The Narrative Voice and its Comments: A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of Jómsvíkinga saga

Abstract: This article pursues two objectives: as a software-based study, it first demonstrates how quantitative methods can be employed to harvest data, which is hard to retrieve as thoroughly and systematically without digital tools. In combination with ‘classic’, qualitative analyses, such an approach can contribute greatly to gaining new perspectives on (medieval) literary sources. Secondly, this article offers a case study of Jómsvíkinga saga (AM 291 4to) with particular focus on the narrative voice and its narratorial comments. They are used intentionally not only to select, structure, and guide the plot but also to embed the saga into the larger extradiegetic narrative tradition. Despite their brevity, the role of the comments goes beyond narratological organisation because they are simultaneously self-reflective on the process of narration. The narrative voice thus crafts a particular, highly artistic narrative about the adventures of the early Danish kings and the Jómsvikings.

Keywords: narrative voice; narratorial comments; self-reflexivity; Digital Humanities; quantitative and qualitative analysis; Jómsvíkinga saga

1 Introduction

Although the Digital Humanities (henceforth DH) have become increasingly prominent over the past few decades, the application of DH-informed methods other than online editions and databases are still underrepresented in more recent (medieval) literary studies. Quantitative analyses are sometimes met with scepticism as

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
numerical and statistical data may seem difficult to combine with ‘classic’ qualitative analyses. This is not least due to the fact that quantitative analyses require a different approach to the research interest, that is, quantifiable elements need to be identified which can then be processed with the help of a digital tool. This article aims at presenting what a software-based case study can look like and demonstrates what kind of explorations are possible on the basis of quantitative and qualitative analyses of a medieval literary text. The case study focuses on Jómsvíkinga saga (henceforth Jvs)\(^2\) and explores how different types of narratorial comments are used by the narrative voice in order to craft and reflect on the process of narration. In this way, the narrative voice not only selects and shapes the plot, it also makes sure that the plot is easy to follow and appealing. What is more, the narratorial comments also reflect on the narrative strategy of the saga.

This case study was first elaborated for a presentation at the 18th International Saga Conference in Helsinki and Tallinn in 2022.\(^3\) Given the Baltic context of the conference, I selected Jvs as a primary source to demonstrate how my DH-based methodological approach can be applied. So far, narratological aspects of Jvs have been overlooked by scholarship. Attention has been paid on five main aspects of Jvs.\(^4\) These are first the stemma of the manuscripts (e.g. Hempel 1923; Krijn 1914; Megaard 2000; Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir 2016); second, the geographic location of Jómsborg and other saga settings (e.g. Morawiec 2009; Larsen 1927–28); third, the discussion of socio-cultural aspects such as the role of kingship or how the notion of individual heroism contrasts with the collective heroism of the band of Jómsvíkings (e.g. Tulinius 2002); fourth, the relation of historicity and fictionality in the saga (e.g. Aalto 2014; Jesch 1993); and fifth, the question of literary genre (e.g. Aalto 2014; Finlay 2014; Tulinius 2002; Þorleifur Hauksson 2018).
2 Narrative Voice and Narratorial Comments

The concept of (narrative) voice, which was first introduced and elaborated by Gérard Genette in his seminal book *Discours du récit* (1972), has been subject to long-standing debates. In Genette’s understanding, the narrative voice is the answer to the question *qui parle?* (‘who speaks?’). It cannot be defined by a single factor but can only be determined on the basis of three aspects: first, from what temporal perspective is the narrative told? Second, on which narrative level is the narrative voice located? Third, how does the narrative voice relate the characters in the narrative? The combination of these three factors determines what kind of narrative voice is present in a text. By introducing the concept of voice, Genette attempted to move away from linking the narrative voice to a personified narrator but he was not entirely successful in freeing the concept from psychological aspects (Blödorn et al. 2006, 1–2). More recently, the term narrative voice is mostly considered “an umbrella term for the field of questions relating to the speech acts of the narrator”, (Aczel 2005, 634). The usage of the term is not uncontested though. While some maintain that the usage of the term *voice* is irritating because the voice of a written text does not compare to an oral voice, others consider the metaphoric usage of the term *voice* as being imprecise and ambiguous (Zymner 2006, 323). Irrespective of the question of terminology, there is a consensus that the narrative voice assumes a narratorial function (Aczel 2005, 635), mediating between what Genette has termed *histoire* and *discours*.

Even though most Old Norse scholars use the term ‘narrator’ rather than ‘narrative voice’, I will use the latter here. I consider it a neutral, non-personified term denoting a narrative function in the text that shapes and guides the process of narration and mediates between the narrative and the audience. Furthermore the term seems more suitable since the sagas have been transmitted in various versions over a long period of time. As every version of a saga is different, the term narrative voice allows me to talk about the authorial agencies without evoking a specific personified speaker.

With regard to the *Íslendingasögur*, it has often been said that the narrative voice is unobtrusive and aims at presenting the plot in a rather unbiased way:

> The narrative method of the *Íslendingasögur* is marked by its formal objectivity and discretion; the narrator appears to view with an unprejudiced eye the unfolding events, explaining what happens, and reporting the words of men as if they had just been spoken. […] He adopts the same tone of voice whether major or minor events are being described, and whether he chooses to focus on or digress from the plot. (Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 106)

5 e.g. Blödorn et al. 2006, 1–2.
In her excellent study *Narrative in the Icelandic Family Saga* (2021), Heather O’Donoghue speaks of the silent saga narrator, since it appears at times to be self-effacing while narrating the saga. At the same time, however, she also explores how the narrative voice withholds information or makes use of ellipses, initiates new episodes, explains or judges some of the characters’ actions, relates to the extra-textual sphere. Even though the narrative voice does not present itself prominently when interfering with the narrative, it is nonetheless anything but silent. Indeed it proves to be “an active force shaping that narrative” (O’Donoghue 2021, 184).

I agree with O’Donoghue on the importance and role of the narrative voice in the sagas, and I show in this article that the narrative voice is not as reticent as the quote by Vésteinn Ólason may suggest. Even though the observations above are made on the basis of the *Íslendingasögur*, I work from the premise that the narrative voice features similar characteristics to present the plot in a skillful and entertaining manner irrespective of the texts or genres and hence they also apply to Jvs. I maintain that the narrative voice employs short comments that indicate how the material to be narrated is selected, structured and evaluated. Examples of such comments are *nú er at segja* ‘now it is to be told’, *sumir segja* ‘some people say’, *sem fyrr var sagt* ‘as was said before’.

