

STUDIES IN THE
TRANSMISSION AND RECEPTION
OF OLD NORSE LITERATURE

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STUDIES IN THE
TRANSMISSION AND RECEPTION
OF OLD NORSE LITERATURE

The Hyperborean Muse in European Culture

Edited by

Judy Quinn and Adele Cipolla



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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgements	xi
Colour Plates	xiii
Introduction ADELE CIPOLLA and JUDY QUINN	1
Part I. The Transmission of Old Norse Literature Before and Between Manuscript Witnesses	
Editing and Translating <i>Snorra Edda</i> : Some Observations on the Editorial History of Snorri's <i>Ars Poetica</i> ADELE CIPOLLA	21
The Principles of Textual Criticism and the Interpretation of Old Norse Texts Derived from Oral Tradition JUDY QUINN	47
Parsimony in Textual Criticism: On the Elimination of Intermediary Manuscripts ODD EINAR HAUGEN	79
Part II. Adaptations of Old Norse Literature and their Influence	
In Search of <i>Amlóða saga</i> : The Saga of Hamlet the Icelander IAN FELCE	101
<i>Ambieto</i> : A Study of an Italian Libretto of the Eighteenth Century MARCELLO ROSSI CORRADINI	123

Translations of Old Norse Poetry and the Lyric Novelties of Romanticism MATS MALM	151
Hrólfr kraki: from Sentimental Drama to Fantasy Fiction TEREZA LANSING	165
Building up the Ties with the Past: August Strindberg and Starkaðr MASSIMILIANO BAMPI	181
August Strindberg's Remaking of <i>Áns saga bogsveigis</i> MARIA CRISTINA LOMBARDI	197
William Morris and the Poetic Edda ALESSANDRO ZIRONI	211
Old Norse Myths and the Poetic Edda as Tools of Political Propaganda JULIA ZERNACK	239
 Part III. The Contemporary Reception of Old Norse Literature 	
A Place in Time: Old Norse Myth and Contemporary Poetry in English and Scots HEATHER O'DONOGHUE	277
An Old Norse Manuscript to Die and Kill for: Viktor Arnar Ingólfsson's <i>Flateyjargáta</i> CHIARA BENATI	295
Arnaldur Indriðason's <i>Konungsbók</i> : Literary History as MacGuffin, Or: Raiders of the Lost Örk CAROLYNE LARRINGTON	311
Sagas as Sequential Art: Some Reflections on the Translation of Saga Literature into Comics FULVIO FERRARI	327
Index of Names	347
Index of Old Norse Manuscripts	355

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AUGUST STRINDBERG'S REMAKING OF *ÁNS SAGA BOGSVEIGIS*

Maria Cristina Lombardi

Among August Strindberg's early attempts at prose writing, there is an almost unknown fragment of a saga text which follows the narrative of the Old Norse *Áns saga bogsveigis* (*The Saga of Án the Bow-Bender*). The fragment was published from among his early texts (all of which appeared in the 1870s) by the author himself, under the title *I vårbrytningen* (*At Springtime*), a title which he kept in later editions. The Swedish version of the saga, *Ån Bogsveigis saga*, was first published in 1872 in *Vitter Kalender*, a magazine edited by a group of Uppsala students, who had previously collaborated in *Runaförbundet*, an association which by that stage had already disappeared (see Bampi's essay in this volume). The text was probably planned by Strindberg before he left Uppsala and his academic studies. It is known that, on 31 December 1871, he bought copies of *Morkinskinna* and *Eyrbyggja saga* (Hagsten 1951, 41), and it was from *Eyrbyggja saga* that he took the name Arnkell Ofeg, which he used as his *nom de plume* in *Vitter Kalender*. Before returning to Uppsala after the Christmas holidays, on 8 January 1872, Strindberg borrowed some Icelandic sagas from the Kungliga Biblioteket in Stockholm, among them *Áns saga bogsveigis*, published in Carl Christian Rafn's *Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda* edition. He took them to Uppsala and returned them to the Kungliga Biblioteket on 12 February. On 3 April he borrowed *Áns saga bogsveigis* again, in Old Norse and also Rafn's Danish translation of 1829–30 (Hagsten 1951, 39).

