The Icelandic Family Saga

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28

The Icelandic Family Saga

AN ANALYTIC READING

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Preface

This book is an attempt to come to grips with the family saga as formal narrative. Though it would seem late in the day to be undertaking such a fundamental task, it can hardly qualify as a work of supererogation. The question of formal definitions and formal categories has in fact seldom been raised, for the simple reason that the saga has never been entertained by literary scholarship. It has traditionally been the property of philologists, historians, and folklorists, who have devoted themselves to textual questions, to the issue of historicity and the problem of origins, or at most to the cultural yield of the sagas. A programmatic acceptance of the sagas as literature is still only a few decades old and has been accompanied by the critical dogma that a saga is best studied in isolation and that a comparative perspective blurs the image. As a result we have a few articles and monographs on individual sagas but no general studies. This would seem to be a critical malproportion. The family sagas do, after all, constitute a homogeneous genre capable of a homogeneous definition. I have tried in the following pages to make some progress toward such a definition, in the knowledge that first steps are always clumsy, but in the hope of providing a tentative basis for discussing the saga as a literary form with specific literary characteristics.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I is theoretical and tries to isolate the basic structure and some of the larger and more prominent rhetorical patterns in the sagas, and to account for their development. My aim is descriptive and I have therefore dispensed with references to the critical literature, a good deal of

which is evaluated in a previous volume, except in the third chapter, where I am conscious of building on the work of others. My indebtedness to the approach of W. P. Ker, whose essay in *Epic and Romance* remains after seventy years the best introduction to the sagas, is signaled at the head of each chapter.

Part II is analytical and is intended primarily to document the conclusions reached in the first part. It includes synopses and outlines of the twenty-four sagas that make up my material. I have used all the sagas published in the standard edition, *Íslenzk Fornrit*, volumes II-XII, except the Vinland and Greenland sagas, which are generically different, and *Svarfdœla saga* and *Fljótsdœla saga*, which are not complete enough to permit structural analysis. The order of sequence is also the one followed by *Íslenzk Fornrit*. Although my synopses are for the immediate purpose of demonstration, it will do no harm if hard-pressed students of medieval literature and scholars in neighboring disciplines use them as plot digests. Saga plots are difficult to remember and most people do not re-read the corpus regularly. To each synopsis is appended a comment. These comments are not intended as capsule interpretations, but simply focus briefly on some special features of each saga. They are meant to counteract the generalizing tendency in Part I, where the individual saga necessarily becomes a victim of the Procrustean fallacy. Apropos of this fallacy, it might be well from the outset to explain that not all the sagas conform equally well to my system. I set up norms only to clarify the structure in general. The point is not that the norms are applicable everywhere, but that they provide a reasonable basis for comparison. It is an attempt to reduce the chaos to manageable proportions and offer one possible reading. The comments are also meant as an invitation to the student to reflect on the saga in literary terms. Wherever there is bibliography with a specifically literary orientation, I have included it in order to facilitate such reflections. I have not included literary histories and general works on the saga, though in a few instances I have referred to important introductions in *Íslenzk Fornrit*.

Where not otherwise indicated, the translations from the Icelandic are my own. In dealing with archaic and exotic languages

translation becomes an irritating problem. I catch myself using the stilted "leman" instead of the readily understandable but abrasive "concubine," rendering Icelandic legal distinctions with false English distinctions between "slay" and "kill" or "exile" and "outlawry," and flailing hopelessly when faced with the necessity of translating *ójafnaðarmaðr*, *sjálfdœmi*, *níð*, *hvǫt*, or *brenna*. My poor translations may be ascribed to lack of imagination, aberration of taste, or inherent difficulties in the transfer of meaning from one language to another, all according to the charity of the reader.

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PART I: Theory

CHAPTER ONE

The Structure of the Saga

> There are all varieties of texture in the Sagas, from the extreme laxity of those that look like mere collections of the anecdotes of a countryside, to the definite structure of those in which all the particulars contribute to the main action.
>
> *W. P. Ker*[1]

There is a little story among the sagas called *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*, which has been translated into English as *The Story of Þorsteinn Prod-Head*. It is ten pages long, has no chapter divisions, and is not given the full status of a *saga* by the manuscripts, but it tells a complete story about the dealings of Þorsteinn and the chieftain Bjarni. The cast is modest and comprises, in addition to the protagonists Þorsteinn and Bjarni, only Þorsteinn's old father Þórarinn and Bjarni's household: his wife, a worker named Þórðr, two lodgers Þórhallr and Þorvaldr, and a woman servant.

The action is engaged when Þorsteinn and Þórðr arrange a horse-match, an Icelandic form of sport in which two fighting stallions are pitted against one another. In the heat of the contest Þórðr gives his opponent a blow on the head with his horse-prod. Þorsteinn bandages the wound and takes no notice, but Bjarni's ne'er-do-well lodgers Þórhallr and Þorvaldr add insult to injury

by giving Þorsteinn the nickname prod-head and making him an object of ridicule in the district. This is a blot on the family honor and Þórarinn eggs his son on to wipe the escutcheon clean: "I would never have guessed that I had a sissy for a son." Þorsteinn makes a measured but firm demand for the compensation to which Icelandic law entitled the recipient of an intentional blow and when he is given only an impertinent reply, he kills Þórðr on the spot. Bjarni prosecutes him under the law and has him outlawed, but Þorsteinn ignores the sentence and remains at home unmolested. This is a challenge to Bjarni's authority and it is now his honor that is compromised. Þórhallr and Þorvaldr again aggravate the situation by making inflammatory comments, but instead of responding to the goad himself Bjarni turns the tables on the two mischief-makers and sends them to do the job of killing Þorsteinn. They prove to be unequal to the task and succumb in the attempt. Poetic justice has been done, but the situation is less tolerable than ever because Þorsteinn has now slain three of Bjarni's men and damaged his reputation as a chieftain. Bjarni's wife, who is sensitive to the issue of prestige, reminds him of this and urges him to repair the damage. He responds by challenging Þorsteinn to a duel, a chivalrous act since the normal procedure was for the more powerful man to resort to larger numbers and leave the outcome in as little doubt as possible. Þorsteinn prepares to do battle, but makes every effort to be conciliatory, so that when Bjarni is unable to reduce his stout but modest adversary, he is ready to be mollified and reconciled. There follows a bit of comic afterplay, in which Bjarni baits Þorsteinn's father Þórarinn by announcing the death of his son. Þórarinn, old and bedridden but still sensitive to the dictates of honor, tries to put a knife between the ribs of his son's killer. Luckily the thrust is too feeble; Bjarni knocks the hand aside, berates Þórarinn affectionately, and the tensions dissolve in expressions of good will, including generous provision for the old man. The story ends with a little information on Bjarni's career, death, and descendants.

This story might be broken down into the following six parts: (1) introduction of the protagonists, (2) development of a conflict between them, (3) violent climax of the conflict (Þórðr's death),

(4) attempted revenge (the mission of Þórhallr and Þorvaldr and the duel), (5) reconciliation, (6) concluding remarks not strictly pertinent to the plot. Reduced to outline form, the story might look like this:

Introduction
- Introduction of Þórarinn and Þorsteinn
- Introduction of their adversaries Bjarni, Þórðr, Þórhallr, and Þorvaldr

Conflict
- Þórðr strikes Þorsteinn during a horse-match
- Þórhallr and Þorvaldr give him the nickname prod-head
- Þórarinn provokes him to revenge

Climax
- Þorsteinn kills Þórðr

Revenge
- Þórhallr and Þorvaldr incite Bjarni
- He dispatches them to Þorsteinn and they are killed
- Bjarni's wife incites him
- Bjarni duels with Þorsteinn

Reconciliation
- The duel is indecisive and the men are reconciled

Aftermath
- Bjarni goes abroad and dies near Rome
- Notes on his descendants

Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs is brief, simple, and clear. The reader cannot be confused either by fullness of cast or intricacy of plot. But *Þorsteins þáttr* is not a saga and the reader of the sagas will almost certainly have a different experience. Especially on first reading he is likely to find them diffuse, overcrowded with persons and details, difficult to follow and keep in mind. They are readable, but the reader's interest tends to gravitate toward certain vivid episodes while the main outline remains chaotic and undigested. This impression of chaos is to a large extent illusory and capable of clarification. The composition of even the longest and fullest

sagas is usually as clear, though not so unencumbered, as in *Þorsteins þáttr*. This little story is in fact not only an illustration but a paradigm of the structure to be found in the family sagas. Half of the twenty-four sagas dealt with in this study lend themselves readily to the same six-part analysis and all but one of the remaining sagas deviate only slightly from it.

Introduction

There are definite rules governing the beginning of a saga. The procedure has been described as follows:

> The story begins with the introduction of the characters; in the shorter sagas we find a list of the dramatis personae, which can be rather difficult to remember, but in the larger sagas the characters are introduced one by one as they enter the action, usually at the beginning of a new section. The introduction includes a genealogy (in some cases the genealogy can be very long, as in *Njáls saga*, so that the person's entry into the saga is imbued with a certain pomp), then follows a description of the person. This is the only occasion on which the author states his opinion.[2]

The key word in this description is the word "pomp." The beginning of a saga is measured and deliberate, never sudden or hectic. The saga never plunges in medias res; the author seems to feel the need of a pause to assemble the elements that he intends to dramatize. His approach is not tentative, but is reserved and intentionally prosaic. The introduction is intended to convey a stationary moment, a state of suspension and stillness against which the momentum of the action can build up. It is the opposite technique from the heroic poem, where there is no epic breadth and where the action is engaged immediately.

No saga is without the initial pause provided by an introduction, with the exception of *Heiðarvíga saga*, where the original introduction is lost. Though the introduction is static, it is functional and to the point. The theme of a saga is a conflict and the introduction is tied to the conflict in such a way as to present the

conflicting parties to the reader and relate them to one another. The simplest method is to name the two men or families one after the other, sometimes in the same chapter and sometimes in successive chapters. *Bjarnar saga*, *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, and *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* introduce the protagonists together; *Bandamanna saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga*, *Ljósvetninga saga*, *Valla-Ljóts saga*, *Vápnfirðinga saga*, and *Hrafnkels saga* introduce them separately.

This introduction is of course sufficient in itself to suggest that the persons introduced are going to be combined in some way to produce the action of the story. However, the author is not usually content to leave the reader with this simple deduction and hints broadly at the coming conflict by weighting the characterization. The scoundrel is not, as a tentative perusal of the sagas might suggest, given the benefit of complete objectivity, but is regularly described as a difficult person in one way or another. He is often an *ójafnaðarmaðr*, that is to say, an overbearing, self-willed, uncompromising man, who is not fair-minded and temperate in his dealings with his neighbors. The saga reader learns to recognize this characteristic as a sure sign of impending trouble since it inevitably leads to frictions. In the story of Þorsteinn prod-head, for example, we learn that: "Þórðr was a very overbearing man and let people know that he belonged to a chieftain's household." Accordingly, it is his unruly behavior that leads to the violence at the horse-match and the quarrel between Bjarni and Þorsteinn.

The brief characterization at the outset of a saga is thus not only a departure from the rule of objectivity but an anticipation of the conflict to follow. The sagas are full of give-aways and this is the first one. In *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* we learn for example that Tungu-Oddr "was not known as a tractable man." In *Gunnlaugs saga* Gunnlaugr is described as "a man with a very haughty temper, ambitious at an early age, and tough and unyielding in all his dealings." In *Bjarnar saga* we learn about Þórðr Kolbeinsson: "Þórðr was not very popular, because he was reputed to be spiteful and malicious when he could get away with it." Þorbjǫrn, the villain of *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, "was of a prominent family and a great chieftain; he was such an overbearing man that no one

in Ísafjǫrðr could stand up to him." Óspakr in *Bandamanna saga* "was a big, strong man and an unruly one . . ." About a protagonist in *Vápnfirðinga saga* we learn: "Helgi was a big, strong man, mature at an early age, handsome and a leader, taciturn as a child and difficult and unyielding already as a young man." Hrafnkell, in the saga bearing his name, was ". . . very overbearing but manly."

On occasion the idea of a conflict is reinforced by contrasting the desirable qualities in the hero of the saga to the undesirable qualities in the villain. In such cases the characteristics usually stressed are good nature, patience, and popularity. *Þorsteins þáttr* again serves as a good illustration. It tells us that Þorsteinn ". . . was a large, strong man and even-tempered . . ." so that the personal conflict that arises between him and Þórðr ("a very overbearing man") is seen to grow out of a temperamental conflict or discrepancy. In *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* the hero Blund-Ketill is described as "the most popular man in the district." Óláfr in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* is ". . . the most accomplished of men. He was large and handsome." Oddr in *Bandamanna saga* "was handsome and manly."

The introduction of the protagonists with or without contrastive characterization is the simplest mode of setting the stage for a saga plot, but there are other more elaborate and more subtle means. *Gunnlaugs saga*, which otherwise adheres to the simple introduction, adumbrates the whole action of the saga in a dream recounted and interpreted in the second chapter, but this is a unique instance. A more common method is to foreshadow the main plot with an introductory episode often placed in an earlier generation. The foreshadowing can be more or less specific; it can be a fairly exact replication of the main action, as in *Egils saga* or *Njáls saga*, or simply suggestive of characteristics or alignments in a following generation, as in *Eyrbyggja saga*. In most cases, however, this introductory matter has no proleptic function and seems rather to spring from the author's historical or antiquarian interest. It is a kind of scholarly preface. Just as the modern biography inevitably begins with a sketch of what the author has been able to unearth about his hero's forebears, so the saga author

sketches in the family history and gives whatever information he can about the genealogy, prowess, and especially the colonization of his hero's ancestors. *Droplaugarsona saga* tells of the hero Helgi's grandfather Ketill, who traveled to Norway and married the enthralled chieftain's daughter Arneiðr. *Hrafnkels saga* tells how Hrafnkell's father Hallfreðr settled Iceland in the days of Harald Fairhair. *Grettis saga* tells how Grettir's greatgrandfather Ǫnundr stood against Harald at Hafrsfjǫrðr, harried in the British Isles, and settled in Iceland. *Hallfreðar saga* tells how in Norway Hallfreðr's father avenged the death of his father at the hands of the viking Sokki before settling in Iceland. *Kormáks saga* tells of the viking exploits of Kormákr's father Ǫgmundr, how he married a jarl's daughter, and how frictions with Erik Bloodaxe caused him to leave Norway and settle in Iceland. By far the most complete historical introduction is the one in *Laxdœla saga*, which gives not only a complete and vivid account of the colonization of Kjartan's ancestor Unnr djúpúðga but also an abundance of information about the intermediary generations, Kjartan's father Óláfr pá and his father Hǫskuldr.

These introductions apparently give information for information's sake and are not integral in the sense that they contribute something vital to the later story. They could be dropped without depriving the reader of any hints about things to come. But a few saga authors seem to have been sensitive to this structural laxity and made an effort to connect their introductions with the plot. The simplest example is *Eyrbyggja saga*. Since the saga deals with the conflicts among the various families on Snæfellsnes, it has an anticipatory function when, in the introduction, two of the colonizing families, the Þórsnesingar and Kjalleklingar, quarrel over Þórólfr Mostrarskegg's temple. This outbreak of hostilities foreshadows the feuding that runs through the whole saga. Somewhat more subtle is *Víga-Glúms saga*, where the slow emergence of Glúmr's father Eyjólfr as a man of mettle in Norway foreshadows Glúmr's own *kolbítr* (male Cinderella) characteristics in Norway and his slow response to the challenge of his enemies. In one saga the plot is anticipated, in the other the character of the hero.

There are three sagas that achieve a high degree of artistry in integrating the introductory background material. Parallels are set up between introduction and plot, which, without being painfully obvious like the dream in *Gunnlaugs saga*, are gradually divulged as the saga develops. *Gísla saga* centers around the strained relationship between two brothers, the friend of one having been involved in a love affair with the wife of the other. The action is precipitated when the dishonored brother kills the offending friend. This pattern is anticipated in Norway before the brothers settle in Iceland when, in reversed roles, one brother kills a friend of the other for having seduced their sister. Both the erotic motivation and the fraternal antagonism are prefigured, but in a way which seems to the reader natural and uncontrived. The effect is to give an added dimension and depth to the story. The antagonism becomes more deep-seated and the tragic dénouement more inevitable when it is projected and mirrored in the introduction.

The prelude to *Njáls saga* is much more elaborate and self-conscious. It concentrates on Hallgerðr and serves to foreshadow her character and her function in the saga. The thief's eyes remarked on while she is a young girl are a preview of the theft which ultimately unleashes the conflict of the first part of the saga; and her first two marriages establish a pattern which holds true for her third marriage with Gunnarr and which causes his death, just as her contentiousness and vindictiveness led to the death of her first husband and to some extent to that of her second husband. The prolonged quarrel with Bergþóra serves to confirm these characteristics.

The most skillful manipulation of the introduction is to be found in *Egils saga*. The prelude to *Gísla saga* is so brief and inconspicuous that the parallel between prelude and plot can escape the inattentive reader. The prelude to *Njáls saga* is rather overdone and literary and contains extraneous matter. The prelude to *Egils saga* is at once full and lean, but its particular virtue is the air of historical authenticity about it and its dramatic structure. The introduction to *Njáls saga* is both contrivedly symmetrical and static. The introduction to *Egils saga* is more naturally symmetrical and is a self-sufficient narrative with its own interest. It

tells the story of Þórólfr's conflict with Harald Fairhair, thus anticipating the main theme of the saga, the conflict between Egill and Erik Bloodaxe. At the same time Þórólfr is no mere prefiguration, but an amply delineated figure in his own right, one of the most attractive and impressive saga heroes. His tragic conflict with Harald is not only adumbration but also motivation, since it explains the latent hostility between Þórólfr's family and the Norwegian royal house. But most impressive is the historical scene it paints with such vividness. Instead of the stereotyped and rather lifeless court scenes, both preludes and interludes, in most sagas, the author of *Egils saga* has created a persuasive historical canvas against which to project Egill's career. In his story the introduction is no formality and no antiquarian exercise, but becomes an opportunity for the reanimation of the past.

Conflict

It is a very nearly universal rule (*Vatnsdœla saga* is always an exception) that a saga is built around a conflict. This principle has not been sufficiently grasped. It is the conflict that gives the saga its special character, its narrative unity, and its dramatic tension. It is the conflict that polarizes whatever else is in the saga, it is the sense of the saga and the organizing concept. This is an instance where a reduction to a single principle is not a case of oversimplification. The usual definitions and characterizations of the sagas have become mired in details of subject matter and have described the sagas as stories of families, feuds, Icelandic life, as biographies, family chronicles, or district chronicles. Such definitions are accurate enough but peripheral; the backbone of the saga, its formal principle, is the conflict.