I term these phrases narratorial comments. They elucidate the decisions of the narrative voice and indicate when and how the elements worth telling are selected, how the plot is organised, how single elements are evaluated and offer explanations and background knowledge. The variety of functions of the comments displays how manifold the scope of the narrative voice is for shaping the process of narration of a saga. Though brief and inconspicuous at first sight, the narratorial comments are much more than pointers to the narratological idiosyncrasies of a saga. In combination, they offer insights into the interplay of these narratological idiosyncrasies and are thus also self-reflective on the process of narrating.

6 O’Donoghue uses the terms ‘narrative voice’ and ‘narrator’ synonymously. She defines her usage of the terms as follows: “By narrator – or more impersonally, narrative voice – I mean what Paul Ricœur sees as an abstract unity of consciousness which we as audience apprehend as allow us to experience the narrative” (O’Donoghue 2021, 3). In her study, she mainly draws on Ricœur and his *Time and Narrative* in particular for his understanding of time as one of the main elements for creating a narrative.

7 Unless indicated otherwise, all English translations are my own.

8 Quite early on in modern scholarship the narratorial comments in the sagas attracted some attention, however, they have never been analysed in a systematic manner. Rather often the main interest resided in the question to what extent these comments, in particular comments like *sem var sagt/ritat*, are potentially helpful to determine how genuinely literary or oral a saga is (e.g. Andersson 1966 or Baetke 1956). Among the most recent publications on the narratorial comments are Slavica Ranković’s articles (2016, 2019). She considers the narratorial comments helpful regarding the question of authorship in the sagas.
3 Methodological Approach and Aim of the Paper

Methodologically, both my project and the present article are informed by the Digital Humanities. Software-based annotation constitutes the basis of my analyses. The annotations gained in this way are examined in a two-step approach including a quantitative computation followed by a qualitative analysis. In the quantitative part, it will first be evaluated how frequently narratorial comments appear in Jvs. Determining the frequency of the narratorial comments will not only reveal whether the categories as such prove helpful for analysing Jvs, it will also indicate what kind of literary means the narrative voice deems most important for telling the saga and guiding the audience.

The focus then shifts from the frequency of the comments to the question of how densely the single chapters of the sagas are commented on by the narrative voice. Building on these quantitative results, the qualitative analysis will look into the way the appearances of the comments correlate with the plot. The aspect of density therefore reveals when and how the plot and the process of narration of the saga are interlinked and create the idiosyncratic narrative version of Jvs. On this basis it will not only be possible to explore the over-all narrative strategy of the narrative voice in Jvs, but also to call for a new perspective on the position of Jvs within saga literature.

This paper focuses exclusively on Jvs as presented in AM 291 4to, the oldest extant manuscript of the saga and dates to around 1300 (Finlay and Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir 2019, 8). In comparison to other versions, this manuscript is said to be verbose and neither summarises nor omits single scenes. In view of the DH-based analysis, it was furthermore necessary to opt for a version that is available online and machine-readable.

---

9 Both the process of annotation and the categories of narratorial comments will be introduced below.
10 I am aware that Jvs is preserved in five main manuscripts which offer different versions of the saga. Rather than taking these variants into account, this paper will focus on the version found in AM 291 4to.
11 This version of the saga was recently edited by Þorleifur Hauksson and Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson for the Íslenzk fornrit series (2018) and translated by Finlay and Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir (2019).
12 The text of AM 291 4to can be retrieved from Snerpa (https://www.snerpa.is/net/forn/jomsvik.htm, last accessed February 9, 2023).
4 Narratorial Comments: The Five Main Categories

So far, my research on the Íslendingasögur, complemented by samples drawn from the fornaldrarsögur and riddarasögur, has shown that there are five main categories of narratorial comments in saga literature. These categories are employed for the software-based annotation and hence the analysis:

– Intratextual comments: They organise the plot and create coherence by referring back or ahead in the narrative, marking the beginning and ending of episodes, offering indications of time, or introducing new characters. Typical comments for this category are: Nú er að segja af meykónginum, hún býr nú ferð sína heiman út á Pul. ‘Now it is to be said of the maiden-king that she prepared for a journey from her home to Apulia’ (both quotes: Nít, (124–125)).

– Intertexual comments: This category is used for marking explicit references to other works that are mentioned with their title, as for instance in Eyrbyggja saga: Hann kemr við Laxdæla sögu, sem mörgum er kunnigt, (Eb, 180). ‘He appears also in Laxdæla saga that many are familiar with.’ References to characters that also appear in other sagas are left out. While characters such as Egill Skalla-Grímsson or Grettir Ásmundarson are easily recognised, less prominent characters, however, cannot always be identified as easily.

– Public opinion: Statements of public opinion appear quite numerously, both on the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic level. On the intradiegetic level, statements of public opinion mostly comment on events and individuals; on the extradiegetic level, however, statements of public opinion should rather be considered expressions of the narrative tradition. An instance of an intradiegetic statement of public opinion can be found in Reykdæla saga: Spurðisk þetta nú víða. Ok þótti mönnun þetta illa orðit [...] (Reykd, 208). ‘Now this news spread widely and it seemed to people that it [= interaction of two characters] has ended badly.’ An instance of the extradiegetic narrative tradition reads as follows: Ok er þat sumra manna sogn, at þessi ðorgils hafí komit til Íslands fyrir Fróðárundr um sumarit,

13 Except for Ívs, all references to sagas merely mention the abbreviation of the title and the page numbers of the referenced edition. For Ívs the year is added to differentiate between the Íslensk fornrit edition and the English translation.

14 Despite their different functions and points of reference, these two types of narratorial comments are subsumed under the heading of ‘public opinion’ because they both express knowledge that is shared and imparted in a public space. For a discussion of how the two types of statements of public opinion interact and shape the process of narration, see Gropper (2023 forthcoming).
And some people say, that this Þorgils had come to Iceland in the summer before the wonders of Fróðá [happened].

Narratorial evaluation: The narrative voice often evaluates both single characters and actions and thus in part foreshadows how the plot may develop: Hon var allra kvenna vitrust ok réð drauma betr en aðrir menn. (Jvs 2018, 5–6). ‘She was the wisest of all women and interpreted dreams better than anybody else’, (Jvs 2018, 16). – Ok vísaði Markis kóngr þeim til sætis [...] at hirðlögum ok hæverskum sið. ‘Then king Markis had them seated [...] according to custom and courtesy’, (both quotes: Tríst, 30–31).

