

# Guardian of Memory: Halldór Laxness, Saga Editor

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**ABSTRACT:** During the 1940s the Icelandic novelist Halldór Laxness embarked on a project to oversee the publication of five medieval sagas. The project emerged as a response to certain editorial practices common to the time and, like many of Halldór's endeavours, invited no small measure of controversy. In fact, Halldór's publication venture resulted in a legal battle with the Icelandic government, from which he ultimately emerged victorious. An examination of his editorial project and its background demonstrates much about Halldór's own understanding of the medieval sagas and the wider significance of the saga heritage in the context of modern Icelandic society and culture. Moreover, this project was also intimately connected to Halldór's own artistic pursuits at the time and in the years that followed, and thus provides important insight into the writer he was and the writer he was yet to become.

**RÉSUMÉ:** Au cours des années 1940, le romancier islandais Halldór Laxness s'est lancé dans un projet qui visait à superviser la publication de cinq sagas médiévales. Le projet survenait en réponse à certaines pratiques éditoriales communes à l'époque et, à l'instar de nombreuses entreprises de Halldór, suscita une controverse qui ne fut pas des moindres. De fait, la publication de Halldór entraîna une bataille juridique contre le gouvernement islandais, dont il sorti finalement victorieux. L'examen de son projet éditorial et de son contexte en dit beaucoup sur la propre compréhension de Halldór à l'égard des sagas médiévales et sur la portée plus large du patrimoine de la saga dans le contexte de la société et de la culture islandaises modernes. De plus, ce projet était intimement lié aux activités artistiques de Halldór à l'époque et pendant les années qui suivirent, et fournit ainsi un aperçu important de l'écrivain qu'il était et de celui qu'il était encore à devenir.

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**I**n June of 1916, a letter from Iceland written by H. Guðjónsson frá Laxnesi appeared in the children’s newspaper *Sólskin*, a supplement to the weekly North-American Icelandic-language newspaper *Lögberg*. The letter was addressed to the *Sólskinsbörn* [Sunshine children]—the publication’s presumed audience—the children of Icelandic immigrants to North America. Assuming a paternal tone, the writer described to his western friends how during the summer every young fellow living in the Icelandic countryside strolled amongst the sheep, with a dog at his side, carrying books in his pack to read. The writer explained that he often read “*Íslendingasögurnar sem segja frá hreystiverkum og dugnaði forfedra vorra á gullöldinni*” [the Icelandic sagas which tell of the courageous deeds and drive of our forefathers from the golden age] and went on to claim that he had read all of the sagas by the time he was eleven years old. The writer finally informed his readers that:

Ef að manni langar að elska landið sitt en gerir það ekki beinlínis, þá er meðalið þetta: Lestu Íslendingasögurnar, með þeim drekkurðu í þig ættjarðarást. – Ekki get eg fullkomlega gert mér grein fyrir hvernig ást mín til landsins hefir aukist við lestur þeirra sagna, en það er vist: Aukist hefir hún og það einmitt við lestur íslendingasagna; og þessvegna vil eg segja ykkur að meðalið er einhlýtt.  
(5–6)

[If one longs to love his country but cannot do it directly, then this is the medicine: Read the Icelandic sagas, with them you will lap up patriotism.—I’m not able to fully clarify how my love for the country has grown from reading these sagas, but it is certain: It has obviously grown exactly by way of reading the Icelandic sagas; and so I want to tell you that the medicine does the trick.]<sup>1</sup>

When this letter first appeared in print its author, H. Guðjónsson frá Laxnesi, was only fourteen years old. Only much later did he gain international renown as Halldór Kiljan Laxness (1902–98), Icelandic novelist and eventual Nobel laureate.<sup>2</sup>

Knowing who this young Icelander eventually became, his reverence for Iceland’s medieval sagas is perhaps not all that surprising. However, just a few years after having written the aforementioned letter and having published his first novel, Halldór expressed a considerably different attitude, appearing rather keen to distance his own literary efforts and ambitions from the sagas and the traditions they were understood to represent. A letter that he had sent to his friend Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1899–1984) during his early twenties provides an interesting perspective on this formative stage of the young novelist’s artistic and intellectual development. Living abroad and in response to having received a copy of Snorri Sturluson’s medieval kings’ saga *Heimskringla* (c. 1230) from Einar Ólafur, Halldór writes,

Ég get ekkert lært af þeim. Þessir gömlu karlar leggja mesta áhersluna einmitt á það sem nútíðarhöfundar leggja minsta á - nfl. að búa til kontúrur. Þeir eru allir í því að tína saman einhver hundleiðinleg facta, sem einga skepnu geta interesserað ...

Málið hjá þessum Snorra er sennilega ekki óviturlegt, það sem það nær, og góð í íslenska. (Víða verður hann þó að grípa til erlendra orða.) En sem sagt, það liggur á alt öðrum sviðum en okkar mál, og maðurinn hugsar með alt öðruvísi innréttuðum heila en nútíðarmenn, og interesserar sig fyrir alt öðrum atburðum og hlutum en við (t.d. er hann mjög interesseraður fyrir því ef einhver konungur gefur manni frakka eða hring).

Ég held ifirleitt að ekki sá hægt að læra að skrifa nýja íslensku af gamalli íslensku. Það þarf eitthvað annað.  
(Quoted in Hallberg 18)

[I can't learn anything from them. These old men place the greatest stress upon exactly that which contemporary authors place the least upon—i.e. producing contours. They are always gathering together some dead boring facts, which no creature could be interested in ...

Snorri's language is probably not foolish, as far as it goes, and good Icelandic. (Though he often resorts to foreign words.) But as I've said, it lay in an altogether different field than our language, and the man thinks with an altogether different brain than contemporary men, and interests himself in altogether different events and things than we (e.g. he is very interested in whether some king gives a man a cloak or a ring).

I generally think it impossible to learn to write modern Icelandic from Old Icelandic. It requires something else.]

The young novelist's polemic letter was just one part of a larger response to what he perceived to be the many backward-looking political, social, and cultural tendencies in Iceland during the 1920s and 30s. Indeed, during this time, Halldór and some of his contemporaries ushered in modern Icelandic literature "as a reaction against traditional prose fiction and a society based on farming," with the result that "Icelandic prose was opened up to completely new dimensions" (H. Guðmundsson 2008, 97; see also Hallberg 3–5). Although echoes of the saga heritage can be detected in some of Halldór's early novels, his adolescent admiration for medieval Icelandic writing appears to have been forfeited or at least relegated as a cost of his modernist ambitions and his longing to escape from long-established traditions.

