THE NEGLECTED GENRE OF RÍMUR-DERIVED PROSE AND POST-REFORMATION JÓNATAS SAGA

Just as it became fashionable in the fourteenth century to render the sagas of preceding centuries into poetic form, the dictates of taste at a later time reversed this trend and encouraged the production of prose narratives derived from the poems of earlier ages. To date, such post-Reformation “sagas” have received little attention, although it appears that enough such reworkings exist so that one can justifiably speak of an entire genre. To name just a few tales which are usually just briefly noted in other editions, there are Hrings saga ok Tryggva, derived from Geðraunir and found in paper manuscripts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,1 a prose version of Krosrimur in the late-eighteenth-century Lbs. 714, 8vo,2 and Hemings þátrr, extant in three paper manuscripts and stemming from Benedikt Sigurðsson’s Hemings rímur, a poem which he composed in 1729.3 There is also a prose redaction of a saga derived from Skíkkju rímur and extant in two manuscripts, Lbs. 1509, 4to and Lbs. 2081, 8vo,4 a short prose recension of Nýma rímur in the nineteenth-century manuscript Lbs. 254, 8vo;5 as

1 Agneta Loth, Late Medieval Icelandic Romances, 5 vols. in Editiones Arnamagnæanae, Series B, vol. 24 (Copenhagen, 1965), V, pp. ix–x. (Although in Icelandic a single canto is a ríma and a poem is normally composed of several cantos (pl. rímur), this latter term will be treated as a singular noun in English when used to refer to a single poem).


well as several manuscripts of a young version of Haralds saga Hringsbana, probably composed in the seventeenth century.6

Evidently a much later, nineteenth-century phenomenon is Perseus saga sterka, refashioned from the Persus rimur of Guðmundur Andresson, who died in 1654.7 On at least one occasion a rimur-derived saga served as the source for even younger rimur. Andra saga jarls, possibly dating from the eighteenth century, is based on the fifteenth-century Andra rimur (hinar form). Another set of rimur, by Hannes Bjarnason and Gísli Konráðsson (printed 1834 and 1905), were in turn independently produced from the rimur-derived saga.8 In at least one instance the rimur appeared in print a year after the composition of the poem, but the derivative saga is only preserved in much younger manuscripts. A Gunnars rimur Hróarssonar was written by Árni Böðvarsson in 1776, published in Hrappsey in 1777, and is extant in three manuscripts in the Landsbókasafn, all postdating the year 1880.9 The practice of writing sagas from rimur evidently continued right up to the beginning of the twentieth century. Sagan af Pontus konungssyni is extant in only one manuscript, Lbs. 1509, 4to, and seems to have been written by Magnús hreppstjóri Jónsson from Tjaldanes (1835–1922).10

In some instances it did not take very long after the composition of the poetic version for a prose recension to be fashioned. From the popular Randvers rimur og Ermingerðar, composed in 1794 by Einar Bjarnason and extant in a dozen manuscripts, a prose reworking was apparently made. The Saga af Randverifi fagra is known from one nineteenth-century manuscript, Lbs. 1504, 4to.11 Evidently the record for prompt "sagatization" of rimur belongs to Hraknings saga Magnússar Hrólfssonar, composed in the year 1813 and attributed to Gísli Sigurðsson, for a prose version derived from the rimur appears in the nineteenth-century annals for the same year.12 Hrakningsríma Magnússar Jónssonar, based on a difficult whaling expedition survived by the poet, probably at the end of 1812, also winds up as a prose report in the annals of the nineteenth century.13

It is quite probable, however, that the composition of prose narratives from poetic texts is a very old phenomenon and one that was not confined to rimur sources. There is evidence, for example, that Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra is not an original mythical-heroic saga, but rather derived from an older ballad.14 If foreign-language sources are taken into consideration, then one of the oldest examples of a derivative romance would be Tristrams saga ok Ísóndar, evidently translated in Norway from Thomas' Tristan in 1226. Of course, the tradition of prose reworking in a wider sense is also known in Iceland from around the same time, cf. Völsunga saga and Snorri’s Prose Edda. Viewed in this light, the rimur-derived sagas are simply part of a much larger literary tradition.

