

Marvin Taylor

On Gizurr Þorvaldsson's Speaking Style [Draft]

One still encounters the claim that the speech of saga characters is not differentiated stylistically.¹ Bouman, though, has observed that the length of sentences can vary in proportion to their "weight" and the importance of the characters who speak them; this relationship holds in the *konungasögur*, where the King is allotted the longest sentences, and in certain *Íslendingasögur* (Bouman 1958: 66-67).² Hallberg, too, has shown that the speech of Njáll and Skarpheðinn in *Njáls saga* is consistently nuanced in characteristic ways (1966: 141-50). In fact, upon closer examination, it is possible to find a number of characters whose speech is distinguished by stylistic features of some kind. Elsewhere I have attempted a stylistic analysis of Atli's speech in *Egils saga* 65 and suggested that he represents the caricature of a courtly aristocrat (Taylor 1992: 118-22). Here I should like to focus on Gizurr Þorvaldsson as he appears in *Íslendinga saga*.³

Sighvatr Sturluson's sarcastic advice to his ambitious son Sturla in *Íslendinga saga* 125 represents one of the saga's stylistic extremes. Here is this part of their exchange:

Þá mælti Sighvatr: 'Þú muntu nú ætla at efna, frændi, er mér er sagt, at þú hafir af höndum látit Reykjaholt. Sér þú nú ok ofsjónum yfir flestum bústöðum, — eða hvar skal staðfestu fá, þá er þér þykkir sæmilig?'
'Þik læt ek nú allt at gera,' segir Sturla.

¹Jeffrey, for example, denies that "peculiarities in the use of speech of the different characters" exist (1934: 53, cited in Bürling 1983: 12n5), and Bürling, too, while arguing that there are psychological differences, agrees with Jeffrey that there are no linguistic ones (1983: 200-03).

²Comparable conclusions were reached for Old English poetry in Perelman 1980: 24-46 and Bjork 1985; cf. Meissner 1924. Hunt has observed (1985: 187-88) that the concentration of 'learned style' features in the *biskupasögur* seems to vary with the 'sanctity' of the subject.

³The discussion of Gizurr Þorvaldsson presented here is largely identical with Taylor 1992: 108-18.

'Ekki er um fleiri at láta en tvá,' segir Sighvatr, 'þegar frá eru teknir biskupsstólarnir. Er þar annarr Oddastafr, en annarr Möðruvellir í Hörgárdal. Þar eru bústaðir beztir ok munu þér þykkja einiskis til miklir.'

'Þessir líka mér báðir vel,' segir Sturla, 'en eigi ætla ek þá lausa liggja fyrir.'

'Margs þarf búit við, frændi,' segir Sighvatr. 'Ráðamann þyrftir þú ok ráðakonu. Þessir menn skyldi vel birgir ok kunna góða fjárhagi. Þessa menn sé ek gerla. Þat er Hálfðan, mágr þinn, á Keldum ok Steinvör, systir þín. Þessi starfi er þeim fallinn í bezta lagi.'

Þá svarar Sturla: 'Þessa er víst vel til fengit.'

'Þá þarftu, frændi, smalamann at ráða í fyrra lagi,' segir Sighvatr. 'Hann skyldi vera lítill ok létt á baki, kvensamr ok liggja löngum á kvíagarði. Þann mann sé ek gerla. Þat er Björn Sæmundarson. En fylgðarmenn skal ek fá þér, þá er gangi út ok inn eftir þér. Þat skulu vera bræðr þínir, Þórkr krókr ok Markús.'

Sturla kvað bræðrum sínum þat vel mundu fara.

'Margs þarf búit við, frændi,' segir Sighvatr. 'Þá menn þyrftir þú ok, sem hefði veiðifarir ok væri banghagir nökkut, kynni at gera at skipum ok því öðru, er búit þarf. Þessa menn sé ek gerla. Þar eru þeir frændr þínir, Staðar-Böðvarr ok Þorleifr í Górbum.'

Sturla lét sér þá fátt um finnast ok lézt þó ætla, at þeir væri báðir vel hagir.

'Svá er ok, frændi,' segir Sighvatr, — 'þá menn þarftu, er vel kunnu hrossa at geyma ok hafa ætlan á, hvat í hverja ferð skal hafa. Þessa menn sé ek gerla. Þar er Loftir biskupsson ok Böðvarr í Bæ.'