Extra-textual references: the narrative voice repeatedly refers to extra-textual aspects and elements, for instance when mentioning toponyms, historical rulers or contemporary mindset and traditions: [Skalla-Grímr] flutton várit eptir skipit suðr [...] ok setti þar bæ ok kallaði at Borg. (Eg, 73). ‘In spring, Skalla-Grímr sailed to the south [...] and built a farm and called it at Borg.’ – Miklir váru í þann tíma fiskirðarar á Snjófellsnesi, (Bárð, 124). ‘Big were the fishing grounds at Snjófellsnes at that time.’ – At Fróðá var eldaskáli mikill ok lokrekkja innar af eldaskálanum, sem þá var síðr, (Eb, 145). ‘At Fróðá, the firehouse was spacious and in the far end of the room were the bed-closets as was custom back then.’

These categories describe different ways in which the narrative voice shapes the process of narration. Except for the intertextual comments, all categories feature more nuanced subcategories. The subcategories will only be introduced to this paper as they become relevant for the analysis. While (main) categories other than those just presented may well be conceivable, all five categories have individually already been described in scholarship although not under the same labels as used here: Andersson (1966) discusses the narratorial comments which I call statements of public opinion. Jakobsen (1983) discusses comments that refer backwards and forwards in the narrative. I subsume these types of comments in the category of intratextual comments. O’Donoghue (2021) discusses inter alia explanatory comments which are part of the category of evaluative comments in my analysis.

The novelty of my analysis lies in exploring all five categories of narratorial comments systematically. The analysis will show that many of these categories interact and shape the process of narration in an orchestrated fashion. Considering that the categories described above were developed on the basis of Íslandingasögur, fornaldrasögur, and riddarasögur, it is safe to say that they are not restricted to a single genre or text but are an inherent feature of saga tradition and thus can also be found in Jvs. Hence no substantial changes of the categories were necessary in order to apply them to this saga.
The quantitative analysis is based on data that was collected using a software-based annotation process.\textsuperscript{15} This type of annotation is an iterative process. In order to annotate, both a corpus and a subject of study needs to be pre-defined. For a software-based annotation the corpus has to be machine-readable.\textsuperscript{16} In order to annotate successfully, the qualitative research aim needs to be reformulated so that it can be analysed in a quantifiable way. On the basis of what aspects are considered crucial for pursuing the research aim, the categories of analysis need to be specified carefully. These categories then form the annotation guidelines. In the ensuing annotation process, only words, phrases, or sentences are annotated that meet the pre-defined guidelines. On this basis, the first round of annotating can be conducted. In case of Jvs, this means that the whole saga is read carefully in Old Norse and all statements by the narrative voice that correspond to the pre-determined categories are annotated as narratorial comments.

As annotation processes require several rounds, it is crucial to evaluate the resulting annotations and the annotation guidelines after each round: do the acquired annotations contribute to answering the research question? Are there aspects that need to be specified, added or left out? How do annotation guidelines need to be adjusted for gaining more specific results? Depending on how satisfying the results of the first rounds are, the guidelines need to be modified, for example, by defining the categories more specifically, or by adding or deleting single (sub)categories. Then the next round of annotation targeting the same corpus starts. This second round of the annotation process covers the same steps as in the first round.

The annotation process ends when the resulting annotations are considered refined and precise enough to contribute towards answering the research questions. The annotations, though quantifiable, are not the final answer to the research question. They need to be examined qualitatively in order to come to final conclusions. In context of this article, this means that the process of annotating is employed in order to identify the categories of narratorial comments in the saga. In the first, quantitative analysis, the focus lies on the questions of frequency and density. In the ensuing qualitative analysis it will be explored how (sub)categories of narratorial comments are interlinked as well as how they engage with the plot and thus curate the process of narration in a unique way.

During the process of annotation both the annotation guidelines and the understanding of the subject of study are continuously refined. The process of annotation can be described as a hermeneutic circle because it entails the simultaneous exploration of the macro level (i.e. the topic, theory, phenomenon in question),

\textsuperscript{15} For an elaborate introductory reading on the annotation process, see e.g. Reiter (2020), Gius et al. (2019), Rapp (2017).

\textsuperscript{16} For my analysis I used the software Atlas.ti (https://atlasti.com/, last accessed February 14, 2023).
and the micro level (i.e. the annotated text or data). Annotating is thus an excellent tool for detailed and systematic in-depth analyses of texts or data.

5 A Question of Frequency

Figure 1 represents how often in total the five main categories appear throughout Jvs. The category of the intratextual comments proves by far the most numerous with 288 instances, followed by statements of public opinion with 138 instances, and evaluative comments with 135 instances. As the mentions of the two remaining categories – extra-textual and intertextual comments – do not figure as prominently, they will not be included in the analysis. This basic distribution of the categories suggests that the narrative voice of Jvs is first and foremost concerned with creating a coherent narrative. The relative frequency of evaluative narratorial comments implies that the narrative voice is also careful to guide the audience by providing evaluations of characters and events to make sure that the narrative is received as intended. Despite closely controlling and guiding the process of narration, the narrative voice is also open to alternative narrative versions expressed by the statements of public opinion, both on the intradiegetic level (i.e. public opinion proper) and on the extradiegetic level (i.e. the narrative tradition). The narrative voice demonstrates its awareness of diverging versions of narratives not by prioritising one version but simply by juxtaposing them.

17 The extra-textual and intertextual comments each appear far less than 50 times throughout the saga. This suggests that the narrative voice of Jvs is not primarily interested in connecting the narrative to other texts or the extra-textual sphere, rather the saga constitutes a narrative bubble. This relative paucity of literary connections may well be related to the fact that the Jómsvikings as well as Jvs are only rarely referred to in other Old Norse works (e.g. Finlay and Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir (2019, 5), Blake (1962, viii)).

18 Indeed, the topic of alternative narratives is repeatedly addressed throughout the saga. On the intradiegetic level, Fjðlnir, for instance, suggests telling a modified version of King Haraldr’s death so as to protect the king’s men from reproaches of not having prevented this disaster (ch. 11). On the extradiegetic level at the end of the saga, the narrative voice ponders Búi hinn digri’s fate of having turned into a dragon and expresses that there is no reliable information available: En þat er sǫgn manna síðan at Búi hafi at ormi orði […]. En vǫr hyggjum þat til þess haft vera at þar haft ormrinn sézk a Hjǫrungravági, ok kann vera at nokkur ill vætr hafi lagizk á feit ok sýnzk þar síðan. En eigi kunnum vǫr at segja hvárt heldr er. Má ok vera at hvártki s´e satt, því at marga vega má sýnask, (Jvs 2018, 140).