The production of a derived-prose narrative need not always be a simple one, however, as shown by the saga of Ásmundr Flaggøgaf, written down around 1700 by Eystjófur Jónsson, a priest in Svarfardaðalur.15 Here it has so far proved impossible to determine whether the extant rimur stem from the prose narrative or vice versa. Other complexities involve the possibility for a single saga to be indebted to more than one rimur-version and for more than one redaction of a single "saga" to exist, as in Áns saga bogsvéigis, in Hrings saga ok Tryggva (mentioned above), and in Ormars saga (discussed below).16

It will not be a simple matter, however, to define members of the genre of rimur-derived prose, since they will have to be differentiated from those sagas stemming from older Icelandic prose narratives as

12 Finnur Sigmundsson, Rímnotal, I, 246-247, 245. Other tales of tribulations at sea are known to exist in both rimur and prose versions, but their relationships have yet to be determined; Finnur Sigmundsson, I, 241, 243, 250, 251.
13 Finnur Sigmundsson, Rímnotal, I, 244-245.
well as from those which are independent (and possibly even younger) translations from European sources. That the relationships may be quite complicated is demonstrated by the version of Samsons saga fagra discussed below, as well as by Móðars þáttur, which is preserved in two parts. The second portion obviously stems from the rímur, while the first part has no parallels in the poetic text at all. In the case of drastic shortenings amounting to no more than a brief plot outline, it may well prove impossible to distinguish between the different types of sources. This difficulty is further demonstrated by Ármanns saga in yngri, which is apparently indebted in its first part to Báðar saga Snæfellssás, but in the latter part it seems to rely either on Ármanns rímur or on a version, probably from memory, of Ármanns saga ok Porsteins gála. To complicate matters it should be noticed that this latter work is itself an example of rímur-derived prose, being a late seventeenth-century reworking of Ármanns rímur. Sometimes only a single canto of the poem would be turned into a saga, as was the case with Ásmundar saga Sébbafóstrar, a reworking, probably in the seventeenth century, of the ninth canto of the popular Geðrunir (also called Hrings rímur ok Tryggva). There is even an example of a disjointed “saga,” modelled on Æneas rímur, a poem written by Jón Jónsson í Móðrufell, who lived from 1759 to 1846. The prose paraphrase is placed at the beginning of each ríma, and it is obvious that these passages were intended as an aid to understanding the poetic text. The placement of the prose is important, because it may point to the ultimate reason for the rise of rímur-derived prose, namely that by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the unusual poetic dictum and

complicated metrics of the rímur were proving too difficult for much of the Icelandic populace, which demanded a more straightforward narrative.

It is well within the bounds of possibility that some rímur-derived sagas will preserve material from lost rímur or from lost older sagas on which these rímur were based. Although the rímur from which the nineteenth-century Mábilar saga sterkju was derived has not been lost, the original prose version that gave rise to Mábilar rímur is no longer extant. In the second half of the seventeenth century Hrómundar saga Gripssonar was composed from the fifteenth-century Hrómundar rímur (also called Graupur), but here, too, the alleged prose source of the poetic version has disappeared. Likewise based on a lost fornaldarsaga is Úlfhams rímur, written around 1400 and turned into a saga some 300 years later (mss. AM 601a, 4to – written around 1700 and Lbs. 1940, 4to – written in 1820). The relationship of this derived prose version to that found in the mid eighteenth-century manuscript Kall 613, 4to has not yet been clarified. Three additional examples of rímur-derived prose are to be found in the same manuscript which contains Úlfhams saga, AM 601a, 4to. The first of these is Ormars saga (f. Ir–4r), based on one of the older rímur (ca. 1500), in turn stemming from a now lost Icelandic saga. Besides the rímur-derived prose version in AM 601, 4to, a second, independent prose version is also known to exist. On folios 4v–6r is Grims saga ok Hjálmars, indebted to a rímur published in Erik Julius Björner’s Nordiska Kämpadater, which makes it one of the oldest rímur to be published (1737). Björner also supplied Latin and Swedish prose translations of the rímur. The last in the ms. AM 601a, 4to is Sigurðara saga Fornasonar (f. 12r–17r), based on a sixteenth-century rímur evidently indebted to several sources, including Blómsturvvalla saga. Bragða–Ólvis rímur is an ex-