'Engi ván er mér þess,' segir Sturla, 'at allir menn þjóni til mín, ok er slíkt þarflausatal.'

'Nú er ok fátt mannskipanar eftir, þat er þykkir allmikla nauðsyn til þera,' sagði Sighvatr, 'en þá menn þarftu, er hafi atdráttu ok fari í kaupstefnur ok til skipa, skilvísa ok skjóta í viðbragði ok kunni vel fyrir mönnum at sjá ok til ferða at skipa. Þessa menn sé ek gerla. Þat er Gizurr Þorvaldsson ok Kolbeinn ungi.'

Þá spratt Sturla upp ok gekk út.

En er hann kom inn, brá Sighvatr á gaman við Sturlu, — ok tóku þá annat tal.

The passage is remarkable both for its cleverly incremented humorous and ironic tension and its controlled, sustained, elevated style.⁴ Among the most obvious stylistic devices are cataphora ("Þá menn ..., sem hefði veiðifarir," etc.) and other hypotaxis, repetition ("Margs þarf búit við," "Þessa menn sé ek gerla"), vocative and apposition ("frændi," "mágr þinn," etc.), clause parallelism, and the tight logical progression of the whole. Although the amount of dialogue attributed to Sighvatr else-

⁴Cf. the psychological analysis in Müller 1939: 52-53.

where is too small for conclusive statistical comparison, it is obvious that the language attributed to him here is not intended to represent his normal speaking style. It is a parody of a particular kind of style.

I am not aware of a source or precise analogue of Sighvatr's speech (the Konungs skuggsjá, my first hunch, contains no comparable scene), but it turns out that a number of stylistic features of Sighvatr's speech are duplicated in a speech delivered by Gizurr Þorvaldsson in ch. 155.

Gizurr is, in fact, unique as a character in Íslendinga saga in that he delivers several relatively long, structured speeches of the classical type, including two in military contexts (137, 155) and one at a wedding (170); as oratory, only documents such as Archbishop Þórir's letter in Íslendinga saga 26 are comparable. Gizurr's other speeches in Íslendinga saga, too, display relative uniformity of situation and style. A large proportion occur in situations in which he is commanding or even intimidating someone (e.g., 156, 200; cf. also the Reykjarfjarðar-bók variant to ch. 195 [vol. 2, pp. 279-80 of the ed.] and Þorgils saga skarða 1). Other types of verbal aggression represented include challenges, resolutions, warnings, refusals, a curse, accusations and criticism, and unspecified expressions of displeasure. There is virtually nothing in what might seem to be informal or colloquial style. Indeed, both the typical discourse situations and the style and structure of the individual speeches suggest comparison with the language of the rulers and courtiers in the konungasögur. (Such a comparison is beyond the scope of this paper; I must be content with mentioning the possibility and referring to Knirk 1981.)

One of Gizurr's military orations even contains a narrative exemplum:

Gizurr talaði þá fyrir líðinu ok eggjaði menn til framgöngu. 'Vil ek eigi,' sagði hann, 'at þér hafið mik á spjótaoddum fyrir yðr, sem Skagfirðingar höfðu Kolbein Tumason, frænda minn, þá er hann fell í Víðinesí, en runnu sjálfir þegar í fyrstu svá hræddir, at þeir vissu eigi, er þeir runnu yfir Jökulsá, ok þar er þeir þóttust skjöldu bera á baki sér, þar báru þeir söðla sína. Leitið yðr nú heldr vaskra manna dæma, þeira er vel fylgðu Sverri konungi eða öðrum höfðingjum, þá er æ uppi þeira frægð ok góðr röskleikr. Efizt ok ekki í þvfi, at ek skal yðr eigi fjarri staddr, ef þér dugið vel, sem ek vænti góðs

af öllum yfir. Er þat ok satt at segja, at sá maðr má aldregi röskr heita, er eigi rekr þessa óaldarflokka af sér. — Gæti vár allra guð, sagði Gizurr. Allirrómuðu þetta erindi vel. (ch. 137)

