Whatever Happened to *Úlfs saga Uggasonar*?

Andrew Wawn (University of Leeds)

This paper takes the opportunity afforded by a conference devoted to *fornaldarsögur* to draw attention to one such work that has long been forgotten. Though its title, *Úlfs saga Uggasonar*, suggests links with skaldic verse, or pagan mythology, or the poet of *Húsdrápa*, or the wedding feast at Hjarðarholt, this proves not to be the case. Like David Frost, the eponymous hero rose without trace, and the saga that tells his story has never been edited, and exists only in post-medieval Icelandic manuscripts. Reviewing the critical literature associated with the saga does not take long. Before it briefly caught the respective eagle eyes of first Margaret Schlauch and then Inger Boberg, I know of only one response to the saga. The writer is the seventeenth-century Danish antiquarian Thomas Bartholin, and the judgement is harsh:

> Inprimis sedulò cavendum, ne dum antiqva septentrionis nostri scripta protrahere allaboramus, pro veris historiis, qvarum adhuc ineditarum immensa copia, insulsas protrudamus fabulas; [. . .] & ejusdem furfuris censenda Ulfs Uggasons saga, non minora de Bialfo consignans. (Bartholin 1689, p. 226).
>
> 'We must in particular take care lest, while we strive to recover the ancient writings of our North, we don't offer stupid fables, of which a great number remain unedited, as true histories [*Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* is mentioned disapprovingly] and the saga of Úlfur Uggason is to be regarded as garbage of the same kind, dealing with no less matters about Biaolfus.'

More of 'Biaolfus' presently, but for now we may note simply that of the many 'stupid' and 'unedited' tales said to be available, *Úlfs saga Uggason* is singled out for special obloquy. It is deemed to be not just a poor saga, but a potentially dangerous one—a work that could seriously compromise Scandinavian humanists' attempts to recover the primary texts of the old north, and to celebrate the civilised values to which they give expression. *Úlfs saga Uggasonar* is dismissed as 'garbage', no doubt because its narrative of mystery, magic, and monsters offended prevailing notions of neo-classical literary decorum, as did its lack of concern for historical truth. That *Úlfs saga Uggason* and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* attracted the disapproving attention of Bartholin (and Árni Magnússon, his assistant) was doubtless because in Jacob Reenhielm's pioneering edition of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* (Uppsala, 1680), *Úlfs saga* is cited frequently in the notes, as the editor traces the provenance of his text's supernatural elements.

For Thomas Bartholin, moreover, the problem with such sagas was as much political as aesthetic. At a time when new editions of old northern texts often included elaborate dedications to the power and influence of the relevant Scandinavian royal house, breaches of literary decorum could reflect unfavourably not just on an individual editor but on his nation. Reenhielm's efforts to assert the historicity of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* (he argues that apparently improbable deeds are explicable in terms of better diet and more robust training regimes in the good old days!) provoked further ridicule from Bartholin and his Danish colleagues. But even

Reenhielm treads carefully in respect of the historicity of *Úlfs saga Uggasonar*: it represented a bridge (and several trolls) too far. In short, like Lord Byron, *Úlfs saga Uggasonar* was mad, bad and dangerous to know.

