THE LANGUAGE OF INTERLACE
Notes on Composition in Saga and Romance

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There are found throughout saga literature a number of
transitional or reorienting phrases which serve to suspend and
retrieve lines of the story:

1) Nú skal þar til taka, sem fyrr var frá horfit.
                                    Oldest Saga (fragment 3)[1]

2) Sverris saga:
Nu munum ver segia noccora   Nv er at segia nokcura atburði
parta þa er gerðuz i fundi   þa er gerðuz i fundi þessa
þeira .ii. konunga, er nu   .ij. konunga. er þar til at
hefir aðr verit noccut af   taka at Berkibeinar reyru vt...
sagt .verþr nu þar til at   Eirspennill[3]
taca, er aþr var fra
horfit. at Birkibeinar
reru ut fra landi...
         AM 427 4°[2]

3) Trójumanna saga:[4]
Nu er at segia   J odrum stad er   En i oðrum stað
fra Priamo konungi   fra ad segia ad   sendi Priamvs
at hann sendi... O   Priamus konungr   konvngr...
                       senndi... S   Hauksbók

4) Nu er þar til sogo at taca er fyR var fra horfit. er þeir
finnaz iDanmorc...   Morkinskinna[5]

5) Nú ferr tvennum sǫgum fram, ok skal þar nú til taka, sem frá
var horfit, er frá því var sagt, er Óláfr Haraldsson hafði
frið gǫrt...   Óláfs saga helga, Hkr[6]

6) Nú er at segja frá Þormóði, hvat hann hafðisk at, meðan Þor-
geirr var í fǫrum.   Fóstbrœðra saga, ch. 9

7) Nú munu vér hvílask láta fyrst frásǫgn Þormóðar Kolbrúnar-
skálds ok segja nǫkkut af Þorgeiri. (Ch 11) Nú er at segja
frá Þorgeiri... (Fóstbrœðra saga, ch. 11)

8) Hermundr hét sonr hans Eyvindar ok Hrómundr inn halti, er
síðar var getit. (Ch. 24) Látum þar nú fyrst líða um, en
segjum nǫkkut frá Hrolleifi... Vatnsdœla saga, ch. 23

9) Nú er fyrst frá horfit. (Ch. 28) Nú er þar til máls at taka
   um várit, at Bǫrkr ferr til Þorskafjarðarþings... Gísla saga

10) Nú munu vér fyrst láta dveljask sǫguna of hríð ok segja heldr
    nakkvat frá þeim jarteignum háleitum...Orkneyinga saga, ch. 56

11) Nú víkr sǫgunni vestr til Breiðafjarðardala...Njáls saga, ch. 1.

12) Nú er þar til máls at taka, at þeir Grímr ok Helgi Njálssynir
    fóru af Íslandi þat sumar, sem þeir Þráinn fóru útan, ok váru
    á skipi með þeim Ólafi eldu Ketilssyni ok Bárði.
                                        Njáls saga, ch. 83

13) Þar er nú til at taka, er áðr var frá horfit, at Þorbjǫrn
    øxnamegin spurði víg Þorbjarnar ferðalangs, sem fyrr var
    sagt...   Grettis saga, ch. 42

14) Víkr nú aftr sögunni þangat, er fyrr var frá horfit, því at
    eigi verðr af tveimr hlutum sagt í senn, þótt báðir hafi
    jafnfram orðit. (Ch. 24) Nú er frá því at segja, at þau
    fóru ór Garðaríki...   Göngu-Hrólfs saga, ch. 24

Because of their formulaic nature and their evocation of a story-
teller in action, such phrases tend to be ascribed automatically
to oral tradition. Closer inspection, however, produces some
facts which argue against that assumption, at least in unmodi-
fied form: 1) the extant texts give evidence not of an unaltered
tradition taken over from oral prototypes, but of a distinct
literary development in the use of such phrases; 2) the compo-
sitional form such phrases presuppose is itself generally held
to be sophisticated or artificial, not oral; and 3) there are in
romance tradition equivalent formulas, the rhetorical context and
literary evolution of which offer a model against which to meas-
ure Norse practice. The object of this essay, then, is to trace,
to the extent the documents permit, the parallel evolution of
these formulas, first in the sagas, then in French romance tradi-
tion. Three roughly chronological stages can be distinguished:

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on the Norse side, 1) the pre-classical texts in the historical
(king's saga) tradition; 2) the Icelandic family sagas; and 3)
the encyclopedic phenomenon represented in the Greatest Saga of
Óláfr Tryggvason and Flateyjarbók; and on the French side, 1) the
verse romances, particularly those of Chrétien de Troyes; 2) the
prose romances, particularly those of the Vulgate Cycle; and 3)
the encyclopedic phenomenon represented in Les Prophécies de
Merlin.   Since the study of transitional phrases is in effect
a study of composition, the comparison raises larger questions
about the exact relation of the sagas to romance tradition and
to medieval narrative in general.

The main body of Flateyjarbók[8] consists of the adjacent
biographies of the two Óláfrs, into which have been inserted
numerous semi-independent tales. As the preface explains:

> ...þar næst fra Olaafi konungi Tryggua syni medr
> ollum sinum þaattum. þui næst er sagha Olafs
> konungs hins helga Haralldz sunar med ollum sinum
> þaattum ok þar medr sögur Orkneyia jarla...