The conflict is most often between two men, as this list indicates:

Bandamanna saga	Oddr versus Óspakr
Bjarnar saga hitdœlakappa	Bjǫrn versus Þórðr
Egils saga	Egill versus Eiríkr
Droplaugarsona saga	Helgi Droplaugarson versus Helgi Ásbjarnarson

Gísla saga	Gísli versus Bǫrkr
Gunnlaugs saga	Gunnlaugr versus Hrafn
Hallfreðar saga	Hallfreðr versus Gríss
Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings	Óláfr versus Þorbjǫrn
Hrafnkels saga	Hrafnkell versus Sámr
Laxdœla saga	Kjartan versus Bolli
Reykdœla saga	Vémundr versus Steingrímr
Valla-Ljóts saga	Halli versus Ljótr
Vápnfirðinga saga	Brodd-Helgi versus Geitir
Þorsteins saga hvíta	Þorsteinn versus Einarr

This principle can be slightly varied. The conflict need not confront two individuals, but an individual and a group, or two groups. The simplest case is *Kormáks saga*, where the hero faces not one rival, as in the other skald sagas, but two, Steingerðr's successive husbands Bersi and Þorvaldr. In *Víga-Glúms saga* the contest is between one man and a clan, the Esphœlingar, and in the first part of *Njáls saga* the contest is between Gunnarr and Otkell's family. In *Eyrbyggja saga* Snorri is pitted against a series of often unrelated opponents, as are Þorgeirr in *Fóstbrœðra saga* and Grettir in *Grettis saga*. The third possible variation is a conflict between two groups of people. In the second part of *Njáls saga* Njáll's sons feud with Þráinn Sigfússon and his relatives, in *Heiðarvíga saga* northerners feud against westerners, and in *Ljósvetninga saga* Guðmundr and his son Eyjólfr feud against two generations of Ljósvetningar.

Where there is a conflict, it must be accounted for by some form of irritation between the conflicting parties. The function of the conflict section of the saga is to motivate and describe the irritation. In *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*, for example, the irritation proceeds from a blow received by a contestant in a horse-match. This constitutes an insult and precipitates a conflict. The form of the irritation is varied and can be severally compounded, but the sagas show that the original cause of strife is an invasion in one of four areas: love, property, honor, and life or limb. Though we think of the sagas as being the least romantic literature imaginable, it remains a fact that love is the most frequent cause for

conflict. In *Bjarnar saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Kormáks saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, and *Þorsteins saga hvíta* the basis of the quarrel is an erotic rivalry between two men, and in *Gísla saga* the conflict stems from a suspicion of infidelity. The next most sensitive area is the area of chattels. In six sagas the conflict is produced by a theft or at least by an alienation of property. *Glúms saga*, *Reykdœla saga*, and the first part of *Njáls saga* provide examples of outright theft. The hostility in *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* is caused by a justified but unauthorized removal of property, in *Bandamanna saga* by the failure of a man to restore a chieftainship to the rightful owner, and in *Vápnfirðinga saga* by a mutual suspicion of theft which is never confirmed.

The third type of irritant is the insult that craves revenge, as illustrated by *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*. The second part of *Njáls saga* is brought about because Njáll's sons feel that Þráinn Sigfússon is reponsible for their imprisonment and humiliation at the hands of the Norwegian king. The quarrel in *Droplaugarsona saga* grows out of the slandering of Droplaug, in *Hávarðar saga* out of the slandering of Óláfr, and in the first part of *Ljósvetninga saga* out of the slandering of Guðmundr inn ríki. The second part of *Ljósvetninga saga* is set in motion by the seduction of a girl and in *Valla-Ljóts saga* the trouble arises from legal chicanery practiced by Halli on the chieftain Ljótr. The fourth possible irritant is homicide. Most sagas do not begin at such a drastic level and prefer to work up to it, but a few are less inhibited. *Heiðarvíga saga* has a killing in the first sentence in the extant transcription, but it is unlikely that the original saga was so abrupt. Egill initiates his conflict by killing one of King Erik's men in a scene where the provocation is about equally distributed. In *Hrafnkels saga* Hrafnkell begins a feud by killing a man who has ignored a private religious taboo. This is, incidentally, one of the few instances where religious considerations provide grounds for conflict. Another is the quarrel over the profanation of temple-grounds at the beginning of *Eyrbyggja saga* and a third is the trumping up of a religious charge against Ljótr at the beginning of the conflict in *Valla-Ljóts saga*.

The conflict can be, and frequently is, brought about by a

simple act of aggression on the part of one of the antagonists. In *Þorsteins þáttr* Þórðr strikes Þorsteinn with his staff and this unleashes the quarrel. But in many sagas the confrontation is not quite so direct. These sagas make use of a third man to goad the principals into action, a sort of agent provocateur. This part is played belatedly in *Þorsteins þáttr* by the two lodgers Þórhallr and Þorvaldr, who provoke Þorsteinn with the nickname "prod-head" and incite Bjarni to kill him. The people cast in this part are usually indigent rascals who are alternately fawning and insolent and who take malicious pleasure in doing mischief. The most fully developed rascal is Hœnsa-Þórir, who receives so much attention that he gives his name to the saga and overshadows the real protagonists, Tungu-Oddr and Blund-Ketill.

Other rascals do not pre-empt their sagas to this extent; they fulfill their provocative function and disappear. Both parts of *Njáls saga* make use of the device. In the first part the conflict between Otkell and Gunnarr is in a fair way of being settled when Skammkell's lying and deceit frustrate the solution. In the second part it is the villain Hrappr who puts Njáll's sons and Þráinn Sigfússon at loggerheads. In *Droplaugarsona saga* it is Þorgrímr torðyfill's gratuitous slander of Droplaug which is at the root of the conflict and in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* Vakr's worse than gratuitous accusations of theft and seduction drive a wedge between Þorbjǫrn and Óláfr. Finally, the conflict in *Reykdœla saga* is initiated by the rascal Hánefr's sheep-theft. Rascals elsewhere play a similar but less pivotal part. Hallgerðr's foster father Þjóðólfr is a case in point, likewise Þorvarðr in *Víga-Glúms saga* and Narfi in *Kormáks saga*, not to mention a whole series of scoundrels in *Vatnsdœla saga*. It is characteristic of saga morality that all these troublemakers, with the exception of Þorvarðr in *Víga-Glúms saga*, receive their just reward and are killed.

In *Þorsteins þáttr* the conflict section is uncomplicated; it describes a quarrel at a horse-match and the ensuing resentment, nothing more. In the full-scale sagas the conflict is not so simple and is not confined to a single irritant. It normally comprises a fairly protracted series of irritants and incidents, sometimes in a

chain in which insult touches off insult, injury touches off injury, and bloodshed touches off bloodshed until the climax is reached. The components from which these chains are forged are thefts, insults, slander, damage to property, ambushes, sorcery, attempts at assassination, legal prosecution and legal chicanery, seduction and abduction, disputes over land, fish, wood, horses, sheep, and cattle, espionage, blows, duels, and killings. These irritants are frequently arranged in a crescendo beginning with the less drastic forms of contention and gradually increasing in seriousness and violence until the measure is full and one of the antagonists is killed.

A good example is *Bjarnar saga hítdœlakappa*. The conflict begins as a love rivalry, as a result of which Þórðr deprives Bjǫrn of his betrothed. Bjǫrn retaliates with an act of piracy. An attempted reconciliation is voided when Bjǫrn abuses Þórðr's hospitality and both men rake up the quarrel with invidious stanzas. The insults culminate in an accusation of sodomy. This is, according to Icelandic custom, an intolerable affront and brings about violence. Þórðr has Bjǫrn ambushed twice, but the ambushers, including relatives of Þórðr, are killed. The rivals now harass each other for harboring outlaws and exchange further offensive stanzas, in one of which Bjǫrn claims to be the real father of Þórðr's son Kolli. Þórðr responds by sending assassins and when they are unsuccessful, he takes personal charge of two ambushes. In the first he is wounded himself and in the second, one of his sons is killed. At this juncture there is no possible compromise and Þórðr prepares one last overpowering attack, in which Bjǫrn is slain. The conflict shows a progression from piracy to insult to bloodshed. Even within each phase of the conflict there is a progression; the insults become increasingly vituperative and the bloodshed decreasingly negotiable. The first to fall are only distant relatives and allies, then the principals themselves are wounded, and finally the son of one of the principals is slain. Another good example of this procedure is the first part of *Njáls saga*, which progresses through the stages of theft, injury, insult, litigation, and bloodshed.

Some sagas concentrate on one particular type of irritation.

Heiðarvíga saga and *Fóstbræðra saga* are content with nothing less than outright slayings. *Gunnlaugs saga* and *Kormáks saga* are fond of the duel. *Njáls saga*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, and *Ljósvetninga saga* have a predilection for litigation. Other sagas incline toward variety and catalogue a great number of irritants. *Eyrbyggja saga* uses theft, sorcery, seduction, quarrels over land and provisions, and piracy. *Reykdœla saga* uses theft, blows, abduction, damage to property, and quarrels over fish, whales, timber, and oxen. All the sagas make use of these provocations in one combination or another. They provide the main substance of the story and our judgment of the saga depends on how well it arranges and dramatizes them.

Climax

The first point to make is that a saga normally has a climax. It is essentially a dramatic form, which builds tensions until the breaking point is reached. The breaking point is almost always violent and fatal to one or more of the protagonists. There are only five sagas that dispense with such a climax. *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Vatnsdœla saga* are organized on a different principle; they are both more nearly chronicles than sagas, one a family chronicle and the other the chronicle of a district. The conflict in *Egils saga* also fails to materialize into a climax, though the episode at York is a near climax. The author was presumably restrained by his information, especially since he shows himself to be a master of the climactic technique in the Þórólfr prelude. In addition, two of the skald sagas, *Hallfreðar saga* and *Kormáks saga*, peter out without any sense of finality. In fact they are awkwardly anticlimactic; both of them prepare and stage a showdown, which is then allowed to languish while the heroes are left to die as an afterthought and under unheroic circumstances.

The simplest example of a standard climax is again to be found in *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*. The conflict begins with a blow and, after a little urging on both sides, culminates in an armed confrontation and the death of one of the antagonists. This is the

pattern followed by most of the sagas. The climax almost always entails the death of one of the protagonists, as the following list shows:

Bjarnar saga	Bjǫrn
Fóstbræðra saga	Þorgeirr
Gísla saga	Gísli
Hávarðar saga	Óláfr
Njáls saga I	Gunnarr
Njáls saga II	Njáll and his sons
Droplaugarsona saga	Helgi
Gunnlaugs saga	Gunnlaugr and Hrafn
Grettis saga	Grettir
Hœnsa-Þóris saga	Blund-Ketill
Laxdœla saga	Kjartan
Ljósvetninga saga I	Þorkell hákr
Reykdœla saga	Steingrímr
Valla-Ljóts saga	Halli
Vápnfirðinga saga	Brodd-Helgi
Þorsteins saga hvíta	Einarr

There are a few instances where death comes not to a protagonist but to someone with close ties to him. In *Bandamanna saga* the death of Oddr's friend Váli furnishes the climax. In the second part of *Ljósvetninga saga* the contest is fought between Ljósvetningar and Eyjólfr and the climax comes not with Eyjólfr's death but with the death of his brother Koðrán. In *Heiðarvíga saga* the victim of the climax is a certain Gísli Þorgautsson, whose identity is not quite clear, but who may be a cousin to Barði's chief antagonist.

In addition, there are two sagas, *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Hrafnkels saga*, where there is a clear-cut climax without bloodshed. There is a true climax in the sense that everything in these sagas focuses on a clear outcome, but for the usual bloody finale is substituted humiliation and loss of property. *Hrafnkels saga* has in addition the unique feature of restoring to power and prosperity the fallen victim after he has been toppled, thus producing an unusual moral and a happy ending.

Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs culminates in the death of Þórðr, who is plainly the aggressor and plainly the villain. In much modern fiction this is the norm, but in saga literature it is the exception. Where there is a clear distinction between hero and villain (there is none in *Fóstbrœðra saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga*, and *Ljósvetninga saga*, for example), it is the hero who succumbs. Only in the three little sagas, *Vápnfirðinga saga*, *Valla-Ljóts saga*, and *Þorsteins saga hvíta*, does the villain receive his just deserts. In ten other sagas the hero must make a bloody reckoning and this contributes largely to the harsh and tragic atmosphere that characterizes the sagas.

The heroic and tragic qualities of the climax are further emphasized by the circumstances of the hero's death. He is invariably slain when pitted against impossible odds. Sometimes he is visited with fire (*Njáls saga* II, *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*), sometimes he is attacked and overwhelmed in his house (*Njáls saga* I, *Grettis saga*), and most often he is cornered in the open and hopelessly outnumbered (*Bjarnar saga*, *Gísla saga*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, *Hávarðar saga*). In any case he is given ample opportunity to display his courage and prowess, which tends to make the climax the most flamboyant and memorable part of the saga.

Revenge

As in many primitive societies and a few less primitive ones, bloodshed in Iceland led to retaliation and feuding. At least this is what we can infer from the sagas and what is borne out by contemporary accounts of the thirteenth century. The same rules applied as everywhere where blood feud prevails, among the Arabian tribesmen, the Eskimoes, or, more informally, the Kentucky hillsmen. No moral stigma attached necessarily to homicide, but it was an infringement on the prestige of the slain man's family and had to be atoned for in blood or compensated for by a legally stipulated payment. Since it was essentially a matter of family prestige and not of personal wrongdoing, the reprisal did not need to fall on the slayer himself. The same effect was achieved if it

was visited on one of his relatives. It was a tooth-for-a-tooth arrangement in which any tooth of equal value would do.

The institution of blood vengeance and blood money with its attendant drama is exploited in almost all the sagas. Since the guiding principle of a saga is a single and exclusive high point, the sagas do not as a rule describe a protracted feud with a whole concatenation of killings. Only *Heiðarvíga saga* furnishes a real feud, in which five men are alternately killed before a settlement is reached. Sometimes a legal settlement is effected immediately, usually one act of revenge is sufficient, and only in four sagas (*Laxdœla saga*, *Valla-Ljóts saga*, *Vápnfirðinga saga*, and *Reykdœla saga*) are there counterkillings. But it is a hard and fast rule that every homicide demands satisfaction of some kind.

This means that every saga that culminates in violent death must also show how the death was avenged. Only those sagas that have no clear-cut climax (*Egils saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Kormáks saga*, *Vatnsdœla saga*) can do without the counterpoise. Everywhere else the introduction, conflict, and climax sections are followed by a section on revenge. The revenge can be effected through blood vengeance, through legal prosecution of the slayer, or through a combination of both. The least common mode of revenge is the purely legal, perhaps because this mode offered the poorest dramatic possibilities, perhaps because it was felt by the Icelandic audience to be the least honorable alternative, and perhaps because in fact legal recourse *was* the least frequent solution. Only two sagas choose the strictly legal alternative and both show signs of dissatisfaction with the choice. The author of *Bjarnar saga* emphasizes the fact that never had the death of one man been prosecuted so vigorously and he makes it clear that the terms of the settlement were particularly humiliating for the guilty party; beneath his emphasis is an apologetic feeling about the bloodlessness of it all. In *Bandamanna saga* Váli's slayer Óspakr is outlawed, but the author seems to have felt that this was insufficient because, as a kind of afterthought, the outlawed Óspakr begins to maraud in the countryside, is wounded, and later found dead. His death is evidently felt to be necessary to the proper discharge of retribution.

In all the remaining sagas, at least an effort is made in the direction of blood vengeance. The effort is not always, but almost always, successful. The exceptional cases, three in number, are illustrated by *Þorsteins þáttr*, in which Bjarni sets out to take bloody reprisal but is forestalled by Þorsteinn's stout defense and appeasing attitude. In *Víga-Glúms saga* there is really no death to avenge, only Glúmr's expropriation. Nevertheless, in an episode reminiscent of *Þorsteins þáttr*, Glúmr tries to take revenge for the injury when, as a bedridden old man, he secretes a knife in his bed ready to take the life of his antagonists Eyjólfr and Guðmundr, should they approach. They do not approach and the vengeance remains only a plan. In *Gísla saga* the revenge is partial. In the apparent absence of a qualified male avenger it is Gísli's sister Þórdís who, in a famous scene also incorporated in *Eyrbyggja saga*, thrusts a sword up under a table at her brother's slayer but catches the hilt against the edge of the table and succeeds only in inflicting a severe wound. In *Heiðarvíga saga* the revenge is also balked. After Barði's slaying of Gísli Þorgautsson the southerners set out in hot pursuit but are fought to a stand-still by Barði's party. There is perhaps another confrontation described in a lacuna, this one equally inconclusive, from what one can gather. The will to execute vengeance is not lacking, but it is parried as in *Þorsteins þáttr*. It is parried, if for no other reason, then, because any further links in the long feud would certainly have led to narrative exhaustion.

Everywhere else in the sagas blood vengeance is carried out to a greater or lesser extent. The vengeance is not always so bloody and complete as in the second part of *Njáls saga*, where retribution claims fourteen (the count is a little uncertain) of the arsonists responsible for the death of Njáll and his family. In a few other cases vengeance exceeds the limit of minimum satisfaction. In *Fóstbræðra saga* Þorgeirr's foster brother kills five men to avenge his death; in the first part of *Njáls saga* Gunnarr's slaying is expiated with four lives; and in *Laxdœla saga* and *Reykdœla saga* three men pay the penalty, as in *Gunnlaugs saga*, where two are killed and one is maimed. Elsewhere vengeance extends only to one (*Droplaugarsona saga*, *Grettis saga*, *Hrafnkels saga*, *Hœnsa-*

Þóris saga, *Ljósvetninga saga*, *Valla-Ljóts saga*, *Vápnfirðinga saga*) or two men (*Hávarðar saga*, *Þorsteins saga hvíta*). In nine cases it is the actual killer or the principal defendant against whom the vengeance is directed (*Fóstbræðra saga*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Grettis saga*, *Hávarðar saga*, *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, *Ljósvetninga saga* part I, *Reykdœla saga*, *Vápnfirðinga saga*), but in seven other cases the vengeance is oblique and affects only a relative or relatives of the killer or certain of the defendants (*Njáls saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga*, *Hrafnkels saga*, *Ljósvetninga saga* part II, *Valla-Ljóts saga*, *Þorsteins saga hvíta*).

In several instances blood vengeance is supplemented by legal sanctions, such as outlawing and fines. In the first part of *Njáls saga* four of Gunnarr's attackers are slain, but the chief instigator, Mǫrðr, is spared on the condition that he relinquish self-judgment. In *Hrafnkels saga* the vengeance falls on the culprit's brother, while Sámr himself is only expropriated. In *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* only Hoensa-Þórir himself is killed, and the others present at the burning of Blund-Ketill are outlawed. In the second part of *Ljósvetninga saga* the slaying of an unimplicated relative is supplemented with outlawing and banishment. Finally, in *Þorsteins saga hvíta* the culprit's brothers are slain, but he himself is merely outlawed.

