



Sheryl McDonald Werronen

Popular Romance in Iceland

The Women, Worldviews, and
Manuscript Witnesses of Níðis saga

Amsterdam
University
Press



Popular Romance in Iceland

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Popular Romance in Iceland

*The Women, Worldviews, and Manuscript
Witnesses of Nítíða saga*

Sheryl McDonald Werronen

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Manuscript Abbreviations

Add.	Additional manuscript
AM	Den arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling
ÍB	Safn Hins íslenska bókmenntafélags
ÍBR	Handritasafn Reykjavíkurdeildar Hins íslenska bókmenntafélags
JS	Jón Sigurðsson
Lbs	Handritasafn Landsbókasafn–Háskólabókasafn Íslands
Nks	Den nye kongelige samling
Papp.	Pappers-Handskrifter
Perg.	Pergaments-Handskrifter
Rask	Rasmus Rask
SÁM	Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi

Acknowledgements

This book grew out of research I undertook at the University of Leeds from 2009-2013. The idea to carry out a detailed study of *Nítíða saga* was formed after reading a number of medieval Icelandic romances for the first time, at the suggestion of Alaric Hall. Needless to say, *Nítíða saga* caught my eye as a particularly enjoyable romance, not least because of its strong female lead. The prospect of working with a text surviving in so many hand-written paper copies, and which so relatively few people had studied before me, was also exciting. The invaluable support of both Alaric Hall and Catherine Batt during my time at Leeds helped me to navigate the many paths of inquiry I found before me in such an ambitious project; their insightful readings of early drafts were crucial in sharpening my arguments. Likewise, the critical readings of my work by Alan V. Murray and Matthew James Driscoll improved it further, and Shaun F.D. Hughes' thorough review of a late draft of the book helped to tighten everything up while highlighting areas meriting more detailed discussions.

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Some of the material in one of the case studies in Chapter 1 was first published in *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures*, volume 1, issue 2, December 2012, pages 303-18; and my text and translation of *Nítíða*

saga included in this book's Appendix are also based on versions previously published in the journal *Leeds Studies in English*, new series volume 40 (2009), pages 119-46.

A final word of thanks is due to Simon Forde and others at Amsterdam University Press, along with Tuomo Fonsén and the other editors of the Turku Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies series *Crossing Boundaries*, for their help and guidance throughout the process of seeing this work through to publication.

Introduction

er og ei audsagt með öfrodre tungu i utlegdumm veralldarinnar, so mǫnnum verde skemtelegt, hvor fǫgnudur vera munde i midiumm heimenum af sliku hoffolke samannkomnu¹

(it is also not easily said with an unlearned tongue in the outer regions of the world, so that it might be entertaining for people, what joy might be in the middle of the world when such courtiers come together)

It is tempting to think of Iceland in the Middle Ages as sitting somewhat uneasily on the ‘outer regions of the world’. While it had first existed as an independent Commonwealth without a monarch, Iceland became subject to the control of Norway in 1262 and just over a century later became part of the larger Kalmar Union. While the communities inhabiting this small island in the middle of the Atlantic were clearly different from their Scandinavian neighbours in terms of their history, literature, and eventually also their language, at the height of the Middle Ages Iceland was drawn into the mainland European community with which Nordic monarchs were keenly interacting. With its landscape of farmsteads instead of towns and, in its Commonwealth days, its decentralized government structured around a federation of chieftains instead of kings, Iceland in many ways had far less in common with the rest of medieval Europe than did Norway or Denmark.² It is no wonder, then, that the author of a romance called *Nítíða saga*³ – a text written in Iceland, probably sometime during the fourteenth century – would appear to situate Iceland at the fringes of the world. But, as we will see throughout this book, the culture and literature of late medieval Iceland was not as isolated from medieval European ideas and ideals as this excerpt might lead us to believe, taken at face value. Likewise, we will see that Iceland’s language was not such an *ófróður tunga* ‘unlearned tongue’ as the author here suggests.