The "þættir" here come in two forms: wholesale (in single units)
and piecemeal (subdivided and interspersed in the longer narra-
tive). To the former group belong Nornagests þáttr, Sǫrla þáttr,
Rauðúlfs þáttr, etc. To the latter group belong the histories of
the skald Hallfreðr (told in seven segments), Kjartan Óláfsson
(five segments), the Jómsvíkings (two segments), Stefnir Þorgils-
son (three segments), the Vinland voyages (two segments), and the
political histories of the Faroes and the Orkneys (five and four
segments respectively). The fact that the preface does not
differentiate between these types of insertion is of some inter-
est, for it suggests that the two were equated in the contempo-

rary mind and, moreover, that as expansion procedures they were
sufficiently familiar to require no further explanation. The
verbal connectives are, in both cases, transitional formulas.
Particularly telling is the case of Hallfreðar saga, which exists
in an integral version (preserved in Möðruvallabók) derived from
the same original. A comparison of the fourteen narrative seams
of the version intercalated in seven parts into the Greatest
Saga (O) with the corresponding passages in M gives an insight
into the mechanics of plot-braiding:

M	O
Þat sumar fór Hallfreðr til Svíþjóðar ok kom á fund konungs ok kvaddi hann. (Ch. 9)	Nv er þar til at taka er Hallfreyðr uandræða skalld var austr æ Gautlandi .ij. uetr. ok hafði gengit at eiga heiðna kono. hann for æ fund Olafs Suía konungs ok flutti honum drapu er hann hafði ort vm hann.[9] (Ch. 219)
Ok um várit, er hann fór norðr, þá rak á fyrir þeim hríð. (Ch. 10)	Nv skal þar til taka sem fyrr var fra horfit at Hallfreðr vandræða skalld sigldi ut til Islandz vm svmarit aðr en barðagiN varð æ Orminum. kom Hallfreðr vt fyrir norþan land ok reið suðr vm heiði sem aðr er sagt. **(Ch. 264)**

It is clear that the O formulas are not original but are gener-
ated by the interspersing process. The most artificial of com-
positional procedures, in other words, is effected by the most
standard of verbal clichés. What Phase 3 documents, therefore,
is the practical mechanics of narrative stranding in conjunction
with the larger esthetic of copiousness and discontinuity.

It is useful to see the Flateyjarbók phenomenon not as a
thing apart from classical saga composition (Phase 2), but as its
logical extension: the exaggerated and mechanical realization of

a story not as a single, progressive line, but as a number of
lines or threads which the narrator plays out alternately either
at shorter intervals (e.g., in ambush passages) or longer ones
(e.g., when major characters part ways). The former, the shift-
ing of focus between the colliding parties before a climax, is
a familiar feature and requires no further explanation;[10] the
intervals are sufficiently short that transitional formulas per
se are optional. As an example of the latter, chs. 75-89 of
Njáls saga may be cited, where no fewer than five parallel sto-
ries are charted for a three-year period. The passage begins
with the departure from Iceland of Þráinn (strand 1), Grímr and
Helgi (strand 2), the decision of Gunnarr to stay (strand 3), the
departure of Kolskeggr (4), and the arrival of Kolbeinn, whose
story eventually merges with that of Hrappr (strand 5). It ends
with the rearrival in Iceland of four of these men (Þráinn,
Hrappr, Grímr, and Helgi) plus a fifth, Kári Sǫlmundarson, who
will eventually move to the saga's center stage. These strands
are developed in the following order:

1: Þráinn leaves.

2: Grímr and Helgi leave.

3: Gunnarr decides to stay.

4: Kolskeggr leaves

3: Gunnarr spends an uneventful winter and declines a spring
invitation from Óláfr pá. At the Alþing, plans are laid
for his attack, and he is killed in the autumn. His revenant
puts in an appearance. Skarpheðinn and Hǫgni slay Tjǫrvi in
revenge. Njáll negotiates a settlement.

4: Kolskeggr arrives in Norway and winters with Hákon. He kills
Kolr. He accompanies Hákon to Sweden, spends the following
winter with him, hears of Gunnarr's death in the spring, and
delays his return to Iceland on that account.

2: Grímr and Helgi are caught in a storm at sea. They fight with vikings, and engage in a later battle in Scotland. They stay the winter, spring, and part of the summer in the Orkneys. They go raiding with Kári the following summer. They spend a second winter in the Orkneys and leave for Norway in the spring.

5: Kolbeinn, having arrived in Iceland, stays the winter in Breiðdalr. He takes Hrappr to Norway the following summer. Hrappr is outlawed after the Guðrún episode.

2: Grímr and Helgi arrive in Norway and begin trading.

1: Þráinn prepares for his return to Iceland.

5: Hrappr burns the temple and tries to arrange passage to Iceland.

1+5: Þráinn takes Hrappr aboard. The two of them escape and live on Þráinn's farm.

2: Grímr and Helgi flee Norway with Hákon in pursuit. They stay with Eiríkr, sail to the Orkneys, winter with Sigurðr, go raiding in the spring, and return with Kári to Iceland in the summer.

These strands stand in the same relation to Njáls saga as the component "þættir" do to Flateyjarbók. They comprise substories which, however miniature, trace whole plots and are temporally complete (every season is accounted for in each of the five stories). They are incorporated both wholesale and piecemeal: Gunnarr's and Kolskeggr's stories are related consecutively, but the other three are broken apart and interbraided in such a way as to bring out certain contrivances of destiny--the three-plot convergence in Norway in the summer of the second year, for example, or the synchronic idea that while Gunnarr is being attacked in his house, Hrappr is in Norway involved in a liaison with Guðrún, Þráinn is in Sweden, Kolskeggr is in Russia, and Grímr and Helgi are raiding off the Orkney coast.