During the late 1930s and the early 1940s, however, and concurrent with the period during which he published his most important early novels—particularly *Sjálfstætt folk* [*Independent People*] (1934–35) and *Heimsljós* [*World Light*] (1937–40)—Halldór's attention was again drawn towards Iceland's medieval saga traditions, the shadow of which he had once seemed so determined to escape. In

fact, during an interview conducted around this time, Halldór recalled the same occasion when his friend had sent him a copy of Snorri's *Heimskringla*:

Ég hef alltaf lesið íslenskar fornþókmenntir, það er ekkert tímabil í lífi mínu sem ég hef ekki lesið þær. Og ég hef aldrei haft áhuga fyrir' því sagnfræðilega í þeim. Þegar ég var strákur hjá munkum suður í Evrópu í tvö ár og heyrdi ekki annað en rómönsk mál, lét ég vin minn Einar Ólaf Sveinsson senda mér Heimskringlu ... það var eina íslenska bókin sem ég hafði og ég las hana miskunnarlaust. Á þessum árum var ég mjög með hugann við aðra hluti, en mig grunaði snemma, að við ættum miklu meiri grundvöll en við vitum, skiljum og skynjum í skáldskap Íslendinga frá, fornu fari.

(S. Guðmundsson 4–5)

[I have always read Old Icelandic literature; there is no period in my life in which I have not read it. And I have never had historical interest in it. When I was a lad with the monks in southern Europe for two years and heard nothing but romance languages, I had my friend Einar Ólafur Sveinsson send me *Heimskringla* ... it was the only Icelandic book that I had and I read it mercilessly. During these years I was much occupied with other things, but I suspected early on that we had a much greater foundation than we knew, understood, and perceived from the poetics of Icelanders from ages past.]

Demonstrating that remembrance can be a many-textured thing, Halldór here advocates for the profound artistic—rather than directly historical—value of medieval saga writing, remarkably by invoking the same event that had spurred his earlier derisive remarks concerning these same literary traditions.

From a young age, medieval Icelandic saga traditions exercised a profound influence upon Halldór's life, though his attitude towards these traditions was far from static as he began to develop as a young writer and sought to escape from the long shadow they cast over modern Icelandic literature. Yet, after asserting the importance of his voice within contemporary Icelandic letters during the 1930s, Halldór embarked upon a profound engagement with Iceland's medieval saga heritage, perhaps most frequently perceived in his novels *Íslandsklukkan* [*Iceland's Bell*] (1943–46) and *Gerpla* [*Wayward Heroes*] (1952). However, during the same period Halldór also pursued an editorial project resulting in published editions of five medieval sagas, each controversially adapted to modern Icelandic spelling. As a result, Halldór became embroiled in an intense public battle over how to best preserve, protect, and properly understand the significance of Iceland's medieval saga heritage. Through this editorial project and the ensuing battle, Halldór further established his position as a formidable cultural, political, and social critic in Iceland while continuing to develop and refine his own artistic methods, drawing profound inspiration and influence from Iceland's medieval saga heritage.

## “... another kind of Esperanto”

In a brief essay dated to 1935 but first published in 1937, “Um stafsetningu á fornsögum” [On spelling in the medieval sagas], Halldór delivered a prelude of what was to come in the battle over Iceland’s medieval saga heritage. Here Halldór swiftly dismissed what had, since at least the late nineteenth century, become common practice when publishing modern editions of medieval sagas, which was the use of normalized orthography. Important evidence survives from medieval Iceland attesting to an early concern for establishing a common system of writing to represent the language Icelanders spoke (*The First Grammatical Treatise* 206–11). However, such efforts were perhaps more prescriptive than descriptive, and, in any case, the surviving manuscripts of medieval Icelandic display a varied rather than a universal, uniform system of orthography. Early Icelandic writing exhibits variance in terms of spelling conventions as well as the use of different glyphs, diacritical marks, and abbreviations across different manuscripts, and sometimes even within a single manuscript (see Figure 1). These variations might reflect not only personal or regional differences, but also the considerable changes both the Icelandic language and its orthography underwent during the Middle Ages (Benediktsson 55–96). By the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century editors and scholars had, however, arrived at a largely unified system of normalized orthography customarily used to represent Old Icelandic texts in print. Drawing on the same early evidence referred to above attesting to a concern for the development of early Icelandic writing during the Middle Ages, this normalized system was thought to better reflect the pronunciation of Old Icelandic as it was spoken during the Middle Ages than the surviving manuscript witnesses of the texts. Thus, an underlying assumption was that the written sagas always represented orally transmitted traditions that pre-dated the arrival of writing in medieval Iceland.

The use of normalized orthography was a practice maintained by *Hið íslenska fornritafélag* [The Old Icelandic Text Society] and its editors in their *Íslensk fornrit* series of medieval saga editions—launched in 1933—whose work Halldór was doubtlessly aware of and likely responding to in some way (Helgason 1996, 112–13). In his brief essay on the subject, Halldór contended that “*Samræmdur*” [normalized] orthography was not reflective of the original manuscripts and that “*hann er nokkurskonar esperantó, sem málfræðingar hafa fundið upp sér til dundurs*” [it is another kind of Esperanto, which linguists have invented to keep themselves busy], going on to dismiss what he calls the “*menntafjandsamlega ritháttar málfræðihetjanna*” [anti-intellectual spellings of the heroic linguists] (1937, 156, 160). Halldór would also later compare normalization to “*þegar Don Quijote tók sápuskál rakarans og skírði hana með mikill viðhöfn Riddarahjálms*” [when Don Quixote took the barber’s soap basin and christened it, with much pomp, a knight’s helmet] (1942, 333). In his short essay from 1935,

Halldór went on to maintain that there was also a certain kind of hostility in reproducing Old Icelandic texts using a language that lies outside of the “lifandi ritmál þjóðarinnar” [living written language of the nation] as the sagas had consistently followed those changes in the language in which they were written and rewritten for centuries. Halldór later elaborated on this same point, noting that the sagas “eru til í handritum með stafsetningum allra alda, síðan þær voru samdar, hver öld skráði þær með sínum rithætti, af því þær voru lifandi og sígild eign þjóðarinnar” [exist in manuscripts with spellings of all ages since they were composed, each age writing them down with their own spellings, since they were living and classical property of the people] (1942, 336). Thus, he argued, reproducing the sagas in print using normalized orthography, developed only during the nineteenth century, contradicts the traditions through which the sagas had always been preserved.

