

**The Silence of *Sigurðr þogll* – *Vox Articulata*, *Vox Humana* and *Vox Animalia* in *Sigurðar saga þogla***

Herbert Wäckerlin  
(University of Zürich)

**Introduction**

It is not very often that scholars have studied indigenous romances like *Sigurðar saga þogla* as discrete texts. What distinguishes late medieval Icelandic romances in general from the rest of Old Norse literature is probably their schematic narrative structure, their purported lack of historical reliability as *lygisögur*, as well as their almost inherent intra-generic intertextuality. Motif-hunting, thematic comparison with similar texts in similar settings (e.g. with continental Arthurian texts or bridal-quest romances), and structuralistic analysis – entailing the collection of extensive motif-indices – have therefore been the usual methodical approaches followed by textual scholars of Old Norse. It is commonly acknowledged that indigenous romances excel neither in style nor in idiosyncratically characterised protagonists, nor do they stand out as particularly metaphorical, let alone allegorical, or even ironic and self-reflective texts. It is exactly in what we as modern medievalists might perceive as a lack in literary complexity, however, that their audiences from the late middle ages to modern times found most pleasure, a fact evidenced by their long manuscript transmission.

Apart from the obvious statement that no text is without its references – if not to some kind of historical reality, then at least to other texts –, the following brief study of voice and silence in *Sigurðar saga þogla* might open a wider and more fruitful way of reading indigenous romances. Basically following a New Historicist approach, I assume an understanding of discursive referentiality removed one step from ‘concrete’ intertextuality, where interrelations of textual sequences or narrative themes were to be directly shown. This excludes not only ‘concrete’ intra-generic references like those mentioned above, but also extra-generic ones. In other words, it is not to be expected that, in *Sigurðar saga þogla*, I will find direct references to Church doctrines or classical authorities on voice and silence that display the signs of intertextual borrowing. I rather presuppose that some quite perplexing scenes of the narrative connected with the topic might be seen in a different light, when certain institutional and, by implication, intellectually common discourses are taken into consideration in a broader context.

At the core of my study, therefore, lies a complex of generic implications that lead to a possible range of reader expectations. As I said above, indigenous romance among other closely related genres is, almost by definition, linked with readers’ expectations of ‘concrete’ intra-generic intertextuality, its schematic structure leading to borrowings of motifs, themes and even whole scenes, which seem to be freely interchangeable and used in the way of a collage. These strongly formalistic characteristics certainly facilitated the introduction of the German generic term of ‘Märchensaga,’ as it is in these features that indigenous romances most strongly resemble the genre of *Märchen*. Max Lüthi (Lüthi, 1997 [1947]) convincingly argues for a certain generic hermeticism (‘Isolation’) and at the same time a distinctive inclusiveness (‘Welthaltigkeit’) of *Märchen*, in that they abstract real life topics by

converting them into figures that signify only within their own *Märchenuniversum*. His analysis implies that, if the genre of indigenous romance were to function like *Märchen*, we could not expect any extra-generic references to other textual genres or extra-textual institutions like the Church, as it would already include and abstract all other discourses within its own intra-generic system of signification. If the term 'Märchen-saga' is validly applied, however, it readily displays that we can expect certain features of the Icelandic saga to form part of the narrative structure of indigenous romances as well. These features should allow for a certain extra-generic referentiality, even if – as I also stated above – we cannot expect too high a level of rhetoricity, let alone anything close to the ironic quality exhibited by many family sagas of the 'classical' saga period.

In the following, I will attempt to exemplify the hypothesis that there is a specific way, in which indigenous romances are open to discursive referentiality, by focusing on a peculiar scene in *Sigurðar saga þögla*, the lion-knight scene. In this scene, Sigurðr is re-introduced after his absence from the story of about ten chapters. The episode allows me to show in how far the whole narrative cannot be fruitfully read in a pure *Märchen*-context. It will not be enough to analyse and compare its motifs and structure with the sole purpose of simply stating them, as the idiosyncrasy of the scene in question calls for a wider perspective.