True or not (the account of Kolbeinn's fall in ch. 21 is not so specific), this insulting story about the Skagfirðingar's panicked flight through the river Jökulsá belongs to an international anecdote type with numerous representatives in historiography, epic, and fabliau. In its best-known form, a flax field is taken for a body of water which must be swum,⁵ but there are also instances—as in Gizurr's speech—of panic or delusion in connection with a real river.⁶

It is not uncommon for saga characters and narrators to mock others' confusion or flight. Agnete Loth (1960) noticed a motif of this general type in parallel passages in Hákonar saga Ívarssonar (p. 40), Morkinskinna (p. 229-30), and Haralds saga Sigurðssonar (Heimskringla) 72 (a horse starts at the enemy's battle cry, its tether flies up and strikes the rider, who believes he has been shot and flees), to which one may compare the story in Íslendinga saga 156 of the confusion wrought by the battle cry of Gizurr's forces (Órækja's men begin to

⁵"Swimming in the flax field" is folktale type AT 1290 and motif type (Thompson) J1821 (cf. D2031, imaginary river). The locus classicus is Paulus Diaconus's report of the Eriulians' flight from the Lombards, Hist. Langob. 1.20; as here, panic is caused by the fall of the leader. In a widespread variant, the water is a sorcerer's illusion: this is represented in Icelandic in Mágus saga jarls (p. 22-23) and elsewhere (e.g., a Séra Eiríkr tale collected by Maurer [1860:162-63]; one is reminded also of Geirrœðr's daughter and Þórr).

⁶The earliest example—though only remotely related—is probably 2Kings 3.22-23, in which the red light of dawn on the water is taken by the Moabites for the blood of their enemies; there is no swimming here, only the fatal rush of the Moabites into the hands of the Jewish army. Closer early medieval analogues of Gizurr's exemplum are Bede, Hist. Eccl. 1.20, in which the Saxons and Picts take the Britons' war cry for the noise of the sky falling, throw off their weapons, and drown in panicked flight through a river (similarly Livy 40.58, though without a river), and perhaps the ninth-century poet Ermoldus Nigellus's description of the Orléanais mocking travelers who swim the Loire: "Aurelianenses illos risere natantes; / turre vocant summa: 'Litus amate, viri'" ("In honorem Hludowici," lines 133-34; cited by Curtius as an example of epic comedy [Exkurs IV.5, 1948: 430]).

attack each other). I have elsewhere collected instances of related motifs in *Íslendinga saga*: coordination problems (falling, etc.), confusion, physical symptoms of fear, irresoluteness (beating about the bush, cowering, wavering, etc.), hiding, and flight (Taylor 1992: 198, 200-01, 211-12). But I have no example of a speaker embedding such a report in a formal oration as Gizurr does. In the closest parallel I know, Flosi's warning to his men that whoever delays will be "svá hræddr, at eigi mun vita, hvert hlaupa skal" (*Njáls saga* 130), the motif is presented as hypothetical result, not as history to be learned from.⁷

Let us return to Gizurr's speech in chapter 155, where he and his men are preparing for Órækja's attack:

Allir skutu nú til sjálfs hans órskurðar, hvers hann væri fúsastr. Gizurr svarar: Þrjú líftast mér ráð til. Þat er eitt at fara í nótt ofan í Flóa í mót lífi váru ok spara eigi, at þeir rekist eftir oss um hrið, er áfr eru farmóðir, ok vita, ef vér mættim ráða stund ok stað, hvar vér finnumst. Þat er annat ráð at fara ofan um ís hjá lðu, — þar var mjó spöng yfir, en þítt var at tveim megin —, 'ok vaka ísinn ok vita, ef vér fáim varit spöngina. Þriðja ráð er þat at búa hér, sem nú höfum vér um búizt, ok senda einhvern góðan mann í móti lífi váru, þann er bæði kunni at skunda ok skipa reiðinni sem helzt gegnir ráði.'

The specific points of similarity between this speech and Sighvatr's in ch. 125 include cataphora and other hypotaxis, alliterative word pairs, repetition, the listing structure, and, from the point of view of content, the search for the "good man" with the qualifications for a particular job. Admittedly, parallels to other saga texts can be found as well. Hrafn and Már in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* 6, for example, discuss personal qualifications in similar phrases.⁸ In *Njáls saga* 29, Gunnarr and his Norwegian benefactors conduct a highly structured question-and-answer discussion as to what help Gunnarr will receive, how the ships he is given will be staffed, etc. Sighvatr's phrase "sé ek gerla" is

⁷Þórhallur Vilmondarson observes that Gizurr's "eggjunarráða" may have been the model for those spoken against the Hólmverjar in *Harðar saga* (1991: lx); the latter are more fragmentary, though, and contain no exemplum.