For Halldór, the use of normalized orthography ultimately rendered the medieval sagas lifeless and unnecessarily distanced the audience from the texts. More than this, he supposed that using more natural language would allow modern Icelandic readers to recognize that the language of the sagas is in fact “okkar eigið mál, sem vér notum þann dag í dag, fagurt og lifandi nútímamál” [our own language, the one that we use today, a beautiful and vibrant contemporary language] (1937, 156–57). He thus contended that the medieval sagas should be published in facsimile or diplomatic editions for the use of trained scholars, who could then explore the texts “orð fyrir orð, teikn fyrir teikn” [word for word, symbol for symbol], and adapted to modern Icelandic for the benefit of the reading public, concluding that editions using normalized spelling served no functional purpose (156). The central idea of this short essay is directly reflected in the publishing venture that Halldór took on some few years later, which provoked considerable political and public outcry.

Between 1941 and 1946, Halldór oversaw the publication of five medieval sagas and, in concordance with the philosophy he had laid out in his brief essay a few years earlier, each of the sagas was reproduced using modern Icelandic spelling, that which Halldór referred to as “lögboðinni stafsetningu íslenska ríkis” [the official spelling of the Icelandic state] (*Laxdælasaga* 3; see also *Alexanderssaga* 5, *Brennunjalssaga* 415–16, *Hrafnkatla* 3, 5, *Grettissaga* 288), referring to modern Icelandic spelling according to school curricula at the time. In anticipation of the appearance of the first of Halldór’s editions in 1941, a brief notification appeared in the daily newspaper *Vísir* in October of that same year announcing a forthcoming publication of *Laxdæla saga* “færast í búningu nútíma stafsetningar” [dressed in the fabric of contemporary spelling] and with “þurum ættartölulanglokum sleppt” [dry, tediously long genealogies omitted] (“Bækur á næstunni,” 2). The notification, over which Halldór doubtlessly exercised some influence, also reiterated the claim that an edition of the saga using modern spelling and omitting certain parts of the text would prove palatable to the reading

public, losing neither the meaning nor the style of its original source. The text also suggested that the sagas might yet be published in other editions using “gamalli stafsetningu” [the old spelling] and including the genealogies, which aligns with Halldór’s earlier contention that the hitherto customary use of normalized spelling served little purpose (“Bækur á næstunni”), and is interesting in light of the publication of the Íslenzk fornrit edition of *Laxdæla saga* in 1934, notably edited by his old friend Einar Ólafur Sveinsson and reproduced using normalized orthography.

The promised edition of *Laxdæla saga* appeared in print just a few weeks later and included a foreword in which Halldór briefly described certain of the literary aspects of the saga. He underlined, for example, the narrative’s “réttta blanda hámenningar og frumstæðis, sem til þarf að skapa stórfengilega, ódauðlega list” [correct blend of high-culture and the primitive, which is necessary to create colossal, timeless art], and certain of the saga’s author’s methods, namely his lack of hesitation—differing from some of his medieval Icelandic contemporaries—to shed or to augment historical events or persons according to the laws of the narrative itself, “ekki frábrugðin aðferðum beztu sagnaskálda seinni tíma” [differing not from the methods of the best novelists of later times] (5–6). Halldór goes on to admit that he has omitted certain parts of the saga that wander far from its primary substance and whose significance to the narrative may be difficult for the reading public to clearly understand. He comments that overall his edition follows laws other than the “vísindalegu, þar sem mikið veltur á, að engum stafkrók fornra handrita sé breytt í prentum” [scholarly, wherein much depends on no syllable of the old manuscripts being changed in print] (6). Interestingly, Halldór notes that the text of his edition is in fact based on Einar’s earlier edition of the saga in the Íslenzk fornrit series, which had followed the series’ editorial standard of reproducing the saga using normalized orthography, the same practice Halldór implicitly rejects in his reference to the requirements of a proper “scholarly” approach.

In addition to the use of modern Icelandic spelling, the most obvious difference between his and Einar’s Íslenzk fornrit edition is the omission in Halldór’s edition of some of the so-called dry and tedious genealogies. For example, in the Íslenzk fornrit edition of the saga, using normalized spelling, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, whom—along with her lovers—Halldór describes as the “meginkjarni” [primary nucleus] of the saga (5), is introduced as follows, using typical generic formulations:

Ósvífr hét maðr ok var Helgason, Óttars sonar, Bjarnar sonar ins autsrœna, Ketils sonar flatnefs, Bjarnar sonar bunu. Móðir Ósvífrs hét Niðbjörg, hennar móðir Kaðlín, dóttir Gongu-Hrólfis, Øxna-Þórissonar; hann var hersir ágætr austr í Vík. Því var hann svá kallaðr, at hann átti eyjar þrjár ok átta tigu yxna í hverri; hann gaf eina eyna ok yxnina með Hákonni konungi, ok varð sú gjöf allfræg. Ósvífr var spekingr

mikill; hann bjó at Laugum í Sælingsdal. Laugabœr stendr fyrir sunnan Sælingsdalsá, gegnt Tungu. Kona hans hét Þórdís, dóttir Þjóðólfs lága. Óspakr hét sonr þeira, annarr Helgi, þriðji Vandráðr, fjórði Torráðr, fimmti Þórólfr; allir váru þeir víglegir menn. Guðrún hét dóttir þeira; hon var kvenna vænst, er upp óxu á Íslandi, bæði at ásjánu ok vitsmunum. Guðrún var kurteis kona, svá at í þann tíma þóttu allt barnavípur, þat er aðrar konur höfðu í skarti hjá henna. Allra kvenna var hon kænst ok bezt orði farin; hon var orlynd kona.  
(85–86)

[There was a man called Ósvífr, son of Helgi, son of Óttarr, son of Björn the Easterner, son of Ketill Flat-nose, son of Björn buna. Ósvífr's mother was called Niðbjörg, her mother Kaðlín, daughter of Gøngu-Hrólf, son of Oxen-Þórir; he was a famous chieftain east in Vík. He was called so because he had three islands and had eighty oxen on each; he gave one island and its oxen to king Hákon, and that gift became very famous. Ósvífr was very wise; he lived at Laugar in Sælingsdalr. The farm at Laugar stands to the south of the Sælingsdalr-river, opposite Tunga. His wife was called Þórdís, daughter of Þjóðólfr the short. Their son was called Óspakr, another Helgi, a third Vandráðr, a fourth Torráðr, a fifth Þórólfr; they were all valiant men. Their daughter was called Guðrún; she was the finest woman who grew up in Iceland, both in beauty and intelligence. Guðrún was a courteous woman, such that at the time everything seemed childish, which other women had in finery next to her. Of all women she was wisest and most well-spoken; she was a generous woman.]

