HEATHER O'DONOGHUE:
Narrative in the Icelandic Family Saga:
Meanings of Time in Old Norse Literature.
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It is an unfortunate feature of this interesting book that its Introduction, which presents ideas of ancient and modern writers that are important for its argument, has no footnotes, leaving it to the reader to trace these ideas to their sources. Only to a limited extent are these ideas served with footnotes in the remainder of the book. It thus needs to be pointed out that the *fabula/sjuzhet* distinction, comparable to Gérard Genette's story/narrative distinction, explained in Chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 47, 75) and involving the difference between, respectively, what is told and how it is told, derives from Viktor Shklovsky's essay on *Tristram Shandy*, first published in 1921 (see L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis, transs, *Russian formalist criticism* (1965), p. 25 (note 1), p. 57; cf. Genette, *Narrative discourse* (1980), pp. 25-29); and that an understanding of Paul Ricoeur's difficult concept of the 'third time' of narrative (effectively 'narrated time') requires a careful reading of Ricoeur's three-volume *Time and narrative* (1984-88; first published in French, 1983-85), especially, perhaps, vol. 3 (1988), pp. 99-274. Ricoeur sees this third time as existing apart from, but mediating between, lived time and cosmic time, the former concept deriving from St Augustine's notion that time exists in the mind: that a *distentio animi* 'stretching of the mind' is required to conceive of the past, present, and future (*Confessions* XI. 26 (33)); and the latter concept deriving from Aristotle's view of time as dependent on movement, the perpetual movement of the heavens (*Physics* IV. 10-14). A further concept presented in the Introduction is *totum simul* 'everything at once', deriving from Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (V. 6), where Boethius, discussing eternity, says that whatever lives in time does not comprehend the whole extent of its life simultaneously (*Non enim totum simul* [...] *vitae spatium comprehendit*) in the way that, to take an example (not from Boethius), someone who has finished reading a book has an idea of its contents from beginning to end (cf. Ricoeur, *Time and narrative*, vol. 1 (1984), pp. 159-60).

The present reviewer's understanding of Ricoeur's 'third time' is that, when reading or hearing a narrative, one becomes aware of 'a certain directedness' in the story (see Ricoeur, 'Narrative time', *Critical inquiry* 7, no.1 (1980), pp. 169-90, p. 174), a sense that the story is moving towards a specific end and already giving a hint of the *totum simul* perspective on it that will be possible when the end is reached. One is thus experiencing what William C. Dowling, in *Ricoeur on time and narrative* (2011), p. 83, calls 'double temporality': sharing with characters in the story an uncertainty of what time will bring, and with the narrator a knowledge that the story is coterminous with a block of time that can be viewed as a whole. This could well have been the experience of the original audiences of the Icelandic sagas, to whom their stories must already have been known in many cases, either wholly or in part.

This book concentrates on just six of the Icelandic family sagas, those named in the present paragraph. Chapter 1, on 'external' or objective time (see pp. 5-6, 11; cf. Ricoeur (1988), p. 104), first shows how the inclusion of introductory genealogies in sagas not only lends authenticity to their narratives but contributes to their themes. The opening genealogies of *Laxdœla saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga, Grettis saga* and *Hrafnkels saga* adumbrate the themes of family prestige, settlement, marginality, and independence of spirit in these four sagas respectively, while the absence of such a genealogy from *Njáls saga*, with its leap to the story of Unnr Marðardóttir and her failed marriage, introduces that saga's marital and sexual themes. (Are these sagas already anticipating the *totum simul* stage, from their very beginnings?) The remainder of the chapter shows how references in sagas to historical events both abroad and within Iceland (such as the conversion of Iceland, initiated in Norway), as well as to 'natural time' (winter and summer, night and day, not least in *Gísla saga* and *Grettis saga*), and the 'cultural times' set for assemblies, length of outlawries, pagan and Christian festivals, etc., provide a consistently realistic backdrop to the stories told.