#### **Vox: Natural Voice and Articulation**

*Sigurðar saga þögla* has been rightfully called a 'bridal-quest romance' (Kalinke, 1990) or, generically even more specific, a 'maiden-king romance,' (Kalinke, 1990) as prince Sigurðr woos maiden-king Sedentiana and, after having punished her for seriously humiliating her potential husbands, he marries her successfully. It is also the story of Sigurðr the lion-knight – built on the pattern of an episode in Yvain's tale –, who defeats a fearsome dragon and thereby rescues a lion, which becomes his companion and friend for several episodes. Furthermore, it is the story of several sworn brothers fighting many battles at sea and on land, including – in one of the two narrative redactions – the account of the siege of maiden-king Sedentiana's main city, Treveris, where they have to withstand assaults carried out with the latest weaponry, which in turn leads to the only mention of firearms (ON *bysstur*) in Old Norse literature (*Die Saga von Sigurd Thögli*, 1998, 427-431). Not least of all, one could also focus on the immense violence between the sexes in Sedentiana's and Sigurðr's reciprocal humiliation, including a quite drastic rape-scene. Most of these narrative themes could be more or less readily interpreted within the boundaries of intra-generic comparison.

Astonishingly enough, however, one thematic complex has never so far been particularly foregrounded, i.e. Sigurðr's silence, as marked by his odd epithet. This may partly be due to the fact that, on the surface, Sigurðr displays all the characteristics of the *kolbíttr* figure, a 'male Cinderella' sitting close to the hearth, showing all the symptoms of a simpleton not worthy of heroic distinction, which of course turns out to be a faulty conclusion, when – later in the narrative – he easily surpasses his brothers in renown (Aarne/Thompson, *Unpromising hero/heroine* L100-199). This motif in itself is to be found in several Icelandic sagas and would not be particularly noteworthy, were it not for its idiosyncratic narrative subtype (Aarne/Thompson, L124 *Dumb hero* > L124.2 *Silent hero*) in *Sigurðar saga þögla*

with its allusions to much wider discursive strands, namely that of voice, speech, muteness, and silence.

According to medieval authorities like Priscian, Remigius of Auxerre, and other influential and widely read grammarians, what is at stake in *Sigurðar saga þøgla* is nothing less than the human nature of the main protagonist. To take Priscian's influential subdivision of *vox*, we can speak of *vox articulata*, *vox inarticulata*, *vox literata*, and *vox illiterata* (Allen, 2004, 306-10). Whereas the latter two divisions deal with the scriptability and non-scriptability of vocal utterances, the former two make an intellectual difference. *Vox articulata*, alluding to the limbs and joints of the body, refers to vocal sound that is distinctly divided or syllabic, and by extension also intelligible (Allen, 2004, 306). *Vox inarticulata*, thus, refers to unintelligible vocal utterances. For Priscian, *vox articulata* and *vox inarticulata* can only be categorised in combination with the aspects of *literata* and *illiterata*, which basically means that, for him, human speech is a special vocal sound presupposing its own scriptability (*literata*), whether it is intelligible (*articulata*) or 'barbaric' (*inarticulata*). Following this logic, non-scriptable vocal sound (*vox illiterata*) is by necessity excluded from any kind of human language.

This distinction of vocal sounds according to the grammarians' discourse alone is not, however, what makes Sigurðr's silence precarious, but it becomes significant in connection with the distinction between *vox humana* and *vox animalia* in a discourse intrinsic to the grammarians' one (Schnyder, 2006 [forthcoming]). This primary division preceding scriptability and articulation becomes especially important in discourse on the human capacity for singing. *Vox humana* is there defined as having the potential of producing all the abovementioned vocal sound combinations, whereas to *vox animalia* this potential is denied. Within the category of non-speech sounds (*voces illiteratae*), *vox humana* and *vox animalia* cannot be aurally distinguished and become *voces naturales* ('natural vocal utterances'). In contradistinction to *vox humana*, though, *vox animalia* is confined to producing only *voces illiteratae*, 'non-scriptable vocal utterances'.