Strindberg also had the opportunity to read the first edition of the saga, with a parallel translation in both Swedish and Latin, in Erik Biörner's famous col-

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lection of *Fornaldarsögur, Nordiska kämpe dater* (1737), held by Stockholm's Kungliga Biblioteket. Erik Biörner had based his version on Codex Holmiensis Papp. Fol. 56 (Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket), which is a copy of Codex Holmiensis Papp. 8°, 7 (Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket). Biörner's *Nordiska kämpe dater* had been widely used by several Swedish writers in their reworkings of Old Norse material (for example, Esaias Tegnér in *Friðiofs saga* (1825) and probably Strindberg as well). Evidence for this can be found in the glossary of Old Icelandic terms which followed Strindberg's text in *Vitter Kalender*. He made partial use of some translations of Old Norse words available in Biörner's version of the saga. In order to explain a number of lexical units, Biörner uses a traditional technique, typical of many medieval translations from Latin into Germanic vernaculars: synonymic doublets to catch the full meaning of the original term. The first word is usually a Swedish archaism derived from the Old Norse term, the second a more commonly occurring word in current Swedish. Strindberg appears to have taken a number of the first words from Biörner's doublets into his text: archaisms as well as Icelandicisms intended to attract the reader's attention. He uses, for instance, *andas* instead of *dö* (to die), *rakna vid* instead of *vakna* (to regain consciousness), and *mannarön* instead of *fara* (dangerous situation).¹

According to what Strindberg wrote in a letter to his friend Eugène Fahlstedt at the beginning of May 1872, the first version of the saga was written in April. In the letter the main theme of the text is also clearly indicated.

Tack för ditt bref; det var roligt att någon förstod min saga. För ändringarna är jag tacksam; och jag kommer sjelf med flera. Så till exempel ska Ån bara torka sig i syna och hålla käften när trälen slår sådet på honom – ty han tror ännu inte att han får någonting – och då spares effekten af uppvaknandet tills fadern slår honom. Vidare skall tydligen framhållas det mensklige som ändå ligger på botten hos far och son; derigenom att, då fadern slår ner ögonen och skäms, skall Ån se på honom, derpå öppnar han knytet osv dvs – det är af harm öfver att den mannen Björn, som ändå är hans far, förödmjukas som han klämmer Gisle med stolsfoten. Då rusar folket mot Ån – då är hans faderns tur att gå emellan. (Eklund 1948, 102)

(Thank you for your letter; it is nice that someone has understood my saga. I am grateful for the changes you have made. I will make some more myself. For example, Ån will only dry his eyes and be quiet when the servant beats him — because he does not yet think that he is scolding him for anything — and so the effect of

¹ Hirvonen (1987, 137–45) discusses which Old Norse words used by Verelius and Biörner have found their way into modern Swedish.

awakening is postponed until the scene in which his father beats him. Later on, the presence of human feelings deep within both the father's and the son's souls will nonetheless be clearly shown; in fact, when the father looks down and becomes ashamed of his son, *Án* will look at him, and then he will unclench his fist etc, etc. — it's because of the pain of seeing Björn being humiliated — the man who is nevertheless his father — that he hits Gilse with the chair leg. Then people turn against *Án* — and now it is his father's turn to go between them.)²

We learn from this that the alliance between father and son following their reconciliation is the real topic of Strindberg's reworking of the saga. In the same letter, Strindberg adds that he intends to make some small changes to his text (for instance, eliminating unnecessary explanations). By comparing Strindberg's first and second versions of this saga fragment, it is possible to observe the tendency towards a more concentrated and elliptical narrative. He went on elaborating the saga until the end of August 1872, when he sent the new version to Fahlstedt with the changes he had promised and an undated letter, probably written on 19 August (Strindberg 1981, 195).