In Halldór's edition, on the other hand, the same passage appears as follows:

Ósvífur hét maður og var Helgason. Hann var spekingur mikill; hann bjó að Laugum í Sælingsdal. Laugabær stendur fyrir sunnan Sælingsdalsá, gegnt Tungu. Kona hans hét Þórdís, dóttir Þjóðólfs lága. Óspakur hét sonur þeirra, annarr Helgi, þriðji Vandráður, fjórði Torráður, fimmti Þórólfr; allir voru þeir víglegir menn. Guðrún hét dóttir þeirra; hún var kvenna vænst, er upp óxu á Íslandi, bæði að ásjónu og vitsmunum. Guðrún var kurteis kona, svo að í þann tíma þóttu allt barnavípur, það er aðrar konur höfðu í skarti hjá henna. Allra kvenna var hún kænst og bezt orði farin; hún var orlynd kona.  
(88)

[There was a man called Ósvífr, son of Helgi. He was very wise; he lived at Laugar in Sælingsdalr. The farm at Laugar stands to the south of the Sælingsdalr-river, opposite Tunga. His wife was called Þórdís, daughter of Þjóðólfr the short. Their son was called Óspakr, another Helgi, a third Vandráðr, a fourth Torráðr, a fifth Þórólfr; they were all valiant men.

Their daughter was called Guðrún; she was the finest woman who grew up in Iceland, both in beauty and intelligence. Guðrún was a courteous woman, such that at the time everything seemed childish, which other women had in finery



next to her. Of all women she was wisest and most well-spoken; she was a generous woman.]

In addition to spelling differences and some slight adjustments in certain of the words, Halldór has notably omitted the lengthy genealogy of Guðrún's father Ósvífr from the text, including the remarkable anecdote about her great-great-great grandfather Þórir and his oxen. The reader thus reaches the information directly related to Guðrún and her character more rapidly and is perhaps more overtly signalled to her central role in the subsequent narrative. However, one might also argue that generic conventions indicate that the exposition of Guðrún's rich genealogy is no less crucial in signalling the reader not only to her noble character but also to her importance in the overall narrative.

In his essay from 1935, Halldór had claimed that the normalized spelling typically used by modern editors was at least as far removed from the language of the sagas as preserved in their medieval manuscripts as was modern Icelandic. Observing the same normalized passage from Sveinsson's edition of the text cited above and its original manuscript witness, the fourteenth-century manuscript AM 132 fol. or Möðruvallabók (see Figure 1 below), several significant changes are evident, including expanded abbreviations and certain glyphs, replaced numerals and other characters, and otherwise standardized orthography.

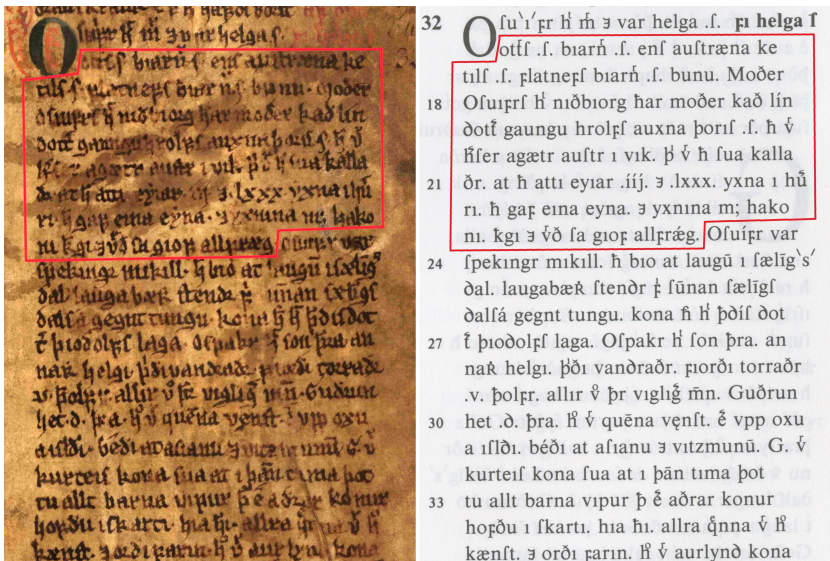


Figure 1, (left) a leaf from the early fourteenth-century manuscript AM 132 fol. (170r) or Möðruvallabók, courtesy of handrit.is, and (right) the same passage from a type-facsimile edition of the manuscript, Möðruvallabók (AM 132 Fol.), 170r, each containing the passage from Laxdæla saga cited above. The portion of the text contained within the box is the passage Halldór omits in his edition of the saga, as discussed above.

When comparing the passages introducing Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir in both Einar's and Halldór's editions of *Laxdæla Saga* to the original manuscript in Figure 1, it is difficult to dismiss Halldór's claim that Einar's normalized orthography differs at least as much from the original written text as Halldór's own modern spelling edition Icelandic does.

While the Icelandic language has perhaps experienced relatively few substantial changes since the eleventh or twelfth century—when compared to the English language, for example—editions such as Einar's clearly fail to accurately represent their original manuscript sources on an orthographic level. Yet, given the relative stability of the Icelandic language since the Middle Ages, Halldór's edition cannot be considered an “Interlingual” or translation proper. In fact, both editions can be regarded as “unmistakably intralingual translations,” which is to say, that each is “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language” (Jakobson 233; Helgason 1999, 122–23, 127). Like all translations, complete equivalence is impossible here, and the end product of this process always actively functions within its own cultural context or contexts (Bassnett 25–26). Though not working with the language of translation theory, Halldór demonstrated a keen awareness of this phenomenon, and the response that his editorial project inspired provides further evidence of the high stakes and profound cultural impact such work might entail. Much of the uproar in response to Halldór's work, however, came not from scholars or other editors whose own work he was criticizing but rather from public and political officials, themselves deeply invested in guiding the development of modern Icelandic society and culture at this pivotal moment in Iceland's history.