Remarkably enough, this nevertheless allows for *vox animalia* to produce intelligible sound (*articulata*), which we can see in the way Sigurðr's lion friend communicates with him. Once, at night, the lion lies in front of Sigurðr's tent, as [leonit] tok [...] ath *Remia*. og [Sigurðr] þottizt *Skilia* ath eitthuat munde þat til bera er dyrinu munde vmrads vert þikia (*Sigurðar saga þøgla* [= *Sþ*], 1963, 148,5-7; my italics).

Clearly, the lion's roar is a non-speech sound, which is nevertheless *articulata* enough for Sigurðr to deduct its signification correctly. In another episode, one of Sigurðr's brothers, Vilhjálmr, gives a gold ring to a dwarf child, who takes it up, *skellði upp og hlo* (*Sþ*, 115,22-23). Even more articulate in his use of signifying systems is a Cyclops, who combines sign language with vocal utterance:

Hann *kuacade* til þeira med palstaf er hann hafði j hendi. og suo þotti þeim hann *blijstrade a þaa* (*Sþ*, 118,11-13).

Shaking his spear and whistling to them, he seems to (magically?) lure the brothers Hálfðan and Vilhjálmr to the shore in order to fight them by using intelligible non-speech sounds.

In the case of Sigurðr, things look bleak at the beginning of the saga. The problem is the fact that *þaa er hann var .uij. uetra gamall hafði eingi þa heyrt hann tala* (*Ssb*, 98,3-4), which disturbs family and folk alike. At first:

þui eingi þottizt uita ath hann munde *manna mal skilia e(dur) mundi hann mallaus,*' (*Ssb*, 98,19-21; my italics)

they are insecure about his mental as well as his bodily state: [...] *Sigurd reiknade einngi maður huort hann war e(dur) ei* (*Ssb*, 104,5-6). Depending on how one interprets this statement, it seems that, here, Sigurðr's humanness is explicitly doubted and he is moved towards the domain of the monstrously deficient. He does not speak, therefore he cannot understand human speech, therefore he is no man at all. Even Sigurðr's lion friend fares better. While Sigurðr shares his dinner with the lion, the narrator describes Sigurðr's realisation

ath þetta dyr mun *naliga kunna mannz male* (*Ssb*, 144,15-16; my italics).

Later on in the narrative, the people clearly interpret Sigurðr's silence as muteness:

[...] *hørmudu miog er þeir hugðu hann eigi mæla mega sem adra menn. og suo søgðu þeir 'þu hamingia' s(ogdu) þeir 'Huij uilldir þu nockut aa lata skorta þijnar gjafir vit þenna mann. hueria søc gerde hann þier. þa er þier þotti þess vert at hann skyllde ei mæla mega.'* (*Ssb*, 136,4-10; my italics)

What becomes clear in their statement is, on the one hand, that muteness is considered a deficiency connected to intellectual capacity as, in absence of its full potential, the voice can no longer mark a being as a non-animal; I will come to that in the next chapter. On the other hand, the episode also prompts us to evaluate Sigurðr's alleged muteness in a different manner than his effective silence, or voluntary muteness. What the narrator does not allow the people of Saxland to know at this point is that, two chapters before this episode, he has already made it clear that Sigurðr is not mute at all. The attention has been shifted to the question of whether Sigurðr just produces unintelligible speech sounds (*voces inarticulatae literatae*) or even unintelligible gibberish (*voces inarticulatae illiteratae*). This is Sigurðr's litmus test, because his humanity can only be ascertained by the potential scriptability of his utterances, which would be unattainable to non-humans. The unique episode I refer to is the one in which Sigurðr (strangely disguised as a lion-knight) sits in a tree above his two elder brothers Hálfðan and Vilhjálmr and overhears their conversation, while Hálfðan mocks Vilhjálmr concerning the shameful treatment they received from maiden-king Sedentiana, after she had rejected Hálfðan's marriage-proposal:

og sem Half(dan) hefir Rætt og Rausat þessa hluti þaa heyra (þeir) up j þessaa sturu eik *manz mal. og þo eigi aa þaa tungu at þeir mætti skilia.* (*Ssb*, 132,8-11; my italics)