But people have said since that Búi turned into a dragon […]. But [we] think the cause of this to be that a dragon has been seen at Hjǫrungravágr, and it may be that some evil spirit has settled down on the treasure and has been seen there since. But we cannot say which is more likely. It may also be that neither is true, for things may appear in many different ways’, (Jvs 2019, 107, my modification; Finlay and Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir (2019) translate the Old Norse pronoun vǫr (dual) with ’I’; I prefer the first person plural pronoun ‘we’.)
After these preliminary observations, it is necessary to zoom-in on the level of the subcategories of the three most prominent main categories. This enhances our ability to examine what aspects of the main categories are dominating. Table 1 lists to the left the five main categories as discussed above; in the middle, the subcategories of the all main categories; and the right hand column features the number of occurrences of the subcategories throughout Jvs. The categories of extra-textual and intertextual narratorial comments are listed here for the sake of completeness.

These detailed Counts shows that it is actually two intratextual subcategories and one subcategory of the public opinion, namely the comments by the extra-diegetic narrative tradition, that appear most frequently in Jvs. None of the subcategories of the evaluative comments features among the three most frequent narratorial comments. The subcategory of intratextual comments numbers up to 165 entries in the saga.\(^{19}\) Narratorial comments belonging to this subcategory emphasise beginnings and endings of episodes, refer backwards and forwards in the narrative and indicate ellipses. Examples thereof are:

- *Ok sat jarl þau misseri heima með hirð sinni um kyrrt*, (Jvs 2018, 10). ‘And the jarl stayed at home that year quietly with his court’, (Jvs 2019, 20).

\(^{19}\) In this case, the names of the main category and the subcategory coincide. While the subcategory exclusively includes references backwards and forwards in the text as well as emphatic beginnings of episodes, the main category also subsumes indications of time and the introduction of new characters, which are separate subcategories.
Second most frequent in Jvs is the subcategory representing the extradiegetic narrative tradition as part of the main category of public opinion. These comments have been counted 95 times in the saga. The majority of them assume in part similar functions to intratextual comments, that is, they mark the beginning of episodes, indicate time, or omissions:

- Þess er við getit […], (Jvs 2018, 3). ‘It is told that […]’, (Jvs 2019, 15).
- Þat er nú frá sagt hinn fyrsta aftan […], (Jvs 2018, 94). ‘It is now told that on the first evening […]’, (Jvs 2019, 77).
- Ok er ekki getit um ferð hans at né eitt yrði til tíðenda, (Jvs 2018, 74). ‘And it is not reported that anything happened on his journey’, (Jvs 2019, 63).

Among the typical statements of the narrative tradition are examples such as

- Nú lýsir hér yfir því er margir mælta, at hún þótti nokkut vergjorn, (Jvs 2018, 25). ‘Now was made manifest that many said, that she was something of a man-eater’, (Jvs 2019, 30).
Ok er þat frá sagt, at Vagn er stundum þá heima fæddr, (Jvs 2018, 71). ‘And it is related that Vagn sometimes lives at home with his father’, (Jvs 2019, 61).

What is more, this subcategory also points to varying reports and interpretations of events and characters:

Ok er svá sagt af flestum fræðimönnum, at þrin flýgr beint í rassinn konunginum, (Jvs 2018, 58). ‘So it is said by most learned men, the arrow flies straight into the king’s arse’, (Jvs 2019, 52).

– Þess er ok við getit eitt hvert sinn at eitt haust kom Haraldr eigi til Danmerkr, sem han áttí vanda til […] En í annarrí sogn er getit at Gormr konungr sendir menn til Hollsetulands at bjóða Knúti, syní, til sín at jólum, (Jvs 2018, 15). ‘It is also mentioned that at one time, one autumn, Haradr did not come to Denmark as he was accustomed to do […] And in another account it is told that King Gormr sent men to Holsetuland to invite his son Knútr to visit him for Yule’, (Jvs 2019, 23).

The third most frequent narratorial comments are the indications of time, mostly indications of relative time with 75 mentions, which are a subcategory of the intratextual comments: En um kveldi, þá ferr konungr heim, (Jvs 2018, 3). ‘But in the evening the king went home […].’ (Jvs 2019, 15). – Þat er nú sagt eitthvert sinn […] (Jvs 2018, 10). – ‘It is now said that on one occasion […]’, (Jvs 2019, 19). – at einhverjum jólum (Jvs 2018, 26); ‘one Yule’, (Jvs 2019, 30).

This short discussion highlights not only basic narrative strategies in Jvs, it brings to attention that quantitative results should not been taken at face value but must be examined qualitatively as well. The frequency of the main categories is not necessarily confirmed on the level of subcategories. Looking at the subcategories reveals a more nuanced view of the use of the narratorial comments in Jvs: the evaluative comments are not among the predominant ones, instead there are two intratextual subcategories that feature most prominently. Their role in curating the process of narration is supported by the extradiegetic narrative tradition that not only support the intratextual comments but they also offer windows to alternative versions of the narrative. In the following section I examine how subcategories are combined by the narrative voice and how their interlacing contributes greatly to the plot development. Particularly the subcategory of evaluative comments proves important in this regard.

6 A Question of High Density

The distribution of narratorial comments will be evaluated on the basis of the chapter divisions as it can be found in AM 291 4to and which is also rendered in the Íslenzk fornrit edition. Although the chapters in the manuscript are neither
numbered nor termed kaflí, all chapter beginnings are marked with a coloured initial. It is therefore justified to refer to chapters as narrative units, and it facilitates tracing and referring to parts of the plot. By identifying both the more densely and less densely commented-on chapters, it will be possible to examine how the narratorial comments correlate with the plot. This reveals in what contexts the narrative voice is strongly present and actively controls the plot, and when more liberties are given to the characters to express themselves through dialogues and actions. While the former mode of mediating the plot is termed (narrative) telling, the latter is called (narrative) showing.  