While the marginality or non-marginality of Iceland is certainly not a new line of enquiry in itself, it has yet to be considered in very much detail

1 ‘Nitida saga’, ed. by Loth, p. 36.

2 On the historical background see e.g. Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland’s 1100 Years*; Helgi Þorláksson, ‘Historical Background’, pp. 136–54.

3 The convention is to treat this name, whether in its Latinate form – *Nitida* – or its modern Icelandic reflex – *Nítíða* (pronounced ‘NEE-tee-the’) – as an indeclinable noun.

from the vantage point of late medieval Icelandic romance (*riddarasögur*), which has until recently been a genre of Icelandic literature left to the margins in favour of the better known family sagas (*Íslendingasögur*) and legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*).⁴ It is only relatively recently that romances composed in Iceland (those not translated from other European vernaculars) have become the primary subjects of academic study, and the number of medieval Icelandic romances translated into modern languages, including English, also still remains far too small. Many texts still await a proper edition, let alone a translation, although progress is now being made.⁵ *Nítíða saga* is one such Icelandic romance that has been little studied, and yet is deeply concerned with such questions of Iceland's place within the wider world at the end of the Middle Ages – and also in early modern times, in the story's many younger post-Reformation versions. *Nítíða saga* is also, even more, concerned with the question of what it means to *be* a romance in Iceland. In its questioning, the saga challenges many of the boundaries that come along with genre classification.

The occasional passing reference to *Nítíða saga* appears in some early twentieth-century scholarship,⁶ but it was largely unstudied until the publication of Agnete Loth's edition (never meant to be comprehensive) in 1965,⁷ and the *Bibliography of Old Norse–Icelandic Romances* twenty years later.⁸ For the next twenty-five years limited analysis of *Nítíða saga* has appeared in a number of works on Icelandic romance, but not usually in much detail.⁹

4 For an overview of this see Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction', pp. 190–204 (esp. pp. 196–97); Ármann Jakobsson, *Ílla fenginn mjöður*, pp. 171–72.

5 The legendary sagas in Hermann Pálsson and Edwards, trans., *Seven Viking Romances*, and the efforts of O'Connor, trans., *Icelandic Histories and Romances*, have contributed good translations; however, many less well known romances remain untranslated. Alaric Hall's recent call for translations and his collaborative translations of two romances are efforts that are beginning to address this need. See Hall, 'Translating the Medieval Icelandic Romance-Sagas'; Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, '*Sigrarðs saga frækna*'; Hall and others, '*Sigurðar saga fóts*'.

6 Some mentions are generally dismissive, e.g. Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, pp. 112–13. Others are more favourable, but it is still only noted in passing, e.g. Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*; Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*; Wahlgren, 'The Maiden King in Iceland', pp. 10–13, *passim*.

7 'Nítida saga', ed. by Loth, pp. 1–37.

8 Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse–Icelandic Romances*. *Nítíða saga's* entry here is primarily valuable for its list of extant manuscripts (pp. 85–86).

9 Bibire, 'From *riddarasaga* to *lygisaga*', pp. 55–74; Driscoll, 'Þögnin mikla', pp. 157–68; Driscoll, '*Nítida saga*', p. 432; Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*; Kalinke, 'The Misogamous Maiden Kings of Icelandic Romance', pp. 47–71; Kalinke, 'The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance', pp. 850–61; Kalinke, 'Norse Romance (*Riddarasögur*)', pp. 316–63; Kalinke,