The way, in which the narrator describes these vocal utterances, makes it immediately clear to the audience of what kind they are. However, this is not the way in which both brothers interpret them. In typical *Märchen*-fashion, Hálfðan fulfils the role of the anti-hero (who even dies at the end of the saga). He is the one who wholly misinterprets Sigurðr's silence as non-human, almost monstrous babbling, totally devoid of meaning:

[...] 'þuiat þath sem hann uilldi *drafa matti engi skilia*'. (*Ssb*, 133,18-19; my italics)

He is apt to do so, as he himself is portrayed as an anti-Sigurðr in that he *war [...] j ordum akafur og wutur* (*Ssp*, 99,2-3; see also Hálfðan's prattling under the tree quoted above) and – almost by definition – does not seem to be able to grasp the quality of *voces*. Vilhjálmr, on the other hand, in many ways stands between the heroic and the anti-heroic. He is more prudent with his words, as

[e]cki hafði hann miog aa hræsne sijnar jþrottir og þo war hann Radagerdarmadur um marga hlute,' (*Ssp*, 99,8-10)

but his close dealings with his older brother Hálfðan weaken his *hamingja*, and even he is not fully able to understand the meaning of Sigurðr's utterances. But at least he is able to interpret Sigurðr's vocal sounds correctly as *voces literatae*, although they remain *inarticulatae* to him:

'þess warir mig helldr' s(egir) hann 'ath hann mune fræddur vera aa fleiri tungur enn nockurn tjima uithir þv skynn áá. og vndirstod eg ath hann talade Roksaamliga aa þaa tungu sem vid unndirstodum eigi. þotti mier lijct at þat munde skotzka veraa er hann talade. enn suo er hann hæuerskr sakir vors brodernis at ockur verðr enngi blygd at hans ordum' (*Ssp*, 133,19-27)

Several details in and around this episode strike me as noteworthy. Firstly, the narrator has 'silenced' Sigurðr for a considerable part of the saga, during which Sigurðr's initially introduced taciturnity hovers ambiguously between a bodily deficiency and a peculiarity of character. Secondly, when he finally introduces him into the narrative, the focus lies on his two brothers, whereas Sigurðr, alias the 'lion-knight', enters from the domain of the wilderness. In other words, he appears as a potentially freakish, almost monstrous being, focussed through the eyes of the characters momentarily filling the slot of the heroic. The motif of the main hero in disguise is, of course, quite common to all kinds of medieval narratives, but then the external narrator usually indicates the identity of the hero to the audience, and it is only the intra-diegetic characters who fail to see through the disguise. It always remains clear to the audience that the narrative function of the disguised knight is the heroic. In the episode in *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, however, the external narrator does not disclose the true identity of the lion-knight even to the audience until much later in the saga, thus leaving us with Hálfðan's and Vilhjálmr's perceptions and interpretations of the lion-knight's potential *vox animalia*. Thirdly, Vilhjálmr's deduction that the lion-knight he supposes to be his younger brother speaks a language he calls *skotzka*, is – to my mind – quite strange indeed. In order to show Sigurðr's courtliness and familial reliability with regard to keeping the secret of their humiliation, the narrator might have let Vilhjálmr make some more neutral presupposition, like e.g. English (as he mentions King Arthur several times in the saga) or French (the language of courtliness *par excellence*, which, however, may be too close to Sedentiana's sphere). It is probably true that, historically, during the late Middle Ages – the time of the first actualisations of *Sigurðar saga þøgla* – the nobility of Lowland Scotland had some very close ties with several high families, especially with the English, and therefore Norman, royalty, but also with the Orcadian earls. It also seems to be a fact that the regional variety of English called 'Scots' – in contradistinction to the Gaelic spoken in many parts of the Highlands and to the Norse variety spoken on the Orkneys, on Shetland and in some other parts of modern Scotland – had already started to function as a distinct

administrative language, supposedly entailing some kind of courtly esteem. Still, even though more exotic realms abound in indigenous romances, Scotland is almost never mentioned as the home of civilised heroes or villains. Thus, Sigurðr's vocal capacities seem to combine human qualities (as they are *literatae*) with some more exotic ones usually connected with the uncivilised wilderness of monstrous adversaries (being *inarticulatae*). In other words, in this very idiosyncratic episode, the narrator 'hyper-civilises' his main protagonist by means of his exotic speech capacities, which then leaves him the kind of freak he is perceived as all along, until he finally talks to everyone in an accepted manner.