The section on revenge is normally brief and a suffix to the climax. Judgment in this matter is plainly subjective, but in fifteen cases the revenge can be fairly regarded as lightly weighted in comparison to the preceding sections of conflict and climax. In these cases it is not narratively self-sufficient, but has an enclitic effect. On the other hand, the revenge section, as a simple extension of the conflict, has potentially as much dramatic interest as the rest of the saga and this potential is occasionally exploited. In *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Hrafnkels saga*, *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, and the second part of *Njáls saga*, the revenge is still subordinate to the conflict, but it is more fully developed, with an outlay of pace and detail usually reserved for the earlier sections. It is promoted from information to a narrative in its own right. The story of Þormóðr's mission of vengeance in Greenland is in many ways the most interesting and vigorous part of *Fóstbræðra saga* and the same

applies to Kári's vengeance in *Njáls saga*. In *Hrafnkels saga* Hrafnkell's revenge and return to power is not told in such detail as his fall from power, but with its balancing function it carries as much weight and is as important to the story as what goes before. In *Hœnsa-Póris saga* Hermundr's careful and detailed preparations for revenge are the most dramatic part of the story and leave the reader in doubt as to whether the burning of Blund-Ketill or the slaying of Hœnsa-Þórir is the true climax of the saga.

In two other cases there is no doubt at all that the revenge section has usurped the function of the climax. In *Bandamanna saga* our interest is not focused on the slaying of the minor character Váli but on the elaborate and entertaining revenge fashioned by Oddr with the aid of his cunning father. In *Hávarðar saga* the conflict is quickly resolved with the death of Óláfr and again it is the protracted, patient, and improbable revenge of an old man that provides the real interest of the story.

Most sagas are essentially complete after one act of revenge, but a few extend into a second act, a counterrevenge. *Þorsteins páttr stangarhǫggs* gives an example of mock counterrevenge when Bjarni baits the old man Þórarinn with the feigned news of his son's death and is very nearly stabbed. In *Hávarðar saga* the counterthrust is futile. Þorbjǫrn's relatives set out to avenge him but are turned back by Hávarðr and his allies without accomplishing anything. The same applies to *Vápnfirðinga saga*. In *Valla-Ljóts saga* the counterrevenge is successful when Ljótr's men waylay and kill Halli's brother Bǫðvarr. *Droplaugarsona saga* shows a vestigial counterrevenge when the man who marries Helgi Ásbjarnarson's widow has one of the participants in his killing slain. By far the most elaborate examples of counterrevenge are in *Reykdœla saga* and *Laxdœla saga*. In *Reykdœla saga* the counterrevenge occupies a section of the saga so considerable and so independent that it has often been regarded as a separate *Skútu saga*. After Skúta has killed the slayer of his father, Þórir Ketilsson, he in turn becomes the quarry and after a long series of frustrated attempts on his life he falls victim to Þórir Ketilsson's sons. In this story the counterrevenge is fitted out with an array of motifs and all the compositional gimmicks regularly found in the conflict

sections. But the best developed and most striking of the counterrevenge sections is without doubt the one in *Laxdœla saga*. After the vivid account of Kjartan's death (climax) and the vivid account of Bolli's death (revenge) the author still has sufficient resources to give an almost equally vivid account of Helgi Harðbeinsson's death (counterrevenge). It is a brilliant job of staging, prepared with as much circuitous planning, devious plotting, dramatic build-up, and honed dialogue as is summoned up anywhere in the sagas. One has the feeling that the author wanted to outdo himself and make his story just a bit more sustained, his heroes a bit dearer, and his canvas a bit richer than in the normal saga. It is all a part of the grand scale cultivated by the author of *Laxdœla saga*.

Reconciliation

One of the fundamental principles of the saga is that of balance. The narrative line of a saga is a progression from balance to imbalance (conflict and the outbreak of violence) back to balance. This is the principle governing the section on revenge, without which the story would be one-sided and the feeling of imbalance would persist. The saga is not complete until a perfect equilibrium is restored between the conflicting parties. The equilibrium is often implied in a simple cessation of hostilities after the revenge, but in about half of the sagas it is reinforced by an express reconciliation, which seals and sanctions the re-establishment of peace. *Þorsteins páttr stangarhǫggs* exemplifies the principle when the revenge ends in a standoff and the antagonists agree to come to terms.

The reconciliation can be of two kinds, personal or legal, and the alternatives are evenly distributed in the sagas. *Þorsteins páttr* is an example of the first; two men become reconciled on the basis of mutual satisfaction. Each recognizes the claims of the other and makes the necessary concessions to achieve a truce. The nearest parallels are in *Vápnfirðinga saga*, *Þorsteins saga hvíta*, and the second part of *Njáls saga*. The feud is put aside in

Vápnfirðinga saga when Bjarni wins Þorkell's confidence and gratitude by first sending him a doctor to heal his wounds and then alleviating his situation during a hay shortage by offering him and his household hospitality. This is reminiscent of Bjarni's (the same Bjarni) generous provision for Þórarinn in *Þorsteins þáttr*. In *Þorsteins saga hvíta* the way is opened for a reconciliation when Þorsteinn fagri places himself at Þorsteinn hvíti's mercy and is accepted into his household, just as Þorsteinn stangarhǫgg is taken into Bjarni's household. The final scene of *Njáls saga* is somewhat similar; after his sanguinary but justified vengeance Kári returns to Iceland and goes directly to Flosi's farm, thus in a sense placing himself at the mercy of his chief opponent. Flosi appreciates the correctness of his conduct, welcomes him with open arms, and the reconciliation is sealed with Kári's marriage to Flosi's niece.

Marriage is also the solution in *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*. Tungu-Oddr's son Þóroddr is at first unsuccessful in his wooing of Gunnarr's daughter Jófríðr because of the hostility between the two families, but he takes the matter into his own hands and forces both the marriage and the reconciliation of his father and father-in-law. In two other cases of personal reconciliation the situation is rather different. In the first part of *Ljósvetninga saga* the feud seems to terminate when the new generation, Eyjólfr and Þorvarðr, exchange gifts and pledges of friendship. But they foresee that the friendship will hold only if no one interferes, which, in saga parlance, is as good as an assurance that someone will interfere, so that this scene is as much a preview of the coming conflict as it is a conclusion of a past conflict. *Bandamanna saga* deals in a sense with two conflicts. The first is the central conflict between Oddr and Óspakr and ends with Óspakr's outlawing and death. The other conflict is a family antagonism between Oddr and his father Ófeigr. This is resolved when Ófeigr comes to his son's aid at a crucial point in the case against Óspakr and wins his son's gratitude. The structure of *Bandamanna saga* is one conflict boxed in another; one is capped with revenge, the other with reconciliation.

The reconciliation in other sagas is a more formal matter.

There were according to Icelandic practice essentially three ways to arrive at the settlement of a dispute. One was for the less powerful litigant to leave the matter to the discretion of his stronger opponent in the knowledge that he is unable to prosecute the case successfully and in the hope that his opponent will treat him fairly. This is the institution of *sjálfdœmi* or self-judgment. The second solution is for the antagonists to find a neutral individual, whom they both trust and whose arbitration they will both acknowledge as binding. The third possibility is to set up an arbitrating commission, to which both litigants appoint a representative or representatives and by whose decision they agree to abide.

Self-judgment is never used as a final solution in the reconciliation section of a saga. This is probably owing to the fact that it was not felt to be genuinely conciliatory or satisfactory. It was inherently coercive and inequitable and was likely to rankle in the mind of the weaker litigant, especially if the decision was immoderate, so that it more often served as an added irritant than as a permanent solution. This feeling leads in fact to an interesting inconsistency at the conclusion of the first part of *Njáls saga*. We learn that Gunnarr's avengers Hǫgni and Skarpheðinn extract self-judgment from Mǫrðr, but at the time of the final settlement they apparently do not make use of the privilege because we are told expressly that "arbitrators were picked." This was evidently felt to be the best way to make the settlement stick.

In the six other sagas where there is a formal reconciliation the arbitration is left to an individual in three cases (*Hallfreðar saga*, *Hávarðar saga*, and *Ljósvetninga saga* part II) and to a commission in three other cases (*Heiðarvíga saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, and *Valla-Ljóts saga*). It might be added that these arbitrators were taken from among the most powerful and influential chieftains. The individual arbitrators are Þorkell krafla (*Hallfreðar saga*), Gestr Oddleifsson (*Hávarðar saga*), and Gellir Þorkelsson (*Ljósvetninga saga* part II). The arbitrators in *Laxdœla saga* are Snorri goði and Steinþórr Þorláksson, in *Valla-Ljóts saga* Guðmundr inn ríki and Skapti Þóroddsson, and among the commissioners in *Heiðarvíga saga* are again Guðmundr inn ríki and Snorri goði.

The authority of these men was felt to be a factor in the success and permanence of a settlement.

Aftermath

The sagas begin deliberately with an introductory prelude of some sort and end just as deliberately with concluding notes not strictly pertinent to the plot. There is a definite discrepancy between the action and the frame. The central core of a saga is usually a lean, tense, tightly conceived drama impatient of any form of annotation or commentary. But introduction and conclusion relax this strict standard and admit various marginalia. They become biographical and even antiquarian. This is apparently not owing to some lapse in the author's art, since introduction and conclusion are ubiquitous and are somehow felt to be necessary adjuncts to saga form. No saga is without a prologue (except the imperfect manuscript of *Heiðarvíga saga*) and only three sagas conclude without affixing some sort of nonfunctional epilogue (*Bjarnar saga*, *Reykdœla saga*, and *Valla-Ljóts saga*). There remain twenty-one sagas that prolong the action with additional information.

Once again *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs* serves as a miniature illustration. The action concludes with the reconciliation between Bjarni and Þorsteinn, but to this the author adds a page with the information that Bjarni became religious in his later years, traveled abroad, and died near Rome. In addition there is a fairly extensive list of Bjarni's more prominent descendants. This brief epilogue combines in an embryonic way the two varieties of aftermath used in the larger sagas. One variety provides information on the later life and deeds of the hero (or *a* hero) and the other provides notes on the survivors, relatives, or descendants of the saga's protagonists. Curiously enough the two types are not usually combined, the only exception being *Droplaugarsona saga*, which tells of Grímr's adventures and death in Norway after his revenge, but also gives a little information on his widow and descendants. Normally a saga concentrates on one type or the other.

The first and more biographical type presupposes that a hero is still alive at the conclusion of the saga, about whom further adventures can be told. This is consequently the less frequent variety. It embraces sagas that dispense altogether with the climax, such as *Egils saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, and *Kormáks saga*, and a saga such as *Víga-Glúms saga*, which dispenses at least with the sanguinary climax. *Hallfreðar saga* concludes with a final adventure in Norway, further travels, the skald's death during his last return to Iceland, and the legend of his washing ashore on the Hebrides and his discovery and burial through the intercession of Saint Olaf. *Kormáks saga* tells more briefly of the hero's last adventures in the British Isles and his death in Scotland. The most detailed aftermath is the one in *Egils saga*, because it is this saga that absorbs the biographical material available to the author least efficiently into the conflict story. After Egill's final confrontation with a Norwegian king there remains the long narrative of his trip to Värmland, the circumstances surrounding the composition of two major poems, his role in his son Þorsteinn's feud, and finally his old age and death. There is only a brief notice about his descendants. In contrast to *Egils saga*, *Víga-Glúms saga* gives less than a paragraph of aftermath with a sketch of Glúmr's conversion, burial, and reputation.

The other sagas that make use of the biographical aftermath are *Grettis saga*, *Fóstbrœðra saga*, *Heiðarvíga saga*, *Hávarðar saga*, and *Þorsteins saga hvíta*. The first three of these have elaborate aftermaths, which come close to constituting separate stories. In fact the conclusion of *Grettis saga* is often given separate status by being called *Spesar þáttr*. It tells the story of Grettir's brother and avenger Þorsteinn, his romantic involvement with a lady in Constantinople, his marriage, return to Norway, penance, and death. The aftermath of *Heiðarvíga saga* is not so romantic but nearly as far-flung; it describes the hero's travels in Norway and Denmark, his marriage and subsequent divorce in Hálogoland, and the end of his career in the Varangian Guard. *Fóstbrœðra saga* concludes with the simple and geographically more restricted but narratively more vivid story of Þormóðr's return to Norway and death in the Battle of Stiklastaðir. All of these sagas show that

travel is a popular motif in the aftermath. *Hávarðar saga* combines it with another frequent motif, that of the hero's conversion. Hávarðr lives long enough to hear of Óláfr Tryggvason's accession to the throne, travel to Norway, and be converted before ending his days in Iceland. The travel pattern holds true even for the little saga of Þorsteinn hvíti. The hero, Þorsteinn fagri, remains in Iceland until his potential slayer comes of age, then, on the advice of his namesake, travels to Norway for the remainder of his life.

The second variety of aftermath does not provide additional story material about a central character but tends to give rather miscellaneous information about several persons. These notes can be extremely brief. *Vápnfirðinga saga* devotes six lines to Þorkell's descendants and *Hrafnkels saga* does no more than tell us that Hrafnkell's sons inherited his chieftainship and were powerful men. A couple of sagas are somewhat fuller; *Gunnlaugs saga* tells of Helga the Fair's second marriage and death and *Bandamanna saga* describes how the outlawed villain, Óspakr, and one of the hoodwinked chieftains sought revenge and were slain.

But, as in the first category, travel is by far the most popular theme. The first part of *Njáls saga* ends with the information that Gunnarr's brother Kolskeggr traveled east and ended his career in the Varangian Guard, while the second part concludes with Flosi's trip to Norway and death in a leaky ship, to which is added a short genealogical note. The aftermath of *Gísla saga* is concerned with the emigration of Gísli's household and especially with the fate of Vésteinn's sons, first in Norway, then in Greenland. *Ljósvetninga saga* ends with a group of banished men and takes us to Saxony, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and England. *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* ends with the disappearance of Þóroddr in Norway and the remarriage of his widow. *Laxdœla saga* presents a variety of material, especially about Guðrún's old age, death, and descendants, but it also includes the account of her sons' voyage abroad, during which Bolli journeys as far as Constantinople, and the account of her husband's trip to Norway in quest of church timber. *Eyrbyggja saga*, in addition to a ghost story and details on Snorri's death and progeny, contains the most exotic travelogue

of all, the story of how shipwrecked Icelanders find Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi as an aged chieftain in Ireland.

Summary

An analysis of the saga plots leads to the conclusion that there are recurrent structural features and patterns. The patterns are in fact so repetitive and the similarities so great that, without doing undue violence to the plots, one can abstract from them a standard structure, to which all the sagas under study, with the exception of *Vatnsdœla saga*, conform to a greater or lesser extent.

A saga invariably begins with a preface about the main characters of the saga. The preface can be a simple presentation of the antagonists with a characterization of one or both which hints at the ensuing conflict. It can be a historical preface which gives the family background of the hero. Or, finally, it can be an almost independent story which serves to adumbrate the personalities of the saga or the unfolding plot.

The body of a saga is concerned with a conflict either between two individuals, between an individual and a group, or between two groups. The conflict is touched off by an insult or injury, sometimes inflamed by the malice of a troublemaker, and gradually intensified by a sequence of invective and assault.

This sequence mounts to a climax. In sixteen cases it culminates in the death of one of the protagonists (more often the hero than the villain), in three cases in the death of someone else, and in two cases in the bloodless discomfiture of the hero.

The death or discomfiture of a protagonist is usually avenged. The revenge may either be effected by legal procedures, or (in the majority of cases) by blood vengeance, or by a combination of both. In a few sagas the revenge is followed by counterrevenge.

The revenge section marks the termination of the action, but in about half of the sagas the termination of conflict is confirmed by an express reconciliation between the hostile parties. The reconciliation is either in the form of a personal agreement or of legal arbitration, to which the parties are bound.

Only three sagas conclude with the completion of the plot. The rest add a section either with the further adventures and fate of a surviving principal or with incidental information on various minor characters and on genealogy. The dramatic core of a saga is thus bracketed with a prologue and epilogue, which are intended as biography or history.

CHAPTER TWO

The Rhetoric of the Saga

> The rhetoric of the Sagas, like the rhetoric of the *Poetic Edda*, was taken too seriously and too greedily by the first modern discoverers of the old Northern literature. It is not, any more than the rhetoric of Homer, the immediate expression of the real life of an heroic age; for the good reason that it is literature, and literature just on the autumnal verge, and plainly capable of decay.
>
> *W. P. Ker*[3]

The reader of a saga feels himself to be in the presence of a chilly and refractory form. The story is rendered in such a matter-of-fact and unidiosyncratic tone that it is difficult to seize on what is really essential to the form and what constitutes its much vaunted uniqueness. Yet it is clear that the sagas comprise a very coherent and well-defined narrative type, which is set distinctly apart from all other forms by certain peculiarities of style. These peculiarities are often summarized under the heading "objectivity." Though the term "objective" only applies to the sagas in a limited sense (the sagas are not free of moralism), it still points to something basic in the form. It describes more what is absent than what is present. It means that the sagas stand outside of the ironic or intellectual tradition to which the reader of prose narrative has been accustomed since the advent of modern fiction.

The saga is plane narrative with no vertical dimensions; the saga-teller does not manipulate the complicated set of mirrors used by the modern author to catch and bind together himself, his subject, and his reader. The subject is supreme; the author never intrudes and the reader is never apostrophized directly or indirectly. This is what has caused the saga to be classed as a primitive form along with the folk tale, though it is plainly more sophisticated.

The saga is distinct not only from the intellectual tradition, but also from earlier currents. It has nothing in common with the idealistic, didactic, satirical, or sentimental traditions which flourished during the Middle Ages and after. In short, there is no guiding principle laid down by the author in order to give his material a specific import. He draws no general conclusions and invites his reader to draw none. In this sense the saga is not interpretable. The critic, whose congenital belief it has been, from the Homeric commentators on, that a moral or a meaning is inherent in literature, has nonetheless refrained from exercising his wiles on the saga. There is too little latitude for the allegorical or metaphysical penchant. The saga is, to be sure, psychological, in that it depicts people and their reactions in trying situations, but it is psychological in an unanalytical way. The point is not psychological portrayal or psychological development; the author is interested only in dramatic psychology, that is, in psychology that is a function of the plot and not of personality. It is symptomatic that love, which has become so much a part of modern narrative as to enter into some definitions of the novel, has no place in the saga except as a cause of contention, where the dimension is purely dramatic and not psychological. The same applies to fate, which, as is commonly pointed out, the author uses very liberally to stimulate his plot, without ever caring to study the concept.