In 2009 the saga was translated (from Loth's edition), into English,¹⁰ and in the same year was the sole subject of a chapter of Ármann Jakobsson's introductory volume on Icelandic literature.¹¹ The greatest strides, however, have been made much more recently, with *Nítíða saga* being discussed in detail, as an atypical Icelandic romance. In Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir's 2013 monograph on women in Old Norse literature, *Nítíða saga* is presented as an example of 'proto-feminism' that subverts the misogynistic norms exhibited in other Icelandic romances.¹² Likewise, Geraldine Barnes notes the saga's unconventional reorientation of world geography in her 2014 monograph entirely dedicated to Icelandic romances,¹³ and Werner Schäfke cites the main character as an example of the regendering of masculine nobility.¹⁴ In this book, I consider and develop these most recent ideas further to show how *Nítíða saga* consciously questions many of the norms and expectations of medieval Icelandic romance. Through the examination of various aspects of the text, from its relationships with other romances to its depiction of the world and the many characters – notably the women – populating it, I will discuss how *Nítíða saga* interrogates and complicates the genre with which it has been associated, to produce a unique medieval romance worldview. In addition to these critical readings of the text itself, I will explore the post-medieval manuscript witnesses of the saga and the different versions these resulted in, often exhibiting their own contemporary worldviews. Because this is still a relatively obscure saga, the full text and English translation are included in an appendix, but a synopsis highlighting some of the main areas I focus on in this book will not now be out of place.

'Riddarasögur, Fornaldarsögur, and the Problem of Genre', pp. 77-91; Kalinke, *King Arthur*; Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*; Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*; Barnes, 'Travel and *translatio studii*', pp. 123-39; van Nahl, *Originale Riddarasögur*. The saga was the focus of an Icelandic BA thesis in the early 1990s, which until more recently was the only work to focus primarily on this romance (Guðbjörg Aðalbergisdóttir, 'Nítíða saga: Meykóngur í aðalhlutverki', and the resulting article Guðbjörg Aðalbergisdóttir, 'Nítíða og aðrir meykóngar'). Geraldine Barnes's 2006 International Saga Conference paper was the next to take the text as its main subject (Barnes, 'Margin vs. Centre').

10 McDonald, '*Nítíða saga*'. This was the first translation of this text out of Old Norse.

11 Ármann Jakobsson, *Ílla fenginn mjöður*, pp. 171-79.

12 Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, pp. 107-33.

13 Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, pp. 35-40.

14 Schäfke, *Wertesysteme*, pp. 220-23.

Synopsis

Nítíða saga begins by describing the maiden-king (*meykóngur*) Nítíða, who rules France (*Frakkland*) alone. Her characterization might have led a medieval audience to expect the saga to be a typical maiden-king romance in which male suitors are violently rejected by the female sovereign, but this is the first of many expectations surrounding Icelandic romance that this saga does not fulfil. After Nítíða's introduction she travels from Paris to Apulia to visit her foster mother Egidía, and from there she ventures to the remote island Visio, from which she brings back stones (*náttúrusteinar*), apples, and herbs with magical properties. In this way, in anticipation of the challenges she will face later in the story, Nítíða is equipped with objects that may prove helpful in much the same way that the male protagonists of other Icelandic romances find or are given magical aids. Returning to Apulia, Nítíða asks for her foster brother Hléskjöldur to accompany her back to France to help defend her kingdom, and this foster sibling partnership, in parallel with Nítíða's recent acquisition of magical objects, further solidifies her characterization as this romance's protagonist.

After these first scenes, the saga introduces the remaining principal characters, many of whom exist simply to pursue Nítíða in marriage, in the tradition of an Icelandic bridal-quest romance: Ingi of Constantinople (*Miklagarður*, lit. 'great city') and his sister Listalín; Soldán of Serkland and his sons Logi, Vélogi, and Heiðarlogi; and Livorius¹⁵ of India and his sister Sýjalín. Ingi is the first to travel to France and ask for Nítíða's hand, and she immediately refuses, as is typical of a haughty maiden-king, but while the rejection hurts Ingi's pride, the saga here does not follow the convention whereby the unwanted suitor is abused, and he leaves without sustaining any physical wounds. Ingi next meets the mysterious figure Refsteinn (lit. Fox Stone), who agrees to aid him in retaliation; they return to France and Ingi abducts Nítíða and brings her back to Constantinople. Once there, Nítíða escapes with the help of one of her supernatural stones, which transports her back to France. Nítíða's escape enhances her reputation as a cunning opponent. After this second humiliation, Ingi meets another mysterious helper, Slægrefur (lit. Sly Fox), who also sails with him back to France. Nítíða, seeing this in her magical stones, which give