### **Absentia Vocis I: Lack of Speech and Intellect**

The narrator's decision not to let Sigurðr speak for the first seven years of his life – and for a further eleven years he speaks only with his tutor Lafranz – reflects more than a schematic choice of the *kolbitr* motif. The fact that the motif-subtype L124.2 *Silent hero* seems to be found in Icelandic tales alone, is noteworthy in itself. It implies that the possible intra-generic intertexts of this episode are to be found in the cultural vicinity of *Sigurðar saga þögla*. In other words, the subtype is not internationally well-known, but rather a speciality of Icelandic medieval narrative literature. If we look even more closely at the other instances of the motif, we realise in addition that the circle of intertexts can be narrowed down to some few Icelandic romances. It is only extant in *Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar*, *Þiðreks saga*, *Sagan af Starkaði Stórvirkssyni*, and Saxo's account of King Uffo's/Offa's legendary story (Boberg, 1966, 189). Yet, in most of these cases, we do not deal with silent heroes proper, as they mainly seem to be notoriously laconic. They do speak, even if only little, saving their rhetoric capabilities for dramatic effect under very specific circumstances. As they are never totally silent, their speaking abilities are not in question. It is in Saxo's tale of Vermundus and Uffo – as well as in Sven Aggesen's version of the story, in the account of the *Annales Ryenses*, and in one of their Anglo-Saxon pre-texts, the *Vitae duorum Offarum* from around 1200 – that we find the closest analogies to Sigurðr's refusal to speak (Herrmann, 296-309, 1922):

This Uffi outgrew all his contemporaries in stature, but in early manhood *he was reckoned so dull-witted and foolish* that he seemed hopeless for public and private affairs alike. From infancy he had never had time for play or merriment and was so devoid of a normal capacity for enjoyment that *he kept his lips locked in continual silence* and governed his face so severely that he had no use whatsoever for laughter. Throughout his childhood he had a reputation for stupidity, yet afterwards altered men's contempt to high estimation; as he had been the very picture of a dullard, so he turned out to be a model of wisdom and valour.<sup>1</sup> (*History of the Danes*, 1999, Book IV, 101; my italics).

<sup>1</sup> Hic Vffo coeuos quosque corporis habitu supergressus, adeo hebetis ineptique animi principio iuente existimatus est, ut priuatis ac publicis rebus inutilis uideretur. Siquidem ab iuente etate numquam lusus aut iocis consuetudinem prebuit, adeoque humane delectacionis uacuis fuit, ut labiorum continenciam iugi silencio premeret et seueritatem oris a ridendi prorsus officio temperaret. Verum ut incunabula stoliditatis opinione referta habuit, ita post

What is more, in all the pretexts of Saxo's version that include the theme of the muteness/silence of Uffo/Offa (adding his temporary blindness in some accounts), the numbers seven and thirty play an important role. Either Uffo/Offa did not speak from his seventh to his thirtieth year, or he was blind until the seventh year and mute until the thirtieth year of his life. In *Sigurðar saga þögla* only the number seven is relevant, where, at the beginning of the saga, it says

þaa er hann var .uij. uetra gamall hafði eingi þa heyrð hann tala' (*Ssb*, 1963, 98,3-4; my italics).

The age of thirty is not mentioned there – Sigurðr is eighteen when he finally speaks in public –, but it is especially interesting that the number thirty occurs in the Uffo/Offa tales, because of the distinct likelihood of its reference to Christ's thirty years of silence (Ruberg, 1978, 120). This reference, however, if at all intended, is certainly not more than of a simple exemplary nature, without the further religious overtones typical of mystic literature.