In short, the saga comes very close to pure narrative without ulterior aims of any kind, much closer, for example, than the modern practitioners of objectivity, whose work is, after all, socially or philosophically loaded. But even if the saga is pure narrative and gives only fitful indications of the author's intention, the pattern of his work is still open to analysis. The arrangement

of the material and the progress of the narrative are governed by certain principles and techniques, which may almost be formulated as saga laws and which combine to give the saga its peculiar complexion.

Unity

The saga has a brand of unity not unlike the classical injunction against the proliferation of plot in drama. A saga has only one plot and one climax, the only exceptions being *Njáls saga* and *Ljósvetninga saga*, both of which double the plot. The climax legislates the action, both the action that goes before and the action that follows. The story is seen only in terms of the climax. Everything that precedes the climax is conceived as preparation for it and everything that follows is conceived as a logical consequence. There is no such thing as digression aside from the *Brjáns páttr* and *Kristni páttr* in *Njáls saga* and some of the travels of the skalds Gunnlaugr and Hallfreðr, which are genuine exceptions. All the episodes are linked in a sequence leading up to the climax of a saga or leading down from it. This is a fundamental rule and is the key to saga economy. No factor in the plot is superfluous because it either serves to explain the outcome or it derives necessarily from the outcome. Paradoxically, it is the operation of this transparent principle that allows a degree of unexplained obscurity in the plot. When, for example, Barði stocks provisions in *Heiðarvíga saga* or Helgi offers to help his relative Rannveig in *Droplaugarsona saga* or Guðmundr prosecutes Þórir Akraskeggr in *Ljósvetninga saga*, it is by no means apparent how these actions fit into the plot of the saga and the author volunteers no information on the connection. But the reader adjusts quickly to this laconic style. Since he has learned by experience that saga economy allows nothing superfluous, he makes a logical connection between a given episode and the climax no matter how disconnected and far-removed from one another they seem. He recognizes that the stocking of provisions in *Heiðarvíga saga* is a preparation for the long delayed expedition of vengeance, that

the aid to Rannveig will somehow increase the friction between the hero and Helgi Ásbjarnarson, and that the prosecution of Þórir Akraskeggr will somehow lead to a confrontation between Guðmundr and Þórir Helgason. What the reader at first finds puzzling, he learns to savor as a reserved and tantalizing form of plot concoction. One could speak of a domino principle; the plot pieces are lined up in such a way that tipping the first one inevitably overturns the last one, in a kind of chain reaction.

This principle embraces even the introduction, which, as pointed out above, is joined with the plot either by anticipating the action or motivating the conflict with a discrepancy of personalities. At this point the conflict is only latent, in the following section it is activated. One episode leads to another, the friction becomes increasingly evident and the situation increasingly explosive as the tinder is added. The episodes can simply be superimposed one on the other or they can be more ingeniously linked so that one leads into the next and so forth. But the effect is the same. Each episode is understood as a preliminary to the final episode, the climax, which it prefigures and anticipates. Saga unity means that each episode is a function of the outcome and is projected ahead and related to the outcome in the reader's mind. His interest is not so much in the immediate situation as in the consequences of the situation: how will it hasten or forestall the inevitable outcome of the conflict?

In this way the outcome controls the first stages of the story. But it controls the latter stages as well since the climax automatically releases a revenge section, without which the story is felt to be incomplete. The nature of the climax dictates the form taken by the rest of the story. The action generally falls off and is less exciting, but it is no less integral. The dramatic line of the saga is thus a simple pyramid, the peak of which is the climax. The incline before the peak describes the events that produce the climax and the decline describes the subsequent events that set it to rest. In simplest terms a saga is the story of a dramatic climax, which everything else is calculated to put in relief.

The incline is generally the more elaborate and consciously arranged plane. On it are deployed a series of preliminaries,

maneuvers, and preparatory moves that lead to the main action. These moves are often interlocking, one leads into the other, and all are aimed at the finale. It is this system of focusing and converging elements that I have rendered with indentations in the outlines appended in Part II; they show how each episode in the conflict builds toward the climax.

That the saga is unified by a high point in the action is not a novel principle. It can be said of a great many narrative and dramatic works of literature. What is unique in the saga is the deliberate and single-minded way in which the story is related to the high point and the peak of the pyramid is achieved. One block is placed on another in a straight line to the apex. To describe this technique of climax-building I use the term scaffolding.

Scaffolding

The scaffolding is of two types. The episodes leading to the climax necessarily all tend in that direction, but they can be unrelated to each other. This might be called the coordinate arrangement. The best example is *Fóstbræðra saga*, where the preparatory section comprises nine independent episodes from Þorgeirr's career. Most of them involve a slaying committed by Þorgeirr and all of them have the effect of putting Þorgeirr at odds with his environment. The conflict between Þorgeirr and his environment is the tenor of the story, so that each of these episodes is a functional unit in the story by virtue of depicting the mounting friction. On the other hand, there is no effort to interrelate the episodes or to show how one grows out of the other. The author makes a fresh start before each new incident. They are coordinated with a view to the outcome of the saga, Þorgeirr's demise, but they are not subordinated to one another. A roughly similar pattern is observed in *Eyrbyggja saga*, which covers a sequence of unrelated episodes in the life of Snorri goði. The sense of the episodes is diametrically opposed to that in *Fóstbræðra saga*; rather than depicting an ill-fated conflict with society, *Eyrbyggja saga* shows how the sagacious Snorri is able to hold his environment at bay throughout his career.

Again the episodes coordinate to produce this result without being interlocked.

This sort of arrangement gives the impression of a loose structure and is not typical of the saga at its best. Usually the episodes are in some kind of integrated sequence. They can, for example, be related as action and reaction. Thus in *Bjarnar saga* an act by one of the antagonists calls forth a response by the other, which in turn causes the first to react, and so forth. The same applies to the quarrel between Steingrímr and Vémundr in *Reykdœla saga*. In both sagas the episodes are tied together and subordinated to one another in the sense that each act is dependent on the preceding act. The conflict reaches the climax in a kind of seesaw pattern.

Generally the pattern is not seesaw and resembles more the indented side view of a pyramid, where one block leads stepwise to the next and eventually to the top. A simple illustration is *Hrafnkels saga*. Hrafnkell takes a vow to kill anyone who rides his pet horse Freyfaxi without permission, but his shepherd Einarr oversteps the interdiction. This leads to the slaying of Einarr and the fruitless demands for compensation by his father Þorbjǫrn and cousin Sámr. Hrafnkell's refusal to pay indemnity in turn leads to his prosecution and outlawing, which opens the way for the climax: Hrafnkell's humiliation and expropriation. In this sequence each scene is prerequisite to the next and derives logically from the preceding. The pattern is similar in *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*. Blund-Ketill is approached for hay; the first two petitioners he is able to satisfy from his own reserves, but the third request forces him to apply to Hœnsa-Þórir. Caught between the hardship of his tenants and Hœnsa-Þórir's churlish refusal, he is forced to take what he needs. Hœnsa-Þórir seeks to retaliate and looks for an ally in Arngrímr, Tungu-Oddr, and finally Þorvaldr. When Þorvaldr agrees to act in Hœnsa-Þórir's behalf, he suddenly finds himself forced into a more aggressive course than he intended. This in turn arouses Blund-Ketill's friends and bloodshed follows. Hœnsa-Þórir promptly uses the bloodshed to incite his unwilling partners against Blund-Ketill and burn him in his house. There is a kind of compelling logic in these events akin to what is practiced

in tragedy; once the sequence is initiated, it becomes inexorable and is not arrested until the catastrophe is complete.

Some sagas combine the coordinating and subordinating structures in such a way that the conflict consists of a series of episodes which do not perforce follow upon one another, but each of which is pyramidal in form. There is a succession of crises, psychologically but not necessarily causally interrelated, which lead to the catastrophe. Thus in *Droplaugarsona saga* and *Vápnfirðinga saga* the conflict builds up in a series of similar but independent confrontations between the antagonists, each of which has its own structure on a small scale and each of which is a miniature of the total confrontation. The conflict in *Droplaugarsona saga* is composed of five legal confrontations between Helgi Droplaugarson and Helgi Ásbjarnarson. Each can be taken as a tiny but separate story. (1) One of Helgi Ásbjarnarson's freedmen slanders Helgi Droplaugarson's mother and Helgi avenges the insult by killing him. Helgi Ásbjarnarson, on whom the case devolves, prosecutes him and extracts a fine. (2) Helgi Droplaugarson takes legal instruction. In the meantime Helgi Ásbjarnarson withholds his chieftainship from a co-owner. The wronged man appeals to Helgi Droplaugarson, who devises a legal trap to oust Helgi Ásbjarnarson from his office. (3) The foster father to one of Helgi Ásbjarnarson's children commits a theft and Helgi Droplaugarson imposes a heavy fine on him. (4) Helgi Droplaugarson is asked to take action against the seducer of a relative, who, as it turns out, is foster father to another of Helgi Ásbjarnarson's children. He warns the offender twice, then kills him. Helgi Ásbjarnarson prosecutes the case, but the seducer's life is declared forfeit. (5) Helgi Droplaugarson plots the death of his step-father, but the deed is bruited about and Helgi Ásbjarnarson initiates proceedings, which this time are successful and end in the outlawing of his rival. This series of preliminary crises leads to the final crisis and Helgi Droplaugarson's death. The pattern is similar in *Vápnfirðinga saga*, where the ultimate confrontation between Brodd-Helgi and Geitir follows a succession of unrelated hostile episodes.

Another particularly clear example of the pattern is provided in the first section of *Njáls saga*, where Gunnarr's downfall is

brought about by a series of five separate encounters. The first is the story of Gunnarr's conflict with Otkell over Hallgerðr's theft; the second is the story of Gunnarr's slaying of Otkell and Skammkell because of an unintentional spur cut; the third is a story of a fight prompted by a quarrel at a horse-match; the fourth is the story of a frustrated attack on Gunnarr; and the fifth is the story of an attack which results in the death of Otkell's son and Gunnarr's outlawing. Though some of these episodes are related as aspects of the same quarrel, each starts afresh and each is an independent drama.

I have used the term scaffolding to describe the arrangement of episodes in the conflict section, but in addition to this general structure the saga makes use of special techniques for guiding the action toward a conclusion. The most important of these techniques is escalation.

Escalation

By escalation is meant the technique of staggering the episodes in the conflict in such a way as to make the dénouement appear increasingly imminent. The author has a tendency to arrange his episodes in order of jeopardy; each succeeding adventure is more provocative or perilous than its predecessor. This is true of the section of *Njáls saga* summarized above. Each episode of the conflict brings Gunnarr closer to his downfall. The first confrontation, brought about by Hallgerðr's theft, is bloodless, ends in a fair settlement, and gives no apparent cause for alarm. The second phase begins with a slight injury and a real affront to Gunnarr and ends with the slaying of Otkell and Skammkell; the matter is again settled peaceably, but violence has broken out and the way has been opened for a blood feud. In the following episode this path is pursued. Gunnarr's enemies attack him in force and fourteen of them fall. The violence is now irrevocable and a legal solution can only be reached through Njáll's cunning; it is plainly a fragile and impermanent solution. Gunnarr's enemies are indeed dissatisfied and immediately organize a new attack. Njáll is able to

divert them at the last moment and levies new fines, but the thrust is only temporarily parried. The litigation can only rankle and the situation is more unsettled and nervous than ever. When the next move is made, it does not fail of its purpose and Gunnarr is drawn into an encounter where he commits one more fateful slaying. This time the litigation goes against him and he is exiled and eventually outlawed. Thus shorn of legal protection he is exposed to the reprisals of his enemies and the climax is quick to follow. Throughout this sequence there is increasing urgency and a mounting sense of doom. Gunnarr is at first in perfect control of the situation but becomes entangled in a conflict, from which he initially emerges victorious but in the course of which his own success gradually strengthens the will of the opposition and weakens his own chances for permanent success. What is actually escalated in this series of episodes is the tenuousness of Gunnarr's position.

Gunnarr's downfall illustrates an idea that seems to have lurked in the minds of several saga authors, the idea that success is fatal. Another telling example is *Víga-Glúms saga*. Glúmr provokes his enemies not only by being too consistently successful but by pursuing his success in an increasingly devious and unscrupulous manner. At the outset he is conciliatory to the extent of leaving Iceland in order to avoid a hostile encounter with the Esphœlingar. In the second phase he reacts slowly and only after extreme provocation. In the third phase there are no further signs of hesitation, but Glúmr is still conciliatory and devises a compromise to restore harmony. But in the fourth episode he becomes aggressive, deceitful, and autocratic. At this point the situation escapes his grasp and, like Gunnarr, he is drawn into a maelstrom, first by the actions of his son Vigfúss and then by involvement in a quarrel which is beyond his control and which confronts him once more with the Esphœlingar. The contest has now become so intense that no degree of proper behavior and no degree of litigious trickery can pull Glúmr out of the vortex. The arrangement of episodes in *Víga-Glúms saga* as in *Njáls saga* has the effect of suggesting a deeper and deeper involvement of the hero in a fatal situation, but unlike Gunnarr, who is a classic of innocence abused, Glúmr is not free of complicity in his own fate.

The conflict in *Bjarnar saga* has a similar structure. Here too there is a gradual mounting of tension and a tightening hostility in which the antagonists become more and more fatefully constricted. Bjǫrn, like Glúmr, is at first only an innocent victim. When he reacts, it is with cause, and he is restrained and open to compromise. But, once in Iceland, rancor begins to alter his behavior. He abuses Þórðr's hospitality, composes scurrilous stanzas, and constructs a *níð* (slanderous artifact). Þórðr is provoked first to legal reprisals and eventually to a series of ambushes, which only serve to inflame the conflict, since Bjǫrn responds by killing his attackers. The conflict becomes irretrievable when he ultimately wounds Þórðr in one encounter and kills one of his sons in another. The quarrel thus progresses through the increasingly drastic stages of insult, slander, assassination plots, and finally direct assault. At each stage it becomes increasingly difficult for the antagonists to draw back.

These three sagas give the most consistent and symmetrical cases of escalation, but the technique in one form or another is used in almost all the sagas, from *Ljósvetninga saga*, where Guðmundr's revenge progresses from "small fry" to "big game," to *Gísla saga* and *Grettis saga*, where the outlaws become shrouded in a thickening atmosphere of doom. The effect can be achieved by an increase of danger, a multiplying of portents, a deterioration of behavior, a quickening of the pace, or the opposite, a meaningful slackening of the pace. The dénouement of a saga never comes as a surprise, but as a release from the tension built up by the various techniques of escalation. Some varieties of this general technique are described in the following paragraphs.

Retardation

The purpose and effect of the escalation techniques are to tease the reader's interest and concentrate his mind on the outcome of the story. Since the outcome is a foregone conclusion, either well known to the reader or clearly predictable, any delay of it has not the effect of fogging the issue, but the opposite effect of focusing

it more clearly since the reader is given more time and better indications for his projections. This is the device I call retardation. In a sense it applies to everything that precedes the climax of the story since everything constitutes a delay; but in a slightly restricted sense retardation may be taken to apply to narrative material that is unusually protracted or nonessential to the story and included only for effect.

In the twice-cited passage from *Njáls saga*, for example, one of the episodes in the conflict tells how Gunnarr's enemies assembled for an attack on his homestead Hlíðarendi. On the way they nap and are discovered by Njáll, who averts the danger by warning Gunnarr. This episode leads to nothing and adds nothing to the story, from which it could just as well be dropped. But it does have a function. It gives the reader some additional opportunity to speculate about Gunnarr's possible fate and it channels the speculation. It suggests how potentially vulnerable Gunnarr's position is and it anticipates the successful attack on Hlíðarendi, which is the climax of the story. In other words, it very definitely focuses the outcome and adds a dimension to the story even though it does nothing to advance the plot. A more obvious, though perhaps less satisfactory, example of the same thing is the legal maneuvering in the second part of *Njáls saga*. It is generally felt to be cumbersome and superfluous, but it can be aesthetically rationalized as retardation. It particularizes the scene, gives weight to the issue, and centers the reader's interest on the solution of the litigation.

By far the most sophisticated manipulation of the device is provided by *Heiðarvíga saga*. The conflict is built from a succession of nine slayings capped by a tenth, which is the climax of the story. The first nine follow one another in quick succession and occupy altogether forty pages. The tenth does not follow immediately and is set off by the device of retardation; it alone occupies another forty pages. All the preparations are recounted in great detail and with great deliberateness, details of strategy, reconnoissance, logistics, and alliances, as well as psychological details. The exact function of all this information is not always readily apparent and is revealed only with time, but the ultimate purpose of the plan shows clearly through all the incidentals. The effect of the

drawn-out material is not digressive but insistent. While it arouses the reader's curiosity about the significance of the tactical particulars, it funnels these particulars in one direction and fixes the reader's interest on a single line of development.

There are other sagas that make effective use of retardation. In *Ljósvetninga saga* the thrust of Guðmundr's revenge is preceded by indifferent material that arrests the pace and leads to the anticipated climax obliquely and slowly. Just as in *Heiðarvíga saga*, the plot is felt to pull at the reins. In *Gísla saga* the hero's certain death is retarded by a series of carefully designed narrow escapes, which build a sense of jeopardy while obstructing the climax temporarily. It is of course only the longer sagas that have the necessary scope to allow for a deployment of this device, but not all the long sagas make use of it. It is, for example, a weakness in *Fóstbræðra saga* and *Reykdœla saga* that the climax comes somewhat abruptly and almost as a surprise. These sagas are less adept at capitalizing on their dramatic potential and manipulating the reader's interest. *Laxdœla saga* makes no use of retardation, but creates a similar atmosphere by different means.

Other sagas sin not by ignoring the technique but by over-exploiting it. In *Bjarnar saga* the conflict is plainly over-extended and overloaded with irritants. The reader has grasped the direction and the outcome long before the author is through with his scaffolding and the delay becomes tedious rather than tantalizing. Five thwarted ambushes and the recital of scurrilous stanzas on seven different occasions are too much. The tension has already been drawn as taut as need be and begins to slacken again. This illustrates the twofold function of retardation, to delay the climax and concentrate interest. *Bjarnar saga* accomplishes the first but not the second because it becomes repetitive and loses its hold on the reader's mind.