⁸'Þat væri mér skapfelldast at vera með þeim mönnum, er ódælir væri ok kynstórir, ok veita þeim eftirgöngu.' Már sagði: 'Slíkir menn væri mér vel hentir, sem þú ert.'

used by Egill in an argument with royal messengers in Egils saga 70 and by Flosi in a long deliberative speech in Njáls saga 117. Indeed, Njáls saga contains a large number of long, logically structured speeches of the same general type as those of Sighvatr and Gizurr (e.g., Njáls saga 7, 22, 64, 65, 67). Potential rivals are listed and evaluated in Valla-Ljóts saga 2 (with "sé ek þar fjóra menn," etc.) and Gunnlaugs saga 2 (in less detail). The "regal" family setting and, to a certain extent, the content of Sighvatr's advice speeches is duplicated in Óláfs saga helga (Heimskringla) 76 in an extended scene in which the King, visiting his mother, questions his small brothers, who are playing outdoors with toy models, about their ambitions for their future estates. As in the scene between Sighvatr and Sturla, the speeches follow a structured progression: the first brother's desire is to possess a fleet, the second brother as much farmland as ten farms, the third so many cows that they would encircle a lake when they came to drink, and the fourth brother so many household staff members that they would consume the third brother's cows at one meal. At this Óláfr pronounces the fourth brother a future king.⁹ The differences between the Óláfs saga scene and Sighvatr's speech are obvious: in the former, the king-as-child motif is taken seriously and the ambition of founding a powerful estate is praised, while in the latter the motif is parodied and the ambition mocked. Still, the similarity is clear and shows that Íslendinga saga 125 must be considered in the context of medieval Scandinavian literary conventions and ideas concerning monarchy and power. A further link between the Óláfs saga scene and Íslendinga saga is suggested by the fact that the former is immediately preceded by a scene in which, on Óláfr's arrival, he and the boys regard each other critically and the verb "ygglá" (scowl) is used; in Íslendinga saga 50, when Gizurr's father presents his various children to Sighvatr Sturluson for his critical appraisal, Sighvatr criticizes only the boy Gizurr, whose "ygglibrún" displeases him. But none of these parallels is as close in both style and content to Íslendinga saga 125 as Gizurr's deliberative speech in ch. 155 is, so it makes sense to look more closely at the

⁹A comparable test of three ostensible king's sons by means of fantasy questions (what bird they would like to be) is Gering's *Æventyri* no. 79, summarized in Kalinke 1989: 1.

relationship between the two passages within Íslendinga saga as a whole. Can the similarity be coincidental?!

The goal of Sighvatr's mockery is to criticize his son Sturla for wanting to be in some respects too much like a king, and the vehicle of the mockery is a pseudocourtly style, delivered as if Sighvatr were advising a young prince. As monarchy and courtly life were institutions that for Icelanders were associated primarily with Norway, the charge of acting like a king may in some cases have amounted to the charge of bearing Norwegian sympathies or having been in some way Norwegicized. By the thirteenth century, the rivalry between Icelanders and Norwegians had become considerable indeed.¹⁰ In fact, many years ago, Ker observed that this rivalry is the basis for a stylistic caricature in the account of the priest Ingimundr Þorgeirsson's shipwreck in Prestssaga Guðmundar góða 6:

One may remark, by the way, that there is something more than history in it, a comic or satiric motive, springing from the old humorous difference between Icelanders and Norwegians. The Norwegians were sometimes rude to the Icelanders: they called them 'tallow-sausages,' with other similar names. Here the Icelandic author takes revenge in a genial way, by merely recording the rather helpless and flurried talk of the Norwegian shipmen. (Ker 1906-07: 100)

The Icelander Ingimundr, by contrast, remains cool-headed and authoritative.

