unless a clan member has the power and influence provided to them by their station in society, their voice is silenced. In other words, a clan member is valid only as a member of the group. Individualism is indeed a modern concept and I as a present-day scholar view *Laxdœla saga* through my own modern frame. However, it is important to note that in the 12th and 13th century was an influencial stakeholder within the saga messages, and the church sees individuals in their relations to God and not their clans, perhaps the subversion evidently present in *Laxdœla saga*.

Consider also women and marriage proposals in the sagas. Although seeking a woman's opinion on a potential marriage candidate does not seem to be the social saga norm, there are prominent examples of consultation, asking the potential bride to share her opinion, mattering significantly to the narrative. In fact, narratives of marriages that were contracted against a woman's wishes—or without her opinion at all—end in disaster, for example, Guðrún's marriage to Bolli and Hallgerðr's first marriage. Women's assent is counter-intuitive to the traditionally perceived saga context, where good women are in the background, in their culturally accepted positions. Yet, these narratives seem to suggest that women should have their say in marital contracts and not to defer to their father or

[382] Mark S. Weiner, in *The Rule of the Clan: What an Ancient Form of Social Organization Reveals about the Future of Individual Freedom,* (2013), 6.

brother. Voices have power and "to speak is to assert one's position. To remain silent is to defer to the position of another."[383] Jochens has suggested that the saga authors, when writing largely of faithful couples, were providing models of behavior,[384] perhaps they are also suggesting that women should have their own voice and volition.

Such effort by the authors is, according to Jochens, a church-influenced development, "Churchmen privileged the idea of consent above all others in their program, because it exemplified the doctrine of the equality of the sexes."[385] Jochens outlines the development of female marital consent from its inception at the Christian religious ceremony to its inclusion in the laws of the land, and determines that "[t]he majority of the marriages in the sagas of Icelanders were contracted without female consent, as allowed by secular law; the few (and notably spectacular) cases of female consent were, one concludes, the result of ecclesiastical propaganda."[386] Jochen's argument leads a present-day scholar to question whether enforced silence of others groups are being subversively dismissed by the sagas.

This study is only the beginning of the study of silence in *Íslendinasögur*, however, and it would be interesting to continue to analyze silence in additional sagas. If silence is used to support the theme of a saga, an analysis of a larger number of sagas might show subtle patterns in use and genre. The corpus of Old Icelandic literature is varied, and a study the use of silence across genres could reveal a great deal about the literature.

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[383] Scott, qtd. in Glenn 5.

[384] Jenny Jochens, in "The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland." *Journal of Medieval History* 6.4 (1980): 377-392.

[385] Jenny Jochens, in *Women in Old Norse Society*, (1995), 44.

[386] Ibid, 48.

Perhaps religious writings use silence differently than secular writing, and those differences could be compared with medieval religious silences and monastic silence. Another silence that would also be intriguing to analyze is narrative support for slaves and children, much like the forced silence of freemen and women can have broad-reaching negative repercussions. When a freeman without political or social power cannot do what he is socially obligated to do (i.e. revenge for a family member, providing for family, protecting family land), it has serious consequences for society as a whole.

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Appendix A: *Íslendingasögur* (Icelandic Family Sagas)

'The system of groupings [...] is based on a refinement of Vésteinn Ólason's classification developed by Örnólfur Thorsson for a forthcoming book" (Complete xxi)

Sagas from Greenland and Vinland

Eirik the Red's Saga

The Saga of the Greenlanders

Tragedies

The Saga of the People of Laxardal

Njal's Saga

Apparently Old Sagas Conerning Local/Family Feuds

North Iceland:

The Saga of the People of Ljosavatn

Valla-Ljot's Saga

The Saga of the People of Reykjadal

The Saga of the People of Svarfadardal

The Saga of the People of Vatnsdal

East Iceland

The Saga of the People of Vopnafjord

The Saga of Droplaug's Sons

The Saga of the People of Fjotsdal

West Iceland

The Saga of the Slayings on the Heath

"Social" Sagas of Feuds & "Allegories" of Class and Power

The Saga of the People of Eyri

Hen-Thorir's Saga

The Saga of the Confederates

Olkofri's Saga

The Saga of Hrafnkel Frey's Godi

The Saga of Havard of Isafjord

The Saga of Thorstein the White

Thorstein Sidu-Hallsson's Saga

A Love Story

Viglund's Saga

Saga of a Nature Spirit

- Bard's Saga

Sagas of Champions

- Killer-Glum's Saga (Saga of a poet)
- The Saga of Finnbogi the Mighty
- The Saga of the People of Kjalarnes
- The Saga of Thord Menace
- The Saga of the People of Floi
- The Saga of Ref the Sly (Comic Saga)
- Gold-Thorir's Saga
- The Saga of Gunnar, The Fool of Keldugnup

Sagas of Outlaws

- Gisli Sursson's Saga
- The Saga of Grettir the Strong
- The Saga of Hord and the People of Holm

Sagas of Poets

- Killer Glum's Saga
- Kormak's Saga
- The Saga of Hallfred the Troublesome Poet
- The Saga of Bjorn, Champion of the Hitardal People
- Egil's Saga
- The Saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue
- The Saga of the Sworn Brothers

Appendix B: Stated instances of silence by saga

Saga	Instances
Njáls	*79*
Laxdœla	*36*
Fljótsdœla	28
Þórðar	24
Heiðarvíga	22
Egils	*15*
Svarfdœla	13
Eyrbyggja	13
Króka-Refs	12
Ljósvetninga	12
Grettis	11
Reykdæla & Viga-Skuta	11
Bandamanna	11
Hávarðar	11
Finnboga	9
Vatnsdœla	9
Droplaugarsona	8
Fóst-bræðra	7
Vopnfirðinga	7
Kjalnesinga	6
Hœnsna-þóris	6
Ǫlkofra	5
Bjarnar	4
Harðar	4
Gull-Þóris	4
Þorsteins	4
Valla-Ljóts	4
Hrafnkels	3
Barðar	3
Gunnars	1
Eiríks saga hin rauða	1
Kormáks	1
Hallfreðar	1
Flóamanna	1
Þorstein Siðu-Hallsson	1

Appendix C: Stated Silences in *Egils*, *Laxdœla*, and *Njáls*

ID	Saga/ þáttur	Chapter	Interest word	Sentence
2	Egils	11	did not speak	He did not speak a word, but it seemed obvious he was angry (44).
3	Egils	12	hardly discussed	The king hardly discussed the matter with other people but it was obvious that he firmly believed what he had been told (46).
4	Egils	13	said nothing	The king noticed him there but said nothing, and it was obvious he was angry (46).
5	Egils	13	falls silent	"I don't know," Olvir said, "but I have noticed that the king falls silent every time Thorolf is mentioned, ever since we were at Leka together, which makes me suspect that people have been slandering him" (46).
6	Egils	38	without speaking	Skallagrim took the axe, held it up and inspected it for a while without speaking, then hung it up above his head (75).
7	Egils	57	long time answering	The king took a long time answering his speech (106).
8	Egils	55	[implied silence]	…he wrinkled one eyebrow right down onto his cheek and raised the other up to the roots of his hair . . . (100).
9	Egils	57	Let the matter rest	Egil let the matter rest for the autumn (104).
10	Egils	58	no one dared talk to him	Egil was so furious that no one dared talk to him (113).
11	Egils	58	Nidstong	"Here I set up this scorn-pole and turn its scorn upon King Eirik and Queen Gunnhild" (114).
13	Egils	65	unable to answer	Unable to answer, she cried all the more (128).
14	Egils	69	long pause	The king answered him after a long pause (135).
15	Egils	72	Whispers	The wife called over to her, and whispered something in her ear (140).
16	Egils	84	little, secretly	Egil showed little interest, but asked secretly in detail about Thorstein's dealings with Steinar and about the men who had supported Steinar in the case (168).
49	Njals	8	Silent	Mord was silent, and sought advice from his friends about the duel
50	Njals	11	little to say	Thjostolf and Thorvald had little to do with each other and little to say to each other, and it went that way all winter.
51	Njals	12	no answer	He made no answer and rowed on home and beached the boat.
52	Njals	12	said nothing	Hoskuld turned bright red and said nothing for a while.