When the text appeared in *Vitter Kalender* in 1872, it was followed by a glossary of terms (in which, for example, *jökul* (glacier) was translated into *berg* (mountain)). These terms are taken partly from the doublets mentioned above, which appeared in Björner's translation of *Áns saga bogsveigis* into Swedish. Strindberg also used some Icelandicisms present in Björner's work, such as, for example, *vindögat* for *fönstret* (window). This might indicate a certain dependence on Björner's Swedish version, but this is impossible to prove, though Strindberg must surely have read it. By comparing the Old Norse original with Rafn's and Björner's Danish and Swedish translations respectively, as well as with Strindberg's reworking, we can see that Strindberg used more archaisms than were used in the Danish version: for example, we find in Rafn (1929–30, II, 258) 'Da han var tolv aar gammel' while Strindberg (1981, 102) uses *vintrar* instead of *aar*, as we find in the Old Norse text and in Björner's Swedish translation. However, in some cases, Strindberg makes independent choices, following his own artistic sensibility, as in the comic scene in which *Án* is described running after his brother who had earlier bound him to an oak. The original saga reads *eik* (oak) as does Björner's Swedish text (which has *ek*), while Rafn's Danish version has the generic term 'tree': 'og ham meget fast ved et træ' (Rafn 1829–30, II, 260) (and he tied him very tightly to a tree). Strindberg differs from all the others, presenting instead a 'pine tree', the most typical tree found

² All English translations are my own.

along Swedish coastlines, especially near Stockholm and in his beloved archipelago: 'Ån blev övermannad och bunden vid en fura på stranden' (Stringberg 1991, 108) (Ån was overpowered and tied to a pine-tree on the beach). His tendency towards realistic descriptions and personal interpretations guides Strindberg's choice of vocabulary even in a text like this, where time and space often have mythical dimensions.

Unfortunately, the first episode of the saga published in the student magazine was not followed by another instalment, due in part to the negative critical judgement it met because of misinformation: in *Aftonbladet* (14 December), in *Nya Dagliga Allehanda* (17 December), and in *Uppsala Tidning* (13 December), the saga is described as being about pigs and sows. In his letter to Fahlstedt written in September 1872, Strindberg expressed his disappointment at the negative comments some of his friends and a few critics had levelled against the text he had published in *Vitter Kalendar*:

Var god skicka mig ofördröjligen min Saga. Jag har hört att Fehr ej tycker om henne, det är nog för mig. Jag vill inte utsätta mig för någon 'nåder' – och jag sjunger min visa för Grotte – att inte Fehr förstår den förvånar mig inte – hur skulle en sådan trasvarg och lushund som Ån kunna presenteras bland bildadt folk som gå på alkaiska klackar och j jambiska frackar? (Eklund 1948, 105)

(Please, send me my saga back immediately. I have heard that Fehr does not like it; that is enough for me. I do not want to leave it to someone's 'clemency' — and I sing my song for Grotte. That Fehr does not understand it does not surprise me — how could such a tramp and a knave as Ån be introduced to educated people who walk on alcaic heels and wear iambic tail-coats?)

It is interesting to reflect on what Strindberg thought of his version of the saga. In his autobiography, *Tjänstekvinnans son* (*The Son of a Servant*), he calls it a personal document, saying that 'he has praised himself through Ån as the black sheep of his family' (1913, 59) (förhårligat sig själv i Ån såsom sin familjs erkända rötägg'). Ån seems to have been a response to the incomprehension and negative treatment with which Strindberg's literary debut had been met. The figure of Ån, the protagonist of the *fornaldarsaga* which Strindberg follows in plot and pattern, is presented as a stupid and foolish young boy, loved and protected by his mother but scorned and despised by his father, Björn. In the original Old Norse saga (as well as in Strindberg's text), Ån is compared to his valiant and promising brother Þórir, whom Björn prefers. Some critics, in particular Vésteinn Ólason (1994, 125), have seen this pair of brothers as mirroring the more famous brothers in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. Like Egill, Ån is physically clumsy and ugly as well as being a talented poet. His vulgarity is superficial, and

he has the makings of a nobleman: the only obstacles are the misunderstanding of people around him and his inability to communicate with them.

Strindberg's text follows the Old Norse saga in many respects. His syntactical constructions, names, settings, and characters have their main elements in common with the original *Áns saga bogsveigis*. Nevertheless, his work differs significantly from its model in certain formal innovations and, most interestingly, in particular psychological aspects that are connected to the Swedish author's own life. He even tries to transform one of the most impersonal genres, the saga, into an autobiographical account, giving his personal imprint to the plot. He especially focuses on the relationship between Ån and Björn, making it reflect the difficult relationship between himself and his own father. In doing so, Strindberg chose two medieval characters who inhabited a cultural environment apparently far from the sophisticated one in which he lived to represent this complex and deep relationship.