And yet, as so often, the evidence of Icelandic post-medieval paper manuscripts tells a different story. It is clear that *Úlfs saga Uggasonar* found plenty of readers who were too busy enjoying its tales of derring-do to worry about any damage that the work could do to 'our [i.e. Bartholin's] north'. Away from the fixities of print and the anxieties of the humanist chattering classes in Copenhagen, the diverse tastes of rural Iceland could be catered for via bespoke manuscripts. I have examined a dozen of the twenty or so paper manuscripts of the saga itself, and also three of the dozen manuscripts of *rímur* based on the saga, along with one manuscript text of the saga (Lbs. 1767 4to, 1857-63) that was 'skrifuð eptir gömlum Rimna', and the fragments that survive in Lbs. 4099, 8vo. All these manuscripts, dating from the late seventeenth century to the early twentieth, confirm the existence of a significant and regionally diverse Icelandic readership. Some manuscripts served the same household over several generations (as with Lbs. 1629, 4to, owned by the family of Magnús Einarsson of Tjörn). In one instance (Lbs. 1767 4to) the act of copying was undertaken over the Christmas week, as if to confirm that *Úlfs saga Uggasonar* was a work whose optimistic exoticism could contribute to the seasonal merriment. The saga finds itself alongside a variety of other narratives in composite manuscripts: though frequently in the company of *Ambáles saga* (ÍBR 38; Lbs. 1767 4to; Lbs. 1943 4to), *Nikulás saga leikara* and *Egils saga einhenda* (both in Lbs. 2405, 8vo, 1790; ÍB 228 4to, 1750), it also rubs shoulders with less frivolous works—*Fostbræðra saga, Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa, Harðar saga* and *Hákonar saga* (all in Lbs. 840 4to, *c.* 1727); *Ljósvetninga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða* (in Lbs. 1629 4to), and *Ynglinga saga* (ÍBR 38 4to, 1829). The saga's date of composition is unknown. Though its earliest extant paper manuscripts (AM 576a 4to, 588r 4to) date from the second half of the seventeenth century, the narrative draws on *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* motifs of demonstrable medieval provenance, and it is easy to imagine a writer in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century dipping a hand into the bran-tub of familiar romance narrative templates, motifs, and motifemes, and then making *a* coherent order and sense out of the random handful. Jacob Reenhielm's annotation to his *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* edition talks of parallels rather than specific borrowings, and we might do well to follow his cautious example.

Title-pages of post-medieval *fornaldarsögur* manuscripts often refer to the *skemmtun* and the *fróðleikur* to be found in their narratives. In order to scrutinise *Úlfs saga Uggasonar* under these headings, and to understand why the story attracted the disdain of late-seventeenth-century Copenhagen scholars, a brief plot summary is required. Marianne Kalinke has warned us against identifying a work such as *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* as a 'bridal quest romance', merely because it has brides and quests. Suffice it to say, therefore, that by the end of *Úlfs saga Uggasonar*, though the two royal princes, Úlfur of Normandia, and Aríus of Persia, have each found a bride, the narrative is primarily shaped and energised by the protagonists' turbulent rite of passage adventures, first as individuals and later as sworn-brothers. Úlfur, granted his inheritance, sets off in search of adventure, while his sister, Menírá, sits shrewishly at home, shunning a succession of suitors, somewhat to the disapproval of

the *vox populi*. A challenge to the court by Skjálgur, a berserker suitor, is neutralised by the arrival and resolve of Aríus, in the absence of Úlfur, whose own pursuit of *aventure* has by this time led him to a chance confrontation with Skráma, a loathly giant-woman, and her daughter Emma. His wrestling skills win Skráma's approval and his sexual prowess impresses Emma. After encountering, refusing to fight, and eventually entering into *fóstbræðralag* with Aríus, Úlfur learns from the all-seeing Skráma about Skjálgur's gruesome family—that the father is Jötunn, the unimaginatively named giant king of Serkland; that there are six sons and ten daughters; that the daughters are skilled in magic; and that the sons can match Skjálgur in ferocity—Haraldr Iron-Mouth, Hundur (eighteen ells tall), Sóti (black all over, with the power to render impervious to sword blows anyone whom he names), Skröggur (with dragon's features, who must be defeated before Skjálgur's dying curse on Menírá can be lifted), and (ultimately the most challenging of all) Gormur.

The remainder of the saga involves the sworn-brothers seeking out and destroying this monstrous regiment in a sequence of three fights: the first against the brothers; the second against the sisters and parents; and, finally, the most extended battle against Gormur. The bravado of the companions is supplemented by the supernatural help that Skráma and her brother make available. It is she who helps them locate Skröggur, and who then intervenes in the subsequent battle by appearing on a headland, destroying the giants' ships, and killing two of the brothers. This battle lasts into a fifth day, before the wounded Skröggur dives overboard with Úlfur in pursuit; after a further struggle back on land, Aríus clubs Skröggur to death. The winged corpse is burnt on a pyre, and the two heroes seize the giants' wondrous dragon ship, treasure, and the precious hallberd Sótanaut.