The second chapter, on 'duration', gives examples from the sagas of the variations in narrative speed described by Genette (1980), pp. 86-112: ellipsis, summary, scene, and pause. An ellipsis such as *Þat var einn dag, at* […] 'It happened one day that […]' takes up virtually no narrative time while indicating the passing of an indeterminate amount of story time, while a sentence such as *Bjǫrn var tvá vetr í Suðreyjum* 'Bjǫrn stayed two years in the Hebrides' conveys a specific and lengthy period of story time in very little narrative time. Ellipsis

shades into summary when it is relatively detailed, as in the opening sentence of Chapter 2 of *Laxdœla saga*, with its account of Haraldr hárfagri's struggle for supremacy in Norway, where a brief instance of narrative time covers years of story time, while the ensuing passage of dialogue in that same chapter gives for the length of its duration an example of scene, in which, as in most passages of dialogue in the sagas, story time and narrative time are more or less equal. Pause, a relatively rare feature of saga narrative, is apparent in passages of description, whether of a place, such as Fljótsdalsheiðr in *Hrafnkels saga*, or a person, such as Óláfr pái in the act of confronting the Irish from his ship in Chapter 21 of *Laxdœla saga*. Here narrative time takes over while story time comes to a standstill.

The third chapter, on 'order', shows how the difference between story and narrative is also apparent in the ordering of events. Use is made here of what Genette (1980), pp. 35-79, calls anachronies, that is, cases of prolepsis and analepsis, the former involving an evocation in advance of an event that takes place later in the story, and the latter, popularly known as 'flashback', constituting a retrospective reference to an earlier event. A distinction is made in this chapter between narratorial and diegetic anachronies. The mention in Chapter 15 of *Eyrbyggja saga* of Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi, *er enn kemr síðar við þessa sǫgu* 'who will come into this saga later', as indeed he does in Chapter 22, thus appearing later in the story than he does in the narrative, is given (p. 84) as an example of narratorial prolepsis, while the prediction of Guðrún's four marriages, made by Gestr Oddleifsson on the basis of her four dreams in Chapter 33 of *Laxdœla saga*, appears to be presented (p. 93) as a case of diegetic prolepsis, since it comes from a character within the diegesis of the saga, the world in which its events take place. Most of the analepses in the sagas, like the prolepses, are presented in this chapter as being of the latter, diegetic type, as in the case of Hallgerðr reminding Gunnarr, in Chapter 77 of *Njáls saga*, of the slap he gave her in Chapter 48, and Skeggi's reference in Chapter 16 of *Grettis saga* to Grettir's fight with Auðunn in a ball-game, described in Chapter 15. It may however be asked, in the case of the *Laxdœla saga* example, whether a prophecy (which may not come true, though it does in this case) may strictly be regarded as a prolepsis; and more generally, whether anachronies should be regarded as other than the prerogative of a narrator, whether diegetic or not. Not all anachronies in the sagas are accurate or successfully handled, as the chapter goes on to show.

The fourth chapter, entitled 'The voice of the silent narrator', first shows how the narrator's silence manifests itself in impassivity, lack

of comment, and most especially in displacement, that is, in delegating the relaying or witnessing of events to characters in the saga, not least where sexual relations and the supernatural are concerned. Thus in Chapter 34 of *Laxdœla saga* Guðrún's relations, while married to her first husband, with the man who becomes her second, Þórðr Ingunnarson, are described as follows: *ok fell þar mǫrg umrœða um kærleika þeira Þórðar ok Guðrúnar* 'there was much talk of a love affair between Þórðr and Guðrún'; and in Chapter 14 of *Njáls saga* it is reported that, after the death of Hallgerðr's uncle Svanr at sea, some fishermen thought they saw Svanr entering the Kaldbakshorn mountain and being warmly welcomed (by its supernatural inhabitants). The narrator is silent on whether what was talked about or thought to have been seen actually took place. This fourth chapter then goes on to show how the voice of the narrator does on occasion make itself felt in informative, judgemental, and explanatory passages, almost as if editing a story already known to the audience, and how it may even reveal a character's unspoken thoughts, as when, in *Hrafnkels saga*, Einarr decides to ride the horse forbidden him by Hrafnkell because he thinks Hrafnkell will not find out.