Strindberg himself lends support to this interpretation in the above-mentioned letter to Fahlstedt: 'Vidare skall tydligen framhållas det menliga som ändå ligger på botten hos far och son' (Eklund 1948, 102) (Moreover, the humanity still lying deep within father and son will be clearly shown). His characters are nothing but versions of Strindberg himself. Biographical echoes and implications are everywhere in his works. He preserves the names and settings of the original, but he reshapes everything else through his own subjective experience. He goes further than his source, ascribing values to the original plot, creating a complex, ironic, and subversive text which quickly reaches a climax. He reduces the narrative time (as he would later do with the one-act plays of his maturity, in which he eliminated division into acts) and achieves an extraordinary degree of concentration. In fact, the climax is reached so quickly because of his tendency to let everything spill over immediately, and the conflict between father and son is displayed and solved by this very particular dramatic method.

Strindberg is an extraordinary creative writer due mainly to his technical ability to find new and dynamic forms through which psychological processes can be enacted. If we analyze how Strindberg operates in recreating the Old Norse text, it is immediately evident that he makes cuts and changes in order to render the text more dramatic, through simple, vivid descriptions and the overt use of dialogue. In this his method is similar to the one he would later adopt in his historical short stories, *Historiska miniatyrer*, published in 1905. Here he re-elaborates the long narrative passages of his historical sources, turning them into dialogical sequences set in short narrative frames, transforming his models into a kind of modern drama where conflicts emerge out of the words of characters.

As far as our text is concerned, the descriptions in the original saga were already quite simple, sometimes reduced to very basic elements, characterizing a person, a thing, or the environment in only the most essential terms. But from the beginning of his career as an author, Strindberg engaged in an aesthetic project of portraying reality as immediately as possible through a few vivid and effective lines. The tendency was similar to being a photographer: indeed, photography and painting were among his central interests, as Rolf Söderberg has shown (1989, 6–15). Strindberg used the camera for the purpose of straightforward documentation in a modern, realist way, but he also saw something supernatural and poetic in both the photographic image and the process which pointed to some magical power behind the phenomena he observed. Like Edvard Munch, he ascribed occult qualities to the camera. Both these tendencies were mirrored in his literary production, and in some cases they overlapped. The role of symbolism in Strindberg's work and his role as a forerunner of Expressionistic literary trends are apparent in the radical changes which he made to the basic genre of the medieval saga. They are clearly traceable in and behind his remake of the saga. The foremost of these changes are concerned with time and place. These aspects are less geographically and chronologically determined than in the original saga. Eliminating the genealogies of the Norwegian kings as well as many place names, the story becomes more symbolic and universal, focusing on the timeless conflict between father and son (or between 'tradition' and 'innovation', between 'old' and 'new').

But the most significant change concerns the mode of narration, which shifts from an account of actions (in the Old Norse original) into the dramatization of characters' interactions on stage (in Strindberg's text). He takes time to reveal his inner identity which appears slowly in the text, especially through dialogue. He wants his audience to be confronted with vital characters, alive in speech and interaction. His extensive use of direct speech in short sequences is deeply significant in shaping the general character of the text, which becomes both tragic and comic at the same time. In this respect, Strindberg's narration shows many similarities with half-serious dramatic late medieval Icelandic texts, which could encompass a wide range of tones, from the ceremonial and serious to the scurrilous and comic. In fact, in the original text the Swedish author found humorous scenes like the one mentioned above and the following one:

Hann [Þórir] tók þá Án ok batt hann við eina eik heldr sterkliga. Ekki braust Án við. Síðan fór hann ok eigi langt, áðr hann sá, at Án fór þar ok dró eptir sér eikina; hafði hann kippt henni upp með rótum. (Rafn 1929–30, II, 328)

(Then he [Þórir] took Án and tied him very tightly to an oak. Án did not resist. He [Þórir] had not got very far before he saw Án coming after him, dragging the oak behind him; he had pulled it up, roots and all.)