53	Njals	13	said no more	She spoke well and boldly and asked for the news. Then she said no more
54	Njals	13	Quiet	Then things were quiet until it was time for men to ride to the feast.
55	Njals	17	Silent	Thorarin was silent then.
56	Njals	33	Secret	This was to be a secret at first, but soon everybody knew about it.
57	Njals	36	Silent	Njal remained silent while Gunnar told him everything.
58	Njals	37	little to say	He had little to say about it and sent a man to tell Njal.
59	Njals	37	nothing to say	Njal had nothing to say.
60	Njals	38	Little	He had little to say.
61	Njals	41	Softly	Then they talked softly together for a long time, and no one knew what sort of plans they were making.
62	Njals	43	Silent	Njal was silent for a while, and then spoke, "That is well offered, and I will accept it."
63	Njals	44	Silent	They were all shocked when they saw him come in and they fell silent, but before there had been loud laughter.
64	Njals	44	Silent	Grim was silent and bit his lip.
65	Njals	44	---	Helgi showed no change.
66	Njals	44	--	Hoskuld went out with Bergthora.
67	Njals	45	Nothing	He did not have any action brought for the slaying and in fact did nothing at all about it.
68	Njals	71	Secret	Summer returned, and the secret meetings became even more frequent.
69	Njals	73	Little	Gunnar was calm and said little.
70	Njals	75	Little	Hallgerd was pleased that Gunnar returned home, but his mother had little to say.
71	Njals	78	no one	So no one took the halbard
72	Njals	78	talked privately	Then he talked privately with Skarphedin for a long time.
73	Njals	85	Silent	Helgi became silent as the winter passed.
74	Njals	87	Private	As time went on, he began to talk to Gudrun in private, so that many said he was out to seduce her.
75	Njals	91	whispered something	Hallgerd was standing on the porch and had whispered something to Hrapp.
76	Njals	91	Hushed	After that Njal and his sons and Kari had a long hushed talk.
77	Njals	93	no one	In the evening, Njal rode back home, and no one knew what plans had been made.
78	Njals	99	present (physical	Do you perhaps want your sons to be present?

			absence)	
79	Njals	102	Silent	Thangbrand was silent while she spoke, but then spoke at length and turned all her arguments upside down.
80	Njals	105	no one	Thorgeir lay for a whole day with a cloak spread over his head, and no one spoke to him.
81	Njals	105	Silence	Thorgeir asked for silence and spoke
82	Njals	105	Secret	Three years' outlawry will be the penalty for open violations, but if these things are practised in secret there shall be no punishment.
83	Njals	110	left out	I am not in on their planning, said Njal, but I was seldom left out when their plans were good.
84	Njals	112	but one	[Mord] named a man for every wound but one
85	Njals	116	Quietly	She sat down next to Flosi and they talked quietly for a long time.
86	Njals	116	Silently	She walked silently up to Flosi.
87	Njals	117	spoke together	Mord and Flosi rode to the Thing together and spoke together every day.
88	Njals	119	Stopped	At this they stopped talking.
89	Njals	119	Quietly	One day Njal and his sons talked quietly for a long time with Asgrim.
90	Njals	120	Grinned	Skarphedinn grinned.
91	Njals	120	Silent	Asgrim remained silent and thought that things looked bad.
92	Njals	121	no one	You're aware that Mord started the proceedings, but the fact is that Mord had been present at the slaying of Hoskuld and delivered the wound for which no one was named.
93	Njals	121	Hidden	Thorhall Asgrimsson spoke up and said it would be unwise not to keep this hidden until the court convened.
94	Njals	123	Silent	Skarphedinn was standing nearby and kept silent and grinned.
95	Njals	123	Grinned	Skarphedinn stroked his forehead and grinned.
96	Njals	123	no one	Then he picked up the cloak and asked who had given it, and no one answered him.
97	Njals	124	did not respond	She did not respond to the greeting, and asked him to step out with her warmly.
98	Njals	132	no one	Kari spoke of no one as often as he did of Njal and Skarphedinn.
99	Njals	132	never spoke	He never spoke ill of his enemies, and he never made threats against them.