If this passage is a somewhat elaborate example of narrative

stranding during the classical period, it is by no means an unrepresentative one. There is some variation, but on the whole one is struck less by the differences than by the persistence of the practice in certain standard forms over the full range of texts: short as well as long (Þorsteins saga hvíta, Njáls saga), biography as well as district chronicle (Grettis saga, Eyrbyggja saga), and early as well as late (Heiðarvíga saga, Víglundar saga). The formulas in these sagas are frequent and for the most part functional and impersonal (see examples 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, and 13). Such first-person formulas as exist (see examples 7 8, and 10) tend to be in earlier sagas or in earlier manuscripts of the same saga--a fact which suggests that the epic-dramatic stance is an acquired habit and not a venerable feature of the tradition.[11]

No such claim for uniformity can be made for those pre-classical vernacular works in the historical tradition which comprise Phase 1. Ágrip, Íslendingabók, and Landnámabók all lack transitional formulas per se (although they make use of the related cross-referencing phrases er fyrr var getit, sem áðr er ritat, sem enn mun sagt verða, etc.). Hryggjarstykki may be ascertained (on the evidence of Fagrskinna, Morkinskinna, and Heimskringla) to have been two-ply in parts, but without clear transitional formulas.[12] Fagrskinna in general lacks such phrases (despite a tendency toward stranded composition). The more clearly stranded Morkinskinna, on the other hand, contains several striking examples of suspension and retrieval phrases (see ex. 4). The Legendary Saga is for the most part single-ply, but on those occasions when the narrative divides (e.g., between the king and

Dala-Guðbrandr in chs. 34-36) there are found phrases of the type
Frá því er nú at segja. Parts of Sverris saga exhibit stranding
patterns and language to a remarkable degree; example 2 indicates
the regular tendency of Eirspennill to have impersonal formulations
where AM 427 4° has personal ones.[13] The "articles" attributed
to Styrmir (preserved in Flateyjarbók) give no evidence of
multi-ply composition or transitional formulas, although the
reconstruction of his saga suggests ample use of both (the
famous example 5 may have originated in Styrmir's version of the
Óláfr biography).[14]

Of particular interest are Oddr Snorrason's and Gunnlaugr
Leifsson's biographies of Óláfr Tryggvason, written originally
in Latin but surviving only in translations (and even then, in
Gunnlaugr's case, in the form of piecemeal inserts in the
Greatest Saga and Flateyjarbók). Oddr's saga[15] can be assumed
with some degree of certainty to have consisted of a combination
of single-ply and multi-ply narration, depending on whether the
focus is on the king himself or on the political matrix. But the
MSS differ somewhat on the use of formulas. At some junctures
the correspondence is word for word, but the general rule seems
to be that the longest and oldest version contains more and
longer formulas and uses the first person where later versions
prefer impersonal constructions (thus þat viliom ver oc rita in
A becomes þat er sagt in S).[16]

Gunnlaugr's version of the Óláfr biography[17] appears--to the
extent it can be ascertained at all--to be both more complete and
more systematic than Oddr's version in its pursuit of multiple
parallel lines. Contained in the passages of Greatest Saga

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ascribed to Gunnlaugr are such phrases as:

> Nv er þar til at taka er þeir Olafr konungr ok Þang-
> brandr skildu með vinattu sem fyrr er ritat... ch. 81

> Nv er þar til at taka sem fyrr var fra horfít at
> Olafr konungr TryGva son hafði uerit .ii. uetr
> íNoregi...   ch. 188

Also attributed to Gunnlaugr is the following comment:

> Nv þo at margar ræður ok fra sagnir se skrifadar
> iþessu mali. þær er eigi þickia miðk til heyra sögu
> Olafs konungs TryGva sonar þa þarf þat eigi at vndraz.
> þviat sua sem rennandi vötn fliota af ymissvm vpp
> sprettum. ok koma oll j einn stað niðr. til þeirar
> sömu likingar hafa þessar fra sagnir af ymisligv vpp
> hafi eítt endimark at ryðia til at burða sem Olafr
> konungr verdr við staddr eðr menn hans. sva sem enn
> man synaz iþvi er eptir feR.   ch.177

This defense of multiplicity is of considerable interest, for
although its immediate reference in this context is the Greatest
Saga (or Flateyjarbók), its original referent--assuming that it
is correctly attributed to Gunnlaugr--is Gunnlagur's own Latin
version of Óláfr's biography. This is not to say that Gunnlaugr
meant by the "network of streams" metaphor what the encyclopedists
chose for it to mean, but we may judge from its tone and from
the fact of its inclusion that it indicates a procedure more
copious than was considered customary by the esthetic standards
of the late twelfth century.

The problems of transmission and attribution in these early
texts are such that the work of the author is hard to separate
from the work of later copyists. But it is reasonable to suppose
in this case that the transitional formulas are as old as the sort
of composition they facilitate, for they are punctuation marks
without which the story would be all but incomprehensible. Their
outer form may have undergone mutation, but their existence would

seem to be guaranteed at an early stage by their compositional
function. It is furthermore unlikely on the face of it that such
formulas sprang into prolific and fully functional existence in
classical saga narrative without some prehistory in the pre-clas-
sical period (nor is it likely that every such formula in the
early texts is a scribal flourish). If we therefore assume for
the moment that our picture of the verbal apparatus in this
period is a roughly true one, we observe 1) that the transitional
formulas are fewer in number and less varied in kind than in the
classical texts; 2) that their appearance is sporadic--they are
used fluently in some texts but not at all in others; 3) that
they appear to exist in texts translated from Latin; and 4)
that first-person examples comprise a substantial minority.   In
other words, the regular and patterned use of impersonal transi-
tional formulas we take for granted in classical saga prose is
not reflected in the early period. The impression is one of a
practice in its formative stages and, moreover, one with bookish,
not oral, origins. If such verbal tags as svá er sagt are in
fact oral remnants, they amount in this context to a kind of
camouflage, for the longer formulas in which they are contained
are the concomitants of a specifically literary form of composi-
tion which itself appears to have been in the process of evolu-
tion in the pre-classical period.