Strindberg often created sequences of thrust and parry action which, with their over-emphasized body language, seem to anticipate silent films of the 1920s. An example is the passage in which Án's father Björn, who despises his son for being lazy, vulgar, dirty, and animal-like, punishes him:

Björn tog ett spett och slog honom över halsen. Án vände på sig.
 Björn slog.
 Án reste sig på armbagarne och såg fadern i ögonen. Björn höll upp.
 'Res på dig!'
 Án satt still.
 Björn slog av spettet.
 'Nu är det slut, far!' sa Án. (Strindberg 1981, 104–05)

(Björn took a spit and struck him on the neck. Án turned around.
 Björn struck again.
 Án raised himself onto his elbows and looked his father in the eye.
 Björn stopped.
 'Stand up!'
 Án did not move.
 Björn threw the spit away.
 'Now it is over, father!' Án said.)

A closer look at this passage reveals another aspect to Strindberg's modernization and reshaping of the genre. He introduces a grotesque quality in the modern, Expressionistic sense of the term. The characters become puppets and the text a tragi-comic farce. Án is now a comic hero who dominates the scene and wins our sympathy. For instance, in the scene when Án is bound to a tree by his brother Thore, he succeeds in freeing himself and runs after Thore, with the tree on his back. This comic scene — already present in the original — creates a humorous caricature of Án's attitude towards life: he does not respect any rule, prohibition, or limitation. Strindberg seems to turn to grotesque methods when countering the world of the establishment, represented here by the father. The grotesque features exaggerate the already ridiculous elements of the original text, in a way which is reminiscent of early twentieth-century Expressionist drama.

The grotesque is designed to denote various sorts of sublimity, and this is certainly the case with the stanzas in Strindberg's text. Making Án address his *lausavísur* — a poetic genre traditionally associated with praise poetry and commonly dedicated to kings and jarls — to a pig, he introduces the possibil-

ity of ridicule.³ Strindberg creates a special type of pet for his hero — a little pig whose name is Grotte and behaves like a dog — and has Ån address all his verses to him. The name Grotte evokes the famous mill Grotti, which the two giant women Fenja and Menja were able to turn, grinding out gold, peace, and fair fortune. It may suggest the important role that Grotte plays in Ån's life, but equally the name may allude here to the colour of the animal (in Swedish *grå* — or *grått* in the neuter form — means 'grey'). If we consider the noble eagles, wolves, ravens, and swans who usually appear in skaldic stanzas, all connected with war and battles or other mythological traditions, the choice of a pig as a friend seems quite unusual. The pig might have been suggested to Strindberg by *Eyrbyggja saga* (which he borrowed from the Royal Library) where there is an episode about a small wild pig (wild pigs are grey like Grotte) which Katla, a woman expert in magic, keeps as a pet. Katla says:

Síðan gengu þeir Arnkell ok leituðu Odds úti ok inni ok sá ekki kvikt, útan túngölt einn, er Katla átti, er lá undir haugnun ok fóru brott eptir þat. (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 53)

(Then he and Arnkell went to look for Oddr outside and inside, but they did not see anybody, except a small wild pig belonging to Katla, which lay under a mound. After that they went away.)

Moreover, in these two *lausavísur*, Strindberg anticipates some modernistic aspects (which would occur later in twentieth-century Swedish poetry) by introducing concrete, vulgar details or practical objects that are found in his later literary work, in particular in the poems of *Sömgångarnätter*. For the metre, he adopts structures which imitate not only Old Norse metrics, using alliteration, variation, and repetition, but also rhyme and rhythmic accents typical of eighteenth-century prosody, as he does in the second *lausavísa*. Strindberg's stanzas in *Ån Bogveigs saga* are not so complex: they consist of single closed sentences, with one clause simply tacked on to the other without subordination. These verses resemble those of his collection *Visor*, in particular *Villemo* and *Semele*: both start with a second-person singular pronoun and an imperative form of the verb. Similarly, in the saga the two stanzas start with vocative elements, the first with the compound vocative *gängekarl* (wanderer) referring to Grotte, and the second with an imperative, *sjung* (sing!), followed

³ Vesteinn Ólason (1994, 104–14) sees *Ans bogveigis saga* as a parody of chivalric values and a parody of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, particularly in regard to the aforementioned pair of brothers: the poet who is strong, ugly, and strange in his behaviour, and his brother, Þórólfr, who is good-looking and accomplished; see also Willson 2009, 1039–46.

by the second-person pronoun *du*. In the first *lausavísa*, Án warns his pig not to go out because it is too cold and *Goemánad* (the period between January and February) is a dangerous time. In the second, Án confesses to the killing of a little sow that Grotte was in love with, in order to protect him from going outside during the night.