In Figure 2, the chapters are represented on the horizontal axis; the vertical axis features the total number of all (sub-)categories of narratorial comments per chapter. The graph shows that the number of narratorial comments fluctuates greatly throughout the saga, particularly, however, in the first eight chapters. In this analysis, only chapters that feature 20 comments or more are considered densely commented-on; these are chapters 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 13, 31, 34, and 39. Chapter 8 features particularly prominently with its 89 narratorial comments; all categories, including their subcategories, peak here. In this section, chapter 8 serves as a case study in order to show how the density of the narratorial comments interferes with the plot. The analysis focuses on the three previously identified most frequent subcategories, which are also most prominent in this chapter: the intratextual comments, the extradiegetic narrative tradition, and temporal indications. Intratextual comments are made 25 times, references to the extradiegetic narrative tradition 12 times and indications of time 11 times.

While chapter seven has brought the first part of the saga to a close after narrating the destruction of the Danavirki and the Christianisation of Denmark, chapter 8 marks the beginning of a new narrative strand and introduces Tóki and his sons Áki, Pálnír and Fjólnir. Áki soon becomes one of most respected men in Denmark, but Fjólnir – who is born out of wedlock – envies his brother(s) for their social standing and for the fact that they receive their parents’ inheritance. Fjólnir decides to discredit his brother Áki and fight for his share with unfair methods. He betrays Áki and has him ambushed and killed by the men of the Danish King Haraldr. Years later Áki’s nephew Pálnatóki takes after Áki and becomes one of the most esteemed man in Denmark. Meanwhile, the Danish King Haraldr impregnates the girl Æsa but later on denies being the father of the boy Sveinn. Only after political considerations Haraldr acknowledges Sveinn as his son, albeit half-heartedly. In the course of the remaining chapters, these premises develop to major events. What is

20 “The terms showing and telling refer to a difference in presentation: showing is a relatively unmediated enactment or dramatisation of events, while telling is a mediated report on them”, (Rabinowitz 2005, 531).
more, the four main rulers, who dominate the rest of the saga – King Haraldr of Denmark, Jarl Hákon of Norway, Pálnatóki the founder of Jómsborg and Sveinn, the Danish king to-be – are introduced in chapters 7 and 8. These four men engage in serious power struggles, which climax in the battle at Hjørungavágr. Chapter 8 is therefore crucial for the plot of the remaining part of the saga. Accordingly, the narrative voice employs numerous narratorial comments of the aforementioned subcategories to make sure that the plot is presented in a coherent way and to provide ample guidance for the audience.

On the extradiegetic level, this caesura at the beginning of chapter 8 and the new narrative strand are explicitly marked with intratextual comments. Not only does the narrative voice state that here [nú] hefsk upp annarr þáttur sógunnar (Jvs 2018, 42; ‘Now begins the second part of the saga’, Jvs 2019, 40), it also emphasises the

Figure 2: Density of narratorial comments per chapter in Jvs.

21 Not only with regard to the diegesis does chapter 8 figure as a watershed in Jvs. As some of the manuscripts do not include the first seven chapters (e.g., AM 510 4to), the emphasised beginning of the second part has therefore led to the question “hvort fyrri þátturinn væri í raun upphaflegur í sógunni eða hvort hann hefði verið spunninn framan við hana síðar”, (Þorleifur Hauksson 2018, XXIII, ‘whether the first part was originally part of the saga or whether it was prefixed to the saga later’). Various arguments have been brought forward in favour and against the original connection of the two parts but no consensus has yet been reached. An overview of the discussions can be found in Finlay and Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir (2019, 9) and Þorleifur Hauksson (2018, XXIII-XXVII).
linearity of the process of narration by stating that má eigi einum munni allt senn segja (Jvs 2018, 42; ‘it is not possible to say everything the same time from a single mouth’, (Jvs 2019, 40). The majority of the intratextual comments in chapter 8 initiate new episodes, which are mostly dominated by single characters: Nú er at segja frá Haraldí konungi […], (Jvs 2018, 43). ‘Now it is to be told about King Haraldr […]’, (Jvs 2019, 41). – Nú kemr hér máli at Áki ferr heimleiðis, (Jvs 2018, 43). ‘Now the matter reaches the point where Áki was on the way home […]’, (Jvs 2019, 42). Hence the intratextual subcategory appears very similar to the descriptions above and thus will not be discussed again.

The same is true for temporal indications and for comments by the extradiegetic narrative tradition: as regards the time line, chapter 8 roughly covers three generations, i.e., from the birth of the three sons of Tóki to the birth of Pálnatóki and until he is 15 years old. The comments by the extradiegetic narrative tradition assume in part again intratextual functions by marking the beginning of episodes: Pat er sagt at Pálna-Tóki kemr þar við land […], (Jvs 2018, 47). ‘It is said that Pálnatóki brings his ships to that land […]’, (Jvs 2019, 44). What is more, it can repeatedly be observed that the extradiegetic narrative voice co-occurs with narratorial comments evaluating single characters: Svá er frá Fjölni sagt at hann væri vitr maðr ok ráðugr ok illgjarn, (Jvs 2018, 42). ‘It is said of Fjölnir that he was a clever man and resourceful and ill-disposed’, (Jvs 2019, 41).

It is therefore also worthwhile to have a look at the usage of the evaluative comments, in particular the comments evaluating individual characters. While the Íslendingasögur mainly describe the physique of their characters, Jvs prefers to point out the idiosyncrasies of the characters. Áki is not only evaluated most frequently in this chapter, he is also portrayed as an outstanding and noble chieftain who does not suffer in comparison with the king:

Svá er frá sagt um Áka Tókason at engi maðr þótti þvílíkr í Danaveldi sem hann í þann tíma, sá er eigi bæri tignarnafn, (Jvs 2018, 43). ‘It is said about Áki Tókason that no man was considered his equal in the Danish realm at that time, of those who had no title of nobility’, (Jvs 2019, 41).

Áki var svá mikils virðr af landsmönnum at engi var sú veizla stefnd innan lands at eigi væri Áka boðit til eigi sîðr en konunginum, (Jvs 2018, 43). ‘Áki was valued so highly among people of the comparable break in the diegesis and the manuscripts can be observed in Bárð, a post-classical Íslendingasaga. Here the caesura is located between chapters 10 and 11, when the narrative voice shifts the focus from Bárðr’s family to Miðfjarðar-Skeggi’s family. Similar to chapter 8 in Jvs, chapter 11 of Bárð is comparatively densely commented on by the narrative voice and thus shapes the premise for the remaining chapters of the saga. What is more, the caesura also features in the manuscript evidence of Bárð because the second part has repeatedly been considered an individual work with its own title. This, however, is not the case with the second part of Jvs.
land that no feast was held within the land to which Áki was not invited, no less than the king’, *(Jvs 2019, 41–42)*.