## War of the Words

Following the appearance of the notification alerting the public to Halldór's forthcoming edition of *Laxdæla saga* in 1941, Icelandic parliamentarian Jónas Jónsson from Hrifla drafted a bill in the hope of preventing the publication of the edition, citing the perceived damage that it would inflict upon Icelandic society and culture. Jónas wrote an impassioned editorial in the Icelandic newspaper *Tíminn*, wherein he framed the proposed volume as the product of a wider communist plot, referring to Old Icelandic writing as “hellubjarg, sem andleg menning þjóðarinnar hvílir á” [the cornerstone, on which the spiritual culture of the nation rests]. He concluded by claiming that the edition, “getur aldrei orðið annað en skrípamynd af fornritunum ... gefin[n] út á háðulegan hátt, eíngöngu í þeim tilgangi að storka þeim, sem þykir vænt um þær bækur, sem grundvalla menningu þjóðarinnar” [could never become anything but a caricature of the old writings ... published in a contemptuous way, only with the goal to provoke those, who love those books, which established the culture of the nation] (426).<sup>3</sup> Much of the negative criticism Halldór's editorial project faced at this stage concerned

the omission of certain genealogical and geographical information, which was particularly perverse to those who considered the sagas to be reliable historical documents, threatening “the way in which these people identified ... with the sagas and their characters” (Helgason 1999, 130). Under the proposed legislation the Icelandic government would retain the exclusive privilege to grant publishing rights for those Icelandic works composed prior to the year 1400, a year which closely coincided—and largely still does—with the perceived ending of the golden age of medieval saga writing (H. Guðmundsson 2008, 286; Helgason 1999, 121–22). The law notably included an exemption for those editions published by Hið íslenska fornritafélag, whose custom was to follow the convention of using normalized orthography (Helgason 1996, 116). However, with Jónas’s bill awaiting approval, Halldór’s edition was published before any legal action could be taken.

In the foreword to his edition, Halldór responds directly to the “skopfrumvarpi” [ridiculous parliamentary bill], repeating his claim that using normalized orthography makes little sense when reproducing a saga in print since normalized spelling “er ekki til eldri en frá níttjándu öld” [did not exist before the nineteenth century] (7). Befitting the early reaction to his new publishing venture, Halldór assumes a firm political stance concerning the preservation of medieval Icelandic culture, arguing that his edition constitutes an “íslenskt landvarnarmál” [a national defense of the Icelandic language]. Icelanders would understand, through his adaptation of the saga into modern Icelandic, that “þrettándualdar-ritin séu í meginatriðum á því máli, sem vér notum nútímamenn” [thirteenth-century writings are on the whole in that language, which we use today]. He argued that those who regarded the language of these works as something other than Old Icelandic, namely “gammelnorsk” or “oldnordisk,” were “vísvituum eða launvituum, að afsanna, að fornþókmenntir vorar væru ritaðar á íslenska tungu; það var tilraun til að slíta fornþókmenntir vorar úr tengslum við Ísland og – einkum – íslenska siðmenning” [openly or surreptitiously refuting that our old literature was written in the Icelandic language; it was an attempt to sever the connection between our old literature and Iceland and—particularly—Icelandic civilization] (7). Interestingly, there is a striking agreement in the historical, cultural, and contemporary significance that Halldór and Jónas each ascribe to the medieval saga heritage, and they seem only to differ in their respective politics and their ideas as to “how the sagas’ relevance could be best maintained” (Helgason 1999, 143).

Despite Halldór’s efforts, the parliamentary bill passed into law. During the following year, however, Halldór and his publishing partners directly defied the new law when they published an edition of *Hrafnkels saga* (*Hrafnkatla*) without having gained the required permission from the Icelandic government. He and his partners—Ragnar Jónsson and Stefán Ögmundsson—were subsequently charged under the new law and quickly sentenced each to pay a fine of 1.000 Icelandic kronur or face 45 days of prison confinement (Helgason 1999, 122). Halldór

confronted the new law directly in his rather brief foreword to his edition of *Hrafnkels saga*, where he provided no literary, historical, or philological context but rather only a provocative reproach. Halldór first acknowledges that his text mostly follows that of Konráð Gíslason's earlier edition of the same saga, but notes that his edition “færð til lögboðinnar stafsetningar íslenzka ríkisins” [follows the statutory spelling of the Icelandic state]. Halldór next explains that he has taken this approach,

í sérstakri minningu um stjórnarskrárbrot það, sem Þjóðfíflí Íslendinga tókst að fá Alþingi til að drýgja í fyrra með setningu skopлага þeirra gegn prentfrelsi á Íslandi, þar sem Íslendingum var gert að skyldu að nota danska nítjándualdar-stafsetningu, kennda við Wimmer, á íslenzkum fornritum.  
(5)

[in particular recognition of the constitutional violation, which Iceland's village idiot managed to get the Alþing to commit to last year in establishing their ridiculous law against the freedom of the press in Iceland, whereby Icelanders were made by law to use nineteenth-century Danish spelling, attributed to Wimmer, in Old Icelandic writings.]<sup>4</sup>

Halldór eschews all but the political aspect of his editorial project, here dispelling any notion that he would yield to his opponents, alluding also to the earlier politicization of the distribution of state grants to writers and other artists. Halldór saw his own grant from the Icelandic government decrease significantly in 1940 and claimed that the reduced grant was “straфф og aðvörun, mér til auðmýkingar” [a punishment and warning, to humiliate me]. Rather than quietly accepting the reduced grant, or simply refusing it, Halldór instead used it to establish a fund to “vernda skáld, hvaða skoðanir sem þeir hafa, fyrir því” [protect poets, whatever views they have] (“Halldór Kiljan Laxness leggur Menntamálaráðsstyrkinn í sjóð,” 183; H. Guðmundsson 2008, 273) . In publishing his edition of *Hrafnkels saga*, Halldór's brazen violation of what he considered to be the government's “ridiculous law” was much in line with the recent history of his conflicts with certain Icelandic politicians.

Refusing to admit defeat, Halldór and his publishing partners quickly appealed their conviction on the grounds that, as Halldór had opined in his foreword to *Hrafnkatla*, the law was unconstitutional since it violated previous laws permitting freedom of the press. When the case was heard the following year, a government commission produced a report detailing the findings of three professors from the University of Iceland, including Sigurður Nordal, who together concluded that in his edition of *Laxdæla saga* Halldór had distorted the saga in several ways, not only in modernizing some of the language of the text but also in omitting and reorganizing certain parts of the narrative. Unlike his earlier

edition of *Laxdæla saga*, no lengthy passages of the original text were omitted in Halldór's edition of *Hrafnkels saga*, though he did relocate a passage describing the famous horse Freyfaxi to a slightly earlier part of the text (9). The professors, however, expressed their own opposition to the new publishing law on the grounds that no wholly consistent spelling system could accurately reflect the original language of the sagas. They also conceded, as Halldór had contended, that modern Icelandic could in some ways be considered more closely related to the origins of the Icelandic language than the normalized orthography customarily used in modern editions of the sagas. The professors went on to undermine the notion that government officials were best suited to oversee the publication of the medieval Icelandic sagas and suggested that such responsibility would be better placed in the hands of scholars and writers. Halldór and his publishing partners were eventually acquitted of all charges when the law itself was finally deemed to violate constitutional rights concerning the freedom of the press, as Halldór had already argued (H. Guðmundsson 2008, 286; Helgason 1999, 122–23, 127–28, 134; 1996, 119–20).