All in all, one can say that it is possible and even likely that the culturally and generically specific application of the *kolbitr*-motif in *Sigurðar saga þögla* shows an interest in the discourses on silence of the time. On the one hand, we have already seen above that the grammarian discourse on the voice does not allow for any positive evaluation of continued silence (the voluntary or forced absence of vocal utterances despite a person's full physical capacity to produce them). Continuous silence inadvertently signifies muteness (a person's physical inability to produce vocal utterances at all), because neither phenomenon allows for a distinction between human and animal/monstrous qualities. Therefore, continued silence alias 'virtual muteness' is indirectly and logically linked with mental or intellectual deficiency. *Sigurðar saga þögla* as well as the Uffo/Offa tales show that their pseudo-courtly values are well in accord with the grammarians' discourse. In agreement with ecclesiastical discourse, on the other hand, it is almost exclusively silence and not muteness that the romances mentioned above really thematise, even if they allow the characters to interpret the phenomenon differently. The ecclesiastical discourse, however, does not shun muteness for the same reasons as the grammarian one does. We do find rare cases of muteness in some texts, for instance in exemplary stories, like the one on Zacharias (Ruberg, 1978, 110). Typically, the mute is shown as a negative example, as his muteness is enforced by his sinfulness, in application of the *ius talionis* (the principle of 'remedy by congruence'). Thus, muteness in ecclesiastical discourse is not equivalent to a deficiency of the body and the mind, but of the soul. *Sigurðar saga þögla* does not follow this ecclesiastical track to a moral evaluation of its main protagonist, but stays within the safe discourse on familial luck or *hamingia*, when it presents the people of Saxland reasoning in the following way about his alleged muteness:

'þu *hamingia*' s(ogdu) þeir 'Huij uilldir þu nockut aa *lata skorta þijnar giafir* vit þenna mann. *hueria sœc gerde hann þier*. þa er þier þotti þess vert at hann skylldi ei mæla mega.' (*Ssb*, 136,6-8; my italics)

Sigurðr's responsibility is not expressed in moral, but rather in legal terms (*sœc*), a discourse much more familiar to the Icelandic saga corpus.

---

modum condicionis contemptum claritate mutauit, et quantum inercie spectaculum fuit, tantum prudentie et fortitudinis exemplum eussit. (*Gesta Danorum*, 1886, liber IIII, 166-167).

### Absentia Vocis II: Lack of Communication and Moral Appropriateness

Where *Sigurðar saga þögla* does not follow the ecclesiastical discourse on muteness, it does all the more adhere to the Church's ideas on silence. Ruberg (1978), and before him Roloff (1973), deal with the topic of speech and (expressive) silence in quite some detail and analyse the influence of religious discourses on secular medieval narratives. Ruberg's chapter headings make the different areas of possible influence obvious, as he divides his study into parts on silence as a school topic, on the three periods of silence in homiletic literature, on pictorial arguments pro and contra silence, on exemplary figures of silence, and on the silence of Christ, which I briefly hinted at above. As complex as these various sub-discourses may be, what they all share is the proposition of *temperantia* best expressed in the dictum *Est enim tempus tacendi, et est tempus loquendi* (Eccl. 3,7; 24B; see Ruberg, 24). The idea of the correct timing of when to speak and when to be silent had a strong influence on medieval narratives. Ruberg specifically looked at German narratives, in which this proper timing or balance was termed *måze* (Ruberg, 32).

This is well in accord with what we find in the few instances of the *Silent hero* motif in Icelandic romances, where, however, a second widespread proposition is added, in that the quality of silence is linked with the quantity of speaking. It is only in *Sigurðar saga þögla* and the Uffo/Offa accounts that we encounter an extended period of silence (like Christ's), which provokes insecurity, because speaking is continuously postponed until a decisive moment within the story and is not interspersed between taciturn episodes in a more regular fashion. In view of this strong imbalance towards taciturnity, the narrators call into question their main characters' *temperantia*, the quality of their silence, in general. As soon as they start to speak, however, it is needless to say that they are rhetorically well-versed and they know all about moral and quantitative appropriateness.