100	Njals	133	not to tell	I think it would be wise for us not to tell anyone about this dream for the time being.
101	Njals	134	Excuse	Hrafnkel tried for a long time to excuse himself but came around to promising that his son Thorir would ride with all their thingmen and offer the same support as the other godis from that district.
102	Njals	135	at length	They talked about this at length.
103	Njals	136	did not greet	Asgrim did not greet them, but spoke to Flosi: "The tables are set so that food is at hand for those who need it."
104	Njals	136	Quiet	Asgrim kept quiet during the meal but was as red as blood to look at.
105	Njals	136	no answer	Flosi made no answer.
106	Njals	137	a long talk	Gizur the White arrived there with a very large force, and they had a long talk together.
107	Njals	137	Quiet	The rest of the day was quiet, and there was no fighting between them.
108	Njals	138	Secret	Then he said to Flosi and Bjarni, "Now I have taken over this case, as you requested, but I want you to keep this a secret to begin with."
109	Njals	138	Dumbstruck	Eyjolf was flustered and dumbstruck.
110	Njals	138	did not want to talk	Eyjolf jumped up and walked away and did not want to talk about it.
111	Njals	139	Secrets	Asgrim spoke: "There is no need for secrets among us, for everybody here knows he can count on the loyalty of the others."
112	Njals	139	Secret	Gizur the White answered, "Snorri the Godi sent a messenger to tell me that Flosi received much support from men in the North, and that his kinsman Eyjold Bolverksson accepted a bracelet from somebody and was keeping it a secret."
113	Njals	140	Whisper	Asgrim spoke: "There's no need to whisper what I have to say: we've come to ask for your firm support."
114	Njals	140	low voice	They answered that they had met with Skafti and Snorri the Godi, and in a low voice they told him all about how it had gone with each of them.
115	Njals	140	so low	They thanked him and talked for a long time so low that others could not hear them.
116	Njals	140	known to only	They all left and returned to their booths, and for a long time this was known to only a few men.
117	Njals	141	never said	Flosi listened carefully but never said a word.

118	Njals	142	without anyone's knowledge	This took place without anyone's knowledge.
119	Njals	145	Silence	Hall of Sida stood up and called for silence, and it was given at once.
120	Njals	146	talked no more	Then they talked no more about it.
121	Njals	149	talked no more	They talked no more about it then, but shortly after that they rode east and did not stop until they came to Bjarnarnes in Hornafjord.
122	Njals	149	said no more	They said no more about this.
123	Njals	149	Silent	Ketil told him to be silent and stop the big talk.
124	Njals	151	said nothing	Ketil said nothing and rode off after his companions and told what had happened to those who had not already heard.
125	Njals	152	said nothing	She said nothing and smiled.
126	Njals	153	should not tell	Flosi said that they should not tell anybody about what had happened or about their journey until he told it to the earl.
127	Njals	156	not able to speak	Brodir was so angry that he was not able to speak.
307	Laxdaela	9	spoke little	Thorleik was a big, strong man with striking features, who spoke little and was unruly (8).
308	Laxdaela	12	cannot speak	The woman cannot speak (11).
309	Laxdaela	19	did not got to meet	Hoskuld was little pleased by the news and did not go to meet and welcome him (21).
310	Laxdaela	20	Secret	They discussed the details of the transaction, and agreed that it should remain a secret (24).
311	Laxdaela	21	Silent	Olaf's companions fell silent when they saw a group of horsemen approach, well-armed and valiant-looking, as it now looked like they would have to face far superior forces (27).
312	Laxdaela	21	Silent	Upon hearing this the king fell silent and went to speak to his followers (28).
313	Laxdaela	23	no one else heard	The two of them then spent most of the day in conversation but no one else heard what they were discussing (32).
314	Laxdaela	29	Secretly	Geirmund had secretly put others in charge of his lands and planned on going to Iceland that summer aboard Olaf's ship (39).
315	Laxdaela	33	Discussion	Gest was pleased to see her and they struck up a conversation; their discussion was both shrewd and lengthy (44).
316	Laxdaela	33	Silent	Gudrun had grown blood-red while listening to her dreams being interpreted, but kep silent until Gest had finished (45).
317	Laxdaela	37	somewhat reluctantly	When Hrut greeted him Eldgrim responded somewhat relunctantly, and Hrut then asked