15 While this is the generally accepted form of this character's name, in the manuscript AM 529 4to, the copy text for Loth's edition, the form found is *Livorinus* or *Liforinus* (with an extra <n>). I use the form *Livorius* throughout this study, and use it instead of *Liforinus* even when translating Icelandic in which that form of the name appears, as in for example Chapter 4 below.

her supernatural vision as well as the ability to fly or teleport, prepares to outwit Ingi again by giving a servant woman her own appearance and making herself invisible, again facilitated by the magic objects obtained from Visio. Ingi arrives, abducts the disguised woman, and returns with her to Constantinople. Ingi's sister Listalín becomes suspicious of this 'maiden-king', and confronts her, while Ingi, hidden, listens. The woman reveals the truth, and in a rage, Ingi tears off her dress, causing the magical disguise to wear off as well. This scene epitomizes another major theme that surfaces throughout the saga, that of women's agency, power, and psychologies in the midst of the inherently masculine world of bridal-quest and maiden-king romance: it is not only that Nítíða again outwits Ingi, but that his sister is the one who considers the possibility of deceit, and that the feelings and emotions of the servant woman are highlighted as much as Nítíða's concern to outwit her suitor.

Nítíða saga next looks to two of Soldán's sons, Vélogi and Heiðarlogi, who sail to France demanding that Nítíða marry one of them. Again, Nítíða foresees their arrival in her supernatural stones, and fortifies her castle in preparation. When the brothers arrive, Hléskjöldur tricks them, one by one, into approaching the castle, where they and their armies are killed. In its violence, this episode in one sense seems to follow the conventions of an aggressive maiden-king story more closely than Ingi's previous encounters with Nítíða in that these suitors from Serkland are killed. However, the scene is not the equivalent of a failed bridal-quest because the brothers do not even manage to address Nítíða in person, but must go through her foster brother proxy, due to their characterization as an Other threat, who must be eliminated. Significantly and potentially somewhat problematically for modern readers, in the saga these characters' deaths in no way mar Nítíða's character, but rather work to reinforce her position as the saga's hero.

After this interlude, the saga turns to Livorius of India, who encounters a dwarf who is willing to help him on his quest to marry Nítíða – by this point in the story she is renowned for her ability to outwit her suitors. Livorius and the dwarf sail to France and manage to bring Nítíða back to India. Once there, she again escapes with a supernatural stone and this time brings Livorius's sister Sýjalín with her back to France in retaliation for her own abduction. While their relationship may not have begun on amicable terms, the two women become good friends, and the saga highlights the support Sýjalín shows Nítíða, developing further the theme of female concerns and perspectives touched on previously. Now Soldán, eager to avenge his sons' deaths, gathers an army and sets off for France by sea with his remaining son Logi. Seeing their plans in her supernatural stones, Nítíða sends Hléskjöldur

with her navy to meet them and fight at sea, away from France. After a two-day battle, Livorius arrives unexpectedly and defeats Soldán in single combat. Hléskjöldur defeats Logi, and Livorius brings him home to India to heal his wounds before sending him back to France. This point marks the beginning of Livorius's portrayal as a positive and caring character, in contrast to the more negative, aggressive suitor of the earlier episodes.