Even when there is a switch to first-person verb forms, these still refer to Grotte. The strong vocative element in many Old Norse poems indicates that they were composed for the purpose of performance in the presence of the king (Jesch 2006). But in Strindberg's poetic texts, this solemn situation is trivialized by changing the addressee to a pig. In comparison with the praise poems usually embedded in *konungasögur* or in *Íslendingasögur*, however, the rhetorical figures and the metrical structures in the skaldic stanzas of the original *Áns saga bogsveigis* are quite simple. This is the case in other *fornaldarsögur* such as *Friðþjófs saga*, where the meaning of verses is easily reconstructable since, for instance, tmesis follows a very recognizable pattern, syntax is not at all complicated, and kennings are very rare and conventional, with usually two or three elements at most. These original *lausavísur* of *Áns saga bogsveigis* do not possess the obscurity typical of some skaldic poems quoted in the other saga genres mentioned above. They are easily comprehensible, as they use syntax which is not so entangled as to obscure the meaning of the verse.

It is interesting to consider some passages in Strindberg's text referring to Án's poetical skill. A sort of metaphorical description of the creative process is hidden in the dialogue between Án and Ivar Bjässe, one of the guests at Thore's wedding feast. Through these two saga characters, Strindberg expresses his own views about the making of a poem. His negative attitude towards fantastic narratives in general — an attitude reflecting the low opinion he had in his early years of non-realistic literature — leads him to eliminate all supernatural elements and characters. Despite the fact that he includes the bow and chair in his text, Strindberg makes no mention of the dwarf who made them or anything about their origin. When Björn accuses Án of having stolen his wood to make the chair and breaks it into pieces, Strindberg has Án reply that he made it from some wood he found on the beach. The dialogue between Án and Ivar Bjässe also expresses Strindberg's idea of the manifold and complex nature of the poetic creative process as well as its concrete qualities:

'Kan du göra visor?' Frågade Ivarr Bjässe.

'Jag har bara gjort en stol.'

'Har du inte gjort visor förr?'

'Jo, men det har gott sönder nu.' (Strindberg 1981, 104)

('Can you make poems?' asked Ivarr Bjässe.
 'I have only made a chair.'
 'Haven't you made poems before?'
 'Yes, but now it's broken.')

The ambiguity between 'poem' and 'chair' reminds us of Snorri's comparison in *Skáldskaparmál* between making a poem and making a ship (Faulkes 1998, 63): both of them require nails (linking elements), different materials (wood, iron/metrics, kennings), and an accurate construction.

This idea is also stressed in a skaldic stanza attributed to Hallar-Steinn in *Skáldskaparmál* (Faulkes 1998, 63), translated by Anthony Faulkes (1987, 115) as follows: 'I have smoothed by poetry's plane my refrain-ship's prow: (poem's beginning), careful in my craftsmanship.' According to Old Norse poetics, poetry is then essentially craftsmanship, and thus the poet is a special kind of carpenter. In the creative process different skills are involved, although inspiration is always necessary. In Strindberg's text, Ån seems to allude to this essential aspect when he tells his mother how he got the wood he used to make the chair:

'Var har du varit son?'
 'Jag har suttit vid stranden.'
 'Vad gjorde du där?'
 'Jag väntade.'
 'Väntade?'
 'Ja, det brukar komma virke med vinden.' (Strindberg 1981, 105)

('Where have you been, son?'
 'I have been on the beach.'
 'What did you do there?'
 'I waited.'
 'You waited?'
 'Yes, some wood usually arrives with the wind.')

Vinden (the wind) seems here to symbolize inspiration (a metaphorical blowing, rather than a metaphorical liquid, perhaps more reflective of classical rather than Nordic tradition), which is needed to start the process. This metaphorical dialogue about poetic creation resembles the discussion in Snorri's *Edda* on the same subject (Faulkes 1998, 63). It emphasizes the same two essential components which Lars Lönnroth has highlighted in *Skaldemjödets i berget*:

I Nordens äldsta lärobok i poetik, Snorra Edda, framträder två helt olika och delvis stridande sätt att betrakta skaldekonsten. Den är å ena sidan ett hantverk [...] och å andra sidan också en gåva från Oden. (Lönnroth 1996, 10)

(The oldest Scandinavian handbook about poetics, Snorri's *Edda*, describes two absolutely different and conflicting ways of considering skaldic poetry: on the one hand as craftsmanship [...] and on the other hand as a gift from Odin.)