The Latin prototype is that figure which Quintilian labelled
an aphodos--a phrase by which an excursus or digression is
joined to the main topic ("longius evectus sum, sed redeo ad
propositum").[18] Aphodoi appear frequently in medieval Latin

historical writings. In Jordanes' Getica,[19] for example, chapters

are regularly concluded and begun with such phrases as these:

Et quia de eius continuatione
pauca libabimus, ad Amazonas,
unde divertimus, redeamus. (VII)

Now that we have devoted a few
words to describing its extent,
let us return to the subject of
the Amazons from which we have
digressed.

Nunc autem ad id, unde digres-
sum fecimus, redeamus doce-
amusque, quomodo ordo gentis,
unde agimus, cursus sui metam
explevit. (XIV)

But let us now return to the
point whence we made our
digression and tell how the
stock of this people of whom
I speak reached the end of
its course.

Ceterum causa exegit, ad id,
unde digressimus, ordine
redeamus. (XV)

But our subject requires us to
return in due order to the
point whence we digressed.

Ad propositum vero, unde nos
digressimus, iubante domino
redeamus. (XII)

But let us now with the Lord's
help return to the subject
from which we have digressed.

Adam of Bremen[20] employs the figure in a more general way to link

and synchronize component parts of the same story:

Nunc ad cetera, unde incepimus,
regrediamur. (I:17)

Now let us return to the other
matters with which we began.

De cuius fortitudine vel
potentia, quam super barbaros
habuit, postea dicemus. Et
haec quidem forinsecus dum
varia sorte gesta sunt, in Bremis
status rerum labefactari cepit.
          (II:79-80)

Of his valor and the power he had
over the barbarians we shall
speak presently. While, indeed,
these things were with varying
fortunes taking place abroad,
the state of affairs in Bremen
began to slip.

Nunc per hystoriae ordinem
redeamus ad ecclesiae
legationem... (II:50)

Now let us return in the order
of our history to the mission
of the Church...

Aphodoi are well represented in both senses (to link digressions

proper to the propositum and to coordinate component parts) in

Scandinavian sources as well. From the Historia Norwegiae[21]

(for which Adam of Bremen's history stood as one source) come

several phrases of the type <u>Revertentes a maritimis transferamur</u> <u>ad montana</u> (But let us leave the coastal regions and turn to the mountains). From the Latin of Theodoricus,[22] who professes acquaintance with Jordanes' work, come many <u>aphodoi</u> of the type <u>Sed revertamur</u> (<u>regrediamur</u>, <u>persequamur</u>, etc.) <u>ad nostra</u> (<u>in</u> <u>Norwagiam</u>, etc.) as well as such phrases as

Sed quia longum est singulis immorari, transeamus ad cætera. (XXIV)	But since it is time-consuming to linger over individual items, let us shift to other matters.

From the <u>De Profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam</u>:[23]

Nunc autem ad ea, que in Dacia super hoc lachrymabili negotio gesta nouimus, uertamus articulum. (III)	But now let us turn the "article" (portion of the narrative) to those matters that we know transpired in Denmark concerning these lamentable dealings.
...sed ad narranda, que restant, reuocetur oratio. (VI)	...let the discourse return to those things which remain to be narrated.
Vt enim ea, que narrare gestio, luculentiori stilo ualeam indagare, superiori reincipiendum est exordio. (XIII)	So that I may be able to explore more clearly those matters I desire to relate, it is necessary to return to my previous point of departure.
Ad illos iterum reuertamur, quorum mentionem supra factam lector inueniet. (XXII)	Let us turn back to those people of whom the reader will find mention above.

The First Grammarian surely had some such Latin phrase in mind when he wrote:

Nú lýk ek hér umrœðu raddar- stafanna, en ek leita viðr, ef guð lofar, at rœða nøkkut um samhljóðendr.	Here I close my consideration of the vowels, and, God willing, I shall try to say something about the consonants.[24]

The correspondence between such Latin phrases as <u>Nunc ad</u>
<u>cetera, unde incepimus, regrediamur</u> or <u>sed ad narranda, que</u>
<u>restant, reuocetur oratio</u> and such Norse phrases as <u>Nú er þar til</u>
<u>at taka, er áðr var frá horfit</u> is likewise such that we may
consider the saga formulas to be vernacular <u>aphodoi</u>--character-
istically depersonalized, and of the sort used to join parts
of the same story.

If this use of <u>aphodos</u> seems to stretch its classical defi-
nition as a figure used to terminate a digression and return to
the <u>propositum</u>, it should be recalled that the idea of digression
itself underwent a corresponding reconception during the period
in question. One of the chief differences between classical and
medieval treatises on the art of poetry is the insistence of the
latter on amplification. Of the various devices to that end,
<u>digressio</u> was the one advocated repeatedly, enthusiastically, and
in remarkably broad terms by the medieval rhetoricians. Geoffrey
of Vinsauf recommended digression in two forms: <u>ad aliud extra</u>
<u>materiam</u> (introducing outside matter--a digression proper) and
<u>ad aliam partem materiae</u> (moving to another part of the same
matter). The second, he explains further, involves omitting
the part of the matter that follows directly and jumping instead
to a later part of the matter.[26] This "intramural digression"
of Geoffrey's is of some interest to literary historians, for it
codifies in theoretical terms a literary practice of such pro-
portions and duration that it may be regarded as a defining
characteristic of medieval narrative. The digression <u>ad aliam</u>
<u>partem materiae</u> amounts to a description of what Ferdinand Lot,
writing of the prose Lancelot, termed <u>entrelacement</u>[27]--a form