Skráma, duly rewarded for her assistance, offers further help as the foster-brothers plan their confrontation with Jötunn and his remaining family. She provides devices to render the heroes invisible—a magic stone for Aríus and a magic helmet for Úlfur. She then enlists the help of her brother Bjalfi in Serkland (the same Biaolfus who so irritated Thomas Bartholin). Bjalfi informs the sworn-companions that the giant-daughters are invulnerable unless their names are known to their attackers. He duly passes on this vital information, and also presents Úlfur with a special sword (Bjalfanaut). Most importantly, he assures them that in times of distress, they need only call out his name for him to make his presence felt at once. Thus fortified, Úlfur and Aríus approach the mountain hideout of Jötunn's family, and launch an attack. Úlfur is soon in trouble, however, and with the ghoulish father about to bite through his throat, Bjalfi is duly summoned, defeats the giant, and defends the sworn-brothers' ships and men.

The troubles of Úlfur and Aríus are not yet at an end, however, for Gormur, the last surviving and most formidable of the giant brothers, is still at large. Indeed, by this time he has attacked Normandia, killed Úlfur's father, and seized Menírá. Gormur's subsequent island hideaway is identified by an (unnamed) benevolent stranger whom the heroes encounter. In the final and most testing battle in the sequence, Gormur, attacked at night with weapons and stones, taunts and howls at his foes, driven on by his determination to avenge his (by now) dead parents. The stranger, like Skráma and Bjalfi before him, appears on a nearby headland and lends sorely-needed help in the conflict. Gormur is seized, while Princess Menírá is

rescued from his ship. In the morning, however, the villain is found to have escaped. He is followed and confronted, and the second and decisive stage in the final battle commences. This lasts for three days, with the companions often in dire straits, and forced to make use of magic helmet, sword and stone. Severely wounded by Bjalfanaut, Gormur escapes under his ship's keel, with Úlfur in pursuit. The hero is dragged to the bottom, where, in distress, he calls for the last time on Bjálfi, who again comes to his aid. Úlfur surfaces, tired but triumphant, to be greeted by his anxious companion. Skráma, having also played her part in the final fight, is reunited with her brother. It remains only for the sworn-companions to return to Aríus's homeland, Persia, where Úlfur is betrothed to Aríus's sister, and with this wedding, together with that between Aríus and Menírá, the saga comes to an end. The two heroes inherit their parental estates and remain friends until they die.

Such is the allegedly 'stupid' substance of *Úlfs saga Uggasonar*. Its author is completely at home within the generically porous worlds of *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*. Incremental repetition governs the sequence of quests, adventures and fights; the companions' exploits become more daunting, their opponents more demanding, and the need for supernatural assistance more desperate. Battles take longer to resolve, with their progress sustained by stage properties drawn from the deep vats of wonder-tale—wondrous dragon ships, rings as recognition tokens, named swords, magic helmets, captured treasure; and by familiar narrative motifs—sexual encounters with supernatural figures, ship-board and underwater fights, sudden powerlessness in battle, throat biting, stone throwing, and flyting exchanges.

Enough narrative substance, therefore, to shorten the days for members of Icelandic households with access to a manuscript copy of the saga. And there will have been shrewd souls aplenty within those communities well able to unpack the narrative grammar of the story, and to recognise elements of *fróðleikur* in its particular configuration of moves and motifs. Bruno Bettelheim was assuredly not the first narratologist to recognise the uses of enchantment—that romances, ballads, fairy tales and *fornaldarsögur* can be unreal and yet true, offering not so much an escape from reality but an alternative means of approaching it. Experienced saga readers and listeners in Iceland will have recognised the thematic boxes being ticked in *Úlfs saga Uggasonar*, such as *svæðis-* and *land-hreinsun*, sworn-brotherhood, and a vengeance culture involving both human and supernatural protagonists. The saga invites its readers to register the contrast between the civilised but vulnerable court of Normandia and the barbarous exoticism and alterity of Serkland, whose inhabitants can traverse earth, sea, and sky, and where malignity represents some elemental force of untamed nature—Caliban confronting Prospero. Within Serkland, the encounters take place in the uncharted space of inaccessible islands—remote locations within remote locations—hearts of darkness. Úlfur may win his early fame against vikings on the familiar paths of the Austurvegur, but the real challenge lies in the surreal wilderness of Serkland, as much a conceptual as a geographical space. While recognising an element of self-conscious carnivalistic 'game' in the saga, it may not be too 'ernest' to suggest that the tale valorises homosocial bonding, the nuclear family, exposure to *aventure* and jeopardy, vengeance as part of conflict resolution, courtliness and decorum, a just system of gifts and reward, loyalty—and royalty. Its world view defines the sources of dislocation not in terms of territorial acquisition by neighbouring groups or of