22 Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson, p. 235.
24 Björn K. Pórolfsson, Rímur fyrir 1600, p. 312.
27 Björn K. Pórolfsson, Rímur fyrir 1600, pp. 444–446.
ample of a derivative work for which the rímur source was almost lost, since the vellum AM 603, 4to now contains only a fragment of the sixth canto, but fortunately a copy was made by Markús Magnússon in the second half of the eighteenth century when the vellum was still complete.28 While the rímur, also known as Ólvis rímur Hákonarsonar or Ólvis rímur sterka, probably dates from the beginning of the sixteenth century, the derivative prose version stems from the end of that same century.

To date there has been no thorough catalog of the members of the genre of rímur-derived prose, and the ease with which it has been possible to find examples of such works indicates that there might exist scores of such “sagas.” A cursory reading of IS 46, 8vo, for example, (referred to below as 46) turned up a deviant version of Samsons saga fagra (ff. 26vl–58r11) that partially stems from the unpublished rímur composed by Guðmundur Bergþórsson in 1683. The poem is rather lengthy, containing 16 cantos in all, and must have enjoyed some amount of popularity, since it is known to exist in eight manuscripts.29 What is of special interest in the derived saga is that it unabashedly begins with the initial manskongr or amorous preamble found in the rímur manuscripts, before launching into a prose refashioning of the poetic text. The alliteration of the original is even occasionally preserved, as when it is said about Samson in the rímur that he: 

stundadi mest á skart og skraut (Lbs. 1889, 8vo, p. 3,12),

while 46 writes: hann stundade mið og skraut og skart, (f. 28r1 – note that the rímur version in Lbs. 2468, 4to also uses skart).

Language in the derived saga similar to that in the rímur is also to be found:

1889, p.3,1 Budlung öl vid brudi þar
46, f.27v17–18 kongur ol vid drotnjingu sinne

1889, p.3,5–6 vinsell fram til elli
46, f.27v22 vinsell fram til elli

29 Finnur Sigurdsdóttir, Rímmatal, I, 412–413. For comparison with the rímur, ms. version Lbs. 1889, 8vo (referred to here as 1889) was used, while the original saga text employed (i.e. Samsons saga fagra) is found in Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Riddarasögur, 6 vols. (Reykjavik, 1949–51), III, pp. 345–401.

1889, p.4,1 tytt ad bruca um tyna þann
46, f.28r5 ij þann tima tiytt ad bruca

Numerous details are common to the rímur and the derived saga. Both state that the wife of Artus was named Filipija, but she is called Silvia in Samsons saga fagra. In both rímur and derived saga, Artus and his wife are said to have two children before Samson and his sister are described in turn, while the earlier saga omits this piece of information and begins with a description of Samson. The two later redactions report that the hero stayed with his foster father Salmon until he was 13, while the original prose work states that he was with Salmon until the age of 11. Salmon’s daughter is named Olumpija in 46 and奥林匹ja in 1889, but Olympia in the older saga.