Livorius then travels to Småland for advice from his aunt Alduria, who suggests he return to France in disguise, stay the winter in Nítíða's household, and get to know her personally, through the exercise of courtly manners. Taking his aunt's advice, he gains Nítíða's confidence during his stay, disguised as a prince named Eskilvarður. In the spring, Nítíða asks him to look into her magical stones, where they see throughout the world, which is depicted in three parts. In this scene, the saga's presentation of world geography is comprehensive, yet also rather unconventional. The geographical descriptions are interspersed with dialogue between Eskilvarður and Nítíða, who claims to be unable to find Livorius of India anywhere in the world. Nítíða then dramatically reveals that she saw through Livorius's disguise as soon as he arrived, and knows he is standing there with her. Livorius then proposes to Nítíða, who accepts, and their wedding is set for autumn.

Ingi hears of this and, still angry and humiliated, gathers an army against France. Upon arrival, Livorius meets Ingi and offers a settlement on behalf of Nítíða. Ingi prefers to fight, and will not give up until he agrees to single combat with Livorius, who confidently names Nítíða as the winner's prize. Ingi is seriously injured, but Livorius graciously spares his life and asks his sister Sýjalín to heal Ingi. Sýjalín and Ingi then fall in love, and Nítíða's foster brother Hléskjöldur is also offered as a match for Ingi's sister Listalín. The saga ends with a lavish triple wedding, after which the couples return to their kingdoms. *Nítíða saga* ends by relating how Nítíða and Livorius's son succeeds them as ruler of France.

Women and Worldviews

As is evident from the synopsis, *Nítíða saga* negotiates a number of themes and the representation and significance of the saga's characters is particularly important in demonstrating these. The roles of women are of central concern, not only because the story is named after a woman, but because of the other female characters represented throughout the story, and their many relationships, both with other women and with male characters. The characterization and presentation of women are prime examples of

how this saga challenges the norms of Icelandic romance, by rejecting the widespread formula identified and discussed by Marianne Kalinke in her 1990 monograph *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*: the male hero, his companions, and their quest for a bride (or brides), often including the woman's humiliation, if not outright abuse. *Nítíða saga* instead cultivates a worldview that not only accepts women as men's equals in marriage and rulership, but hones in on their actions, words, and skills as more than stock characteristics. In addition to this, the saga's vision of the medieval world these characters inhabit also demonstrates a quite literal 'worldview', with the extensive geographical reach that *Nítíða* holds. This opens up questions of how the saga's Icelandic author and audiences understood their relationship with Continental Europe, as seen through the lens of romance literature. The chivalric sagas of Iceland, while recognizably romances (adopting and adapting foreign plots and motifs), are still quite different to those of medieval England or France. Considering these differences, and especially in light of *Nítíða saga*'s own differences to other Icelandic romances, will shed light on issues of late medieval (as well as post-Reformation) identity.

Nítíða saga is a type of saga that can be categorized using a variety of terminology. A now seldom used term is *lygisaga* (lie-saga), once popular in earlier scholarship because of these sagas' inclusion of non-realistic – i.e. obviously fictional – plots and motifs.¹⁶ This genre label reveals the negative attitude once commonly held towards such romances, dismissed as almost worthless because they 'lie', when compared to other types of sagas, notably the *Íslendingasögur* (sagas of Icelanders, or, family sagas), which have been deemed more serious and historical representations of Icelandic life.¹⁷ Other, less pejorative genre descriptors include 'native' or 'indigenous' *riddarasaga* (chivalric or knights' saga), to avoid confusion with the separate group of translated *riddarasögur* – European romances (particularly French) translated into Old Norse at the court of the Norwegian King Hákon Hákonarson

16 Andrews, 'The Lygisögur', pp. 255-63; Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', pp. 266-86; Bibire, 'From *riddarasaga* to *lygisaga*'; Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction'; Driscoll, 'The Oral, the Written, and the In-Between', pp. 193-220; Driscoll, 'Traditionality and Antiquarianism in the Post-Reformation *Lygisaga*', pp. 84-99; Foote, 'Sagnaskemtan: Reykjahólar 1119', pp. 65-83; Jakob Benediktsson, 'Lygisögur'; Glauser, 'Lygisaga', p. 398; Kalinke, 'Norse Romances (*Riddarasögur*)', pp. 316-63.