The intense battle spurred by Halldór's editorial project was much more than a clash over a few letters, reflecting an ongoing conflict stemming from the profound chasm between Halldór's political views and those of his opponents, most prominently Jónas Jónsson (Helgason 1999, 133). Both parties indeed maintained that the medieval saga heritage represented a crucial and constitutive element of modern Icelandic culture and identity, an extremely pressing matter in light of Iceland's struggle for political independence during this period (Hastrup 69–135). The battle on this front was thus waged not over whether but rather how and by whom the medieval saga heritage should be preserved and protected, and how its relevance might be best maintained within the now rapidly modernizing Icelandic society of the mid-twentieth century.

## The Art of the Saga

Halldór's interest in the sagas during this period was never purely political, and he continued to nurture his deep and multifaceted engagement with Iceland's medieval saga heritage not only through his ongoing editorial project, but also by way of his closely allied artistic pursuits. Halldór's editorial venture indeed did not come to an end following his legal victory in 1943, and the greatest share of the output from this project appeared during the years that followed. In 1945 Halldór published editions of both *Alexanders saga mikla* and *Njáls saga*, and his edition of *Grettis saga* followed in 1946. During these years, though still facing criticism from certain of his political opponents, Halldór appears to have devoted more attention to the medieval narratives themselves and to their literary qualities, rather than to the political concerns that had more explicitly framed the publication of the earlier editions.

In the foreword to his edition of *Alexanders saga*, Halldór again shows concern for language, noting his desire to make the saga accessible for a modern audience, adapting the text to the language “sem Íslendingar skrifa nú” [which Icelanders write today]. He also claims that in *Alexanders saga* one can hear “niðinn af uppsprettum tungunnar” [the murmur of the origins of the language] (5), the familiar philosophy informing Halldór’s use of modern spelling now requiring no explicit explanation. As Halldór notes, the medieval Icelandic *Alexanders saga* is a translation of Walter of Châtillon’s medieval Latin epic poem *Alexandreis* (c. 1170). The translation is thought to have been compiled during the second half of the thirteenth century and is attributed to the Abbott Brandr Jónsson, later the Bishop of Hólar (d. 1264). In his foreword Halldór refers to the Abbott as a wise and learned man from whom “geta Íslendingar allra tíma lært fleira en eitt um það, hvernig útlenda hluti skal um ganga á Íslandi” [Icelanders of all times could learn more than one thing about how foreign things should be treated in Iceland], noting that all “sem ritar á íslenzku, jafnvel á vorum dögum, ætti að verða til eftirdæmis sá hreinleiki og tignarbragur norræns máls” [who write in Icelandic, even in our day, should follow the example of the tidiness and grand character of the Nordic language] (5). While Halldór goes on to discuss the Latin poem and its author in some detail, he ultimately claims that the original work may have lost some of its spark since only very few learned individuals could now fully appreciate it. Yet, again drawing a connection between modern and Old Icelandic, Halldór asserts that “við Íslendingar getum verið stoltir af því að hafa smíðað upp úr hinu forna verki íslenzkan skartgrip, og eiga hann enn sem nýjan á tuttugustu öld, jafngildan eða gildari en hann var í fyrstu, jafnfafran eði fegri” [we Icelanders can be proud to have fashioned out of the ancient work an Icelandic jewel, and have it still as good as new in the twentieth century, as valuable or more valuable than it first was, as beautiful or more beautiful] (6). Halldór also contended that because *Alexanders saga* was probably never “almennings eign til forna” [public property in days of old] as were some of the more well-known sagas, it had likely undergone fewer rewritings and its language fewer changes than other medieval sagas. Thus, for Halldór, *Alexanders saga*’s greatest value rested in its apparent proximity to the apparent origins of the Icelandic language.

Near the end of the foreword, Halldór also mentions the eighteenth-century Icelandic antiquarian, scholar, and manuscript collector Árne Magnússon (1663–1730) who had worked on his own edition of the saga, though his work was lost in the Copenhagen Fire of 1728. Interestingly, Halldór’s curiosity with Árne’s life and work extended beyond the pair’s shared interest in *Alexanders saga*. In fact, Árne Magnússon served as the model for the manuscript collector Arnas Arnæus, one of the central characters of Halldór’s novel *Íslandsklukkan*, which was published in three volumes during 1943–46. Though the genesis of the novel might be traced to the early 1920s (S. Guðmundsson 4–5), it was notably completed

amidst the execution of Halldór's editorial project. In preserving and protecting the medieval saga heritage in his own way through his editorial project, one may wonder whether Halldór would have seen in his own work a reflection of Árni's efforts to preserve the original manuscript witnesses of the texts several hundred years earlier. In any case, it seems impossible to regard Halldór's editorial work and his work as a novelist during these years as anything other than complementary.

The two other central figures of Halldór's novel *Íslandsklukkan*, Snæfriður Íslandssól and Jón Hreggviðsson, are also based on historical figures from the eighteenth century. However, in fleshing out these two characters, Halldór also seems to draw upon several typical aspects, specific figures, and important events appearing in certain of the medieval sagas. This includes, for example, Halldór drawing inspiration from the story of the aforementioned Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir of *Laxdæla saga*, and women from other sagas, in shaping the character of Snæfriður Íslandssól (E. Jónsson 20–21, 91–93, 157, 221, 309–10; Jakobsson 31–33, 38, 42). Moreover, somewhat in contrast to his earlier novels, Halldór took a more direct approach here, employing little psychological or emotional description and focusing instead on action, physical reaction, and dialogue. This allowed Halldór to remove the obvious presence of the author from the narrative and was a conscious move “closer to the old style of the Icelandic sagas” (H. Guðmundsson 2003, 38; see also G. Nordal 49–51; Hallberg 9–13; and S. Guðmundsson 4–5). Though a complex work with myriad dimensions, *Íslandsklukkan* is largely concerned with the persistent vitality and significance of native Icelandic culture amidst what has been considered one of the most dismal periods of Iceland's history, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It has frequently been interpreted as primarily a nationalistic work closely tied to the Independence movement of the 1940s. However, it retains many of the same hallmark subtleties of Halldór's wider artistic output despite the nationalistic and political frameworks scholars have commonly used to interpret the novel (Jakobsson 33–34).