internecine strife, but as assaults on courtly values by creatures from the *óbyggð*. The alterities explored by *Úlfs saga Uggason* are very 'other' indeed.

The young representatives of the court are sternly tested and their communities are ultimately renewed by their success. As in romance and fairy tale, good luck tends to attach itself to those who lie along the grain of nature, with steadfastness of spirit sufficient to trigger supernatural assistance. Indeed, those with a taste for the 'family drama' that Bettelheimian and (better still) Brewerian interpretations have helped to highlight might identify the heroes' successful rite of passage as the principal use to which this saga's enchantments are put. Thus, two young men leave home (Úlfur eagerly, Aríus reluctantly); their parents are killed; the young protagonists confront and win the favour of potentially hostile 'split' parent figures; they resist the temptation to abandon their maturation quest in favour of hedonistic sexuality; the proper balance between independence and dependence, justice and mercy, and instinct and will, is explored and established; and the pursuit of long-term goals is rewarded both emotionally, materially, and dynastically.

And yet readers familiar with the sagas to which *Úlfs saga Uggasonar* is brought closest by Jacob Reenhielm's annotation—*Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* and (hence) *Friðþjófs saga*—are conscious of the narrative dogs that fail to bark in the adventures of Úlfur and Aríus. We find no exploration of tensions between a royal bride-to-be and her lower-born suitor, as there is in *Friðþjófs saga*; no diversity of view or temperament between siblings as there is in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*—family loyalty, whether among trolls or humans, is unquestioning and unquestioned; no exploration of alternative models of authority within a community—merely the contrast between the structured values of the *byggð* and the grotesqueries of the *óbyggð*; no interest in tensions between paganism and Christianity, or between fathers and sons; no ironic scrutiny of the assumption that youth must triumph over old age; and no exploration of the language of moral evaluation to be found so strikingly in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. Moreover, there are none of the familiar medieval romance complexities generated by lost identical twins, disguise scenes, or hostile mothers-in-law or nurses or predatory counsellors.

Thus, though *Úlfs saga Uggasonar* feeds off the spirit and substance of its indistinct generic ancestry (part *fornaldarsaga*, part *riddarasaga*), it does not offer the additional filigree which, as Jacob Reenhielm's 1680 commentary confirms, characterises the much lengthier *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. We may compare the relative density of the two narratives initially by considering the presentation of the twin supernatural helpers, the dwarf Sindri and the giant Bjálfi. As we recall Bartholin's irritation with Bjalfi, we should note that Sindri fared no better:

> qvas inter palmarium locum meretur putrida Thorstens Vikingssons saga, Sindrum Thorstano, ad nominis invocationem, opitulantem commemorans
> 'The putrid saga of Þorsteinn Víkingsson easily deserves the palm here, commemorating Sindri helping Þorsteinn at the invocation of his name.'

Here is the same humanist disdain so often visited on Shakespeare's cheerful breaches of neo-classical unities by Ben Jonson and his university friends. In the *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* scene, Sindri, the island-dwelling dwarf-in-the-stone, aids the hero in his hour of need against the loathsome amphibian Faxi who, like Skröggur, seeks vengeance

for the death of his brother. The respective 'tradition' and 'individual talent' elements in the following scene are easily identifiable:

> Lagðist hann [Faxi] þá á haf ok Þorsteinn eftir, ok er Faxi sá þat, sneri hann í móti Þorsteini, ok takast þeir til á sundinu. Höfðu þeir þá sviptingar miklar ok stórar. Færðu hvárir aðra í kaf. Þó kenndi Þorsteinn aflsmunar. Þar kom, at Faxi færði Þorstein til grunna. Tók þá af honum sundlætin. Þorsteinn þottist þá vita, at Faxi ætlar at bíta sundr barkann í honum. Þorsteinn mælti: 'Hvat mun mér annan tíma meiri þörf á þér, Sindri dvergr, en nú?' Þorsteinn varð við þat varr, at gripit var á herðar Faxa svá hart, at því næst var hann við grunni niðri ok Þorsteinn ofan á honum. Hann var þá mjök móðr ok þjakaðr af umfangi þeira. Þorsteinn tekr þá tygilknífinn, sem Sindri gaf honum. Hann stingr honum fyrir bringspalir Faxa, svá at sökk allt upp at skafti. Reist hann þá niðr allan kviðinn at smáþörmum. Þó fann hann, at Faxi var eigi dauðr, því at hann mælti þá: 'Mikil þrekvirki hefir þú unnit, Þorsteinn, er þú hefir mér fyrir komit, því at ek hefi átt níutigi orrostur ok haft í öllum sigr nema í þessi. Ek hefi sigrazt átta tigi sinna í einvígum, svá at ek hefi á hólm gengit, en ek er nú níu tigi ára gamall.' Ekki þótti Þorsteini gagn, at hann fleipraði fleira, ef hann mátti at gera. Rak hann þá ór honum innan þat laust var. Nú er at segja af þeim Angantý ok Bela, at þeir tóku sér skip ok reru fram á sjóinn ok leita at þeim Faxa ok Þorsteini ok finna þá hvergi langan tíma. Þá kómu þeir þar at, sem sjórinn var blandinn ok rauðr af blóði. Þóttust þeir þá vita, at þar mundi Faxi á grunni niðri ok Þorstein drepit hafa. Ok er stund leið, sáu þeir, at flaut á sjónum nokkut óþokkaligt. Þeir fóru þangat ok sáu þar innyfli mikil ok ósélig. Litlu síðar kom Þorsteinn upp ok var þá svá lúinn ok yfirkominn, at eigi gat hann flotit á sjónum. Reru þeir þá at honum ok drógu hann upp í skipit. (Guðni Jónsson, 1950, III 65-7, ch. 23)

In the equivalent scene at the end of *Úlfs saga Uggason*, Bjalfi confronts the no less formidable Gormur:

> Úlfur sá að höggin gjörðu honum ei neitt mein. Tók hann saxið Bjalfanaut og hjó af honum nefið, og allan neðri skaltinn svo skein í beran tanngarðin. Aríus braut þá úr honum allar tennurnar með kelfunni. Var það hið mesta meiðsla. Högg þetta þótti honum ilt að líða og hljóp á haf. Kafaði hann ofanundir kjölinn á skipinu. Úlfur hljóp á eptir. Mættust þeir þar enn hjeldust ei við fyrir áföllum af skipinu, og í því rak Úlfur í bakið á honum. Flugust þeir síðan á og dro Gormur Úlf niður að botni og ætlaði að bita hann á barkan. Úlfur mælti þá: 'Aldrei hefur mér leigið á Bjálfa mínum meir enn nú.' Í því var Garmi kift ofan af honum. Náði Úlfur í annan fótinn en Bjálfi í annan. Rifu þeir hann svo að endilaungu á milli sín og hurfu partarnir úr þeirra höndum. Úlfur var bæði stirður og moður. Sinti hann svo upp á skipið og fagnaði Aríus honum vel. Var þá hreinsað skip þeirra, því það voru í sama mund að sigurop var æpt á skipinu og Gormur var drepinn. Var og Skráma kerling þar. Hafði hún veitt þeim mikið lið við að fyrirkoma þessu hiski. Þökkuðu þeir henni fyrir liðveisluna og gáfu henni mikið af sínu herfángi. (Lbs. MS 2082 4to, *c.*

1900, with punctuation and capitalization standardised, and abbreviations silently expanded)