17 See e.g. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga*; Jones, 'History and Fiction in the Sagas of Icelanders', pp. 285-306; Vésteinn Ólason, 'The Icelandic Saga as a Kind of Literature', pp. 27-48; Vésteinn Ólason, 'Family Sagas', pp. 101-18.

in the thirteenth century.¹⁸ Within the romance genre we find two other subgroups and *Nítíða saga* has also been associated with both. While on some levels it can be said to be a 'maiden-king' and 'bridal-quest' romance,¹⁹ this romance is, as I have already mentioned, not a typical member of either type, concerning not a hero's exploits in search of a bride, but a potential bride's exploits to keep herself from marrying.

In this book, I have tried to avoid referring to the texts I discuss as 'indigenous/native Icelandic romance' and 'popular romance', as I feel these are potentially problematic terms. The distinction between romances that are 'native' or 'indigenous' and those that are 'translated' is of course significant,²⁰ but in this book, I prefer, following Loth in her collection of editions, simply to refer to the so-called 'indigenous' *riddarasögur* that shape my discussions as 'Icelandic', or 'late medieval Icelandic', romances. They were written in Iceland, using the Icelandic (West Norse) language, for Icelanders. It is worth re-evaluating the dichotomy of translated vs. indigenous Icelandic romance, and it is in order to take a step towards forming a sharper critical vocabulary in this field that I wish to put it to one side in the present work. However, I do also find it useful occasionally to refer to *Nítíða saga* and its peers as 'popular' romance, in the sense of 'well-known' or 'widely-read' literature, rather than necessarily 'appealing to the masses' or 'non-elite'.²¹ At the end of the Middle Ages, the audiences and authors of these romances can certainly be understood as elite: the literate, including not only the clergy, but also wealthy educated landowners and aristocrats.²² After the Middle Ages the copyists and audiences of Icelandic romances spread as this 'popular', secular literature was no longer read and enjoyed as openly as before the Reformation, following

18 On the translated romances see Barnes, 'Some Current Issues in Riddarasögur-Research', pp. 73-88; Barnes, 'The *Riddarasögur*: A Medieval Exercise in Translation', pp. 403-41; Glauser, 'Romance (Translated *riddarasögur*)', pp. 372-87; Kalinke, *King Arthur*; Kalinke and Barnes, 'Riddarasögur', pp. 528-33. Most recent is Sif Ríkharðsdóttir's *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*, studying various aspects of translation into Old Norse, including those from Middle English.

19 See Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, and my discussion of her definitions in Chapter 4; and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, 'Meykóngahéðin í riddarasögum', pp. 410-33. On bridal-quest in other medieval literature see Bornholdt, *Engaging Moments*.

20 Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', pp. 266-86; Kalinke, 'Norse Romances'; Kalinke and Barnes, 'Riddarasögur', pp. 528-33.

21 For work on the increasingly established field of medieval English popular romance, see e.g. McDonald, ed., *Pulp Fictions of the Middle Ages*; Putter and Gilbert, eds., *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*; Lacy, 'The Evolution and Legacy of French Prose Romance', pp. 167-82.

22 Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, pp. 183-85.

strong Church disapproval. It is then that late medieval Icelandic romance can be understood also as popular in the former sense,²³ for despite their discouragement in official circles, romances like *Nítíða saga* became as well-loved and widespread as ever.