				where he was taking the horses (52).
318	Laxdaela	40	neither spoke	They both emerged once more, but neither spoke to the other (59).
319	Laxdaela	40	no answer	Kjartan made no answer but turned to leave without putting on his outer cloak (69).
320	Laxdaela	43	little to say	After that they had little to say to one another (67).
321	Laxdaela	44	no sign	He learned of Gudrun's marriage and showed no sign of response, although many people had been dreading his reaction (68).
322	Laxdaela	44	hardly spoke	Although Gudrun hardly spoke of the matter, it was obvious that she was anything but happy, and most people assumed that she regretted having lost Kjartan, though she tried to conceal it (69).
323	Laxdaela	45	conferred together	They conferred together all that day (70).
324	Laxdaela	46	said nothing	Gudrun heard his words, looked at Kjartan and changed colour but said nothing (71).
325	Laxdaela	46	without either	Gudrun unwound the head-dress and looked at it awhile, without either praising or criticizing it, until Hrefna took it and put it away (72).
326	Laxdaela	47	without saying	After Christmas that winter Kjartan collected a group of sixty men, without saying anything to his father of his plans (74).
327	Laxdaela	47	said no more	Hrefna said no more on the subject (74).
328	Laxdaela	47	said little	Gudrun said little, but the few words she did let fall showed that it was not necessarily of less concern to her than to others (74).
329	Laxdaela	47	no answer	Bolli made no answer, but walked away at once (75).
330	Laxdaela	47	little answer	Ospak and his brothers gave little answer apart from a few scornful words about Kjartan as usual, but Bolli acted as if he had not heard, as was his custom (76).
331	Laxdaela	47	kept silent	As a rule, if anyone criticised Kjartan, he kept silent or argued in his defence (76).
332	Laxdaela	49	not heard	Bolli acted as if he had not heard (79).
333	Laxdaela	49	no response	Bolli made no response to Kjartan's words, but dealt him a death blow, then took up his body and held him in his arms when he died (79).
334	Laxdaela	52	little to say	Halldor had little to say in reply but told his mother to do as she liked regarding the boy's position (83).
335	Laxdaela	53	little else to say	Halldor had little else to say, although his hatred for Bolli swelled (84).
336	Laxdaela	55	Secretly	He caught sight of the men in the wood and

				their tethered horses, and suspected that anyone who moved so secretly could hardly be on a peaceful errand (85).
337	Laxdaela	55	merely smiled	Gudrun looked at him and merely smiled (87).
338	Laxdaela	57	Refrained	She answered him politely enough but refrained from giving any definite answer (88).
339	Laxdaela	71	talking privately	That winter the brothers met regularly, spending their time talking privately to one antoher and showing little interest in games or other entertainment (109).
340	Laxdaela	71	Talking	Once, when Thorleik visited Tunga, the two brothers spent day talking (109).
341	Laxdaela	71	broke off	They greet him well and immediately broke off their conversation (109).
342	Laxdaela	76	did not speak	Gudrun did not speak to them but entered the church and stayed there as long as she cared to (117).
392	Egils	13		Without saying anything, the king went to where the ship was moored (46).
393	Egils	22		They stayed with him, kept a low profile and spoke little to other people (56).
394	Egils	22		Given what had happened, Sigrid felt she had no choice but to accept the king's will (57).
395	Egils	24		When Kveldulf heard about the death of his son Thorolf he was so saddened by the news that he took to his bed, overcome by grief and old age (58).
396	Egils	25		The king fell silent and his face turned blood-red (61).
397	Egils	33		Bjorn neglects to tell Skallagrim that he has kidnapped the daughter of Skallagrím's friend (71).
398	Egils	36		Although Thorir spoke diplomatically, the king was somewhat curt in his replies, saying that Kveldulf and his sons posed a great threat to them and he expected this Thorolf to have a similar temperaent to his kinsmen (74).
399	Egils	38		Skallagrim inspected the edge without saying a word, then went into the fire-room, climbed up on a bench and put the axe on the rafters above the door, where it was left that winter (75).
400	Egils	40		Then Egil and Thord walked away to their people (77).
401	Egils	40		Skallgrim did not mention the matter and it was left to rest afterwards, but father and son did not speak to each other, neither kind nor