Grettis saga also fails in this regard, but for different reasons. The core of the saga is Grettir's outlawry, culminating in his death on Drangey. The author is able to create an atmosphere of doom around his hero by portraying him as a quarry relentlessly pursued by his enemies and by giving him the fateful flaw of nyctophobia, which condemns him to seek out untrustworthy company to

escape his loneliness. The catastrophe is suspended for a dozen or so episodes, but these episodes do not contribute uniformly to the drama. The story is not so exciting and the picture of outlawry is not so oppressive as in *Gísla saga*. This is not so much because the scenes are inherently less vivid, but because they are not all to the point. Whereas *Bjarnar saga* tends to overwork the conflict, *Grettis saga* tends to neglect it and become digressive. It includes episodes that have no function. The test of strength with Þorgeirr and Þormóðr, the meeting with Loptr/Hallmundr, the interlude at Sandhaugar, and the appearance at Hegranesþing seem to be included more for the sake of anecdote than because they contribute anything to the plot. They may be entertaining, but they are also distracting. They fail to focus the reader's attention on the central problem and the effective use of retardation is as much a matter of focus as of delaying tactics. Where the reader's mind is allowed to slip because of either repetition or digression, the effect is compromised.

Symmetry

The saga authors have a fondness for the use of pairs and series in their plot structures. The principle is one of matching actions; the actions may match in several ways, as parallels, contrasts, or repetitions. Though the technique strikes one as particularly artificial and untrue, it can often be very effective in crystallizing an issue. Like the device of retardation it clarifies and fixes a situation. In addition, it affords a purely literary enjoyment; since it is so patently superinduced, the reader becomes consciously interested in the technique per se at the same time he is more unconsciously submitting to the author's emphasis.

In *Fóstbræðra saga* the two hostile warriors Þorgeirr and Butraldi are forced to spend a night under the same roof. They are silent and morose. When the time for the evening meal comes, they are seated at the same table and served with a piece of cheese and a brisket. Butraldi seizes the brisket and Þorgeirr the cheese and each satisfies his appetite with no thought of sharing. The next

morning the procedure is repeated but reversed; Þorgeirr takes the brisket and Butraldi the cheese. When the meal is over, they take their leave, but not far from the house Þorgeirr turns on his enemy and plunges his battle-axe into him. Later in the saga Þorgeirr is encamped on the shore ready to take passage on the same ship with a certain Gautr Sleituson, who is encamped nearby. Firewood is in short supply and one day Gautr solves the shortage by using Þorgeirr's spearshaft and shield as kindling. Þorgeirr says nothing, but makes the same use of Gautr's spear and shield on the following day. The antagonists are restrained for the moment, but that night Þorgeirr invades Gautr's tent and kills him.

These examples combine the features of parallel, contrast, and repetition. The acts are identical, but opposite. The author has used them with good effect to depict the hostile atmosphere without the use of dialogue. The reader is given a vivid impression of repressed animosity about to break into the open. The delicate psychological equilibrium is rendered by the use of structural and literary equilibrium. At the same time this parallelism serves as a form of escalation, since the balance of the situation is plainly forced and in imminent danger of being upset. And the danger becomes more imminent with each act since each act represents an artificial repression, a substitute for direct action. The author manages to draw at once a psychologically very clear and literarily rather amusing picture of what is going on in the minds of the antagonists.

During the burial of Vésteinn, the first casualty in *Gísla saga*, Þorgrímr, following an otherwise unknown custom of preparing the dead for the trip to Valhalla, ties the dead man's shoes with the comment: "I don't know how to tie Hel-shoes if these come undone." Later, after this same Þorgrímr has been slain in revenge for Vésteinn's death and is being buried in a ship according to viking custom, Gísli picks up a large boulder and places it in the ship with the comment: "I don't know how to anchor ships if the weather unmoors this one." The saga adds that the people remarked on the similarity of the acts. The function of these scenes is expository. We do not know who killed Vésteinn, but we do know that Gísli killed Þorgrímr. When, therefore, Gísli creates this

parallel, the reader is invited to form a proportion: Gísli is to Þorgrímr as Þorgrímr is to Vésteinn. In other words, Þorgrímr killed Vésteinn. (This is actually uncertain because of conflicting evidence on the point.) But in addition to the expository function the incidents serve as characterization. They describe the heroic mentality incapable of deception and unwilling to take refuge in secrecy. Both Þorgrímr and Gísli feel impelled to publicize their responsibility at least symbolically without regard for the probable consequences of their recklessness.

In *Gunnlaugs saga* the two skalds Gunnlaugr and Hrafn meet at the court of the Swedish king Óláfr and compete for precedence in reciting panegyrics before him. Gunnlaugr, as the more resentful and easily offended of the two, is allowed to recite first and when he has finished, Hrafn is asked to comment. His candid appraisal is: "That is a high-sounding poem, but rough and a bit unsubtle, like Gunnlaugr himself." Hrafn is then given the opportunity to recite his poem and Gunnlaugr comments in turn: "This is a pretty poem, like Hrafn himself, but of little consequence . . ." To his critique Gunnlaugr then adds a malicious question as to why his opponent selected a lesser poetic form with which to celebrate the king and whether he did not find him worthy of a grander one. This is the encounter which motivates the theft of Gunnlaugr's bride and the rivalry between the two men. It suggests the smoldering resentment beneath a smooth exterior and what might be understood as clever and half-humorous repartee; without an open breach the rivals are able to call each other respectively "boor" and "no-count." At the same time the scene gives a succinct characterization of the men through the medium of their poetry. And finally, it affords an entertaining and very early example of barbed parlor wit; the verbal dimension raises it above the raw contentiousness in *Fóstbræðra saga*.

Bjarnar saga, with its taste for excess, indulges in the tit-for-tat pattern repeatedly, but without deriving an extra dimension from it. Two examples will suffice. Þórðr is bitten while in pursuit of a seal and Bjǫrn composes verses to commemorate what seemed to his contemporaries to be comical and humiliating. Shortly thereafter Bjǫrn is engaged in his farmwork and is obliged

to pick up a calf and move him when one of his workmen refuses to do so. This was apparently also felt to be funny and degrading because Þórðr now retaliates with some disparaging stanzas of his own. At a later juncture in the saga Þórðr prosecutes Bjǫrn for harboring outlaws and Bjǫrn promptly responds by killing two outlaws harbored by Þórðr. These symmetrical episodes are empty. They do not give the plot any impetus or any perspective. The stanzas are not clever but broadly insulting and the symmetry in the outlaw episodes is unexploited. Unlike *Fóstbræðra saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga* there is no exercise in psychology, characterization, or wit, though the technique of matching is identical.

The most extended and far-fetched use of the retaliatory pattern is in the quarrel between Bergþóra and Hallgerðr in *Njáls saga*. The two housewives, jealous over a matter of prestige, compete by instigating the death of each other's workers and dependents. Before the vendetta is over, they have taken six lives, in precise succession and alternation. Each pair of slayings matches as to circumstances, and after each slaying there are matching settlements by the long-suffering husbands. The sequence commands the interest which naturally attaches to a feud and is amusing in its portrayal of tiger-wives and lamb-husbands, but it is even less integral than the symmetrical material in *Bjarnar saga*. The rivalry between Hallgerðr and Bergþóra has ultimately no function in the plot, but is simply a bit of unattached prefatory matter. The fact that it is so elaborately worked out actually misleads the reader into seeking some function for it which it does not possess. It does not even contribute anything essential to the characterization of the two women; Hallgerðr is fully delineated elsewhere and Bergþóra's character does not play an important part in the saga.

Symmetry in the sagas is not always a matter of balancing pairs but can also entail series, in which motifs are repeated for the sake of effect. The reiterated pattern in Hallgerðr's marriages, preparing the reader's mind for her abandonment of Gunnarr in his hour of peril, has already been mentioned. The prelude to *Egils saga* is built around the two recurring motifs of the Lapp tax and slander. Twice Þórólfr collects the tax and twice his enemies

poison the king's mind against him. The third time the enemies collect the tax and, when the king is dissatisfied with the meager return, they put the blame on Þórólfr. This time the slander is effective and the king takes action against Þórólfr, which leads to a brief contest and Þórólfr's death. The use of symmetrical episodes with a slight change of emphasis on the last one is in line with the principle of escalation. The repetition of danger produces the impression that the hero's position is being gradually undermined.

The most persistent use of repetition is made in *Gísla saga*. When Vésteinn returns to Iceland from Denmark, the author gives a haunting description of his ride to Sæból. During this ride the reader is made aware of the impending danger by the detail of the description (only significant matters are treated fully in the sagas), by Gísli's attempted warning, and by Vésteinn's own tacit resignation. But the most tangible device for depicting the danger is a thrice-issued warning. On three separate occasions during the trip three different people caution Vésteinn, twice with the words "vertu varr um þik" (be careful) and the third time with a very slight variation "ver varr um þik." The same technique is elaborated much further during the period prior to Gísli's death. The repetition of ill-boding dreams, Gísli's four meetings with his brother Þorkell and his futile entreaties, the four missions of Njósnar-Helgi all combine to suggest that fate is closing in on Gísli.

By far the most refined instance of symmetrical structure is contained in *Heiðarvíga saga*. After several stages of the feud the final act is left in the hands of Barði Guðmundsson. He begins his maneuvering by appealing for compensation at the Allthing for three years in succession, so as to draw the opposition into the open. He then initiates a series of preliminaries preparatory to his revenge. He acquires a special sword, is given a plan of action, enlists allies, and stocks provisions. Each of these measures is then repeated in a slightly escalated form. The enlisting of allies is followed by the assembling of allies, the stocking of provisions is followed by the fetching of provisions, the general plan of attack is supplemented by a more specific plan, and the acquisition of a sword is superseded by its whetting. The whole

sequence is intersected by three reconnoissance missions, one at the very outset, one at the midpoint, and one at the end. The exactness of this symmetry will certainly escape the less fastidious reader and exercise on him only the effect of retardation. It is a case where an extremely artificial procedure is successfully camouflaged by the author as minute realism. But once the procedure is discovered, it affords the additional dimension of literary pyrotechnics.

The technique of symmetry can be used for the sake of exposition, psychology, characterization, and atmosphere. It can also be used for humorous effects, repetition being one of the easiest comic gimmicks. In *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, for example, Hersteinn is left without friends and allies in the wake of his father's slaying. With the aid of his foster father Þorbjǫrn he sets about acquiring the necessary support with a series of subterfuges. They arrive with lock, stock, and barrel at the farm of Þorkell trefill, who generously and unsuspectingly offers them hospitality. But he quickly repents his haste because his guests no sooner have their feet firmly in the door than they proceed to solicit his assistance for their projected revenge. Unwilling to renege at this point, he accedes. From here the petitioners ride on to Gunnarr Hlífarson, whom they arouse in the middle of the night and pressure into betrothing his daughter to Hersteinn. Only after he has agreed to the betrothal does he learn to what the new family alliance commits him. Finally, Hersteinn catches Þórðr gellir in his net by asking him to sanction the betrothal and hold the wedding at his home. This series of very similar ruses is not only the comedy of powerful men consistently duped by their inferior (as in *Bandamanna saga*) but also a kind of parody on the earnest and intent assembling of allies as we have it in *Heiðarvíga saga* and elsewhere.

One final example of the humorous series is provided by *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*. On the news of his son's death the old man Hávarðr has such an access of sorrow that he takes to his bed and remains there. After a year his wife arouses him from his apathy and sends him to demand compensation from his son's slayer, but when Hávarðr is scorned by the culprit, he takes his

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mortification to bed for another year. Again his wife arouses him to action and this time he is on the threshold of success. But the settlement fails at the last moment and Hávarðr returns to bed for a third year, until his wife arouses him one last time and he wreaks bloody vengeance. The humor here lies in the exaggeration of a common theme, the slow and certain cancer of dishonor. The stereotyped laconism, the quiet nursing of revenge, and the patient but purposeful delay seem almost mischievously overplayed. At the same time there is what amounts to a parody of the symptomatic psychology of which the sagas are so fond, a device according to which a person betrays his emotions physically, with a change of color in medieval style or with some violent muscular constriction in heroic style. Hávarðr carries the psychosomatic trick ad absurdum; his excess of grief so cripples him that he annually returns to bed, but at the prospect of revenge he leaps out of bed, arms himself, and strides out of the house like a supple twenty-year-old.

Foreshadowing

The most obvious and ubiquitous rhetorical device in the sagas is foreshadowing. Like escalation, retardation, and some cases of symmetry it serves to guide the reader's interest to what follows and give it a correct focus. He finds himself caught up in the stream of events and aware of where the current is leading him, though unaware of what route it will follow. Once informed about the goal of the story, his interest attaches to the events which lead to the goal. Foreshadowing is therefore, unlike retardation, not a method for creating interest in the outcome, which is prematurely divulged, but a method for creating interest in the preliminary details. The reader of a saga is not likely to leap ahead; he knows what will happen. If he is curious at all, he is curious about *how* it will happen. The technique thus effects a distribution of interest over the whole text and prevents the otherwise heavily stressed climax from eclipsing the rest of the story.

The most frequent means of foreshadowing is the dream.

Dreams are legion in the sagas and are the subject of several monographs; there is hardly a fey man who is not so informed in a dream. It is not necessary to catalogue these premonitory dreams, but suffices to mention a few of the more elaborate ones. It will be recalled that at the outset of *Gunnlaugs saga* Þorsteinn has a dream in which he sees two eagles quarrel over a swan and claw each other to death, after which a falcon alights beside the swan and then flies off with her. The dream foreshadows in detail the rivalry between Gunnlaugr and Hrafn over Helga the Fair, their death, and her marriage to a third man. In *Gísla saga*, where the patterns are very persistent, the hero is advised repeatedly of his death in dream apparitions. He dreams of being in a house where seven fires are burning, which, he is told, signify his remaining years of life. He dreams of a woman who washes him in blood, and the dream is later repeated. He dreams that he is attacked by a large group of men. Again, he dreams that he is bathed in blood, and finally he dreams of birds staging a bloody fight in his house. These omens create an atmosphere thoroughly drenched and incarnadine before Gísli is ever attacked. Another saga with a full dream apparatus is *Laxdœla saga*. Guðrún has a succession of four dreams, which are interpreted as adumbrations of her four marriages with details covering three pages. Aside from being overdone, the passage is distracting since only one of her dreams is directly involved in the plot. Unlike most dream passages, which bear directly on the outcome of the story, the effect here is arbitrary and ornamental.

Similar to the dreams are the omens and portents which frequently forebode coming events, especially baleful ones. Shortly before Barði's attack in *Heiðarvíga saga* one of his intended victims is seated at table. When the meal is served, he sees blood in the food, the cheese tastes earthen, and he imagines that he sees water flowing through the house. There is a similar scene in *Ljósvetninga saga*. Just before his death Guðmundr inn ríki apparently loses his sense of perceptions because he drinks hot milk three times and comments each time that it is not hot. Then he leans back in his highseat and dies. The conflagrations in *Njáls saga* and *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* are signaled by portents. In the former

a certain Hildiglúmr sees in an apparition a horseman with a firebrand ride east and light a great fire. In *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* Hersteinn is warned of his father's burning by a dream in which the father appears in fiery clothes. The most elaborate and medieval portents are the Fróðá prodigies in *Eyrbyggja saga*. The death of the Hebridian woman Þórgunna is preceded by a blood rain, and the pestilence that follows her death is signaled by the apparition of a half-moon on the wall of the house and accompanied by various other supernatural phenomena. But like Guðrún's dreams in *Laxdœla saga* these omens have little to do with the story, which is diffuse anyway, and seem rather to be recorded for their own sake.

Another premonitory device is the prediction. In *Njáls saga* an old woman in Njáll's household becomes obsessed with a pile of weeds outside the house and predicts it will be used to kindle the fire in which Njáll and Bergþóra will be burned. In *Laxdœla saga* Gestr Oddleifsson, after watching Bolli and Kjartan at play, predicts that Bolli will kill his foster brother, and in a similar scene in *Glúms saga* a seeress predicts the quarrel between the foster brothers Steinólfr and Arngrímr, which eventually leads to Glúmr's defeat. In *Gísla saga* Gísli predicts that his brother Þorkell will die before he himself does. This is apparently irrelevant to the plot and misdirects our attention to a secondary character. This is in fact not the case, the point being not that Þorkell is doomed but that Gísli's death is tied to and made imminent by his brother's death. When Þorkell is unexpectedly slain, the reader feels that another shield has fallen away and Gísli's fate has become more immediate. Such predictions are almost always dire, but one specific type is favorable. In *Heiðarvíga saga*, *Kormáks saga*, and *Reykdœla saga* men who are about to fight are probed by old women with magic powers, who are able to determine by touch that they will not be seriously wounded.

Another type of prediction is the warning, always warranted and always flouted. In *Egils saga* Kveld-Úlfr warns his son Þórólfr against taking service with King Harald, but to no avail. In *Gísla saga* Gísli's warning to Vésteinn is equally ineffectual and in *Njáls saga* Gunnarr seals his own fate by ignoring Njáll's repeated

injunctions. The opposite of the warning, which aims to avoid trouble, is the curse, which is calculated to induce it. The sorceress Þórveig thwarts Kormákr's love for Steingerðr by placing a curse on it and the motif is repeated in a more peripheral context in *Njáls saga*, where Gunnhildr puts a curse on Hrútr's marriage to Unnr. In *Grettis saga* Grettir overcomes the revenant Glámr but is cursed with nyctophobia, which becomes a factor in his death. In *Víga-Glúms saga* the hero ousts his antagonist Þorkell from his land, but Þorkell makes a propitiatory sacrifice to Freyr to insure that Glúmr will someday part with the land as unwillingly as he, a fate which Glúmr, with all his cunning, is unable to elude. Finally, in *Laxdœla saga* Geirmundr puts a curse on his prize sword when it is taken from him by his estranged wife Þuríðr. His curse is to the effect that the sword will be the death of the best man in Þuríðr's family. Eventually it is given to Bolli and is used by him to kill Þuríðr's brother Kjartan.

This last incident borders on another foreshadowing technique, according to which some inanimate object or token is used to signal a future development. In *Víga-Glúms saga*, for example, Glúmr is given a coat, a spear, and a sword by his grandfather in Norway and is told that his honor will remain intact as long as these objects are in his possession. When, toward the end of the saga, Glúmr parts with these gifts, Einarr Þveræingr senses that his luck is on the wane and initiates proceedings that lead to his final discomfiture. In *Gísla saga* Gísli fashions a coin split in two parts, which can be fitted together to form a whole. He keeps one half and gives the other to Vésteinn with the understanding that when the life of one man is in danger, the other will warn him by sending the missing half of the coin. When, therefore, Gísli does send his half to Vésteinn, the reader knows clearly what is in store without any comment on the part of the author. A token with more than psychological potency is the necklace given to Barði by his foster mother before the final clash in *Heiðarvíga saga*. The effect of the token is real since it deflects a murderous sword stroke during the battle. Easily the most mysterious and magical instance of token prediction is the scene in *Vatnsdœla saga* in which a Lapp charms a little statuette

of Freyr out of Ingimundr's purse and promises him that he will find it on the site he is fated to settle in Iceland. The prediction is of course borne out.