In 46 the first eight divisions or chapters are unnumbered, but the text corresponds to the first eight rímur in 1889, and each of the chapters begins with the corresponding mansçongr from the rímur. There can be no doubt that the first eight chapters in 46 have been heavily influenced by the poetic version. However, the subsequent chapter in 46, which should be number 9, is labelled XV. It has no mansçongr, and follows the text of the older saga (called there Chapter 11) quite closely.30 This correspondence continues to the end of the story (ch. 25 in 46, ch. 24 in the edited version of the older saga).

It should also be noted that the “sagas” discussed here do not usually exist in many copies and their manuscripts are often signed and/or dated. There is a good possibility that patterns of geographic distribution could also be determined, at least for some of the works. Besides the philological aspect of reconstructing sources and studying obscured motifs, the rímur-derived sagas can be regarded as repositories of information about the Icelandic language and prose narrative style. And just as the rímur genre has to some extent overcome the negative biases of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars, so, too, must such saga retreads eventually become legitimized as literature.

An excellent example of how such works can be examined is provided by Jónatas saga, a tale preserved in only one paper manuscript

30 E.g. 46, beg. ch. “15”: Einn Tjóma talar Olem. til Sams, so er nu komið, seiger hun, ad vid skulum nu forvitnast um høfðingja hvad sem fram fer. Samsons saga fagra, ch. 11: Einn morgan talar Olympia til Samson: „Svo er nú komið“, segir hún, „að vör skulum forvitnast hvað fram fer um höfðingja.“
from the eighteenth century, JS 408, 8vo. The Gothic cursive hand belongs to Sigurður Magnússon from Holtar in Austur-Skaptafellssýsla, who dated his copy February 15, 1772, giving it the title: “af einumni ágætumum Læknara sem hiet Jónathas”. It is a tale about the youngest of three princesses (Jónatas), who inherits three magical gifts from his father, a ring and brooch (which give him the love and support of all men), as well as a flying carpet. While he is away at school his girlfriend pretends to lose both the ring and the brooch, so the hero takes the young lady for a ride to the end of the world on his carpet, intending to leave her there. She, however, pulls the rug out from under his plans and returns home to live like a queen. Jónatas attempts to make his way back home and contracts leprosy by swimming across a lake and by eating apples, but he is healed by water from a second lake and apples from a different tree. Taking samples of each with him, he encounters and heals a king seriously ill with leprosy. Jónatas is then allowed to sail to the place of his schooling, where he disguises himself and establishes a reputation as a doctor. Meanwhile, his former girlfriend has contracted leprosy and has him summoned to her. He extorts a confession from her, offers the wrong medication, which causes her a painful death, and returns to his homeland to live happily ever after.

The tale sketched above is indebted to a rímur version which was composed prior to 1600 and extant in one vellum manuscript (Selskinna) from the end of the sixteenth century and in three paper manuscripts from the seventeenth through late-nineteenth centuries. The composition itself is divided into three cantos, each written in a different meter: the first two in four-line stanzas, ferskeytt and staphent, respectively, and the third in braghtent meter. Each rína begins with a mansöngr of 9, 10, and 6 stanzas, respectively, with the total number of stanzas in each rína being 63, 63, and 66. In content, Jóna-
tas rímur is one of about only a dozen rímur which can be said to be derived from an avintýr. Dating the composition of Jónatas rímur unfortunately supplies only a very early terminus post quem for the saga. The presence of a final unstressed syllable in end rhyme (mannsönginn/menn I,9,1,3; hann sig/merkilib I,37,1,3; frijða hring/ourting I,62,1,3; hræðilib/pjíncrit mig II,18,3,4) probably indicates a composition for the poem no earlier than around 1550, as does the rhyming of i and y (e.g. dylía/skilia I,12,2,4; neytr/aibeit/vieiter III,22,1–3; þýdum/lydum/fridum III,46,1–3).