of literary composition by which a story is told in two or more
lines with the narrator moving from one action to another, inter-
rupting an episode from one sequence to launch into the matter
of another, and again breaking off to return to the suspended
narrative line: 123, 123, 123 rather than 111, 222, 333. The
precise origins of narrative interlace are not clear, though it
is conveniently associated with the interweavings both of northern
and Romanesque art[28] and with polyphony in music (C.S. Lewis,
writing independently of Lot, called the same practice in Spenser
"narrative polyphony").[29] Interlace tendencies have been dis-
cerned in Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Latin poetry,[30] but the technique
is associated above all with romance tradition, where it is
considered to have its formal beginnings in the works of Chrétien
de Troyes, particularly in those instances (e.g., Perceval) where
the parting of ways of major characters necessitates the forking
of the plot, and where the narrator alternates focus between
lines of action which are understood to be simultaneous. The
synchronic impulse, Vinaver argues, is centrally implicated in
the emergence of interlace composition as the dominant form in
the prose romances of the thirteenth century:

> The next and possibly the decisive step towards a
> proper understanding of cyclic romance is the realization
> that since it is always possible, and often even necessary,
> for several themes to be pursued simultaneously, they
> have to alternate like threads in a woven fabric, one
> theme interrupting another and again another, and yet all
> remaining constantly present in the author's and the
> reader's mind.[31]

This describes the procedure in, e.g., the Prose Tristan, the
Suite du Merlin, the Livre d'Artus, Amadís de Gaula, and the

Vulgate Cycle (these alone amount to some 7,000 pages). Narrative interlace in all these works is both the point of departure for their genesis and development and the basic principle of their construction. Isolated examples of the technique can be found in earlier literature, but it is principally a medieval phenomenon, whose gratuitously developed and extended use in prose romance "may well derive its status as a legitimate artistic procedure from the authority of the rhetoric manuals."[32] It has been called "one of the fundamental esthetic issues of the thirteenth century,"[33] but its popularity survived in some sectors for three centuries beyond that. When Tasso, championing the classical precepts of epic unity, attacked the compositional esthetic of multiplicity in the work of Boiardo and Ariosto, he was in effect attacking the entire medieval system of narration.[34]

But let us return to the topic from which we have digressed: the language of interlace. In the verse romances (Phase 1), transitional phrases are few, largely first person, and used for digressions in both of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's senses. Examples include:

Meis n›i vuel feire demorance
A parler de chascune chose.
A Thessala qui ni repose
de poisons feire et atanprer,
Vuel ma parole retorner.
    Cligés, vv. 3245-50[35]

But I do not wish to stop to
describe all this in detail.
To Thessala, who does not
pause in preparing and ·
tempering her potions, my
story wishes to return.

De monseignor Gavain se taist
Ichi li contes a estal,
Si commenche de Percheval.
Pèrchevax, cè noś dist l›estoire,
Ot si perdu là miemoire
Que de Dieu ni li sovient maïs.
    Perceval, vv. 6214-19[36]

The story is silent about
Sir Gawain at this point.
Perceval, as the story tells
us, had so lost his memory that
he had forgotten God.

Alle ir unmuoze
die lâzen wir nu sîn
und sagen wie vrou Kriemhilt
unt ouch ir magedîn
gegen Rîne fuoren
von Nibelunge lant.
  Das Nibelungenlied, st. 778[37]

Let us leave their bustle and
tell how Kriemhild and her
maidens, journeyed on towards
the Rhine from the land of
the Nibelungs.

Or reviendrai al pedre et la medre,
Et la espose qui sole fut remese:
Quant il ço sovrent qued il fuiz s'en eret,
Ço fut granz dols qued il en demenerent,
Et granz deplainz par tote la contrede.
  La Vie de Saint Alexis, st. 213[38]

Now I shall return to the
father and the mother, and
to the spouse who had re-
mained alone; when they
knew that he had fled, they
mourned greatly, and great
was the lamenting throughout
the country.

It is, predictably, in the prose romances (Phase 2) that <u>aphodoi</u>
appear with mechanical regularity. They are mostly of the
"intramural" type, impersonal, and standard in form. Phrases
like this one from La Queste del Saint Graal occur throughout
the Grail cycle:

Mais atant laisse ore li contes
a parler daus tous. & retorne a
parler de galaad por ce quil
estoit li souereins & commenche-
ment de la queste. Or dist li
contes que quant galaas se fu
partis des ses compaignons..
  La Queste del Saint Graal[39]

But here the tale leaves them
and tells of Galahad, for he
it was who and instigated this
Quest. Now the story relates
that when Galahad had parted
from his companions...

The equivalent cliché in the Amadís de Gaula is:[40]

Do los quales dexará la hystoria
de hablar, y contará de don Gal-
aor...(I:20)

The story will cease to talk
of them, and tell of Don
Galaor...

Phase 3, as in the Norse case, is not so much a phase as a
specific application of the technique for purposes of encyclo-
pedic expansion. The French counterpart of Flateyjarbók is
Les Prophecies de Merlin[41] (ca. 1275), a catalogue of political

prophecies into which are interspersed nineteen semi-independent
stories of a more romantic nature. Thus the story of the Saxon
invasion is related in ten parts; the story of Morgain la Fee in
three parts; the story of Perceval in three parts; the story of
Alixandre d'Orphelin in five parts, and so forth. The Alixandre
history[42] stands in the same relation to the Prophécies as the
Hallfreðr history does to Greatest Saga. In each case, a free-
standing biography of considerable dimensions has been laced onto
a host narrative (itself little more than a compilation of such
strands); in each case, the parts of the substory, removed from
the host text and set together single file, form a continuous
and complete biographical history; and in each case, the inter-
spersing process generates transitional formulas. Two examples
of these formulas in the Prophécies are:

Mes atant s'en test ore li contes et parole d'une autre aventure. (I:87)	But at this point the story is silent on this matter and speaks of another adventure.
Mais je retornerai apres a vos pour conter de ce que j'ai comencie. Ici fenest nostre matiere et retorne a l'autre. (I:116)	But I will return to you later to tell what I have begun. Here our matter concludes and returns to something else.