The same narrative template underpins both scenes, as several motifs and elements are common to both—the use of a weapon gifted by the supernatural helper; the underwater disempowerment of the hero; the summons for help; the sudden disabling pressure on the villain; his eventual dismemberment and death; and the exhausted hero's triumphant return. Even the presence of Skráma may remind us of the role of the initially loathly but ultimately beautiful—and benevolent—Skellinefja in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. Yet the reader is struck as much by the differences as the similarities. Unlike Þorsteinn's knife, gifted to him by Sindri's children, the sword Bjalfanaut is too unwieldy for effective use in the underwater endgame; unlike the disembowelling of Faxi, the dismemberment of Gormur no longer recalls Beowulf's defeat of Grendel's mother, with the hero's companions gazing anxiously on the gory surface of the water; and there is no dying speech of the villain, recalling previous triumphs, and confronting his own mortality, though there are perhaps faint echoes of this motif in Skjálgur's death speech earlier in the saga.

The contrasting treatments of this scene reflect broader differences in the sagas' narrative structure. We might say that *Úlfs saga Uggasonar* represents an alternative model to the single-stranded coherence of *Friðþjófs saga*, with its deft blend of realism and fantasy, and the multi-stranded extravagance of the *Friðþjófr*-prequel *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, whose narrative process is characterised by what ballad scholars call 'leaping and lingering'. In *Úlfs saga Uggasonar*, more a satellite text than a sequel, the building blocks recall the bold minimalism of a cartoon. In terms of setting, Sognefjord has, as it were, become Illyria. And yet, by accident or design, the story is not without its moments of complexity. Three scenes catch the eye in this respect: the response of Aríus to King Uggi's *einvigi* summons; the taut exchange between Skráma and her daughter Emma; and the equally laconic dialogue between Menírá and King Uggi concerning the threat posed by Skjálgur the berserk. Each is worth a brief look.

In the first scene King Uggi sends a messenger to Aríus offering marriage to Menírá in return for securing the young prince's help against Skjálgur:

> Aríus las það og bregður litum og mælti: 'Henni var betra að giftast fyrri heldur enn að verða þennan risa nauðug að eiga, því ei hef ég megn til að ríða út við hann og er henni einginn áboti, þó hann drepi mig og eigi hana sem aður.' Ásbjörn mælti: 'Dreingilega muntu við verða'.' Aríus mælti: 'Ei mun ég þá hicka ferð fara því heirt hef ég nemdan Skjálg.' Ásbjörn fjekk ei meira af því og sigldi heim við svo búið og seigir hversu komið var. Voru þau nú ráðalaus og varð það konungs ráð að berjast við hann með her sínum, því konungr kvaðst vilja vera dauður ef hann ætti dóttur sína. Og beið svo alt til þriðja dags að þeir sjá risan ganga að höllinni og var hann ei pruðari enn áður. Í því vóru gjörð boð í höllina að maður kom inn friður sinum, stór og sterlegur. Hann kom inn fyrir konung og kvaddi hann virðuglega. Konungr tok vel kveðju hans og spyr hann að heiti. Hann kvaðst Aríus heita. Konungr bauð honum til sætis. Aríus spyr hvort risin sé kominn. Í því kili komu boð að risin væri kominn. Aríus mælti: 'Viltu gifta mér dóttur þína ef svo ólíklega kann til að bera að ég vinni hann, en hinn kvað "já" við því.' Aríus gekk þá út og sá hvar risinn stóð og þótti

> honum hann ógurlegur. Risinn spyr hvar sá maður sé sem riða vildi út við sig. 'Aríus,' mælti hann, 'er nú ei langt frá þér og ætla eg nú að reina við þig ef þú þorir við mig.' Þá hló risinn og mælti: 'Eigi muntu það vera, því ég vil ei spilla þér. Gjörst þú heldur minn maður.' Aríus mælti: 'Óðinn veri þinn maður.' Skjálgur reiddist þá [...]