In addition to the political threat increasingly posed to Iceland by the centralized Norwegian crown, there is ample evidence in the sagas of a cultural tension between the traditional lifestyle of the Icelanders and the new, continental trends followed at the Norwegian courts and in the Norwegian towns. We may note the implicit criticism directed at Snorri and his retinue's shields on their return from Norway (Íslendinga saga 38: "höfðu meir en tólf skjalda ok alla mjök vandaða ok létu allvænt yfir sér"); another demonstration of hostility toward Snorri

¹⁰ See Ljósvetninga saga 19 and Björn Sigfússon's note there (with reference to Yðu-Brands þáttir, Víga-Glúms saga 2-3, etc.); further Andersson 1991: 77-79.

after his return took the form of parodies of the effusive encomium he had composed on his Norwegian patron Skúli (*ibid.*, 38-39). Snorri's enemies' objections to the poem must have been to a large extent political, but they seem also to have had aesthetic grounds: one of the parodies refers to Snorri as a poetaster of the worst sort, and the parodists focus on Snorri's line "harðmúlaðr vas Skúli," which seems to have struck them as an overwrought metaphor. So it is possible that the report of Snorri's poem and its parodies is meant to suggest that his vanity had a stylistic dimension as well. This negative view of Norwegian courtly culture seems to apply also to the flashy but poorly made axe that King Eiríkr Blóðøx gives to Skalla-Grímr in Egils saga 38; the sagaman describes in detail the scorn with which Grímr, a smith, treats the gift, and eventually it is simply thrown away into the sea.¹¹

Although many Icelanders were adept at learning to function in foreign cultural and intellectual milieus and assimilating the best elements for their own use at home, these endeavors were not always viewed positively: the learning of foreign languages appears in a negative light already in some of the *riddarasögur* (Kalinke 1990: 43, Kastner 1978).

Political tension is evident also in the attitudes toward monarchy displayed in the *Íslendingasögur* and Sturlunga. The weak, cowardly king is a recurring feature in Egils saga, for example. The accusation of "wanting to be king" seems almost to have been a standard criticism or insult directed by Norwegians at Icelanders, who, ironically, as a rule had no interest in monarchy either for themselves or others. In Egils saga 12, Þórólfr Skallagrímsson is slandered with wanting to usurp the Norwegian throne and with being so vain that he would have burnt the King to death if that had not meant the loss of his own new, ornate hall—a false charge, as Þórólfr is absolutely loyal (to a fault,

¹¹Nationalistic resentment of this type, though from a Danish perspective, has been identified by Andersson (1991: 76-77) in Saxo's criticism of the twelfth-century King Svend's love for Saxon fashion, food, and customs (Saxo 14.9.1-4, pp. 387-88; cf. also the account of Svend's visit to Merseburg: 14.8.2, p. 386).

actually).¹² In Íslendinga saga 35, an Icelander is mocked in Bergen as wanting, on the basis of his royal ancestry, to exact oaths of allegiance and mount a claim to the Norwegian throne. This is the kind of insult referred to in Njáls saga 116, in which Hildigunnr's first ploy in inciting her guest Flosi to vengeance is to flatter him by offering him a specially raised seat of honor. He casts it aside, saying, "I am neither a king nor an earl, and I am not to be set on a throne and made fun of." In Bandamanna saga 10, the word "king" functions as a mocking term of abuse: during a jury selection, two candidates are said to be "arrogant as a king" and loyal to the Norwegian King, respectively, and both are dismissed with the remark, "you won't be king over this case."¹³

The same political and cultural tensions are embodied in Gizurr Þorvaldsson, one of the most controversial figures in Icelandic history. Although the image of Gizurr in Íslendinga saga, our principal source of information, is by no means uniformly negative, it is dominated by his unscrupulous rise to virtually absolute power which, once attained, he turns over to Norway, and for this reason Icelanders have generally viewed Gizurr as more of a traitor than a hero. Nevertheless, he has had defenders (e.g., the author of a modern play about him), and scholars have been divided as to how fairly he is treated in Íslendinga saga and the other parts of Sturlunga. Björn Magnússon Ólsen postulated a lost *Gizurar saga, which he thought was reworked by Sturla Þórðarson in Íslendinga saga to place Gizurr in a negative light (1897; cf. Sigurður Nordal 1942: 347, Úlfar Bragason 1986: 25); Pétur Sigurðsson responded by defending Sturla's impartiality with respect to Gizurr (1933-35: 14-20).