        In summary: the aphodos is a concomitant of digressio
represented with some frequency in Latin writings in the North
as well as on the Continent; digressio was, together with other
forms of amplification, advocated in the broadest of terms by
the medieval rhetoricians; the reciprocal development in the
literary sphere was narrative interlace, a compositional technique
evident in varying degrees in both romance in saga; the transi-

tional formulas of both literatures--in some cases remarkably
similar--may be regarded as derivatives of the aphodoi; in both
cases these vernacular aphodoi underwent, in their new literary
environments, a rapid generalization in use, particularly in
prose works, and a depersonalization in form; and, finally, they
are used in the later stages to effect encyclopedic compilations
which are themselves hypertrophied expressions of the interlace
technique.[43]

It is finally less the form than the function of such
phrases that identifies them as aphodoi. That the kind of
composition on which they are predicated is not oral, but liter-
ary, is a point on which scholars from Bååth on are generally
agreed.[44] Olrik's eighth "law" remains the most forceful state-
ment on the subject:

> Moderne dichtung...liebt die verschiedenen fäden
> der handlung in einander zu verwickeln. Die volks-
> poesie hält den einzelnen strang fest, sie ist immer
> einsträngig. Sie geht nicht zurück, um fehlende
> voraussetzungen nachzuholen....Wenn in den isländischen
> geschichtswerken sätze wie dieser vorkommen: 'jetzt
> gehn geschichten neben einander' [Nú ferr tvennum
> sǫgum fram--see ex. 5] , dann ist die stufe der
> volkspoesie verlassen, es ist litteratur. Die volks-
> sage hat nur eine geschichte auf einmal.[45]

Following Olrik, W.H. Vogt detected multi-ply narration in the
first half of Egils saga and judged it to be "literary" on that
account; conversely, he regarded the single-ply second half to
be indicative of oral tradition.[46] He tried on similar grounds
to distinguish the traditional from the literary layer in
Bjarnar saga hítdœlakappa.[47] Reinhard Prinz, using more or less
the same scheme, found instances of stranded composition, and

hence a literary sensibility, in Gísla saga.[48] Liestøl found
some cases of simple stranding in folktales and for this reason
preferred, like Heusler, to reduce Olrik's "law" to a "tendency",
but he nevertheless affirmed the underlying principle.[49] Heusler
considered to be clear signs of literary structure (buchmässiger
Aufbau) the sagas' copiousness, polycentricity, and broken chron-
ology:

> Snorris Saga von Olaf dem Heiligen flicht mannigfaltige,
> polyzentrische Stoffmassen ineinander zu einem chrono-
> logisch vorrückenden Ganzen, so dass oft ein Faden
> abbricht und viele Seiten später wiederaufgenommen
> wird. Dieses kunstvolle Verfahren liegt weit ausserhalb
> des Könnens der unliterarischen Sagamänner. Auch die
> äussere Stoffbegrenzung, der Umfang des Werks, über-
> schreitet das dem mündlichen Vortrag Zuzutrauende.[50]

M. van den Toorn arrived at much the same conclusion by using
the tools of modern narrative theory (Lämmert, G. Müller, Jolles,
etc.).[51] Ian Maxwell perceived the non-Aristotelian nature of
saga composition: "These were different stories, with rules of
their own; and although some made complex and beautiful wholes,
their form is not what I should have expected in epic or novel."[52]
Einar Ólafur Sveinsson refers to the composition of Njáls saga
as a "web" or "network of events" and distinguishes it from the
more straightforward patterns of biography or chronicle.[53] What
Anne Heinrichs has recently termed "intertexture" in the sagas[54]
is remarkably like Lot's "principle of inseparability"[55]--the
"system of forecasts and concordances" which binds together the
narrative mass of the prose romances.[56] Lee Hollander, in an
ingenious essay on the "exceedingly multifarious" composition of
Eyrbyggja saga, compared its interbraiding with the practice of

sentence intercalation in skaldic poetry, and concluded that they were manifestations of the same esthetic.[57] Andersson focuses on the macrostructure of the Icelandic family sagas but notes in passing some puzzling instances of "unnecessarily complicated" plot organization.[58] He speculates that the author of Eyrbyggja saga "had chronological sources that called for the interspersing of these episodes"[59] and agrees with Hollander that since the interweaving of plots in this saga could easily be eliminated, it must be deliberate.

What all these commentaries describe, without naming it as such or relating it to its Continental counterpart, is interlace composition. For their style, structure, and subject matter, the sagas are indebted in varying degrees to folktales, heroic poetry, romance, and learned traditions; but as formal constructions they resemble nothing so much as the French cyclic romances. The specific patterns differ: romances pursue fewer lines at greater length and focus on remarkable chronological coincidences, whereas the sagas intertwine a larger number of shorter strands in the interest of tracing subtle webs of acts and consequences in the broader social fabric. But in their copiousness, their inter-weaving of synchronic plot lines, and their obvious delight in the esthetic of multiplicity and recurrence, the sagas and the prose romances are sufficiently alike to be considered manifes-tations of the same phenomenon. The romance model is most immediately helpful in understanding the rapid evolution of the saga from shorter and clearer plots to the voluminous amalgams that we find in the latest period of saga writing.