This is an intriguing but puzzling sequence. Aríus's arrival at a court desperate for help is impressive. He is commanding in appearance, and decorous in word and deed. He banters dryly with the berserker, and, having won the war of words with a final ace—"Óðinn veri þinn maður", proceeds to win the ensuing fight in straight sets. Yet earlier in the episode Aríus seems a less secure figure. His initial response to Ásbjörn's mission is understandably self-deprecating and fatalistic, and yet he appears to accept the challenge. That acceptance seems less clear, however, when we are told that on the messenger's return the court is *ráðalaus*, and that the king ponders the possibility of himself having to confront Skjálgur in an *einvigi*. How can this be if Aríus's acceptance of the challenge has been reported and understood? Aríus's subsequent arrival comes as rather a surprise, as does his request for Menírá's hand in marriage should he defeat Skjálgur, for this offer has already been made by the king's messenger. All in all, a hero's transition from doubt to determination in the face of a fearsome challenge could have been a fruitfully complex process in a scene designed to display Aríus's credentials as a potential sworn-companion of Úlfur—but how well managed is it here? Was the saga-man fully in control of his materials?

No less intriguing is Menírá's reaction to Skjálgur's advances. After delivering his peremptory challenge and marriage proposal the berserker leaves the court without favouring them with the courtesy of a farewell:

> Risin gekk þá burt og kvaddi ei konung, en konungr gekk til dóttur sinnar. Hún fagnaði honum vel og fjekk honum stól til sætis og spurði hann tíðinda og hversu vænn maður til hans hefði komið í dag. Konungr mælti: 'Eingan hef ég slíkan séð, því úr hófi er vöxtur hans. Mér list hann vera 16 álnir á hæð, en 11 á digurð. Ekkert hár er á hausi hans og augun sem stöðuvatnsbrunnar.' Hún mælti: 'Þá sér hann.' 'En tennur hefur hann þriggja álna lángar.' Hún mælti: 'Þá þarf ei að tiggja fyrir hann.' 'Eiru hefur hann svo stór sem bjarndýrshlustir.' Hún mælti: 'Hann kelur þá ei á vángann.' 'Haka hans nær á bringu ofan.' Hún mælti: 'Hann er því ljótari sem leingur er af honum sagt.' 'Kjafturinn er sem hellirs gap eða jarðfall en nefið sem horn á gömlum hrúti og er á því stór hnútur sem fjálsnýpa.' Hún mælti: 'Þá er hann ei kyssilegur, og vil ég heldur ganga útá eld og brenna mig sjálf heldur enn eiga hann.'

The reader is struck by the contrast between the frantic father and the wry self-assurance of a daughter already well versed in the arts of suitor shunning. Her whimsical responses to the grotesque physical details of her potential bridegroom take us into a discursive world in which *senna* meets *Little Red Riding Hood*. Though the saga scene's dialogic structure is faithfully retained in the *rímur* versions I have examined, its anatomical detail invited creative intervention in transmission. The scribe of Lbs. 1767 4to, for example, no doubt aware of Bergþór Oddsson's more explicit late seventeenth-century *rímur* version of the scene (as in Lbs. 1634 4to, copied by Jón Þorsteinsson of Staðartunga in 1877, from a 1797 manuscript), could

resist everything except temptation and adds (or restores) some anatomical filigree at the end: '"Böllurinn er eins og skógar eik, en eistun sem sáta." Hún brosti við.'[1] The same breezy irreverence re-emerges later when Aríus beheads the berserker. After 'Í því hjó hann höfuðit af Skjálgi', our scribe allows himself an aside: '(og fór hann þá til fjandans í neðstu bigð).'

A third comment-worthy scene involves Úlfur's first meeting with Skráma, the ghoul who becomes our hero's fairy godmother, and with her independent-minded daughter Emma:

> Hún seigir honum frá mörgu er hann fysti að vita, en um kvöldið er til sængar var geingið bað Emma móður sína að lofa Úlfi að sofa hjá sér um nóttina. Skráma mælti: 'Gantalega lætur þú dóttir mín og máttu ei yngri til vera.' Emma mælti: 'Þetta líggur þó fyrir mér.' Skráma mælti: 'Kallmenn eru vanir að tala til þessa fýr þó vor sjé opt viljinn líka.' Ljet hún hana þá ráða. Enn um morguninn spyr Skráma: 'Hvernig hefur þér likað við Úlf í nótt.' Emma mælti: 'Ærið vel. Vildi ég hann færi hvergi heðan brott.' Úlfur gekk um morgunn og vildi finna menn sína og halda í brott. Skráma mælti: 'Vertu hér í vetur og menn þínir ef þú vilt.'