Still another proleptic device is the psychic farewell. When Þórólfr leaves home to join the service of Harald Fairhair, his father Kveld-Úlfr has the following premonition: "I have a foreboding that this is our last meeting; the difference in age would seem to indicate that of the two of us you will live longer, but I believe it will turn out the other way." It does turn out the other way and Kveld-Úlfr lives to avenge his son. When Glúmr takes leave of his grandfather Vigfúss in Norway, Vigfúss says: "I have the feeling that we will not see each other again . . ." This is true enough, but not so dire as in the case of Þórólfr. The final farewell is almost a standing formula when Icelandic heroes leave the service of Norwegian monarchs for the last time. As Kjartan embarks for Iceland, Óláfr Tryggvason says to himself: "Much is in store for Kjartan and his kinsmen and it will be difficult for them to resist their fate." The same king takes leave of Hallfreðr with the words "it is uncertain when we will meet again" and when Þorgeirr insists on returning to Iceland from Norway, Saint Olaf warns him not to: ". . . we will not see each other again if we part now."

These farewell scenes can be affecting when they involve lovers. On the occasion of Kjartan's aforementioned departure he must also take leave of his royal paramour Ingibjǫrg: "After that Kjartan stood up and embraced Ingibjǫrg and people had the feeling that it was very hard for them to part." In *Hávarðar saga* the lovers Óláfr and Sigríðr have a last interview, during which she sees his antagonist Þorbjǫrn and warns him against an encounter. But Óláfr is young and reckless and promises her that she will hear brave things about him should they meet. "Sigríðr answered that she would hear nothing. Óláfr jumped up quickly and bade her farewell and she bade him farewell." In this laconic parting is secreted the promise of a love suicide because after Óláfr's death Sigríðr is never found again. There is a similar scene in *Droplaugarsona saga*, which in a few words depicts the parting of Helgi Droplaugarson and his leman Tófa Hlíðarsól

just before his death. In its stark understatement and primitive emotional expression it is one of the most mournful scenes in the sagas. "She had an inkling that he would not return from this trip. She went a short way on the road with them and wept much. Helgi took off a good belt with a knife attached to it and gave them to her. Then they parted."

Staging

Just before the climax a saga frequently lapses into a fuller and denser narrative. There is a deceleration of pace, a magnifying of detail, and a dwelling on incidentals in order to focus the central event one last time and enhance its importance in relation to the rest of the story. This is the peculiarity described by the term "staging." Since the climax usually entails the slaying of one major figure, the staging of the event generally concentrates on the last acts of this person, the preparations of his enemies, and the details of the attack. It has been pointed out that this phase of *Heiðarvíga saga*, the details of stratagem and preparation just before Barði's attack, is equal in length to everything that goes before. This is not a typical proportion, but it is symptomatic of the pattern. A good analogy of more manageable dimensions is the staging of the final attack in *Bjarnar saga hítdœlakappa*.

Bjǫrn's enemies learn from one of his farm hands that he is almost alone at home (farm hands and especially maidservants often act as unwitting informers in the sagas). They immediately incite Þórðr to plan an attack and he does so. Men are assembled, others are sent to reconnoiter, and Þórðr plans a strategy involving four ambushes to cover all possible avenues of escape. In the meantime we learn that Bjǫrn is about to set out to clip the manes of some horses, but he has had ominous dreams and his wife warns him not to leave home. He ignores her warning and sets out with one companion, a boy. Bjǫrn's eyes are weak and it is the boy who first sights the ambushes. There follows a dialogue in which the boy expresses apprehension and Bjǫrn deliberately belittles the danger, first with the glib comment that more helpers

will make it easier to catch the horses and then with the bland suggestion that they are probably only shepherds. The boy describes the men as they approach and Bjǫrn recognizes them from the description, but he rejects his companion's suggestion of retreat out of hand and sends him away at the last moment. Then the attackers close in and battle is joined, interspersed with cold-blooded and laconic dialogue in which Bjǫrn demonstrates his spirit and his moral superiority. After an almost miraculous defense he succumbs to his twenty-four opponents. One might summarize the separate phases of the staging thus: intelligence (information about Bjǫrn's vulnerable position), inciting, assembling of men, reconnoissance, strategy, omens, warnings, sighting of the enemy, flouting of danger, dismissal of aid, heroic dialogue, and prodigious last stand.

These elements, in one combination or another, form a regular pattern before each climax, or before slayings which are not necessarily climactic. In *Hrafnkels saga*, for example, the revenge killing of Eyvindr is described in very much the same way. He returns to Iceland from abroad and rides with a small group to his brother's home. The route is described with such care that the reader already senses what is in the offing. On the way Eyvindr is seen by one of the women in Hrafnkell's household (intelligence), who returns home and abuses Hrafnkell for his tardy revenge (inciting). Hrafnkell sends for help (assembling of men) and sets out in pursuit. Eyvindr's boy attendant catches sight of the pursuers and urges him to make his escape, but Eyvindr feigns ignorance of any cause for alarm and waits. This time there is no dialogue and Eyvindr falls after he and his four followers have killed twelve of the eighteen attackers. The technique is a little less elaborate but otherwise identical. It survives in even further reduced form in Jón Ólafsson's transcript of *Heiðarvíga saga*, on the occasion of Styrr's slaying of Þórhalli. Þórhalli sets out with one attendant, who has better eyes and catches a glimpse of Styrr's ambush. Þórhalli turns down his advice to flee on principle and because he claims to have no quarrel with Styrr, but he does let his man go. When he is confronted with Styrr's ambush, he gives a dignified verbal account of himself and defends himself

stoutly despite advanced years until Styrr intervenes personally in the fight and kills him.

A few more random examples, taken from the climax sections, will serve to reinforce the pattern. In *Ljósvetninga saga* Guðmundr inn ríki compasses his revenge by sending a man in the guise to a poor peddler to his intended victim Þorkell hákr (strategy). He gives the route to be followed and the means of gaining admittance to the house in some detail, the object being to ascertain how many defenders there are (intelligence). Þorkell's wife is openly suspicious of the peddler (warning), but Þorkell is persuaded to admit him. Then during the night Guðmundr arrives with his men and storms the house. During the combat Þorkell casts into Guðmundr's teeth the charge of sodomy, which was the original cause of conflict (verbal heroics), and dies after a ferocious defense. In *Droplaugarsona saga* the climax is a confrontation between Helgi Droplaugarson and Helgi Ásbjarnarson. It is first hinted at when the former has a last interview with his leman in the scene described above (warning). There follows a description of Helgi's route and visits. The farmer at one of his stops betrays his presence to Helgi Ásbjarnarson (intelligence) and urges him to act (inciting). He responds, sends for help (assembling of men), and dispatches two men to reconnoiter (reconnoissance). In the meantime Helgi Droplaugarson has an ominous itching on the chin (suggesting a wound) and dreams of the attack. A companion warns him, but he refuses to turn back. During the encounter he receives a terrible face wound, which provokes only a laconic comment on the spoiling of his appearance (verbal heroics). After a memorable fight he succumbs, but not without leaving a mark on all his attackers. An additional touch, which parallels *Bjarnar saga*, is that he is without his own sword and must defend himself with an inferior weapon.

The attack on Bergþórshváll in *Njáls saga* develops according to the same ritual. Flosi lays his plans before his allies and describes the route to be taken (strategy). In the meantime two people have premonitions of the burning (omens). In the autumn Flosi summons his forces (assembling of men) and sets out. On the way he is observed and Njáll's sons are informed (intelligence).

At Bergþórshváll Bergþóra predicts that the evening meal is their last and Njáll sees bloody omens. When the attackers appear, Njáll advises retreat into the house and ignores Skarpheðinn's well-founded advice to the contrary (warning). Finally, during the attack Skarpheðinn finds opportunity to sneer both at his enemies and at the situation of the defenders (verbal heroics).

From these episodes we can abstract the following constituent elements of staging: the planning of a strategy, topographic detail (especially the route to be followed), the relaying of intelligence, inciting, assembling of men, reconnoissance, dreams and omens, warnings and the rejection of warnings, a description of the enemy or ambush by a companion while still at a distance, belittling of danger by the hero and refusal to withdraw, dismissal of companions, heroic dialogue, and courageous resistance at a great disadvantage. In constructing his climax the saga author makes a selection from these possible motifs; the story is therefore variable, but is always recognizable as a variation on a standard pattern. *Laxdœla saga* uses the pattern, for example, three times, prior to the slaying of Kjartan, Bolli, and Helgi Harðbeinsson. Without summarizing the story I will simply list the motifs used each time and from these motifs the reader can mentally reconstruct approximately what happens. Kjartan's death is staged with a dream, a warning and its rejection, topographic detail, inciting, the dismissal of help, and a defense with an inferior weapon. Bolli's death is staged with inciting, strategic planning, assembling of men, intelligence, topographic detail, the sighting of the enemy at a distance, and heroic dialogue. The death of Helgi Harðbeinsson is staged with strategy, inciting, assembling of men, topographic detail, intelligence, a dream, description of the enemy at a distance, and heroic dialogue.

In addition to these motifs there are three special techniques, which have been reserved for separate discussion.

Shift of Scene

The climax of a saga entails the collision of two parties. Since it

is inherent in the technique of staging that the narrative does not jump to the point of collision at once but prefaces it with particulars, the author is in the position of having to focus alternately on both parties. He must shift from one to the other once or several times in order to balance the picture. In some sagas this necessary shift of focus becomes an effective dramatic trick. The drama derives from the foreknowledge and certainty that a clash is impending and that the colliding forces are being held apart only temporarily. Each time the focus shifts from one force to the other, the reader is reminded of the polarity of the situation and the fact that the axis between the two poles is gradually being telescoped. It is a camera technique familiar to any moviegoer accustomed to westerns or suspense films, where the camera focuses alternately on two groups as yet invisible to one another but bent on a clash. The effect is ultimately one of retardation since the climax is being artificially suspended while the audience is left on tenterhooks. But the effect is doubly vivid and doubly tantalizing when the writer repeatedly diverts the reader's attention from one scene to another, in a sense breaking his attentiveness momentarily only to attach it more firmly by focusing it on another aspect of the same situation. It can be one of the more playful suspense gimmicks.

There is a nice exploitation of the device in *Heiðarvíga saga*. After the saturated account of Barði's preparations for revenge, he finally advances toward the scene of the showdown, the field Gullteigr, where his victims are mowing. Short of his goal he stops and spends a night at a nearby farm. The narrative has thus reached a temporary plateau and the author quickly shifts to the opposing camp. In the morning the sons of Þorgautr arise and in the midst of ominous dreams and portents ride out to mow their field. Though they are unaware of the attack, the air is already nervous and laden with apprehension and as they ride toward Gullteigr, we feel the gap being narrowed. Now the scene shifts again to Barði, who approaches Gullteigr from the other side with his men in single file in one another's footsteps so as to appear fewer than they are. One last time the scene shifts to the mowers, who, at first deceived by the trick, scoff at the notion

that Barði is coming, then realize too late that Barði has indeed come. At this moment the gap separating the antagonists has closed and the mêlée begins.

The final sequence in *Bjarnar saga* is rather similar. We follow the maneuvers and movements of Bjǫrn's enemies until they are deployed in their ambushes and a static moment sets in. Then the scene shifts to Bjǫrn's home, where he is visited by dreams and cautioned by his wife, again a mounting of tension before the actual confrontation. On the way to his pasture his companion catches sight of the ambushers, but Bjǫrn, like the mowers on Gullteigr, rejects the thought of danger. As the men approach and are described by Bjǫrn's companion, we again have a graphic picture of how the margin of safety is gradually whittled away.

In *Grettis saga* the technique is the same, though the approach is not by land but by sea. We learn that Grettir's wound has begun to fester, which he correctly interprets as black magic and as the prelude to a regular assault. He therefore takes special precautions to guard the approach to his island. The scene now shifts to the mainland and we learn that his foreboding is justified; Þorbjǫrn ǫngull gathers men for an expedition and sets sail. Again we watch the margin dwindle as the boat approaches Drangey through a storm which has been magically assuaged. Then the scene changes again. Grettir is on his deathbed unable to secure his own safety; he sends his thrall Glaumr to guard the only ascent up the cliff island, but Glaumr is remiss in his duty and falls asleep at his post. The scene reverts once more to Þorbjǫrn as he arrives at the approach and finds it unguarded. He scales the neglected ladder, which represents the last joint in the contracting situation, and carries off his attack on Grettir.

A final example comes from *Njáls saga*. The sequence opens when Flosi assembles his men and begins to advance on Bergþórshváll. The scene shifts. Two of Njáll's sons, Helgi and Grímr, learn of the attack and cut short a trip to return home. Meanwhile at Bergþórshváll the atmosphere begins to thicken as Bergþóra predicts the evening meal will be their last and foresees that her dark premonitions will be confirmed by the return

of Helgi and Grímr. The air of doom is further keyed up when Njáll sees bloody portents and becomes palpable when, as Bergþóra predicted, Helgi and Grímr unexpectedly return. We are told that no one went to bed that night. The focus now changes from this edgy scene and picks up Flosi once more. The parallelism of the change is signaled by a verbal echo. The first change was introduced with the words: "Nú er þar til máls at taka at Bergþórshváli . . ." The second change echoes the locution with the words: "Nú er þar til at taka, er Flosi er." Flosi arrives at Bergþórshváll, finds the inmates outside in a defensive posture, and sees no possibility of success if they remain there. The reader visualizes the double array facing one another and waiting for an opening. Njáll still has it in his power to win a tactical victory, but he is doomed and gives the fatal order to retreat into the house. With this the last protective barrier is abandoned, just as in the case of Grettir's ladder. The last obstacle to the clash is removed and makes way for the well-known fiery finale.

Necrology

It is frequently pointed out how chary the saga author is of direct characterization. He often devotes a sentence or two to describing his main characters at the beginning of the story or at the point where they are introduced, but this usually exhausts his loquacity. There is only one other juncture in the saga that sometimes draws a comment from him on a man's physique, personality, or prowess. This is at the time of the hero's death, which the author will on occasion solemnize with a few eulogistic words. Since this brief recharacterization is always associated with the hero's death, I call it a necrology.

It sometimes occurs just after the man's death. The author of *Reykdœla saga* uses it twice in this way. After Skúta's death the reader is told: "Skúta's death came as no surprise to many people. And yet it is only fair to say that he was wise and every bit a man, and many were no better than his equals though they were outstanding men. But he seemed overbearing to some." The

notice on Áskell earlier in the saga is briefer but less reserved: "People thought he was a great loss because he had been a great chieftain and a popular man." Glúmr's necrology makes some of the same points: "It is generally said that Glúmr was the greatest chieftain in Eyjafjǫrðr for twenty years, and for another twenty years no one was more than his equal. It is also said that Glúmr was the best warrior this country has seen." Gísli's career concludes with the words: "This was the end of Gísli's life and it is agreed that he was a very brave man though in some ways he was not destined to be lucky."

Sometimes the necrology is not retrospective but anticipates the hero's death. The best example comes from *Bjarnar saga*. As Bjǫrn is being hemmed in by his enemies, the author pauses for a moment to describe his appearance. "Now he prepared to go out to his horses. He had a large shears at his belt, his head covered with a hood, and a shield on his arm. He had Þorfinnr Þvarason's sword in his hand. Bjǫrn was a big man, handsome and freckled, with a red beard and curly hair, but with poor eyesight. He was a great warrior." The reader, who has learned that such a physical description is associated only with an entrance on the stage or a permanent exit from it, senses immediately that this impressive figure has not long to live. Another good example is provided by *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* just prior to Óláfr's death. "He was developing into a very promising man with a very handsome appearance, big and strong. He was eighteen years old at the time." Again the portrait is too explicit to leave any doubt about the drift of events. In *Fóstbrœðra saga* the author pauses in the middle of Þorgeirr's last combat in order to obituarize. "All who knew how bravely he defended himself praised him, and on the score of his defense and valor all agreed that they had not seen his equal. Þorgeirr struck hard and fast and with great strength and spirit and his courage was both shield and byrnie to him; people could not remember a fight to match the one put up by Þorgeirr."

These brief notices have only a mournful effect when they are used to conclude and round out the hero's life, but when they are placed crucially just before his death, they contribute to the

texture of doom and are another type of foreshadowing and moriturus device. Like the other staging techniques discussed above they signal an impending catastrophe and bind the reader's attention. In addition, they serve the purpose of eulogy and enlist the reader's sympathy and admiration for the hero who is about to pass into his apotheosis.

Posturing

Despite the intensification of plot during the conflict and the heightening of atmosphere during the staging of the climax, the saga author does not exhaust his arsenal entirely on these preliminaries. He retains one last device with which to enhance the climax and set it above the rest of the narrative. It is generally an act of laconic but supreme heroism on the part of the doomed man just before he is slain. Since it is usually a symbolical display of the spartanism that characterizes the hero, some flamboyant and memorable gesture of endurance, I have called the act posturing. It is heroic to be sure, a last flash of spiritual as well as martial grandeur, but it is often so improbably and theatrically heroic that the term posturing is not out of place. It is the point at which the author is most apt to depart from a realistic presentation in the interest of writing something indelible on the reader's imagination.

The posturing may be nothing more than a particularly vivid or picturesque last stand. Thus in *Egils saga* Þórólfr, hemmed in and beset by Harald's men, penetrates with a two-handed assault to within three feet of the royal standard, receives, already transfixed with swords and spears, the coup de grâce from the king himself, and falls forward dead at his feet. What engraves itself in the reader's mind is the picture of the hero within an eyelash of overcoming Harald Fairhair, the most unconquerable of the Norwegian monarchs and hardly less glorified in legend and less coddled in public imagination than the two Olafs. In *Bjarnar saga* the picture is more rustic without being less heroic. Bjǫrn, without a serviceable sword, surrounded by twenty-four assailants,

and badly wounded, sinks to his knees and continues to defend himself for some time with a pair of farm shears.

Sometimes the grand gesture entails the ignoring of a particularly horrid wound. In the duel which caps *Gunnlaugs saga* a lucky sword stroke severs Hrafn's foot or lower leg, but he remains standing oblivious to the wound, supports the abbreviated limb against a tree stump, and offers to continue the fight (a bit of intrepidity reminiscent of a scene in the prelude to *Grettis saga*). The scene at Stiklastaðir in *Fóstbrœðra saga* is equally drastic. Þormóðr is pierced with an arrow, but refuses to be ministered to, still manages to inflict a considerable wound on a man who mocks his wounded comrades, and dies on his feet. The *Hauksbók* version of the saga adds to this the grisly touch that Þormóðr tore out the arrow and commented on the well-fed appearance of the flesh clinging to the arrowhead, a last ghoulish testimonial to his royal master's solicitude. In *Droplaugarsona saga* Helgi Droplaugarson receives a blow which detaches the lower part of the face. After commenting that the blow is not likely to improve his appearance, he puts his beard between his teeth and clamps down tightly in order to hold up the pendulant flesh while he continues the fight. The motif recurs somewhat altered in *Njáls saga* when Skarpheðinn is found upright in the charred remains of Bergþórshváll with his beard between his teeth, perhaps to stifle any impulse he might have had to cry out.