It is interesting that during his time of alleged muteness, the narrator of *Sigurðar saga þögla* already hints at Sigurðr's expected *måze*, when he lets the people of Saxland go on reasoning:

'[...] Ranngt skiptir þu þaa til er þu gaft þeim mikla malsnild er til jllz og mikils hrops við marga menn villdu hafa sijna tunngu. Enn þu varnadir þeim er til mikils soma og sæmdar munde sina tungu haft hafa og morgum til nytsemdar' (*Ssb*, 136,11-14; my italics).

That silence of a certain quality is needed to balance it with socially and morally appropriate communication is not what is said here. But what is implicit is the qualification to speak by means of a character's moral stance. The argument is that, although it should be otherwise, bad people are perfectly able to communicate, whereas good people are forced to be silent. The people of Saxland, therefore, do not consider the possibility of 'temperate' silence, but regard silence in a totally negative way. That this understanding of silence is not what the external narrator thinks to be true, can be seen in his final comment added to the people of Saxland's interpretation of Sigurðr's 'muteness' quoted above:

Enn þo at þeir talade slika hlute þaa vissu þeir þo eigi ath osyniu aaujtuðu þeir hamingiuna. þui Sigurde uar huorke varnat maals ne minnis þott þeir visse þat ej.' (*Ssb*, 136,14-17)



And when Sigurðr finally starts to talk in public some chapters later, the narrator feels himself prompted to add a further comment:

Nu uar eigi sem fyrr ath hann þegde er honum uar heilsat helldur fagnade hann ollum *med hæuerskligum ordum* birtande þat ath honum war eigi sijdur gefin *malnilldarlist* enn adrar jbrottir. og þotti ollum monnum þetta mikil nylunda. ath saa hinn agiæti kongs sonn skylldi nu *birtast med suo fogru male* sem þeir hugdu fyrr mallausan mundu uera. (*Ssb*, 159,14-21; my italics)

That Hálfðan does not share Sigurðr's ability to tailor his words to fit the situation has already been mentioned above. His qualities are deemed according to the same mixed discourses, in that he talks a lot, mostly out of place. Unwittingly, he even betrays his and his brother's secret under the tree. Sigurðr, on the other hand, keeps what he has heard to himself and thereby fulfils Vilhjálmr's estimation of his character. Because he thinks Sigurðr able to speak a courtly language like Scots, he deduces from this that he knows what is appropriate in this situation. Thus, much as the absence of voice signifies intellectual deficiency, *voces literatae* do not simply entail human nature – as we have seen above –, but also a human being's moral status.

Other evil characters share Hálfðan's inaptness, although their vocal qualities include features from another discourse, namely that on the power of *níð*. One particularly depraved viking called Garðr hinn girzki is described as having magical vocal properties:

[...] Wil(hialmur) villde eigi verda fyrir *orda aakasti* vikingsins þuiat hann hafdi mart heyrt enn visse eigi nema *nockur jllzcu kraptur fylgde ordum hans*. [...] (*Ssb*, 108,9-12).

That is why Vilhjálmr pre-empt's Garðr's verbal attacks by throwing his own vocal waste at him. He simply reverses the situation by using an appropriate response to inappropriate vocal behaviour. Later on in the saga, Sigurðr does the same, whereby the narrator emphasises that, he too, is capable of uncivilised vocal usage, whenever the situation makes it suitable behaviour.

### Conclusions

To sum up, one could say that, in *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, silence is appropriate as long as it is tempered with vocal pithiness. This *máze* might even include the use of *níð* against non-civilised beings, but usually entails social propriety in courtly conversation as well as familial and moral decency in keeping secrets harmful to everyone's *hamingja* to oneself. The absence of silence is evaluated as something positive only in that it basically excludes the possibility of a bodily and intellectual deficiency, muteness. Neither the folktale matrix, nor the grammarians' discourse on the voice, nor the ecclesiastical discourse on muteness allow for the support of the total absence of voice as a constitutive cultural phenomenon. The discursive focus, therefore, lies on the borderline between non-constitutive muteness and the social and moral value of silence. *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, on the whole, surprisingly often dwells upon the demarcation of proper silence, contrasting intra-diegetic interpretations with extra-diegetic commentary.