Halldór's edition of *Njáls saga* also appeared in print in 1945. It was preceded by (and met with) not only political uproar but also the publication of a competing edition of the saga sponsored by the Icelandic state (Helgason 1999, 119–36). With his legal victory in hand, Halldór, however, used the occasion not to linger on the familiar political battle but to express a more elaborate view of his understanding of the significance of the medieval saga heritage and the art of the saga narratives (Helgason 1996, 117). In the afterword to his edition of *Njáls saga*, Halldór highlights, for example, what he considers to be the primary essence of the work, which is its interest in the “örlagatrú norrænnar heiðni” [fatalistic belief of Nordic paganism] and the narrative's relative amorality within the context of medieval Christendom. He claims that the narrative, and the doctrine of fate that it appears to advocate, constitutes a rejection of the Christian notion of free will such that in the saga “beztu mennirnir vinna ævinlega verstu verkin” [the best men always

perform the worst deeds] (416). Halldór maintains that *Njáls saga* and some others like it, presenting this doctrine in such a highly learned form, are thus a singular phenomenon in the cultural history of medieval Europe, writing “á Íslandi hefur á þessari öld lifað mjög sterkur heiðinglegur andi, óþekktur annarsstaðar í kristnum löndum ... leifar – eða endurvakning – forns hugarfars norræns” [in Iceland during these centuries a very strong heathen spirit survived, unknown elsewhere in Christian lands, remnants—or a revival—of the old Nordic temperament] (416–17).

Halldór expressed similar ideas in the afterword to his edition of *Grettis saga*, which was published the following year. Here he notes, for example, that the narrative works to valorize an overwhelmingly pagan hero, Grettir Ásmundarson, particularly in the saga’s concluding passage, which describes the reasons why the thirteenth-century politician and saga-writer Sturla Þórðarson (1214–84) considered Grettir to be the most distinguished of outlaws (281). Thus, for Halldór *Grettis saga* is “fjarri kristinni hyggju” [far from the Christian mind] and reveals “innsti kjarni íslenzku hetjusögunnar, sem á ... rætur sínar djúpt í heiðni og miðri siðblindu víkinglegs hugsunarháttar” [the innermost core of the Icelandic heroic saga, which has its roots deep in paganism and amidst the amoral Viking mentality] (287). However, as noted above, Halldór continued to regard the sagas not as reliable historical sources of the period they purport to describe but rather as literary products of the time, the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, during which they were first written down. He describes *Grettis saga*, for example, as “fjórtaðu aldar skáldverk” [a fourteenth-century work of fiction], noting that it is “að því leyti sérkennilegt verk, að hún er í senn safn þjóðsagna og skáldverk eins höfundar” [in some ways a peculiar work, in that it is at once a collection of folk stories and a work of fiction of a single author], one who “leitast við vitandi vits að fá hið sundurleita efni sitt til að loða saman” [consciously seeks to get his diverse materials to stick together] (283).

Halldór’s profound interest in the artistry of the sagas, rather than the history that they purport to represent, coincides with certain ideas he had more briefly expressed in the earlier foreword to his edition of *Laxdæla saga*; for example, he emphasized the role of the “author” in gathering materials together to suit the “laws” of the narrative, emphasizing the fictional and even somewhat novelistic qualities of the medieval sagas. In his afterword to *Njáls saga* Halldór is, however, somewhat equivocal in remarking that “sá tími er liðinn, að menn rugla þessu skáldverki saman við sagnfræði” [the time has passed, that people confuse this work of fiction for history] (415), while also noting that scholars have mostly “ekki áttað sig á, hverskonar bókmenntir þetta voru, og flestir sem sagt byggt skoðanir sínar á þeim misskilningi, að Brennunjálssaga væri sagnfræðirit” [not understood what sort of literature this was, and most claim to build their view on the misunderstanding that *Njáls saga* is a work of history] (416). He goes on to mention a singular exception to this rule, namely his old friend Einar Ólafur



Sveinsson and his then recently published study of the saga, *Á Njálsbúð, bók um mikið listaverk* (1943). Interestingly, Einar, who had also edited three volumes in the Íslenzk fornrit series by this time, would also later serve as editor of the series' edition of *Njáls saga* (1954).

Despite some of Halldór's concerns for the editorial practices of those involved with the Íslenzk fornrit series, particularly their use of normalized orthography, his understanding of the nature of the medieval sagas as literary rather than strictly historical sources closely coincided with many of the ideas proposed by these same editors. In addition to Einar Ólafur, this group also counted the aforementioned Sigurður Nordal amongst its "members," and came to be known as the "Icelandic school," gathered under the collective understanding that, though certainly relying upon history and inherited oral traditions in some ways, the medieval sagas are more properly understood and interpreted as artistic works of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Andersson 65–119; Helgason 1996, 111–25). For example, in highlighting the role of the author, as opposed to the copyist or scribe, Halldór's emphasis on the artistic and even novelistic qualities of the sagas bears a striking resemblance to Sigurður's momentous declaration that "Hrafnkatla er ... ein hin fullkonnasta stutta bóksaga ... sem til er í heimsbókmenntunum" [*Hrafnkels saga* is one of the most perfect short novels that exists in world literature] (66; Helgason 1999, 148).<sup>5</sup> Like the members of the "Icelandic school," Halldór was also interested establishing a place for the sagas within the context of world literature, comparing both *Njáls saga* and *Grettis saga* with the works of medieval Italian writers Dante (1265–1321) and Boccaccio (1313–75) respectively.<sup>6</sup>

Despite several points of agreement, Halldór remained as steadfast in his contempt for certain aspects of the work of modern editors as he was now certain of the timeless literary value of the sagas and the genius of their medieval authors. In the afterword to his edition of *Grettis saga*, for example, he particularly rebuked Guðni Jónsson, whose edition of *Grettis saga* had been published in 1936 as part of the Íslenzk fornrit series. Halldór claimed that Guðni "brigzla hinum forna snillingi næstum á hverri síðu Grettluútgáfu sinnar um einhverja vömm" [reproaches the old master on nearly every page of his edition of *Grettis saga* about some disgrace] (288), specifically referring to Guðni's use of footnotes in describing what he perceived to be errors or inconsistencies in the text. Halldór compared this aspect of Guðni's editorial work to "drukkinn fóla, sem stöðugt æpir ókvæðisorð fram í fyrir söngvara í áheyrendasal" [the drunken brute, who constantly screams forth abuse before the singer in the auditorium] (288), asserting above all else the brilliance of the medieval saga writers. Halldór's spirited reproach perhaps betrays a sense of solidarity or kinship he, as a novelist facing his own critics, may have felt with the medieval saga writers he seemed to regard as his own predecessors.