A wound which must have seemed particularly hideous and therefore particularly well adapted to display the hero's spartanism was a stomach wound exposing the intestines. In *Laxdœla saga* Bolli is slain standing against a wall and holding his tunic tightly in order to contain the intestines. Gísli ties himself together similarly before making his final dash, and in *Ljósvetninga saga* it is noted that exposed intestines detracted nothing from the vigor of Þorkell hákr's defense.

In some cases the wounds are not scorned simply out of monumental fortitude but out of magnanimity as well. In these cases it is more a grand gesture of charity than of heroism; they are attributed to the peacemakers in the sagas. Ingimundr in *Vatnsdœla saga*, Koðrán in *Ljósvetninga saga*, and Áskell in *Reykdœla*

saga all receive lethal wounds but conceal them long enough to prevent the new outbreak of hostilities which the discovery of their wounds would inevitably precipitate. Their posturing is more spiritual than physical.

Two other examples show that the posturing can also have a pathetic effect. In the climax of *Laxdœla saga* Kjartan cannot bring himself to bear arms against his foster brother and casts aside his sword. Bolli then kills him, but immediately rues the deed and takes the head of the expiring Kjartan on his knees. The scene catches visually the tragic dilemma in which Bolli finds himself, the clash between two opposite and equally imperious demands, the obligations of honor on the one hand and the obligation of friendship on the other. The scene is repeated, less effectively and surely not independently, in *Vápnfirðinga saga*, where Bjarni kills Geitir, then takes the dying man on his knees.

Conclusion

These are some of the more prominent dramatic moments and techniques in the saga. They are designed to make the story tense and telling, to catch the reader's interest while the plot is being unraveled. They are often the same devices that we are accustomed to from modern suspense fiction, but it is startling to find them in such concentrated and articulate form in medieval prose, where there is nothing else remotely analogous. It remains then to account for the phenomenon. How did such a precocious narrative style develop in thirteenth-century Iceland?

CHAPTER THREE

The Heroic Legacy

> They [the sagas] show, at any rate, that the difficulties of reluctant subject-matter and of manifold deliverances of tradition were not able, in all cases, to get the better of that sense of form which was revealed in the older poetic designs. In their temper also, and in the quality of their heroic ideal, the Sagas are the inheritors of the older heroic poetry.
>
> *W. P. Ker*[4]

The idea that the family sagas carry on the heroic tradition of Germanic poetry is an old one, best expressed by Ker and echoed by a good many scholars since his day. The present chapter aims at reformulating the opinion in more general terms, but before undertaking a new perspective it will be useful to review what has been said already.

The first to record reflections on the subject was Guðbrandur Vigfússon in appendices to *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*. His comments are restricted to a series of parallels between saga passages and passages in the heroic poetry. He suggests, for example, that the scene in *Laxdœla saga* where Óspakr urges Bolli to abandon his passivity and join the fight against Kjartan derives from the Germanic lay behind the *Waltharius*, in which (ll. 1064–72) Gundhere harangues Hagano and urges him to join the fight

against Walter.[5] In the second volume of *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* he devotes an excursus to "The Traces of Old Heroic Poems to be Found in the Icelandic Family Tales."[6] Here he brings up the familiar analogy between *Grettis saga* and *Beowulf* and adds the supposition that Grettir's skill in swimming may be another reflection of the Beowulf story. He assumes that there were Germanic lays about Beowulf which influenced the author of *Grettis saga*. He further compares the beginning of *Vatnsdœla saga*, in which Þorsteinn finds himself at the mercy of the mortally wounded robber Jǫkull and agrees to bring the news of his death to his father and mother, with a story in Paulus Diaconus' *History of the Langobards*,[7] which is generally supposed to go back to a heroic lay. According to this story the Langobard prince Alboin kills Turismodus the son of Turisindus, king of the Gepidae, in battle. After this success his companions urge his father Audoin to recognize his valor by according him a place at his table, but Audoin points out the custom forbidding a son's being seated with his father before receiving arms from the king of another tribe. Alboin, unabashed, rides off to Turisindus, who chivalrously receives and arms his son's slayer despite his own grief. The analogy lies in the reckless visit of a young warrior to the father of the man he has slain.

Another analogy is drawn between Gunnarr's last stand in *Njáls saga* and the picture on the Franks casket showing a man defending himself in a house with bow and arrow. This man is labeled Egili by the runic inscription on the casket and has been identified as Egill, the brother of Wayland Smith, since scenes from Wayland's story are depicted on another surface of the casket. It is supposed that the picture records an otherwise unknown heroic story about Egill, which influenced the author of *Njáls saga*. With a classically circular argument Vigfússon then establishes a similarity between the duel in *Gunnlaugs saga* and Walter's duel with Hagano by the expedient of inventing a scene which he thinks was omitted from the version of the Walter legend preserved in the *Chronicon Novaliciense*.[8] Finally, Vigfússon offers the frequently noted analogy between *Laxdœla saga* and the story of Sigurðr. "Kjartan is the blameless Sigfred, Bolli is Gundhere, the anger of

Gudrun is exactly like that of Brunhild, the revenge and all the rest are parallel."[9] In addition, Vigfússon likens Guðrún's inciting of her sons to vengeance in the saga to the inciting of Hamðir and Sǫrli by her namesake in *Hamðismál*. He mentions a few other similarities, but the only one that is persuasive is the analogy of Skarpheðinn's verbal exchanges in *Njáls saga* (chaps. 120–24) with the fliting of heroic poetry. He gives no instances but was probably thinking of flitings in the *Poetic Edda* (*Helgakviða*, *Harbarðslióð*, *Lokasenna*), in *Beowulf* (Unferþ), in *Waltharius*, in the *Hildebrandslied*, and examples in Saxo.

Since Vigfússon's day the search for motif analogies has concentrated particularly on *Gísla saga* and *Laxdœla saga*. The best known study is a short article by Magnus Olsen.[10] Olsen drew attention to the direct allusion to Guðrún Gjúkadóttir in Gísli's twelfth *lausavísa*, where he comments that his sister Þórdís, who betrayed him to her husband Bǫrkr, is not made of the same stuff as Guðrún, who plotted her husband's death in revenge for her brothers. In addition Olsen found some verbal reminiscences of *Guðrúnarkviða II* in Gísli's stanzas and pointed out a number of similarities in situation between the saga and the story of Sigurðr, of which the most convincing are the swearing and subsequent breaking of blood brotherhood among Sigurðr and the Burgundian brothers in the *Edda* and among Gísli, Þorkell, Þorgrímr, and Vésteinn in the saga, the motive of jealousy common to both stories, and the role allotted to fate in both stories.[11] The problem has been taken up more recently by H. M. Heinrichs.[12] Heinrichs suggests that *Gísla saga*, specifically the dilemma in which Þórdís is caught between loyalty to her brother and loyalty to her husband, was modeled on the German modernization of the story of the Nibelungen, according to which Kriemhilt avenges her husband by killing her brothers, whereas in the older Norse version Guðrún is content to leave her husband unavenged. The conflict between conjugal love and family solidarity was, Heinrichs feels, indicative of the loosening of the family unit in Germanic society, a modern problem that was characteristic for the late stage of heroic literature as we have it in the *Nibelungenlied* and *Gísla saga*.

In the wake of Vigfússon's statement, the analogy between

Laxdœla saga and the heroic legend of Sigurðr has been brought up at regular intervals. Ker put the case as follows:

> Some of the Sagas are a reduction of heroic fable to the temper and conditions of modern prose. *Laxdœla* is an heroic epic, rewritten as a prose history under the conditions of actual life, and without the help of any supernatural "machinery." It is a modern prose version of the Niblung tragedy, with the personages chosen from the life of Iceland in the heroic age, and from the Icelandic family traditions . . . In Laxdœla, Kjartan stands for Sigurd; Gudrun daughter of Osvifr, wife of Bolli, is in the place of Brynhild wife of Gunnar, driving her husband to avenge her on her old lover.[13]

The similarity was commented on by Knut Liestøl and others and discussed in some detail by Johannes van Ham.[14] Van Ham is inclined to make a rather conservative estimate of the influence exercised by the Sigurðr story on *Laxdœla saga* and attributes the basic correspondence in situation to a real and factual correspondence rather than to literary influence. He admits the notion of influence only in the pivotal position and central importance which the author assigns to his female protagonist Guðrún in *Laxdœla saga*. The influence is therefore one of general attitude and not of detail; only the idea of a dominant heroine is borrowed from heroic legend. Among the smaller correspondences van Ham is impressed only by the scenes in which Guðrún and Brynhildr force revenge from their husbands on pain of desertion and the scenes in which they express their cold joy at the prospect that their rivals will not laugh when they learn of the death of their husbands. Guðrún's vengefulness in the saga he likens rather to the spirit of her namesake in the Atli legend. Otherwise van Ham emphasizes the differences in plot and characterization, Guðrún's relative conciliatoriness toward Bolli contrasted to Brynhildr's irreconcilable attitude toward Gunnarr, the sequel to Guðrún's life in the saga contrasted to Brynhildr's suicide, and above all Guðrún's stoicism contrasted to Brynhildr's passion and emotionalism.

The most recent and most complete treatment of the subject is by Arie C. Bouman.[15] Bouman sets up an elaborate twenty-

two-point series of analogies between the story of Brynhildr and *Laxdœla saga*, which is largely convincing. He concludes that the author of *Laxdœla saga* consciously appropriated the heroic fable as a narrative backbone for his somewhat incoherent traditions about Guðrún and Kjartan (p. 145). The contradictory conclusions reached by van Ham and Bouman reflect decreased confidence in the solidarity of saga tradition during the thirty years separating the publication of their books. Van Ham assumed that *Laxdœla saga* was based on a substantially historical tradition which left little leeway for literary distortion, while Bouman assumes that the tradition behind the saga was slight and open to almost limitless patterning according to literary prototypes. Bouman's assumption is more attractive and accords better with the very real similarities involved than does a theory which assumes a fortuitous historical correspondence.

A more general discussion is given by Knut Liestøl, who summarized the question of heroic prototypes and expanded the number of examples. "Gunnar of Hlíðarendi reminds us of Sigurd Fafnisbani and Skarphedin of Hogni. The quarrels between high-born women in the family sagas (Ljósv., Njála) are reminiscent of the quarrel between Brynhild and Gudrun."[16] The non-intervention of Bolli and Styrr in the attacks on Kjartan and Þórhalli (*Heiðarvíga saga*) is likened to Hagen's passivity in *Waltharius*. The scene in *Grettis saga* where Grettir and Þorgeirr Hávarsson row so strenuously that they break their oarlocks (chap. 50) is reminiscent of *Atlamál* 37, where the Gjúkungar do the same, as does Hagen in the *Nibelungenlied* (1564) and *Piðreks saga* (chap. 366).[17] Liestøl repeats the case for influence from the Sigurðr story on *Laxdœla saga*.

> Here we can clearly recognize the Sigurd poems in the Edda, especially Sigurðarkviða hin skamma. In both cases a noble-minded woman loves a valiant man, but has been beguiled into marrying a less valiant one, while the man she loves has married another woman. She urges on her husband to kill the man she loves. He is unwilling to do this, for they are friends. But the woman threatens him . . . In Laxd. Gudrun's words to Bolli, as she urges him to slay Kjartan, are "It is the end of everything between us two if you shirk this business" (ch. 48,

13). In the one story the man is accompanied by his own brothers, in the other by hers. In both she praises the deed, although in reality it appals her. The dialogue in Laxd. after the murder, is directly modeled on Sigurðarkviða hin skamma . . . It is significant that what pleases Brynhild most is to hear Gudrun Gjukadottir weep as she lies beside the slain Sigurd, and Gudrun Osvifsdottir says that what she likes best is the thought that Hrefna will not laugh as she goes to bed that night. The man's answer is substantially the same in both accounts, and in both he observes that she changes colour.[18]

The falcon dream in *Gunnlaugs saga*, Liestøl suggests, is based on Kriemhilt's dream in the *Nibelungenlied* (13), according to which she raised a beautiful falcon (Siegfried) who was killed by two eagles. In *Vǫlsunga saga* 26 Guðrún also dreamed of Sigurðr in the shape of a falcon, though the bloody portent is omitted.[19] Another model from *Vǫlsunga saga* is the scene (chap. 8) in which Signý refuses to leave her husband King Siggeirr when Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli take their revenge by burning him in his hall. There are three instances in the sagas where women submit or are prepared to submit to a fiery death in preference to an act of conjugal or familial disloyalty (*Njáls saga* 129, *Ljósvetninga saga* 10, *Harðar saga* 31). Finally, Liestøl points out a parallel between Egill's grief over the death of his son Bǫðvarr, which caused him to swell and split his clothes (*Egils saga* 78), and a stanza preserved in *Vǫlsunga saga* 31, which describes how Sigurðr's byrnie was rent with emotion after an interview with Brynhildr.

On the basis of these examples Liestøl concludes:

May we not say that, in part, the family sagas derived their soul from the heroic poetry? The rich fund of tradition provided a large stock of detailed material which was fashioned for generations, in peculiarly favourable circumstances, by men with scholarly and literary tastes; but without the heroic poetry the sagas would never have possessed the inner fire which shines through from below the surface in their penetrating soul-analysis, their dramatic tension, and their pathos. The heroic poetry is no inorganic component of the sagas. The sagaman, meditating on his subject in his day-dreams, was struck by certain resemblances to heroic motifs, and exploited his discovery . . . What the heroic poetry imparted to the family sagas was not so much any concrete loan of material as a kind of psychological sense and

intuition—a gift for delineating individuals in a life-like way, with a spiritual harmony and a consistent personality which we recognize at once against any historical background.[20]

Ulrike Sprenger again reviewed briefly the evidence for heroic influence on the sagas and added as further parallels the role of the woman as avenger and the flitings before battle, analogies already noted by G. Vigfússon.[21] In addition, she suggests that the rapid change of scenery in the sagas is a technique inherited from heroic poetry. "The early saga was undoubtedly more dependent on the heroic lay than is evident from the extant texts. It is not credible that the saga came into being with no model at all." Earlier in the volume (pp. 16–27) Sprenger devotes special attention to parallels in wording and motif between the *Edda* (especially the heroic poems) and the sagas. "This is not to claim a direct borrowing from the quoted passages, but is intended only to show the similarity of presentation, the 'Eddic perspective' of the teller of *Heiðarvíga saga*." It is not practicable to reproduce the texts here, but her parallels are discerning and demonstrate nicely the saga author's Eddic perspective. These pages are suggestive of ways in which the search for parallels might be lifted from the study of motifs to the stylistic plane.

When analogies have been drawn between heroic poetry and the sagas, it has almost always been a question of the family sagas, but a study by Wolfgang Fleischhauer tried to extend the demonstration of influence to the kings' sagas, specifically to Snorri's *Heimskringla*: "In the following investigation I would like to show that in the historical prose of Snorri Sturluson there are in certain episodes stylistic and compositional forms which are similar to those in the Germanic heroic lay."[22] Fleischhauer limits himself to one story in *Óláfs saga helga*, the story of Kálfr Arnason, one of the leaders in the revolt against King Olaf and one of the leaders in the Battle of Stiklastaðir. He shows very clearly how the story developed from little more than a name in early versions of Olaf's saga to a full-fledged story of conflict in Snorri's version. Kálfr is originally characterized as a traitor motivated by nothing more than ill will. In Snorri's reworking his action is motivated as revenge for the king's slaying of his

stepson and the whole conflict is presented in considerable detail.

Using Andreas Heusler's characterization of heroic poetry in *Altgermanische Dichtung*, Fleischhauer tries to explain Snorri's treatment of the story on the basis of heroic principles.[23] He points out that the plot is lean and summary and conceived as a succession of a few vivid scenes, not as deliberate and evenly spun narrative, novellalike and not with the proportions of a novel. A *hvǫt* (inciting) has been added, in line with *Hamðismál*, for example, and dialogue is used to mark the dramatic high points. The story is personalized in accord with the classical formulation that heroic poetry is personalized history. Instead of being cast as a political traitor, as in earlier versions, Kálfr is engaged in a purely personal conflict with the king. At the same time the story is objectivized, in line with the rule that heroic poetry never takes sides. Kálfr is raised from a rascal and a traitor to the antagonist in a problematical conflict; Snorri never condemns him. Finally, Fleischhauer points out the introduction of that fatalism peculiar to the heroic genre along with the tragic atmosphere which it induces. Fleischhauer's experiment is clear and successful; one feels in fact that he could have exploited his material for a fuller confirmation of the thesis. Heroic style is certainly a tangible factor in Snorri's procedure just as it is in the family sagas.[24]

Aside from Fleischhauer's fruitful but rather limited demonstration and the hints contained in Sprenger's discussion, it is apparent that the comparison of the saga with heroic poetry has not moved beyond the accumulation of motif analogies, except in the case of *Laxdœla saga*.[25] These analogies could probably be multiplied without difficulty, but without much additional profit. They are minor and incidental and provide a comparative basis which is less than partial. Ker, with his broad perspective, saw long ago, as did Liestøl, that there is a more fundamental similarity in style and spirit between heroic poetry and the family sagas. He regarded the family sagas as a kind of heroic afterglow, more prosaic in their realism, but also on the verge of becoming stylized in heroic rhetoric, in any case, a direct continuation of the heroic tradition. "Whether with good results or bad, is another

question, but there can be no doubt that the Sagas were composed under the direction of an heroic ideal, identical in most respects with that of the older heroic poetry."[26] So far as I know, no one has seriously questioned Ker's insight, nor has anyone tested it. As the above review of divergent opinion suggests, the substantiating evidence is restricted to a few similarities in motif in a few sagas and has nothing like the perspective from which Ker's essay was written. Yet the feeling persists among contemporary scholars that the relationship is very real.[27] The lack of an over-all comparison between the two genres may reasonably be attributed to the lack of a stylistic distillation of either one. We have had no general categories of form or content to use as a basis for comparison. This is a demanding and a long-range desideratum, but at least a start can be made with the tentative categories suggested in the last two chapters. To what extent are these compositional peculiarities of the family saga foreshadowed and perhaps inspired by heroic poetry?