In Strindberg's text, the wind and sea together bring the gift of poetry, as if Nature, and not a mythological being, were the giver. This is a further example of how Strindberg eliminated all supernatural beings from his text.

As for the elimination of the genealogy of Norwegian kings, it serves not only to change the original plot into a timeless narrative but also to express Strindberg's anti-royalist ideas. In the target-text (the reworking) the king is mentioned in passing, when Thore is equipping a ship in order to sail to the king's court. As Karl G. Johansson has pointed out (2009, 462–63), the original *Áns saga bogsveigis* is certainly anti-royalist, and this is another quality which may have attracted Strindberg's attention. King Ingjaldr is evil and aggressive, a deceiver, and a liar. In the Old Norse saga, while Þórir conspires with King Ingjaldr and tries to convince his brother to do the same, Án resists, avoiding any kind of agreement with the royal power. He says to his brother: 'Goldit hefir þú grunnýðgi þinnar, er þú trúðir konungi vel, en annat mun nú skyldara en at ávíta þik.' (Rafn 1929–30, II, 354) (You have paid for your credulity when you trusted the king too much, but something else is now more pressing than to rebuke you).

Here Án seems to possess an uncommon skill, in that he is able to foresee events and others' intentions. A character in Strindberg's *En blå bok* (*A Blue Book*), the Teacher, has a similar experience: 'Han läste mina tysta tankar bakom mina höga ord' (Strindberg 1918, 55) (I heard their thoughts behind their words). There is a sort of echo of Hamlet here: the madman and the child are able to see behind appearances. Án is a victim of circumstances and of his own defective constitution, but he has an important natural gift: he is a poet. He sees further than his brother. He can guess King Ingjaldr's treacherous plans and warns Þórir against him. Án also has good relationships with the class of *bændr* (farmers). He stays with the *bondi* Erpr during one winter, and has a child with Drífa, Erpr's daughter; he does not know about this son, because she gives birth to the child after Án's departure.

Unfortunately, we do not know how this saga would have appeared if Strindberg had been able to conclude the series of episodes, had he met with a positive reception. But the original *Áns saga bogsveigis* reports a crucial fight between father and son — Án and his son Þórir — at its end. They do not know each other because Án ignores his son's existence.⁴ Although closely resembling

⁴ Before leaving, he had told the *bondi* to send him the child if it were a male, or keep it if it were a female, something the *bondi* had not done to protect Þórir from the king.

the fatal struggle in the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, the Old Norse saga differs from the German lay, as it presents a happy ending (as is the case in most *fornaldasögur*) with the reconciliation of the two men, followed by Án's introduction of his son to his wise wife, Jörunn, who responds with a proverb: 'kemr at því, sem mælt er, at hverr er auðgari er þykkist' (Rafn 1829–30, II, 359) (it happens, as it is said, that each is richer than he imagines).

The pattern which Strindberg elaborates in his reworking of the saga is simple: a narrative close to the original tradition in name and plot but differing from the original genre by the elimination of many supernatural elements. He provides a balanced set of playful inventions and even satirical sketches, as well as serious concerns, profound human relationships, and difficulties connected to his hero's search for integration into society. In his earlier work, Strindberg regarded the fantastic as a falsification of reality, yet he considers older forms of narrative, such as myth, fairy tales, sagas, and eddic poems, as archetypes of collective behaviours and depositaries of human wisdom. He retells *Áns saga bogsveigis* in his own manner, using the saga text to create a highly literary version. His obsessions and fears, and his misogyny (in this fragment projected onto the little sow), anticipated his subsequent conflicts and pathological traits. Án attracts him because of his split and discordant mind, his ambivalence, and complexity which are part of the artist's rebellion against the established social order. Strindberg's need for intense self-analysis makes him one of the most autobiographical writers in the history of literature, irrespective of the form or the genre he uses. Identifying him as a precursor of Expressionism and even Surrealism, it is possible to see a coherent line from this initial, ironic textual experiment in remaking a traditional work to the later prose and dramatic works of his maturity.

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