¹²The same slander story appears, *mutatis mutandis*, in Njáls saga 109 (see Kersbergen 1927: 74); the motivation for the alleged disloyalty (among friends) is expressed by the slanderer in terms of a power struggle for *goðorð*.

¹³On Icelandic attitudes toward monarchy see also Hermann Pálsson 1990; further Þórhallur Vilmandarson's discussion of Sturla Sigvatsson's apparently real desire to be king—or at least to have the trappings of one, such as fortified castles: 1991: LII-LVII.

The information we have from Íslendinga saga itself about Sturla Þórðarson's relationship with Gizurr indicates a certain ambivalence. Though not himself a major figure in the power struggles of the time, Sturla was usually a member of the faction opposing Gizurr, and on one occasion was tricked and taken hostage by him at a negotiation meeting (157). For a period of about two years, though, perhaps in part as a result of his association with Gizurr as hostage, Sturla seems to have been on excellent terms with him: he marries off two daughters into Gizurr's family, for example, becomes his *lendr maðr*, and privately, as well, they are described as friendly with each other (195). But just before the final loss of independence in 1261, Sturla breaks with Gizurr when he fails to make good his promise to grant Sturla Borgarfjörður as a fief (197). Sturla's judgment of Gizurr seems to have colored by this break from then on, and although it is not known when Sturla began to write Íslendinga saga, it is likely that even the portions covering earlier years were written or rewritten from the post-break point of view. It is clear that Sturla repudiates Gizurr's opportunism and regards the loss of Icelandic independence as a tragedy, though he does not say so directly and though he himself, ironically, was at one point willing to receive his beloved Borgarfjörður as a fief from Gizurr's hand.

These circumstances suggest that Gizurr could well have been regarded by Sturla and other Icelandic contemporaries as politically and culturally too Norwegicized. Little is told directly in Íslendinga saga of Gizurr's stays in Norway, but what little there is, is punctuated by two unflattering reports: as a young steward in Bergen, the drunken Gizurr one night held an Icelandic relative under the blows of a servant, from which the relative died (ch. 79); and in ch. 192 it is suggested that Gizurr was able to grow in esteem at court only through the death of another Icelandic courtier, Þórðr kakali, his chief rival for favor with the Norwegian King. It is true that the oracular dream-woman in Íslendinga saga 190 is "well disposed" toward Gizurr and designates not him, but Þorgils skarði as a "bird that fouls its nest," i.e., a traitor, but this passage, along with certain others, is thought to be an interpolation by the compiler of Sturlunga saga, whose judgment of Gizurr seems to have been more favorable than Sturla's (Úlfar Bragason 1986: 170-78).

Especially in the light of the circumstantial evidence, then, the similarity between the sarcastically "regal" speech in ch. 125 and the style associated with Gizurr later in Íslendinga saga suggests that the sagaman may have intended a kind of subtle criticism of Gizurr through a style elevated—beyond the demands of naturalism in the presentation of dialogue—into the realm of caricature. If so, Gizurr would be linked with the type of the xenophile who scorns both homeland and native speech, such as the prodigal son Helmbrecht in the Middle High German Meier Helmbrecht of Wemher der Gartenære, a work contemporary with Íslendinga saga, or several figures in the plays of the Dane Ludvig Holberg. The type is represented also in the writings of Baldvin Einarsson, one of the founding fathers of the modern Icelandic republic (Árni Bððvarsson 1964: 198).

This interpretation of the style of Gizurr's speeches is supported by an event early in Gizurr's career reported in Íslendinga saga 129, when Gizurr is temporarily defeated by his rival Sturla Sighvatsson and must promise to go into exile in Norway: he tells Sturla, when asked, that he would prefer to swear the required oath in its Norwegian rather than Icelandic form. The distinction is evidently one of diction, not dialect. The preference has been interpreted as a mocking allusion on Gizurr's part to *Sturla's* ties to the Norwegian crown (e.g., Úlfar Bragason 1986: 111; cf. Madelung 1972: 195), but the passage can also be read as the sagaman Sturla Þórðarson's implicit indictment of *Gizurr's* Norwegianism. Sturla Sighvatsson had, indeed, spent time in Norway and apparently received orders to bring Iceland under his control and deliver it up to the crown (see note 13), but it must be remembered that Snorri Sturluson and, later, Gizurr himself, received such orders, too. Snorri defied his, and Sturla's power never became firm enough to allow him to carry such orders out. Gizurr, on the other hand, as we know, defeated and killed Sturla and his father Sighvatr in 1238, and afterwards, acting on direct orders from Norway, assassinated Snorri, accepted the title of jarl and large parts of Iceland as fief from the Norwegian crown, and arranged eventually for the Icelanders to surrender their sovereignty completely. Moreover, Íslendinga saga makes the contrast in character between Sturla Sighvatsson and Gizurr clear: both were