This history of phrases has suggested that romance interlace and saga interlace represent, at least in the first stages, responses to a common medieval esthetic. Whether such a general drift suffices to explain the parallel evolution in both traditions is of course open to question. To the extent that there was direct influence--the only sure point of contact is the translation into Norse of the verse romances--it would have served to reinforce existing habits and perhaps to contribute certain technical refinements (e.g., the use of suspended animation at transition points). The precise relation, on the compositional level, of sagas to romances and to late medieval narrative in general is a chapter of Norse literary history that remains to be written; what this essay has tried to show is that it is a chapter worth writing. From the point of view of medieval esthetics it is of some interest that interlace literature has a substantial representation in the north. From the point of view of Scandinavian cultural history it is correspondingly important to understand that the sagas are, in the central aspect of their composition, not so anomalous as they are often taken to be, but are full partners in the European literary community.

[1] Gustav Storm, ed., Otte Brudstykker af den Ældste Saga om Olaf den Hellige (Christiania: Grøndahl, 1893).

[2] Gustav Indrebø, ed., Sverris saga (Kristiania: Dybwad, 1920), ch. 91.

[3] Finnur Jónsson, ed., Eirspennill (Kristiania: Thømte, 1916), ch. 81.

[4]Jonna Louis-Jensen, ed., Trójumanna saga, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, Series A, vol. 8 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), p. 63.

[5]Finnur Jónsson, ed., Morkinskinna (København: Jørgensen,1932), p. 56.

[6]All citations from the Icelandic family sagas, Orkneyinga saga, and Heimskringla are from the Íslenzk fornrit editions (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1933–).

[7]Guðni Jónsson, ed., Fornaldar sögur norðurlanda (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1959), vol. 3.

[8]Guðbrandr Vigfusson and C.R. Unger, eds., Flateyjarbók, 3 vols. (Christiania: Malling, 1860-68).

[9]Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta, vols. 1 and 2, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, Series A (København: Munksgaard, 1958 and 1961).

[10]See Theodore M. Andersson, The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 28 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1967), esp. pp. 57-60.

[11]This accords with the findings of Paul Schach, "Some Forms of Writer Intrusion,+ in the Íslendingasögur" Scandinavian Studies, 42 (1970), 128-36.

[12]For a recent discussion of Hryggjarstykki, see Bjarni Guðnason, Fyrsta sagan, Studia Islandica, 37 (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa menningarsjóðs, 1978).

[13]Ludvig Holm-Olsen notes the personal/impersonal alternation in his Studier i Sverris saga, Avhandlinger utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo (hereafter Avhandlinger/Oslo), 1952, II. Historisk-filosofisk klasse, pp. 11-104, esp. 68-71.

[14]Oscar Albert Johnsen and Jón Helgason, eds., Den store saga om Olav den hellige, 2 vols. (Oslo: Dybwad, 1930).

[15]Finnur Jónsson, ed., Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk (København: Gad, 1932).

[16]A=AM 310 4° and S=Sth. 18 mbr. 4°

[17]I have followed Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Om de norske kongers sagaer, Avhandlinger/Oslo, (1936), pp. 1-236.

[18]H.E. Butler, ed., The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian, 4 vols., Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, and New York: Putnam, 1921), vol. 3, IX:3.87. See also Heinrich Lausberg, Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik (München: Hueber, 1960), vol. 1, 187.

[19]Theodor Mommsen, ed., Iordanis Romana et Getica, Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1882).

[20]Bernhard Schmeidler, ed., Adam von Bremen, Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum, 3rd ed. (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1917).

[21]Gustav Storm, ed., Historia Norwegiæ in Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ (Christiania: A.W. Brøgger, 1880).

[22]Ibid.

[23]M.C. Gertz, ed., De Profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam in Scriptores minores historiæ Danicæ medii ævi, 2 vols. (København: Gad, 1918-20).

[24]Einar Haugen, ed., The First Grammatical Treatise, Language Monograph No. 25 of the Linguistic Society of America, 2nd. ed. (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 22-23.

[25]This is the theme of the documents contained in Edmond Faral's Les Arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle (Paris: Champion, 1958). Faral remarks that "L'amplification est la grande chose; elle est la principale fonction de l'écrivain" (p. 61). The relationship between amplification and narrative interlace is treated at some length by Eugène Vinaver, The Rise of Romance (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971), esp. pp. 73-76 and William W. Ryding, Structure in Medieval Narrative (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971), esp. pp. 66-73.

[26]From Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi in Faral, Les Arts poétiques, p. 274: "A materia ad aliam partem materiae, quando omittimus illam partem materiae quae proxima est et aliam quae sequitur primam assumimus."

[27]Ferdinand Lot, Étude sur le Lancelot en prose (Paris: Champion, 1918), esp. the chapter "Le Principe de l'entrelacement."

[28]See, in particular, Vinaver, Rise of Romance (pp. 77-81); John Leyerle, "The Interlace Structure of Beowulf," University of Toronto Quarterly, 37 (Oct., 1967), 1-17. The analogy between the patterns of viking art and skaldic poetry has been pursued by Axel Olrik, Nordisk aandsliv i vikingetid og tidlig middelalder (København: Gyldendal, 1907), esp. p. 101; Andreas Heusler, Die altgermanische Dichtung, 2nd. ed. (Potsdam: Athenaion, 1945), esp. pp. 140-42; Hallvard Lie, "Skaldestil Studier," Maal og Minne (1952), pp. 1-92; and the same author's "'Natur' og 'Unatur' i skaldekunsten (Avhandliger/Oslo, 1957).

[29]C.S. Lewis, introduction to selections from Spenser in George Bagshaw Harrison, Major British Writers, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954), vol. 1, 97-98.

[30]See Leyerle, "Interlace Structure in Beowulf," and Peter Dale
Scott, "Alcuin as Poet: Rhetoric and Belief in his Latin Verse,"
University of Toronto Quarterly, 33 (1964), 233-57.