The final chapter, 'Withheld knowledge', illustrates cases of information temporarily withheld by the narrator (with the sanction, as it were, of the *totum simul* perspective), such as the details of Snorri goði's advice to Styrr in Chapter 28 of *Eyrbyggja saga* on how to dispose of a couple of berserks, and the revelation of Melkorka's identity in *Laxdœla saga* (Chapter 13); and cases of questions which are simply not answered, such as 'who stole Hrefna's headdress?' in *Laxdœla saga* (even though the answer is obvious) and 'who killed Vésteinn?' in *Gísla saga* (even though an answer is given in *Eyrbyggja saga*).

Open to criticism is O'Donoghue's definition (p. 75) of analepsis as an anachrony 'in which an event which occurred at an earlier point in the story or discourse than the present moment of the narrative is not narrated or alluded to at the time at which it took place, but at a later point in the narrative'. Even with the correction: 'but at this present moment of the narrative,' this will not do as an overall definition. What is being described here is what Genette (1980), p. 51, calls a *completing* analepsis, a reference to an event which has taken place earlier in the story but has not yet been mentioned; the analepsis thus has a completing, or gap-filling function. But analepsis may also have a repeating function, in referring to an event that has been mentioned earlier, as O'Donoghue clearly recognises, in including among her

examples (pp. 99-100) Hallgerðr's reference in Chapter 77 of *Njáls saga* to Gunnarr slapping her in the face, as reported in Chapter 48: a case, in Genette's terms (1980), p. 54, of *repeating* analepsis.

Also open to question, though it might seem to have the support of Genette (1980: pp. 244-45), is O'Donoghue's statement on p. 113 that 'Family saga narrators are always heterodiegetic'. More to the point, surely, is her statement on p. 183, that 'family saga narrators are always extra-diegetic' (her hyphen). To be heterodiegetic a person or thing must strictly speaking belong to a diegesis different (*hetero-*) from the one to which it is linked: it must belong to a story world of its own. Thus the first-person (homodiegetic) narrator of Chaucer's *Canterbury tales*, who inhabits the story world of a pilgrimage to Canterbury, is heterodiegetic in relation to the stories he reports his fellow-pilgrims as telling, which are set in their own worlds: ancient Athens, Oxford and Cambridge, etc., whereas the narrators of family sagas are almost without exception totally extradiegetic, belonging to no discernible story world. The one possible exception, which O'Donoghue does not mention, is the final sentence of *Njáls saga*: *Ok lýk ek þar Brennu-Njáls sǫgu* 'and there I end the story of Njáll's burning'. Here the hitherto extradiegetic narrator of the saga seems momentarily to become heterodiegetic and also, with the use of the first person, homodiegetic: the sentence might almost be read as part of a story, told in the first person, about the production of *Njáls saga*. The word *heterodiegetic* would be applicable to the story in *Grettis saga* of Kárr inn gamli, which 'contributes to the primary narrative, but comes from outside of it', p. 98.

A few errors may be pointed out. Although not often mentioned, the patronymic of Ingólfr Arnarson, traditionally regarded as Iceland's first settler, is consistently misspelt (pp. 18, 103, 220); 'an old woman' is stated on p. 33 to have brought Hrafnkell news of the approach of Eyvindr Bjarnarson (*sic*); and the name of Unnr in djúpúðga seems to do service in the Index both for herself and for Unnr Marðardóttir, who does not receive a separate entry. One must assume indeed that Heather O'Donoghue was not responsible for the Index: the listing of names beginning with the Icelandic letter <Þ> (pronounced *th* as in *thin*) together with words beginning with <p> belies the sensitivity to the Icelandic language mostly shown elsewhere in this thought-provoking book.

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