Since the narrative content of the rímur versions is so fixed by the meter, one would expect to encounter difficulty in placing the saga in the rímur tradition. However, the name of the hero’s father in the saga, which is given there as Golfríður, indicates that Lbs. 990, 4to could not be the source, since it gives the king’s name as Golferius, as opposed to Golfríður in AM 605, 4to and as Golfríður in AM 612g, 4to. In addition, Lbs. 990, 4to omits numerous stanzas, among which are several containing information used in the saga (II,11; III,18; III,22). AM 612g, 4to leaves out a half stanza at I,45,1–2 with the important fact that Jónatas returns to his mother, but this information is to be found in the saga (I65,22–23). Near the end of the rímur, AM 612g, 4to reverses two stanzas (III,42–43), but this is not reflected in the derived prose version (170,18–24). It would appear that the saga is closely related to the vellum AM 605, 4to, but whether from this manuscript directly or from earlier or later related versions cannot be said with certainty.

The rímur is in turn indebted to a fifteenth-century avintýr, but it is obvious that JS 408, 8vo must be derived from the rímur and not from one of the seven extant avintýr manuscripts. First of all, there is no striking verbal parallel between the saga and the avintýr, which one might reasonably expect between two related prose works. There are several passages in JS 408, 8vo which deviate significantly from the prose versions, but in each case these can be derived from the rímur. During Jónatas’ trek from the end of the world, for example, the hero in both the rímur and the saga is afflicted with leprosy after swimming

31 Páll Eggert Ólason, Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins, 3 vols. (Reykjavík, 1918–37), III, 698. The “saga” occupies all of pages 161 through 172, with 28 to 32 lines per page, and quotations here are by page and line number.

32 AM 605, 4to and AM 612g, 4to: Kristian Káldn, Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske håndskriftssamling, 2 vols. (København, 1889–94), II, 10, 19. Lbs. 990, 4to and Lbs. 2033, 4to: Páll Eggert Ólason, I, 412–413; III, 271. Quotations are by rína and stanza in AM 605, 4to and, where necessary, by line number after a period.

33 Björn K. Pórólsson, Rímur fyrir 1600, p. 236.
This document is a page from a text discussing the neglected genre of rímur-derived prose. It mentions a clever concubine who has lost her magic brooch and attempts to feign suicide. The text also discusses Jónatas saga, an excellent example of a post-medieval author putting together a prose story. The source is poetic, but it can be inferred about its stylistics, with general composition also being gleaned from a comparison. Omissions are common in prose renditions, but not to such a degree as might be expected. The rímur (27 stanzas in all) leave no trace, but these are not typical of Icelandic genres. There are instances where the rósmógar have been omitted from a rímur manuscript.

From the first ríma the saga omits the descriptions of each of the three inherited treasures (six stanzas in all), but their particular powers are later made clear during the course of the poem. Likewise in the saga, there is no coyness on the part of the hero before finally revealing the secret of his first gift (163,9), while in the ríma it takes a full thirteen stanzas for the girlfriend to wheedle the information from him (1,41–53). It is quite rare, however, that such large segments of information are omitted entirely in the prose retelling, and even condensed passages are frequent. An example of this phenomenon, however, is found in the second ríma, where Jónatas’ trip home to his mother after losing his ring comprises only seven lines in the saga (164,12–18), while this section is told in five stanzas in the poetic redaction (II,20–24).

Besides omitted material there is also action added as well, which indicates that the saga author felt a certain freedom to take liberties of a creative nature with his source. In both rímar and saga, after Jónatas’ clever concubine has lost his magic brooch, he foils her attempted but feigned suicide. Thereupon the saga adds that she fainted and that he brought her to with a dousing of cold water (165,12). In the third ríma Jónatas rides to the castle and is immediately granted an audience with the king, while in the saga the king commands that the hero first be given fine clothing and velvet shoes (169, 20–21). Both rímar and saga mention that Jónatas was not recognized upon reentering the city where he had studied, but only the latter supplies some motivation by having the hero don a disguise and allow his hair and beard to grow (170,24–25).