Manuscript Witnesses

The manuscripts that preserve *Nítíða saga* are many, and in fact almost all of those known survive from after the Icelandic Reformation of 1550. The ways in which this originally medieval story continued to be told and retold in early modern times, and even up to the beginning of the twentieth century, are lines of enquiry just as interesting, and important, as the close reading of the text itself. Looking at some of the different manuscripts from different post-medieval periods allows us to see that not all Icelanders enjoyed the same *Nítíða saga* – the text, popular as it was, was never accessed through print, but always as the product of a scribe's copying, from another manuscript, or sometimes even from memory. This allows us also to question what really constitutes the text under consideration when it survives in such diverse forms, and to reveal the differences of outlook and worldview that each version of this medieval romance suggests its scribes and readers may have held.

While one of the manuscripts preserving *Nítíða saga* contains this text alone – Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn–Háskólabókasafn Íslands, MS ÍB 312 4to (1726) – the saga is usually transmitted along with romances and other types of literature alike. There are, furthermore, a few romances that *Nítíða saga* can consistently be found with in manuscript. Therefore, in addition to discussing some of the physical manuscripts and the different versions of the medieval saga they transmitted, I also consider some of the intertextual connections that *Nítíða saga* demonstrates with other medieval Icelandic romances that share themes, demonstrate literary connections, or were transmitted together in manuscript.²⁴ Throughout this book I compare and

23 Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*, pp. 1–33.

24 See the following catalogues, which list the texts contained in the manuscripts: British Library, *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years MDCCCLIV–MDCCCLXXV*; British Library, *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts, 1756–1782*; Gödel, *Katalog öfver Kongl. Bibliotekets fornisländska och fornnorska handskrifter*; Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romance*; Kommissionen for det Arnamagnæanske Legat, *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske Handskriftsamling*; Kommissionen for det Arnamagnæanske Legat, *Katalog over de Oldnorsk-Islandske Håndskrifter*; Lárus H. Blöndal, Grímur M. Helgason, and

contrast *Nítíða saga* with other Icelandic ‘maiden-king’ romances, focusing mainly on *Clári saga*,²⁵ *Dínus saga drambláta*,²⁶ *Nikulás saga leikara*,²⁷ and *Sigurðar saga þøgla*.²⁸ *Nikulás saga leikara* by far occurs most frequently with *Nítíða saga*, and half the time it does it appears directly before or after, suggesting that they were often transmitted together. *Dínus saga drambláta* is the next most frequently co-occurring with *Nítíða saga* in manuscript, and is also occasionally adjacent. These three texts were transmitted together as a group in at least one manuscript, Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket–Sveriges nationalbiblioteket, MS Papp. 4to nr. 31 (1650×1689), containing these three texts, along with one other,²⁹ only. Various other sagas occur multiple times in *Nítíða saga*’s manuscripts, but these are the most significant. However, in addition to high co-occurrence in manuscript, the number of parallels in plot and motif shared with *Nítíða saga* are also important factors that suggest strong relationships among texts and the usefulness of comparing them. In this way may be added both *Sigurðar saga þøgla* – which despite only co-occurring in manuscript with *Nítíða saga* a couple of times, shares more motifs with it than any other text,³⁰ and *Clári saga*, which also shares important motifs and, as we will see especially in Chapter 2, seems to have inspired *Nítíða saga*’s author.

Organization and Conventions

This book is in two parts. In the first, comprising three chapters, I discuss some of the metatextual issues already raised here, as well as the way in which *Nítíða saga* sets out the romance world in which the story takes place.

Ögmundur Helgason, *Handritasafn Landsbókasafns*; Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins*; Stefán Einarsson, ‘Safn Nikulásar Ottensons í Johns Hopkins Háskóla-bókasafinu í Baltimore, Md.’, pp. 157–72.

25 *Clári saga*, ed. by Cederschiöld.

26 *Dínus saga drambláta*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson. This edition provides two redactions of the saga; I here refer to the older version (pp. 1–94), which is dated to the fifteenth century (p. lxiv).

27 Wick, ‘An Edition and Study of Nikulás saga Leikara’. This edition provides two redactions of the saga; I refer to the longer redaction (pp. 62–161), the oldest manuscripts of which date to the seventeenth century; the saga itself may however be much older than this.