ambitious, but Sturla was impetuous and naive, while Gizurr was cool and calculating. It is difficult to imagine the ingenuous Sturla as the agent of a foreign king, but Gizurr's adroitness in political intrigue and deceit, reported in Íslendinga saga again and again,¹⁴ together with his mannered, cosmopolitan speaking style, which is explicitly praised several times, make him the sort of international figure who would be at home in any medieval European chronicle. If any Icelander in Íslendinga saga is Norwegicized, it is Gizurr. To sum up: even if it is true that Gizurr is (intended by the sagaman to be) making a veiled criticism of Sturla Sighvatsson's Norwegicism by offering to swear a Norwegian oath to him, the irony of the criticism cannot have been lost on the sagaman, who must have seen the passage, on one level at least, as an indictment of Gizurr's own Norwegicism.

The foregoing argument is based on the premise that the sagaman was able to stylize the speech of a certain character in a relatively uniform way. Obviously, this does not preclude the possibility that the actual speech of the real Gizurr Þorvaldsson distinguished itself in more or less this way from that of other Icelanders of his time. Several considerations make this likely, in fact. For one, sagaman Sturla was a contemporary and erstwhile associate of Gizurr's and thus able to draw from life. Also, Gizurr was by all accounts a man of culture and achievement with a strong sense of his own importance, and it is only natural that he would have chosen his speaking style carefully. He was probably educated enough and familiar enough with the European tradition of political and military leadership to have delivered formal, rhetorical speeches of the type transmitted in Íslendinga saga.¹⁵ It is also quite possible that Sighvatr really did at one point give his son Sturla the sarcastic advice in pseudocourtly style that is reported in ch. 125. If so, whom or what he was parodying? That is, where did he get his idea of courtly style? Could the source have been the Konungs skuggsjá or riddarasögur, personal contact with foreign courts or

* ¹⁴Examples in Þórhallur Vilfrundarson 1991: LXII-LXIII, Taylor 1992: 222-25, 329.

¹⁵On the question whether military leaders actually gave or could have given the speeches attributed to them in classical historiography, see Norden 1958: 87n1; the answer seems to be yes.

people who had spent time at them? Was Sighvatr parodying the style of a particular person he knew? If so, it probably cannot have been Gizurr, who would still have been rather young to serve as the stylistic source of Sighvatr's parody in real life, despite the fact, as we have seen, that his speeches provide the closest parallel to it in Íslendinga saga and that Sighvatr's antipathy toward Gizurr is signaled already in the latter's childhood.

In any event, the actual speech of real medieval people is beyond reconstruction. We can reconstruct, to a certain extent, typical vocabulary, phraseology, syntactic and stylistic patterns of the spoken languages, but we can only rarely be certain that a given speech transmitted in a text was actually spoken by the person it is attributed to, or by anyone else for that matter. The fact that any writing, even copying or compiling, necessarily involves some degree of editing and stylization in the broad sense (at least the choice of what to copy and what to omit) means, of course, that we must treat a text primarily as an artifact, not as fossilized speech. In the case of the present investigation, this means that when we notice a unique similarity between Sighvatr's mockery in ch. 125 and Gizurr's address in ch. 155, we are justified in looking for a connection within the framework of the text as a whole. Indeed, although we must perhaps rule out that either Sighvatr the character or Sighvatr the real person could plausibly have intended to parody Gizurr specifically, it is evident, when we take stock of the style attributed to the different characters in the text, that the speech in ch. 125 mimics a stylistic type that the sagaman consciously associated with him.

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Marvin Taylor
Ruhr-Universität Bochum