This seems a classic 'family drama' scene. The domineering parent figure is defeated in wrestling by a young man who thus earns the right to an 'ef þú vilt' relationship with her; in expressing her wish to sleep with Ulfur, Emma asserts her own sense of destiny, and is rewarded by Skráma's wry recognition of the force of female as well as male sexual desire. Unlike many fairy-tale parents, Skráma is able to stay close to her grown-up daughter by acknowledging her independence. And yet the scene is puzzling in one respect. Emma, in her quiet way as verbally assured as Princess Menírá, claims to be a figure of destiny, only to disappear completely from the saga after this scene. Wherein lies that destiny, then? Sexual liaison between human and supernatural figures is a familiar *fornaldarsögur* motif. But what is the latent logic behind the superficial strangeness of this particular scene? Does Úlfur's maturation require him to confront as an adult a variety of parent figure 'splits' (Skráma, Jötunn), and does sexual liaison with Skráma's daughter signal a further (passing) stage in that maturation process, with Emma thereafter jettisoned like the fuel tank of a space rocket? Or, once again, did the saga-man need to revisit this scene and tighten the narrative screws?

On this occasion the salacious scribe of Lbs. 2082 4to offers us no help, yet when he and his colleagues made texts of *Úlfs saga Uggasonar* available to their respective households they confirmed the unregulated cultural independence conferred by the longevity of Iceland's manuscript culture. In their own way the post-medieval insular scribes had the last laugh over the scowling metropolitan spirit of Thomas Bartholin. In the reception history of *Úlfs saga Uggason* we are reminded, as with Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims, that 'diverse folk, diversely they spake'.[2]

---

1 Jón consigns this to a footnote, p. 82: '"Rassinn eins og rótakilfa á sandi / en boran eins og botnlaus lopt / barmafull með gula sótt. || Bollurinn eins og bjálka trje í skógi / en eistun eins og sáta að sjá." Seymaskorðin brosti þá.' Lbs. 1417 4to (1813), p. 85, includes the second verse as a footnote in a smaller and different hand from that of the main scribe.

2 I am grateful to Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir for helpful discussion of textual and interpretative matters, and to Jim Binns for guidance with Thomas Bartholin's Latin.

Select Bibliography:

Manuscripts:

[*Úlfs saga Uggasonar*] Lbs. 840 4to, 1505 4to, 1629 4to, 1767 4to, 1943 4to, 1804 4to, 4484 4to; Lbs. 2082 8vo, 2405 8vo; Lbs. JS 641 4to; ÍB 228 4to; ÍB 362 8vo; ÍBR 4to 49, 96;
[*rímur* based on *Úlfs saga Uggasonar*] Lbs. 695 4to, 1417 4to, 1634 4to.

Printed Works:

Andersson, Theodore M. 1985. '"Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar" and European Bridal-Quest Narrative', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 84, 51-75.

Thomas Bartholin. 1689. *Antiqvitatum Danicarum de causis contemptæ a Danis adhuc gentilibus mortis*. Copenhagen: Joh. Phil. Bockenhoffer.

Bettelheim, Bruno. 1978. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Boberg, Inger M. 1966. *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*. Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 27. Copenhagen: Munksgaard.

Brewer, Derek. 1980. *Symbolic Stories*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.

Driscoll, Matthew. 1997. *The Unwashed Children of Eve. The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland*. Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press.

Guðni Jónsson, ed. 1950. *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, 4 vols. Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan.

Kalinke, Marianne. 1990. *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*. Islandica XLVI. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Schlauch, Margaret. 1934. *Romance in Iceland*. London, George Allen and Unwin.

Sverrir Jakobsson. 2005. *Við og veröldin: Heimsmynd Íslendinga, 1100-1400*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Wallette, Anna. 2004. *Sagans svenskar. Synen på vikingatiden och de isländska sagorna under 300 år*. Malmö: Sekel Bokfölag.