Of interest in the saga is the mention of a special trip to the school which Jónatas’ mother makes in order to give him the ring (162,17), for this fails to appear in any rímar or rósmógar manuscripts. Since the rímar author had previously stated that the mother was keeping the gifts for her young son (I,13–14), the saga writer evidently felt obliged to explain how Jónatas happened to have the ring with him in school, although his mother’s return home is never mentioned.

Much more usual than additions which increase the action are those which supply descriptive material. It is only in the saga that Golifridus is said to be “af einu ypparlegu edal slegte” (161,12) or about Jónatas that “huxade hann umr ráð fudurs sýns, og gaf sig til lærðoms yðkana” (162,15). When Jónatas wishes to leave the castle after healing the king there of leprosy, only the saga gives his goal as Wolland (170,8) and the length of the trip as 122 miles (170,20). After Jónatas’ return to the city, we learn that the queen, his former girlfriend, had been sick for three years (171,11) and the hero is given the unnecessary incentive that he can earn a great deal of money by curing her (171,13–15). After the open confession of her sins and the revelation of the treasure’s whereabouts, the saga adds that the queen gave him the key to the chest (172,14). One interesting change of emphasis is given upon Jónatas’ receipt of the third magic object. In the rímar the hero says he will never see his mother again should he lose the third gift as well (II,49,3–4), but in the saga his mother tells him never to come into her sight again if he should lose the last treasure (166,2–4).

On the stylistic level there are numerous passages which invite comparison. The degree to which saga authors follow their poetic sources will probably vary in individual cases, but in Jónatas saga the close
across the first body of water, while the apples from the first tree worsen the affliction. The Ævintýr, on the other hand, has the water cause cancer and the apples the leprosy. Likewise Jónatas’ love affair with the skóla þjónusta, dwelt upon in some detail in the saga, finds only the barest outline in the Ævintýr, but a similar, fleshed-out version in the rímur.

Jónatas saga provides an excellent example of how a post-medieval author went about the task of putting together a prose story. Since the source employed is a poetic one, there is much that can be inferred about stylistics, but information about general composition can also be gleaned from a comparison. For the latter purpose it is not so much those features which the versions have in common which are of interest, but rather the deviations of the saga from the rímur which are revealing.

Omissions are of course to be found in the prose rendering, but not to such a degree as might be expected. The mansöngvar (27 stanzas in all) leave no trace, but these are so atypical of Icelandic genres that their disappearance is hardly surprising. There are even instances where the mansöngvar have been omitted from a rímur manuscript. From the first ríma the saga omits the descriptions of each of the three inherited treasures (six stanzas in all), but their particular powers are later made clear during the course of the poem. Likewise in the saga there is no coyness on the part of the hero before finally revealing the secret of his first gift (163,9), while in the rímur it takes a full thirteen stanzas for the girlfriend to wheedle the information from him (1,41–53). It is quite rare, however, that such large segments of information are omitted entirely in the prose retelling, and even condensed passages are infrequent. An example of this latter phenomenon, however, is found in the second ríma, where Jónatas’ trip home to his mother after losing his ring comprises only seven lines in the saga (164,12–18), while this section is told in five stanzas in the poetic reedition (II,20–24).

Besides omitted material there is also action added as well, which indicates that the saga author felt a certain freedom to take liberties of a creative nature with his source. In both rímur and saga, after Jóna-

tas’ clever concubine has lost his magic brooch, he foils her attempted but feigned suicide. Thereupon the saga adds that she fainted and that he brought her to with a dosing of cold water (165,12). In the third ríma Jónatas rides to the castle and is immediately granted an audience with the king, while in the saga the king commands that the hero first be given fine clothing and velvet shoes (169, 20–21). Both rímur and saga mention that Jónatas was not recognized upon reentering the city where he had studied, but only the latter supplies some motivation by having the hero don a disguise and allow his hair and beard to grow (170,24–25).