This emphasis on his personality makes Áki’s death much more tragic. However, his role is later on taken by his nephew Pálnatóki, the later founder of Jómsborg and the first leader of the Jómsvíkings. The resemblance of the two men is emphasised: *ǫngum manni var hann [= Pálnatóki] líkari í sinni lýzku en Áka, fóðurbróður sínun, (Jvs 2018, 47).* ‘He resembled no one in his manner more than Áki, his father’s brother’, *(Jvs 2019, 44).* Characters other than Áki and Pálnatóki, however, are mostly described with plain evaluative comments regarding social standing and wealth: *Hon [= Ólóf] var vitr kona ok vinsæl, (Jvs 2018, 47).* ‘She was a clever and popular woman’, *(Jvs 2019, 44).* – *Hann [= Atlí] var félitill, (Jvs 2018, 48).* ‘He was a poor man’, *(Jvs 2019, 45).* By focusing on the nature of single characters, the narrative voice suggests what role they may assume in the plot.

This tendency is intensified by the combination of evaluative comments with explanatory comments, which both are subcategories of the main category ‘evaluative comments’.22 Explanatory comments, which have not been considered so far, are mostly initiated by causal conjunctions such as *því at, sakir, or þess vegna* (*‘because of’, ‘due to’*). These comments explicate selected situations and thus not only provide background knowledge but also elucidate what characters think and how some of their deeds are motivated. The subcategory of evaluative comments mainly refers to actions or characters. The relevance of these two subcategories and how they interact can be particularly well traced in connection to the portrayal of Fjólnir and his scheming against Áki in order to violently seize his share of the inheritance.

First, Fjólnir’s social position is evaluated: *Hann var frílluson, (Jvs 2018, 42).* ‘He was illegitimate’, *(Jvs 2019, 41).* When the parents die, the narrative voice mentions how the brothers Áki and Pálnir legally divide the inheritance between themselves:

*Ok berr þá fjárhlutí alla undir þá Áka ok Pální, því at þeir áttu arf at taka eftir foður sinn ok móður, (Jvs 2018, 42).* ‘And all the property fell to Áki and Pálnir, for they had the right to inherit from their father and mother’, *(Jvs 2019, 41).*

Being an illegitimate child, Fjólnir does not inherit, which he thinks unfair. He decides to avenge himself and lures Áki into an ambush. Due to his high social standing, Áki does not expect any attack:

---

22 Similar to the intratextual comments, both the main category ‘evaluative comments’ and one of its subcategories bear the same designation. The difference lies in the scope of the respective (sub-)categories.
They went then and kept watch for Áki’s movements, and that was easy, because he knew of no reason for fear, (Jvs 2019, 42).

Having his brother killed, Fjôlnir is finally content:

It is now said that it seemed to Áki’s brother Fjôlnir to have been settled extremely well, and he thought he had repaid him for the fact that he had not received the goods that he thought he should have inherited from his father’, (Jvs 2019, 42).

For the plot development and the creation of tension, it suffices to mention in the beginning that Fjôlnir is an illegitimate child and that he is of a difficult disposition. These statements alone have the power to foreshadow how the plot will develop and where conflicts (may) flare up.

The narratorial comments in chapter 8, and arguably throughout the entire saga, interact and emphasise selected episodes. What is more, they contribute considerably towards a highly orchestrated process of narration by creating and intensifying dramatic effects. In case of chapter 8 in particular, the narrative voice crafts an elaborate build-up that facilitates the understanding of the protagonists and their social network which in turn influences their actions and consecutive developments in the plot. The numerous narratorial comments assume key functions not only in shaping but also in directing the second part of the saga. After the narrative telling in chapter 8, the remaining chapters of the saga exhibit comparatively extensive narrative showing where the characters express themselves at length through action and direct speech. Accordingly, the rest of the saga (i.e. chapters 9–39) features comparatively few narratorial comments per chapter.

This does not mean, however, that chapter 8 is the only chapter with a high density of narratorial comments. Indeed there are several chapters in Jvs that feature 20 and more (i.e. up to 52) narratorial comments (see Figure 2). These are chapters 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 13, 31, 34, and 39. Similar to chapter 8, they all feature diegetic milestones: There is the conflict between the brothers Knútr and Haraldr which results in Haraldr killing his brother, becoming king of Denmark (ch. 3) and being much later challenged by Sveinn, the king to-be (ch. 8). Later on, Pálnatóki kills King

---

23 Ólafur Halldórsson (1969, 54–55) notes on telling and showing: “Mönnum er ekki lýst beinum orðum […] En lesandinn fær sínar hugmyndir af því, hvernig sagt er frá orðum þeirra og athöfnum”, (“Individuals are not characterised directly […] Rather, the reader gets his impressions from how their speech and actions are talked about”).

24 While the average chapter of Jvs features 15 comments, the second part of the saga (i.e. chapters 9–39) features on average only 11 comments.
Haraldr (ch. 11) and becomes the founder of Jómsborg (ch. 13). Moreover, the destruction of the Danavirki and the Christianisation of Denmark is told in these densely commented-on chapters (ch. 7). Towards the end of the saga, the Norwegian farmer Úlfr gives away the location of the Norwegian fleet just before the battle (ch. 31), Jarl Hákon offers his son to Þorgerðr Hróatróll (ch. 34), and chapter 39 eventually narrates the fate of the most prominent Jómsvikings after the battle. In combination, these nine chapters with a relatively high density of comments offer the narrative backbone of the saga.

These chapters bear witness to the fact that the narrative voice attributes relative importance of single parts of the saga and accordingly carefully chooses when to make extensive use of narratorial comments for shaping key moments of the plot. The densely commented-on text passages not only make sure that the audience receives ample guidance, they also aid the understanding of those parts that are dominated by narrative showing and are thus far less dependant on narratorial comments. Throughout the densely commented-on chapters, the dominating subcategories of narratorial comments remain unchanged: intratextual comments (87 instances), comments by the extradiegetic narrative tradition (43 instances), and indications of time (39 instances). As the discussion of the following section will confirm, the narrative voice consistently employs the same subcategories of comments in the same ratio throughout the saga and thus shows a clear preference of how to curate the process of narration.