Arguably Halldór's most direct artistic engagement with the medieval saga heritage, his novel *Gerpla* (1952), could be considered a manifestation of this sense of kinship. The novel is largely a retelling of the medieval *Fóstbræðra saga*, though drawing also upon parts of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, the latter a particularly remarkable source in light of the aforementioned attitude Halldór expressed towards this work as a young writer. Though in some ways celebrating Iceland's medieval saga heritage, in *Gerpla* Halldór clearly subjects "the old heroic ideal to caustic satire," while simultaneously reflecting the life and culture, anxieties, fears, ideals, and ideas of the mid-twentieth century (Hallberg 13–15; see also Geeraert in this volume). This aspect of the novel interestingly parallels Halldór's fundamental contention that the medieval sagas themselves are most revelatory not as historical sources of the culture and society they purport to represent, Iceland in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, but as products of Iceland's thirteenth and fourteenth century literary culture. By this time, for Halldór the great heroes of Iceland's medieval sagas were not the famous figures populating the narratives themselves such as Egill Skalla-Grímsson, Gunnar of Hlíðarendi, or Grettir Ásmundarson, but rather the anonymous authors of these "meistaraverkum bókmenntanna" [masterpieces of literature] (*Grettissaga* 288; see also Helgason 1999, 145–53). While Halldór infuses *Gerpla* with an overall caustic critique of the old heroic ideal (Hallberg 15), his artistic response to the medieval saga heritage does not contradict but rather closely echoes the perspective that informed his editorial project, which was further developed during that project's execution.

## Conclusion: The Impenetrable Fortress

In his lengthy essay, "Minnisgreinar um fornsögur" (1945), Halldór expanded upon many of the ideas expressed in the afterword to his edition of *Njáls saga*, claiming that "íslenskur rithöfundur getur ekki lifað án þess að vera síhugsandi um hinar gömlu bækur" [an Icelandic writer cannot live without continually being mindful of the old books] (13). From his earliest writings and consistently throughout his life such a mindfulness is apparent in Halldór's work even if his attitude towards Iceland's medieval saga heritage—these "old books"—was not always the same. As a young writer, for example, Halldór appears to have shed his adolescent reverence for the medieval sagas and sought to emerge from the long shadow they continued to cast over modern Icelandic literature in the early twentieth century. Later, as an established novelist and cultural critic Halldór began to exhibit growing interest and self-confidence in facing the medieval saga heritage, which he later acknowledged shaped and nurtured much of (if not his entire) writing career (G. Nordal 45). Though this was perhaps most prominently manifested in the novels *Íslandsklukkan* and *Gerpla*, Halldór's editorial project, including both the public and political conflict that it inspired and the important

victory that Halldór earned from that conflict, was a crucial part of his engagement with the medieval saga heritage, deeply connected to his artistic struggles and the successes that followed.

At its conclusion Halldór himself acknowledged that the conflict emerging from his editorial project “var ekki first og fremst um stafsetningu, heldur var barist um lífræna menningu og almennt siðgæði á Íslandi” [was not first and foremost about spelling, but was fought over the living culture and common morals in Iceland] (1946, 245). It is difficult to overestimate the continuing significance of Iceland’s medieval cultural heritage, particularly with respect to Iceland’s Independence movement and the establishment of the Icelandic republic in 1944 (Hastrup 69–135). According to Halldór, for Icelanders during the “myrkur lángra alda” [long dark centuries] characterized by foreign rule in Iceland, “fornsagan var okkar óvinnanlega borg, og það er hennar verk að við erum sjálfstæð þjóð í dag” [the medieval saga was our impenetrable fortress, and because of it we are an independent nation today] (1945, 55–56). It has been said that during this time, through his multifaceted engagement with Iceland’s medieval saga heritage, Halldór established himself as a modern equivalent to Iceland’s medieval saga writers or had perhaps even managed to assume their place as Iceland’s national and cultural hero (Helgason 1998, 185–97; see also Eysteinnsson in this volume). While his work as a novelist was perhaps paramount in allowing Halldór to reach these great heights, his editorial project and his involvement in the accompanying intense battle over how to best preserve, protect, and properly understand the significance of Iceland’s medieval saga heritage forms a crucial part of the foundation for understanding the writer he was, and the writer he was yet to become.

## NOTES

1. All translations are my own, though I wish to thank Ármann Jakobsson for his help with certain challenging passages.
2. Halldór’s first novel, *Barn náttúrunnar*, was published under the name Halldór frá Laxnesi in 1919. However, by the time he had published his controversial and ground-breaking novel *Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír* in 1927, he had assumed the name Halldór Kiljan Laxness. Having converted to Catholicism in 1923, he adopted the middle name Kiljan from the seventh-century Irish Saint Cillian (Kilian) and had replaced the patronym Guðjónsson with the surname Laxness, the name of the farm at which he had grown up.
3. On Halldór’s complex ties to the socialist movement, see H. Guðmundsson 2008, 269–369.
4. Halldór is referring here to the Danish scholar Ludvig F. A. Wimmer (1839–1920) whose instructional *Oldnordisk formålære til brug ved undervisning og selvstudium* (1870) formed the basis for much of the subsequent normalized orthography used to represent medieval saga writing in print during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century,

as discussed above; see also *Brennunjalssaga* 416; Halldór Kiljan Laxness 1942, 333, 336, and 1946, 242–45.

5. Furthermore, Halldór's edition of *Hrafnkels saga* actually borrows its title, *Hrafnkatla*, from Sigurður Nordal's monograph on the saga published two years prior to Halldór's edition.
6. An important aspect of these final two editions, but which cannot be addressed in any detail presently, concerns the works of several contemporary and modernist Icelandic artists who were commissioned for and used to illustrate Halldór's editions of *Njáls saga* and *Grettis saga*, making the volumes beautiful objects in their own right in addition to containers for the invaluable texts (Helgason 1999, 152–53). Interestingly, the notification promoting his earlier edition of *Laxdæla saga* promises that the volume will be “prýdd myndum eftir Gunnlaug Blöndal listmálara” [decorated with pictures by the painter Gunnlaugur Blöndal]. No such illustrations appeared in the final printed edition and it is not clear what might have become of them. Víkingsprent did later release a small book of illustrations by Gunnlaugur O. Scheving bearing the title *Myndir í Laxdælu og Hrafnkötlu úr útgáfu Halldórs Kiljan Laxness (1942)*.

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