				unkind words, and so it remained through the winter (78).
402	Egils	40		On reaching the ship, Thorolf took the axe that Skallagrim had given to him, and threw it overboard into deep water, so that it never came up again (79).
403	Egils	45		King Eirik was so furious that it was virtually impossible to talk to him, and he said that his faterh would be proved right when he had said that pledges could hardly be made on behalf of those kinsmen (84).
404	Egils	55		Deep as my sorrow is I must keep it to myself (99).
405	Egils	55		The king unsheathed his sword, took a fine, large ring from his arm and slipped it over the point of the sword, then stood up and walked across the floor and handed it over the fire to Egil (100).
406	Egils	56		As autumn progressed, Egil grew very melancholy and would often sit down with his head bowed into his cloak (102).
408	Egils	57		The king took a long time answering his speech (106).
409	Egils	57		Queen Gunnhild breaks up the court to silence her husband's decision (107).
410	Egils	61		King Eirik sat upright and glared at Egil while he was reciting the poem (124).
411	Egils	69		After the Yuletide feast, Egil grew so depressed that he did not speak a word (134).
412	Egils	79		Then they were silent for a while (151).
413	Egils	83		Thorstein let the matter rest, and Thrand started watching over the cattle day and night (167).
414	Laxdaela	4		She had a knorr built secretly in the forest
415	Laxdaela	8		Hoskuld took over all her wealth, althogh his brother Hrut was entitled to half.
416	Laxdaela	9		Bjorn consented for his part, and said in his opinion his daughter could not wish for a better marriage, but referred the question to her
417	Laxdaela	9		She and Hoskuld got along well together, but they seldom showed strong affection for each other.
418	Laxdaela	13		Hoskuld said that she had too long concealed such noble birth
419	Laxdaela	13		Jorunn picked up the socks and struck her with

				them
420	Laxdaela	13		Angered, Melkorka gave Jorunn a blow on the nose, causing it to bleed, before Hoskuld came in and separated them
421	Laxdaela	16		After Vigdis leaves him, Thord gives all wealth to Hoskuld to avoid paying Vigdis her half. He also offeres to foster Olaf Hoskuldsson.
422	Laxdaela	16		Vigdis's relatives have no legal right to any payment as she did not "declare any grounds for divorce."
423	Laxdaela	18		Thord Bellower, the leader of Vigdis's family, accepted gifts and message from Hoskuld and did not take any action on Vigdis's behalf
424	Laxdaela	18		Thorkel Scarf manipulates the story of a family's drowning in order to inherit the wealth and cheats at an ordeal meant to establish the truth
425	Laxdaela	19		Hoskuld refused to give Hrut his share of inheritance.
426	Laxdaela	19		Hrut and Thord Bellower have been exchanging messages.
427	Laxdaela	20		Hoskuld stops looking after Melkorka's affairs and tells Olaf to do it.
428	Laxdaela	20		Melkorka marries Thorbjorn Pock-marked in order to provide Olaf with the necessary goods for him to travel abroad--in part to spite Hoskuld, but also to improve Olaf's standing.
429	Laxdaela	20		Hoskuld's sons, Bard and Olaf, keep Olaf's trip abroad and Melkorka's marriage from Hoskuld
430	Laxdaela	21		King Myrkjartan, after initial exchanges with Ylafr, "inquired more carefully into Olaf's kin than before, as he realized that this man was both proud and careful to say no more than he was asked
431	Laxdaela	21		The king took the ring in his hand and upon examining it, his face grew very red.
432	Laxdaela	21		When Ylafr was ready to return to Norway, he asked to take his mother's nurse with him, "but the king said there was no need to do so, and so she remained."
433	Laxdaela	22		"Olaf remained with the king over the winter, but as spring passed he spoke privately to the king and asked his leave to journey to Iceland that summer."
434	Laxdaela	23		After responding positively to Hцskuld's and Ylaf's request for his daughter ÞOyrgerp's hand in marriage, Egill speaks "privately" with her