28 ‘*Sigurðar saga þøgla*’, ed. by Loth. This edition is of the longer redaction of the saga, and is based on the oldest manuscript survivals, which date roughly to the end of the fourteenth century. For more on the two redactions and their relationship, see Driscoll, ed., *Sigurðar saga þøgla*.

29 The fourth text is a fragmentary life of St Eustace, known in Iceland as *Plácíðus saga*.

30 See Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*.

In Chapter 1 I consider the saga's manuscript context, from its late medieval origins to one of its youngest rewritings in the early twentieth century, in order to shed light on the textual diversity of the surviving manuscript witnesses. Discussing this medieval text's post-Reformation reception and transformation through three case studies will also illuminate some of the differences of worldview evident in these different versions. In Chapter 2 I discuss the saga's intertextual relationships through the analysis of a motif important to this and other romances, and through two case studies that highlight *Nítíða saga's* relationships with *Clári saga* and *Nikulás saga leikara*. In Chapter 3 I analyse aspects of the saga's setting through a close reading of *Nítíða saga's* unique depiction of world geography and the distinctions maintained between private and public spaces, in order better to understand the way in which this romance situates Iceland in relation to the rest of the known world.

In the second part of this book, also of three chapters, I discuss *Nítíða saga's* characters and their various relationships. These analyses are primarily through close readings of the edited text, although I also consider, as a means of comparison, some of the other post-Reformation manuscript versions that survive, and which I will have touched on earlier in the book. In Chapter 4 I focus on the depiction of the saga's female hero, including perspectives on gender and power; I also look at the characterization and actions of Nítíða's main rivals. In Chapter 5 I consider the characterization of the saga's other female figures and how their depiction reinforces Nítíða's position as the saga's hero, while also demonstrating the importance of elite women's relationships. In Chapter 6 I end by exploring the role of the saga's anonymous narrator as another character who guides the audience through the story, and in doing so, further illustrates some of the aspects of the worldviews I discuss in other chapters, but from different perspectives.

This book sets out to show, through close readings of the saga as literature and through material philological considerations of some of the variant early modern and later versions of this originally medieval romance, how *Nítíða saga* explores and negotiates the genre of Icelandic romance, and raises questions of Icelandic worldview and identity, both locally and in relation to the wider world. In the process, this book introduces to a wider audience some of the hitherto little-known relationships among Icelandic romance manuscripts and texts, and illuminates Icelandic attitudes towards literature and literacy in the late medieval and early modern periods. In all of this I aim to demonstrate how *Nítíða saga*, as a late medieval Icelandic romance, engages with and questions the norms of the genre and the nature of the society in which it was produced, and to show how this text,

significantly, crosses the boundaries of periodization, popular in medieval as well as early modern Iceland – though copied and recopied, written and rewritten, its hold over Icelandic imaginations remained strong across time and place.

All translations of original language quotations are my own unless otherwise noted. I have decided to normalize the names of characters and places across textual versions in my discussions, so that regardless of the form in any given manuscript, I always refer to Nítíða and Livorius, for the sake of consistency. Further to this, I use the form Nítíða (instead of Nitida) because this is the form the name takes in most modern Icelandic scholarship. I feel it more appropriate to use modern orthography for this saga and its title character, though medieval in their origin, primarily because I discuss the saga over time: it seems to me no more anachronistic to use modern spelling than it would be to retain the fifteenth-century spelling popularized by Loth's single, and far from exhaustive, edition. Apart from this, when quoting from *Nítíða saga* and other works in either edited or manuscript form, I have not modified or normalized my quotations, and when quoting directly from unedited manuscripts, I have endeavoured to use semi-diplomatic transcriptions, following the individual orthography of each manuscript as closely as possible, but expanding abbreviations using italics and parentheses in order to keep the texts easily readable for those less familiar with unnormalized Icelandic.