Deemed equally inappropriate as total muteness, the total lack of silence in abounding verbosity as well as the improper use of *níð* against civilised beings (as in

the case of Sedentiana's humiliation of Hálfdan and Vilhjálmr) are clearly marked off as out of bounds. This is not the case in those instances in which non-human beings (e.g. Sigurðr's lion companion or the laughing dwarf) utter articulate, though illiterate, sounds that give a positive turn to events in the story. The extreme of total loquacity is, in *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, reserved to the seemingly civilised *vox humana*, thereby reserving this particular immoral trait for the domain of the 'heroic'. Sigurðr, on the whole, is presented as a multifaceted character. On the one hand, he is on the verge of being a non-human freak, considered mute as well as dumb. Later, he becomes 'hyper-civilised' in his idiosyncratic choice of Scots as a language for communication. He mainly learns his articulateness through his companionship with the lion, as he dines with it, understands its needs, and correctly interprets its warnings. In the end, he shines as an exemplar of *temperantia*, finally ready to use his *vox articulata literata* appropriately to win the hand of the un-tempered maiden-king.

#### Works cited

- Aarne, Antti. *The types of the folktale: a classification and bibliography*. FF communications 184. Transl. and enlarged by Stith Thompson. 2nd rev. ed. Helsinki: Academia scientiarum Fennica 1974.
- Allen, Valerie J. 'Broken Air'. In: *Exemplaria* XVI, 2 (2004), 305-322.
- Boberg, Inger M. *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*. Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana XXVII. Copenhagen: Munksgaard 1966.
- Herrmann, Paul. *Die Heldensagen des Saxo Grammaticus*. Erläuterungen zu den ersten neuen Büchern der dänischen Geschichte des Saxo Grammaticus 2. Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann 1922.
- Kalinke, Marianne E.. *Bridal-Quest: Romance in Medieval Iceland*. Islandica XLVI. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP 1990.
- Lüthi, Max. *Das europäische Volksmärchen. Form und Wesen*. Uni-Taschenbücher 312. 10th edition. Tübingen and Basel: Francke 1997 (1947).
- Roloff, Volker. *Reden und Schweigen. Zur Tradition und Gestaltung eines mittelalterlichen Themas in der französischen Literatur*. Münchner Romanistische Arbeiten 34. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag 1973.
- Ruberg, Uwe. *Beredtes Schweigen in lehrhafter und erzählender deutscher Literatur des Mittelalters*. Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften 32. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag 1978.
- Die Saga von Sigurd Thögli*. Translation and commentary by Herbert Wäckerlin. In: *Isländische Märchensagas 1*. Ed. Jürg Glauser and Gert Kreutzer. Saga. Bibliothek der altnordischen Literatur. München: Eugen Diederichs 1998, 210-311.
- Saxo Grammaticus. *Saxonis Grammatici Gesta Danorum*. Ed. Alfred Holder. Strassburg: Verlag von Karl J. Trübner 1886.
- Saxo Grammaticus. *The History of the Danes. Books 1-IX*. Ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson, trans. Peter Fisher. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer 1999 (1979/80). [Translation of *Gesta Danorum. Libri I-IX*.]
- Schnyder, Mireille. 'Gefangene Stimmen – Geordnete Körper. Die Stimme in Texten des Mittelalters. Eine Skizze'. In: *Balladenstimmen*. Ed. Jürg Glauser and Barbara Sabel. Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie 40. Tübingen: Francke 2006 [forthcoming].
- Sigurðar saga þøgla*. In: *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances II*. Ed. Agnete Loth. Editiones Arnarnagæanæ Series B 21. Copenhagen: Munksgaard 1963, 95-259.