Of interest in the saga is the mention of a special trip to the school which Jónatas’ mother makes in order to give him the ring (162,17), for this fails to appear in any rímur or Ævintýr manuscripts. Since the rímur author had previously stated that the mother was keeping the gifts for her young son (1,13–14), the saga writer evidently felt obliged to explain how Jónatas happened to have the ring with him in school, although his mother’s return home is never mentioned.

Much more usual than additions which increase the action are those which supply descriptive material. It is only in the saga that Goli-friddus is said to be “af einu ypparlegu edal slegð” (161,12) or about Jónatas that “huxade hann umn ráð fóðurs sýns, og gaf sig til lær-döms yðkana” (162,15). When Jónatas wishes to leave the castle after healing the king there of leprosy, only the saga gives his goal as Waldland (170,8) and the length of the trip as 122 miles (170,20). After Jónatas’ return to the city, we learn that the queen, his former girlfriend, had been sick for three years (171,11) and the hero is given the unnecessary incentive that he can earn a great deal of money by curing her (171,13–15). After the open confession of her sins and the revelation of the treasure’s whereabouts, the saga adds that the queen gave him the key to the chest (172,14). One interesting change of emphasis is given upon Jónatas’ receipt of the third magic object. In the rímur the hero says he will never see his mother again should he lose the third gift as well (II,49,3–4), but in the saga his mother tells him never to come into her sight again if he should lose the last treasure (166,2–4).

On the stylistic level there are numerous passages which invite comparison. The degree to which saga authors follow their poetic sources will probably vary in individual cases, but in Jónatas saga the close
level as well, especially since the poetic source provides a less tempting model for slavish imitation. If it ever does become fashionable to study the rímr-derived sagas, the application of criteria such as those used above should allow a meaningful comparison between individual authors as well as between members of the genre.

ÁGRIP


Til þess hefur ekki verið gerð nein skrá um sílkar “rímla-sógu”, en þær skipta líklega tugum. Í JS 46, svo er t.a.m. sérstök gerð af Samsøns sögu jagra sem að nokkru er runnin frá óprentuðum rínum eftir Guðmund Bergþórsson ortum 1683. Rímnunar eru nokkruð langar, 16 áils, og hafa notið talsverðra vinsælda því að þær eru til í 8 handritum. Fyrri hlið sögurnar er gerður eftir 8 fyrstu rímunum með þeim hætti að mansöngvarnir eru tekin upp en sagan síðan sögu í lausu míla. En síðan er horfið frá rímunum, og er síðari hlið hinar nýju sögu nokkruð í nákvæm uppskrifi gömlu sögurnar (frá og með 11. kap.).

Stundum getur reynst torvert að greina sílkar endursagnar rímina frá öðrum sem gerðar voru eftir erdri fráfrógnum í lausu míla eða frá sögum þyddum úr erlendum mála.


Ljóst er að sagan getur ekki verið samin beint eftir ævintýrinu, því að þeim eru engar beinar líkingar í órðalagi. Í sögumna eru ýmis frávik frá ævintýrinu, en þau má öll rekja til rímnanna. Í rítergöndi er sýnt hvernig höfundur sögurnar snýr ljóðunum í óbundið míla. Hann fer að ýmsu leyti sjálftsett með heimild sína, fellir nokkruð úr en eykur óðru við, og þó fremur í lýsingum en í efni. Orðalagslíkingar eru talsverðar sem venta má, en þó er aðhylgisért að í sögumna verður naumast vart endurhljóms frá lýðformi rímnanna, hvorki frá stuðlasætingu né fornyrðum eða flóknum kenningum sem nóg er af í rímunum. Virðist svo sem höfundur hafi vísitandi reynt að dylja hinn skáldelega uppruna sögurnar. Hann eyðir jafnmiklu rúmi til að endursæga sústustu rímana sem hinar fyrri tæva. Líklegasta skýringin er sú að í lokarímunni er meira af skemmtilegu efni sem vert var að endursæga.