7 A Question of Low Density

In order to fully grasp when and how the narrative voice appears in Jvs, it is also necessary to examine the chapters that feature considerably fewer narratorial comments or even none at all. Among these chapters fall those featuring eight or less comments,25 i.e. chapters 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 29, 30, 33, 36, and 37.26

25 This division is based on the following considerations: throughout the saga the distribution of narratorial comments fluctuates strongly and unevenly between zero and 89 comments per chapter. The average number of narratorial comments per chapter is 15 comments. In an overview listing the numbers of comments per chapter, divisions can be identified: first, several chapters feature 20 or more comments. These chapter have been discussed in the previous section. Second, a group of chapters feature 9–20 chapters and are considered average regarding the density of comments. Third, several chapters feature eight or less comments per chapter. These are the chapters focused on in this section.

26 In view of the fact that they are all located in the second part of the saga, it can be asked whether this points to chapters 1–7 figuring as an introductory part, which is comparatively more intensely commented on in order to set the stage for the second part of Jvs.
The reduced numbers of comments can be connected to the more extensive display of narrative showing, that is, presenting more action scenes and a higher proportion of direct and reported speech, which do not require being commented on.27

As already observed in the section above, these chapters feature the same relative frequency of the subcategories of the narratorial comments. Out of 77 narratorial comments in total in these chapters, the intratextual comments dominate clearly with 23 instances, second most prominent are the statements of the extra-diegetic narrative tradition (14 instances), and third come the indications of time with nine instances.28 Hence there is a general preference for particular subcategories throughout Jvs which are applied irrespective of chapter length, density of comments or the frequency of direct speech.

As regards the relevance of the less densely commented-on chapters for the plot, they often present either background knowledge (e.g. the law code of the Jómsvikings in chapter 14), elucidations on single characters (as e.g. the focus on Vagn in chapter 21), or they initiate the build-up of important plot developments (e.g. chapter 33, when Jarl Hákon announces that he will observe the further development of the battle from the woods, but, as is revealed later on, ventures for the island Prímsigð and sacrifices his son in order to influence the course of the battle). What is more, the majority of the less densely commented-on chapters form thematic pairs. These are chapters 9–10, 17–18, 21–22, 24–25, 29–30, and 36–37.29 Sharing more than their vicinity in the saga, these pairs always deal with the same topic and present two steps of a narrative development that eventually lead to a key moment: Young Sveinn challenges his father King Haraldr twice to acknowledge the paternity and raids Denmark after Haraldr’s denial (ch. 9–10). – Véseti has to deal with the aftermath of the raid of Sigvaldi and his brothers and asks King Sveinn for assistance (ch. 17–18). – Because of his difficult disposition, Vagn is provided with ships and men so that he can go on raids. He sails to Jómsborg and is ready to fight for this membership among the Jómsvikings (ch. 21–22).30 – Pálnatóki falls ill, senses his approaching death and decrees that Sigvaldi becomes the new leader. Once Sigvaldi is in charge, however, the customs of the Jómsvikings begin to deteriorate (ch. 24–25).31 – While Jarl Hákon recruits men all over Norway for the battle at Hjǫrungavágr, Vagn and his men meet the Norwegian farmer Úlfr who shows them

27 Chapter 33, for instance, is a very short chapter, containing only direct speech by Jarl Hákon to his sons. Apart from the inquit-formula, the narrative voice leaves the space to Jarl Hákon.
28 I refrain from offering examples of the subcategories in these chapters.
29 While chapters 14 and 15 do not form a thematic pair, chapter 33 is not part of a pair.
30 The fight itself takes place in chapter 23, which features an average number of narratorial comments and thus will not be discussed here.
31 On the level of content, these chapters call to mind the Jómsborg law code that is presented in chapter 15, which features few narratorial comments as well.
where Jarl Hákon and his fleet are hiding (ch. 29–30). – After the battle, 11 Jómsvikings are executed by the Norwegians (ch. 36–37).

Although they do not necessarily present key moments of the saga and are not commented on extensively by the narrative voice, these chapters are nonetheless important to the saga. They contain background information and details upon which many dramatic scenes eventually hinge or which foreshadow future events. Considering for instance chapters 9–11: after calling twice on King Haraldr to acknowledge his paternity of Sveinn (ch. 9–10), Sveinn makes his third, unsuccessful attempt whereupon Pálnatoki kills Haraldr in chapter 11, which is densely commented-on. Similarly, the hardly commented-on chapters 29 and 30 describe how the Jómsvikings and Jarl Hákon prepare for the battle, however, without knowing exactly where the other party is hiding. Only after Úlfr the farmer has shown the Jómsvikings where the jarl is hiding does the battle finally start in chapter 31, which is densely commented-on again. Thus the fact that not all chapters of the saga are equally densely commented on is not a sign of fluctuating narrative quality or indecisiveness by the narrative voice. Rather the narrative voice demonstrates how skillfully and in what varied ways it is possible to fashion and present the plot for different narrative and dramatic effects.

8 An Instance of frásagnargleði

The previous sections have shed light on how the usage of narratorial comments, the combination of several subcategories of comments as well as the interaction of the comments with the plot are central for curating the process of narration of Jvs. Four main factors can thus be identified that shape the presentation of the sagas as preserved in AM 291 4to:

- The (sub-)categories of narratorial comments: the various types of comments not only serve different purposes, they can also be combined in order to achieve a particular effect, as was exemplarily shown with Fjólnir and how he betrays and kills his brother Áki (ch. 8). The choice or predominance of particular (sub-)categories curates and directs the whole plot throughout the saga. The three most prominent subcategories – intratextual comments, indications of time, and extradiegetic narrative voice – thus paint a picture of a close-knit saga that is shaped by a narrative voice that is aware of surrounding narrative traditions, draws on them and is self-reflective on the process of narration.

- Frequency: The frequency of the (sub-)categories reflects what narratological aspects are considered most important in order to craft a particular version of a narrative. Although all predefined (sub-)categories of narratorial comments are present in this version of Jvs, it is the subcategories of intratextual comments,
references to the extradiegetic narrative voice and indications of time that dominate. Interestingly enough, these three types of comments appear with the same ratio throughout the saga, irrespective of the second major factor of the density of comments.