				about the matter, as “no man … could make Thorgerd his wife should she be set against it.”
435	Laxdaela	23		The two men spoke privately and Hoskuld asked for news of the marriage proposal. Egil said the prospects looked glum and related what had happened.
436	Laxdaela	25		Hrolf went and told this to Hrut, who said he should pay no attention to Hoskuld and refuse to pay him.
437	Laxdaela	27		At the Alþing, Ylafr takes it upon himself to invite all gopar and promises them gifts, and he invites all others. His unconsulted brother, Barpr and ÞOyrleikr were displeased (summary 37).
438	Laxdaela	29		He had kept this a secret from everybody, and before Olaf realized what was happening Geirmundr had had all his wealth, which was no small sum, loaded aboard the ship
439	Laxdaela	30		They could not provoke Olaf into taking action.
440	Laxdaela	34		Gudrun was not asked for her opinion and, although she was rather against the idea, nothing was done.
441	Laxdaela	35		Audr's brothers were not at all pleased but nothing was done.
442	Laxdaela	36		(summary) In exchange for four horses, Thorleik agrees to house and protect the sorcerer family that killed Thord. Something that displeases the Laugar family greatly.
443	Laxdaela	37		(summary) Thorleik is angry when Hrþtr kills the man stealing Thorleik's horses while Thorleik slept.
444	Laxdaela	42		She walked away blushing. Other people suspected that she hardly thought the nws as good as she implied.
445	Laxdaela	42		(summary) Kjartan doesn’t send a message with Bolli for Gudrun
446	Laxdaela	45		(summary) Kjartan refuses to accept Bolli's gift of a stud of horses of equal but unusual color.
447	Laxdaela	45		"I've been told, brother, that you have been rather quiet this winter, and that people say it's becuase you regret the loss of Gudrun," (Thurid)
448	Laxdaela	46		Gudrun and her brothers are responsible for the disappeance of Hrefna's headdress and the temporary disappearance of Kjartan's sword
449	Laxdaela	47		At this Kjartan's colour rose, as Hrefna's bantering tone had obviously angered tone.

450	Laxdaela	57		(summary) The son of Eid, who was an old man, was killed. One killer was drowned, the other outlawed. People criticised Thorkel Eyolfsson because he took no action.

Appendix D: Silences of Njáll Þorgeirsson

Character	Chapter	Wording (translted)	Context
Njáll	21	Njáll was silent for a while, and then spoke	Njáll is devising a secret plan to get Unnr's dowry back from Hrútr Hérjólfsson
Njáll and Gunnar	22, 23	Njáll called for silence	Using secretly gained information, Njáll is advising Gunnar how to summons Hrútr to court
Njáll	36	Njáll remained silent while Gunnar told him everything	Njáll is creating a plan for Gunnar to atone for his wife's doings
Njáll	37	Njáll had nothing to say	The wives are killing slaves and freemen
Njáll	43	Njáll was silent for a while, and then spoke	The wives are killing slaves and freemen
Njáll	70	Njáll called for silence	Njáll is negotiating for Gunnar with the two Þorgeirs (Mǫrðr Valgarðsson helped Þorgeir Otkelsson to force Gunnar to break a settlement)
Njáll	91	After that Njáll and his sons and Kári had a long hushed talk	Hallgerðr and entourage have publicly insulted the Njálssons
Njáll and Ketill	93	Things were then quiet for a while	Settlement of the slaying of Þráinn is made (þráinn attacked the Njálssons with the group from Hlíðarendi)
Njáll and Ketill	93	No one knew what plans had been made	They made secret plans for Njáll to foster Höskuldr. Ketill offers Þorgerðr that we would foster him, but Njáll then takes him into foster
Njáll	97	Many people came to consult Njal, but he gave advice …ruined…	Njáll gives bad advice and stalls court cases on purpose for his own ends.

Njáll	97	Then Njáll called for silence	Njáll suggests a Fifth Court to address the legal log jam, and offers Höskuld the new goðorð
Njáll	97	Njáll had nothing to say to this	Hródny comes with the body of Höskuldr Njálsson
Njáll	110	Njáll's sons leave him out of their planning	Mǫrðr Valgarðsson has convinced the Njálsson to kill Höskuldr
Njáll and sons	119	Njáll and his sons talked quietly for a long time	They are making legal plans to defend themselves for the killing of Höskuldr