[31]Vinaver, Rise of Romance, p. 76.

[32]Ryding, Structure in Medieval Narrative, p. 71.

[33]Eugène Vinaver, "The Prose Tristan," in Roger Sherman Loomis,
ed., Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon,
1959), p. 345. The reader is directed to pp. 295-357 of that
work for a brief overview of the prose romance literature.
For a distinction between English and Continental habits of
composition, see Larry D. Benson, Malory's Morte Darthur
(Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 1976), esp. pp.
51-99.

[34]Torquato Tasso, Discorsi dell'Arte Poetica e del Poema Eroico,
ed. Luigi Poma (Bari: Laterza, 1964); Eng. tr. by Mariella
Cavalchini and Irene Samuel, Discourses on the Heroic Poem
(Oxford: Clarendon, 1973).

[35]Chrétien de Troyes, Cligés, ed. Wendelin Foerster (Halle: Nie-
meyer, 1884).

[36]Chrétien de Troyes, Le Roman de Perceval, ed. William Roach
(Genève: Droz, and Paris: Minard, 1959). The corresponding
transition in Parcevals saga is: En nú er at segja frá
Parceval, at... (ch. 18).

[37]Karl Bartsch and Helmut de Boor, eds., Das Nibelungenlied,
2oth ed. (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1972).

[38]Gaston Paris and Léopold Pannier, eds., La Vie de Saint
Alexis: Poème du XIe siècle (Paris: Franck, 1872).
Translation from Ryding, Structure in Medieval Narrative, p. 70.

[39]H. Oscar Sommer, The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances,
7 vols. fol. + index (Washington: Carnegie Institute, 1909-16),
vol. 4, 20.

[40]Edwin B. Place, Amadís de Gaula, 4 vols. (Madrid: Consejo
Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1959-69), vol. 1, 20.

[41]Lucy Allen Paton, Les Prophecies de Merlin, 2 vols. (New York:
D.C. Heath, and London: Oxford UP, 1926).

[42]On Alixandre, see Cedric E Pickford, "Miscellaneous French
Prose Romances" in Loomis, Arthurian Literature esp. pp. 353-54.

[43]It is also worth noting that aphodoi in all three cases--
Norse, Latin, and French texts--tend to coincide with marked
chapters or capital letters in the manuscripts.

[44]A.U. Bååth, Studier öfver kompositionen i några isländska ättsagor (Lund: Gleerup, 1885).

[45]Axel Olrik, "Epische Gesetze der Volksdichtung," ZDA, 51 (1909), 8.

[46]Walther Heinrich Vogt, Zur Komposition der Egils saga (Görlitz: Tzschaschel, 1909). On Vögt's observations, Ole Widding wrote: "Måske er skellet ikke så skarpt som foreslået af Vogt, men afsnittene i højere grad vævet ind i hinanden, --helt efter de middelalderlige regler for litterære lån." Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Thorkil Damsgaard Olsen, and Ole Widding, Norrøn Fortællekunst (Copenhagen: Akademisk forlag, 1965), p. 85.

[47]Walther Heinrich Vogt, "Die Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa," ANF, 37 (1920), 27-79.

[48]Reinhard Prinz, Die Schöpfung der Gísla saga Súrssonar (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1935).

[49]Knut Liestøl, Upphavet til den islendske ættesaga (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1929), pp. 101-2.

[50]Andreas Heusler, Die Anfänge der isländischen Saga, Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse, 9 (1913), paragraph 31; rpt. in Kleine Schriften, 2 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969), vol. 2, 440-41.

[51]Maarten Z. van den Toorn, "Zur Struktur der Saga," ANF, 73 (1958), 140-68; and "Zeit und Tempus in der Saga," ANF, 76 (1961), 134-52.

[52]Ian Maxwell, "Pattern in Njáls saga," Saga-Book of the Viking Society, 15 (1957-61), 17.

[53]Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Á Njálsbúð. Bók um mikið listaverk (Reykjavík, 1943), esp. pp. 39-41; Eng. adaptation by Paul Schach, Njáls Saga: A Literary Masterpiece (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1971), pp. 53-55.

[54]Anne Heinrichs, "'Intertexture' and its Functions in Early Written Sagas: A Stylistic Observation of Heiðarvíga saga, Reykdœla saga and the Legendary Olafssaga," Scandinavian Studies, 48 (1976), 127-45.

[55]Lot, Étude sur le Lancelot en prose, esp. p. 28; see also Vinaver, Rise of Romance, pp. 81-84.

[56]Jean Frappier, "The Vulgate Cycle," in Loomis, Arthurian Literature, pp. 22-23.

[57]Lee M. Hollander, "The Structure of Eyrbyggja saga," JEGP, 58 (1959), 222-27. Hollander orders the strands by number and

concludes: "Unless thus schematized, all these involutions would be hard for us to follow. The modern reader, with a neatly printed text before him, can, to be sure, leaf back at his leisure to disentangle the skein of interbraided events...I believe we must come to the conclusion that the interbraiding, like the intercalation of sentences in Skaldic poetry, is hardly fortuitous; rather it shows conscious planning on the part of an author who has in mind an audience that is constantly on the qui vive and able to follow this method of presentation. He does not merely string along the traditions of his countryside artlessly--popular tradition does just that--but arranges them to suit his purpose." (pp. 226-27). Vinaver makes a similar point: "The assumption [of interlace technique] is not only that the reader's memory is infallible, but that the exercise of such a memory is in itself a pleasurable pursuit which carries with it its own reward" (Rise of Romance, p. 83).

[58]Andersson, The Icelandic Family Saga, esp. pp. 148-52, 160-62, and 208-10.

[59]Ibid., 162.