- Density: The aspect of density was shown to be the main variable in terms of the use of narratorial comments in AM 291 4to. While the key moments in the saga are relatively densely commented on, the beginnings of major plot developments are rather sparsely commented on and leave much more room for the characters to present themselves. When commenting extensively on central text passages, the narrative voice makes sure that the audience receives the necessary guidance. The density of comments is not an indicator of fluctuating quality in the narrative process, rather it illustrates that the narrative voice plays with the different effects.

- Showing versus telling: The varying density of narratorial comments allows the saga characters some scope to present themselves through (in-)direct speech and/or actions. In chapter 8, the characters are not granted much liberty to show themselves (i.e. narrative telling), while the chapters on the battle at Hjörungavágr are dominated by action scenes and short dialogues (i.e. narrative showing).

The narrative voice thus pursues different strategies and resorts to these four factors for presenting the plot. It is crucial, however, that none of these factors is by itself all-decisive for the process of narration. The composition of the saga depends both on the interaction of these four factors, which all require that the process of narration engages with the plot. In this way, the narrative voice masterly creates a coherent yet dynamic saga narrative that is not only easy to follow for the audience but also artistically appealing.

Indeed, the narrative voice demonstrates a keen interest in the power of narrating and entertaining. Ólafur Halldórsson attests “frásagnargleði” (‘narrative joy’) to Jvs. He identifies this enthusiasm for entertainment in the selection and description of the protagonists, while Finlay and Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir (2019, 7) see the entertaining value in the countless adventures of the Jómsvikings. Based on this analysis I maintain that this unchallenged frásagnargleði is also reflected on the level of the narratorial comments.

32 “En þessi frásagnargleði birtist meðal annars í því, að gleggra er sagt frá sérkennilegum mönnum en hinum, sem kallast mega venjulegir menn”, Ólafur Halldórsson 1969, 54, ‘This narrative joy is for instance seen in how peculiar men are portrayed in more detail than those who could be called ordinary’.
What is more, these findings have the potential to reach much further than the narratological level of *Jvs*, or any saga for that matter: for a long time, scholarship stuck to a teleological view on the development of ‘good’ saga narration, which supposed that works such as *Njáls saga* could only be created at the climax of a long-standing and well-developed narrative tradition. Accordingly, sagas that are said to be early (or late) have often faced the stigma of being unrefined and flawed. Even though *Jvs* is one of the earliest preserved sagas, it does not fall short as a skillful literary creation. The narrative voice proves strongly self-reflective on the process of (written) narration and displays a keen interest in fashioning a refined narrative, which captivates and entertains.  

9 Conclusions

Tools based on and developed by the DH are often met with scepticism, because literary studies still prefer qualitative approaches and shy away from involving quantitative methods. This software-based study has demonstrated that quantitative methods can be employed to harvest data, which would be hard to retrieve as thoroughly and systematically without digital tools. In combination with ‘classic’, qualitative analyses, such an approach contributes greatly to gaining new perspectives on (medieval) literary sources.

The discussion has shown that the (sub-)categories of narratorial comments, which have previously been developed on the basis of the *Íslendingasögur, fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, have proven helpful for the analysis of the narrative voice in *Jvs*. The primary quantitative analysis revealed that three out of the five main categories of narratorial comments are predominant in the saga (i.e. the intratextual comments, the comments by the public opinion and the evaluative comments). Zooming-in on the subcategories, these results shifted somewhat as it

---

33 In his article on *Reykdaela saga* and *Harðar saga ok Hölmverja*, Schmidt (2022) approaches this long-standing prejudice and convincingly shows how deeply the dating of sagas (esp. of the *Íslendingasögur*) has influenced saga analyses in the past. Both sagas are structured in a similar way but depending on their dating, the episodic narration has been deemed archaic or a sign of deterioration respectively (138). Schmidt calls for moving away from such preconceptions and using dating as one of the primary indicators for the literary quality of text. Instead we should approach the sagas with an open mind for their narrative idiosyncrasies (145).

34 Finnur Jónsson (1923, 656) would certainly not agree with this statement as he maintains that “[t]eksten i 291 er den mindst tiltalende af alle”, (‘the text in 291 is the least appealing of all *Jvs*-versions’).
turned out that the intratextual comments, statements by extradiegetic narrative tradition and indications of time appear most frequently in the saga. This not only illustrates how important a qualitative analysis of quantitative results are, it also suggests that the narrative voice is above all interested in crafting a coherent account, which allows though for alternative narrative versions of single events or characters as expressed by the extradiegetic narrative tradition.

Having scrutinised the (sub-)categories of the narratorial comments, their frequency and density, the following picture of the narrative voice appears: all three elements just mentioned individually allow the narrative voice a considerable scope for shaping the process of narration of the saga. The analyses of both chapter 8, the most densely commented-on chapter in the saga, and the least commented-on chapters have shown that the density correlates with the plot. While key moments are densely commented on (i.e. narrative telling), characters are granted more liberty to show themselves either in (in-)direct speech or in actions (i.e. narrative showing) in episodes with a low density of comments. Such episodes are often essential for the build-up to key moments in the plot. Hence the plot and the usage of the narratorial comments correlate.

The relationship of narratorial comments and the plot is thus rather complex, as is shown in the case of Fjölnir (ch. 8). For portraying his character and his scheming against his brother Áki several subcategories of narratorial comments are combined in order to underline the spitefulness of his deeds. Only in combination do the narratorial comments disclose their full potential. This versatility and complexity proves that the narrative voice narrates neither objectively nor randomly. It skilfully crafts a highly artistic narrative and is self-reflective on the act of narrating and the difficulties that emerge with it. While this case study focuses exclusively on Jvs, it can be assumed that similar observations can be made for saga narration in general.

For a long time, scholarship has postulated that sagas that date either early or late are not as refined literary products as the ‘classical’ sagas. The analysis of Jvs has shown that it is time to revisit this often encountered prejudice and approach sagas and their idiosyncratic way of narrating with an open mind, irrespective of their alleged dating. If anything, Jvs bears witness to a masterly narrative voice that is highly self-reflective on the process of narration, which is expressed by the prominently featuring comments of the extradiegetic narrative tradition that prove the saga to be part of a long-standing tradition of saga narration.
Literature

Abbreviations of saga titles

Bárð = Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss
Eb = Eyrbyggja saga
Eg = Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar
Eir = Eiríks saga rauða
Jvs = Jómsvíkinga saga
Nit = Nítiða saga
Reykd = Reykdæla saga
Trist = Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar

Primary literature


Secondary literature