A real difficulty in carrying out such a comparison lies in the late, fragmentary, and largely adulterated survival of Germanic heroic poetry. It is hard to know what heroic poetry really is and what it is we are to compare. The heroic material available to us is almost all subject to various qualifications that make it unsuitable for use. The *Hildebrandslied* and the Finnsburg piece are fragmentary. The *Nibelungenlied* and *Kudrun* are late, courtly, and epicized. *Beowulf* has heroic affinities, but the fable is atypical and its use is complicated by a host of other features: epic, Christian, and perhaps even Virgilian. The *Battle of Maldon* is postclassical and fragmentary. The Ingeld and Offa stories are irretrievable in full, despite the best efforts of the reconstructors. The heroic lays behind the stories in Jordanes, Paulus Diaconus, and Widukind of Corvey are strictly putative. The legends of the Skjoldungs are a shambles. Though few will subscribe to Friedrich Panzer's theory that the *Waltharius* is an *Urlied*, the Germanic story it reflects is probably classicized and obscured in so many details that speculation about the original form, which is not usefully illuminated by the *Waldere* fragments, is fruitless. Helga Reuschel drew heavily on Saxo to establish heroic patterns

in the *fornaldarsǫgur*, but Saxo is in turn influenced by the *fornaldarsǫgur* so that a separation of layers is a desperate undertaking. Saxo's accounts are further corrupted by literary and political biases. We are left with the heroic lays of the *Poetic Edda*, large parts of which are certainly older than the sagas as we have them and were presumably known to the saga authors. These poems are at least relatively complete and seem to represent the heroic lay in something like what we imagine to be its classical form. In any case, they represent the heroic lay as the saga authors knew it. It therefore seems wisest in comparing the sagas with the heroic tradition to restrict the discussion to the Eddic material rather than to adduce parallels from reconstructed or partial lays from the West Germanic area.

Structural Patterns

The story of Sigurðr in the *Codex Regius* begins with a brief prose insert entitled "Frá Dauða Sinfjǫtla" (On the Death of Sinfjǫtli). It tells part of the legend of the Frankish king Sigmundr and his son Sinfjǫtli. Sinfjǫtli wooed the same woman as did the brother of his stepmother, Borghildr, and because of the rivalry slew him. On his return Borghildr tried to turn him away, but Sigmundr offered composition for the slaying and she was obliged to accept it. However, at her brother's funeral feast she brought Sinfjǫtli a poisoned drinking horn. Twice Sigmundr, who was proof against poison, emptied the horn for him, but the third time Borghildr taunted them and Sigmundr bade his son drink. Sinfjǫtli died immediately. Sigmundr took his son's body and carried it a long way in his arms until he came to a fjord, across which a ferryman offered to transport him. But as soon as Sinfjǫtli was put aboard, the ferry was full and the ferryman, after telling Sigmundr to take the land route, vanished. Sigmundr remained for a long time in Denmark with Borghildr, then he went south to his Frankish realm. There he married the daughter of King Eylimi, Hjǫrdís, who bore him the son Sigurðr. Sigmundr fell in battle against the sons of Hundingr, after which Hjǫrdís married

Álfr the son of Hjálprekr, with whom Sigurðr was fostered. Sigmundr and all his sons surpassed all other men in strength, size, bravery, and accomplishments, but Sigurðr was the foremost and is called the mightiest leader by all men versed in ancient traditions.

It may have struck the reader already that this is a perfect miniature saga. It begins with an introduction of persons: Sigmundr, Borghildr, and Sinfjǫtli. There follows the engagement of a conflict between Sinfjǫtli and Borghildr's brother over a woman. It will be recalled that love rivalries are the most frequent source of conflict in the sagas. The conflict culminates violently in Sinfjǫtli's slaying of his rival. There follows a legal settlement between Sigmundr and Borghildr, but the truce is short-lived and gives way to Borghildr's urge for revenge. The vengeance is carried out with a formalism reminiscent of the saga techniques of symmetry and repetition; Borghildr offers the poisoned cup twice without success, then incites Sinfjǫtli and proffers it the third and fatal time. When Sigmundr carries his son off in his arms, it suggests the kind of pathos surrounding the death of Kjartan. The little summary of this story then concludes with information on Sigmundr's later life and descendants, in line with what we would expect from the aftermath section of a saga. In short, "Frá Dauða Sinfjǫtla" comprises the standard parts of the saga: introduction, conflict, climax, vengeance, and aftermath, complete with symmetrical structure and an air of pathos.

It might be noted that this passage taken as a whole serves as a prelude to the Sigurðr story which follows it in the *Codex Regius*. As such it has a double function. Not only does it introduce Sigurðr and account for his ancestry, but it also anticipates the fateful triangle theme which is the center of the story. Just as the Norwegian prelude to *Gísla saga* anticipates the love conflict which underlies the main body of the saga, so "Frá Dauða Sinfjǫtla" suggests the erotically motivated quarrel among in-laws which is the central theme in the legend of Sigurðr. Thus "Frá Dauða Sinfjǫtla" has the same relationship to future events as the anticipatory preludes found in certain sagas (*Egils saga*, *Gísla saga*, *Víga-Glúms saga*).

The Sigurðr legend proper, as it is preserved in the *Codex*

Regius, is complicated by contradictions and by its fragmentary state; a large lacuna in the manuscript must be filled by referring largely to the prose account in *Vǫlsunga saga*, written on the basis of the poetic account and while *Regius* was presumably still complete. In general the outline of the story is as follows. The collection of poems opens with a synthetic lay, in which Sigurðr converses with his uncle Grípir and learns from him the future course of his fortunes up to and including his death. There follows an account of his youth. We learn that he was fostered by Reginn, the heir to a treasure of which he has been deprived by his brother Fáfnir. Reginn's father, Hreiðmarr, once acquired the treasure as ransom from the captured gods Odin, Hœnir, and Loki after Loki had slain Otr, another of Reginn's brothers. In order to pay the ransom, Loki caught the dwarf Andvari and extracted the necessary gold from him. But Andvari put a curse on the gold (*Reginsmál* 5):[28]

Þat scal gull, er Gustr átti,
brœðrom tveim at bana verða,
oc ǫðlingom átta at rógi;
mun míns fiár mangi nióta.

Now shall the gold that Gust once had
Bring their death to brothers twain,
And evil be for heroes eight;
Joy of my wealth shall no man win.

Loki turns over the gold to Hreiðmarr and reiterates the curse (*Reginsmál* 6):

syni þínom verðra sæla scǫpuð,
þat verðr yccarr beggia bani.

But fortune thy sons shall find not there,
The bane of ye both it is.

Hreiðmarr's sons Fáfnir and Reginn demand a share in the ransom and when Hreiðmarr refuses, Fáfnir kills him and takes the treasure for himself, in turn refusing Reginn a share. Reginn

therefore urges his foster son Sigurðr to slay Fáfnir, who now guards the treasure in the shape of a serpent, and after first avenging his father's death, Sigurðr gives in to Reginn's urging and attacks Fáfnir. As he is dying, Fáfnir renews the curse on the gold, which, he says, will cause Sigurðr's death (*Fáfnismál* 9):

iþ gialla gull oc iþ glóðrauða fé,
þér verða þeir baugar at bana.

The sounding gold, the glow-red wealth,
And the rings thy bane shall be.

Reginn, who has withdrawn during the fray, emerges to congratulate Sigurðr, drink the serpent's blood, and ask Sigurðr to roast the heart for him. When Sigurðr tests the meat with his finger, he burns himself and puts the finger in his mouth. The taste of Fáfnir's blood immediately gives him the faculty of understanding the birds and he learns from two nuthatches on a nearby branch that Reginn intends to kill him for the sake of vengeance (Fáfnir was after all his brother) and for the sake of the gold. Sigurðr follows the hint and forestalls Reginn's intention by killing him and taking the gold himself.

There follows an interview with a maiden named Sigrdrífa, whom Sigurðr awakens from an enchanted sleep induced by Odin. Since much of the material in the interview is irrelevant and since the conclusion of the poem falls in the lacuna, both the function and the identity of the maiden remain obscure.

It has been conjectured by Heusler that in the lacuna itself there were three complete poems and part of a fourth. The so-called *Falkenlied* tells of Sigurðr's arrival at Heimir's house, his meeting with Heimir's foster daughter Brynhildr, and their betrothal. The postulated *Traumlied* tells of Gudrun's baleful dream (the two dreams in *Vǫlsunga saga* Heusler believed to be a case of reduplication) about her marriage to Sigurðr and his death. There remain three lays about Sigurðr, a *Longer Lay of Sigurðr* (lost entirely in the lacuna), an *Old Lay of Sigurðr* (*Brot*, half lost in and half preserved after the lacuna), and a *Short Lay of Sigurðr* (completely preserved). These lays tell how Sigurðr arrived at

Giúki's court, became the sworn brother of Giúki's sons, and married their sister Gudrun (according to Heusler's calculations only the *Longer Lay of Sigurðr* reckons with Sigurðr's previous betrothal to Brynhildr and gives as the cause of his forgetfulness a potion administered by Gudrun's mother Grímhildr). Sigurðr now helps his brother-in-law Gunnarr woo Brynhildr by taking his shape and leaping over the wall of flame which bars access to her. He spends three nights with her but places a sword between them, then reassumes his natural shape and lets Gunnarr celebrate his wedding with Brynhildr. Sometime later, while the two women are bathing, Brynhildr takes precedence over Gudrun because she claims to have a more eminent father and a more famous husband. Gudrun is angered to the point of revealing the deception practiced by Gunnarr and the fact that Brynhildr was won by Sigurðr in disguise. To prove it she shows a ring from Andvari's unlucky treasure, which Sigurðr had given Brynhildr at their betrothal and taken again on the occasion of the sham nuptials. Brynhildr is struck dumb with mortification and when she recovers her senses, she incites Gunnarr to kill Sigurðr, whom she loved and who betrayed her. Gunnarr and his brothers compass the deed, the exact circumstances of which are recorded in three different versions in a prose insert in the *Codex Regius*. On the news of Sigurðr's death Brynhildr gives vent to her grief and commits suicide, leaving orders that she be placed on a funeral pyre next to Sigurðr (thus the *Short Lay of Sigurðr*).

The outline of the story is simple, aside from a tangle in details caused by inconsistencies and the imperfect state of *Regius*. The story is foreshadowed by Grípir's prophecy. There follows the account of Sigurðr's youth and his acquisition of Andvari's treasure. At least one version of the story tells of his betrothal to Brynhildr, which is broken when he marries Gudrun. In any case he runs afoul of Brynhildr when he wins her for Gunnarr by deception. The deception is revealed in the quarrel between Brynhildr and Gudrun and the duped woman avenges herself by inciting her brothers against Sigurðr. It is a story not so much of conflict as of passion. Yet some of the fundamental elements of saga structure are present, the hero's background and youth, the

love rivalry (here between two women, in the sagas always between two men), the bloody climax, and the aftermath (Brynhildr's lament and death). What is missing is the idea of revenge; Sigurðr was after all alone at Giúki's court and had no natural avengers. But it is interesting that the later development of the story, as we have it in the *Nibelungenlied*, felt this lack and cast Gudrun/Kriemhilt in the role of avenger. The structure of the *Nibelungenlied* thus approaches saga structure even more closely.

There are also analogies in technique. There is the prophetic device in *Grípisspá*, the cursed treasure reminiscent of the curses in *Njáls saga* and *Grettis saga* and especially the cursed sword in *Laxdœla saga*, and Gudrun's baleful dream, which is in line with the ominous dream lore of the sagas. Again, the version of Sigurðr's slaying in *The Short Lay*, according to which he receives the mortal wound and is still able to slice his assailant in two, recalls the last posture of the incomparable saga hero who dies in splendid defiance. Finally, the whole atmosphere of repressed emotion and understated pathos is true to the spirit of the saga.

Andvari's gold does not exhaust its dire consequences with the slaying of Sigurðr. After his death Giúki's surviving sons Gunnarr and Hǫgni take the treasure, but the Hunnish king Atli, brother to Brynhildr and now husband to the widowed Gudrun, covets it as well. This leads to renewed conflict. The story is told in two poems, a short lay (*Atlakviða*) and a longer one (*Atlamál*). They tell very much the same story. Atli sends a messenger to the Giúkungar with an invitation to his court. Gudrun knows his intent and tries to warn her brothers by sending a ring with a wolf's hair (*Atlakviða*) or a message in runes (*Atlamál*). Gunnarr and Hǫgni grasp the situation (the warning is reinforced with foreboding dreams in *Atlamál*), but in heroic fashion they ignore the portents and set out to Hunland. At Atli's court they are seized and bound. Atli tries to extract from Gunnarr the location of the treasure, but Gunnarr asks to be given Hǫgni's heart before he will reveal it. He is first given the heart of the slave Hjalli, but he recognizes the fraud because of its unheroic quivering (the motif is obscured in *Atlamál*). When he is finally given Hǫgni's heart, he exults because the secret of the hidden treasure, known only

to the two brothers, is now secure. Gunnarr is then thrown into a snakepit and dies plucking a harp. Gudrun, who in *Atlamál* had joined the fight on her brothers' side, takes vengeance for their death by feeding Atli his own children and stabbing him in his bed. *Atlamál* is somewhat more than twice as long as *Atlakviða* and differs chiefly in dimensions, not in matter. It elaborates the figure of the messenger, adds a dream apparatus, gives a fuller version of the fight at Atli's court, demotivates the Hjalli episode, and expands the dialogue, especially between Gudrun and Atli at the end of the poem.

This fable comes much closer to the saga pattern than does the story of Sigurðr. The psychology of passion has no part in it. It is not the emotional confrontation of rival women, but the cold, tight-lipped confrontation of men who have a concrete issue to settle. This is the essential feature of the saga conflict. The story also adheres to the structural principles laid down for the saga. There is no need for exposition since the persons of the story are already known from the story of Sigurðr. The conflict is based on competition for property, the second most frequent ground for contention in the sagas. The climax is bloody and brought off in heroic style. And the death of the heroes is avenged by a woman with the vengeful dimension of a Guðrún or Þorgerðr in *Laxdœla saga*, a Þuríðr in *Heiðarvíga saga*, an Auðr in *Gísla saga*, or a Bjargey in *Hávarðar saga*. The structure is complete down to an aftermath, which is given in a prose insert entitled "Frá Guðrúno." The rhetoric is equally sagalike and the analogies are so extensive that they are best reserved for a separate discussion.

The last heroic fable in the *Codex Regius* is the *Lay of Hamðir* (*Hamðismál*). From the prose passage "Frá Guðrúno" we learn that after her murder of Atli Gudrun tried to drown herself, but floated instead to the realm of King Jónakr. She became his wife and had two sons by him, Sǫrli and Hamðir (the prose names Gudrun's stepson Erpr as well, probably a lapse). In the meantime she married her daughter by Sigurðr, Svanhildr, to King Jǫrmunrekkr (Ermanaric), but the marriage was ill-fated and Ermanaric had his bride trodden to death by horses for an illicit affair instigated between her and his son Randvér by the evil

counselor Bicci. This is the point at which the poetry sets in. *Hamðismál* is preceded by another poem called *Guðrúnarhvǫt* (*The Inciting of Gudrun*), which gives eight stanzas of dialogue between Gudrun and her sons, partly echoing what is in *Hamðismál*, and thirteen stanzas of a retrospective lament. *Hamðismál* itself begins with an elegiac stanza and continues with nine stanzas of dialogue between mother and sons, in which Gudrun eggs them on to avenge their half sister. They remind her of the death of her other sons (by Atli) and go off with forebodings that their own fates will not be dissimilar. On the way Hamðir and Sǫrli kill their brother Erpr for reasons which are not made clear by the text and which are not understood. Then they approach Ermanaric's hall, which is filled with the clamor of feasting. Ermanaric ridicules such an undermanned attack, but he loses both feet and hands before his followers overcome the assailants. Hamðir and Sǫrli regret now the death of Erpr, who would have severed Ermanaric's head, but they resign themselves fatalistically and one falls under the gable while the other falls at the back of the hall.

The conflict in the story is initially motivated by love and jealousy. As in the story of Sigurðr, this leads to murder, and, as in at least two other Eddic fables, the main action stems from a desire for revenge. But unlike the story of Sigurðr with its complicated psychological prelude and the story of Atli with its distinctive acts, *Hamðismál* compresses all phases, conflict, climax, and revenge, into one rapid sequence of thirty stanzas. *Hamðismál* is the prime example of lapidary heroic style.

A heroic fable not preserved in *Codex Regius* but in the same style and equally impressive is *Hlǫðskviða* or *The Battle of the Goths and the Huns*. It is transmitted in *Heiðreks saga* in thirty-four complete or incomplete stanzas with connecting prose passages and tells the story of two half brothers and sons of the Gothic king Heiðrekr, Hlǫðr born and raised among the Huns, and Angantýr born and raised with his father among the Goths. On the news of Heiðrekr's death Hlǫðr comes to claim half of his father's inheritance from Angantýr, but he is offered only a third and is insulted by Angantýr's foster father Gizurr to boot. Hlǫðr retires for a winter and enlists Hunnish troops with the aid of the Hunnish

king Humbli. In the spring he marches with a vast army, defeats a Gothic vanguard under the command of his sister Hervǫr, then confronts Angantýr and the main Gothic force. When the battle has raged for eight days, during which the Goths have received a continuous flow of reinforcements, the Hunnish lines finally buckle and Angantýr kills his brother.

This is, like *Atlakviða*, the story of a conflict over rights and property. It is partly instigated by the rascally intervention of Gizurr, a role familiar from the sagas, and it is made tragic by the fact that the conflict is between brothers, just as *Laxdœla saga* takes its pathos from a conflict between foster brothers. As in *Hamðismál* the aspects of conflict, climax, and revenge are all telescoped and focused in one vivid scene. The tribal war of eight days' duration is to be sure grander and more epic than the skirmish in Ermanaric's hall, but it projects the same monumental, and slightly statuesque, moment of pride.

The object of reviewing these heroic plots is, for the moment at least, not to show any extended degree of congruity or elaborate set of analogies to the sagas. It is intended only to suggest a quite simple but fundamental formal similarity. We have seen that the saga reduced to simplest terms is the story of a conflict. This is clearly also the dominant feature of our heroic plots. The technique in both genres is to simplify and polarize the action so as to isolate and study the strain between two individuals or groups. Twice the issue is love, twice property, once honor, but each time the central theme is a personal collision and a testing of wills, a clashing of mettles.

We saw in the sagas that the resolution of the conflict was almost invariably violent and bloody. This is true without exception of the heroic plots. We saw in the sagas that the structure is built around a dramatic peak, which focuses and proportions the rest of the story and is itself set in relief by special rhetorical devices. The heroic poems of the *Edda* are not built *around* a dramatic peak, they give *only* the dramatic peak of a story, the details and background of which are presupposed knowledge. But fundamental to both saga and heroic art is the ability to seize and visualize the high point. In both, the essential moment is the

climactic moment. We have seen that the sagas are preoccupied with the theme of revenge. This is even truer of the heroic poem. Borghildr avenges her brother. Brynhildr avenges her deception at the hands of Sigurðr. Guðrún avenges her brothers against Atli. Hamðir and Sǫrli avenge their sister and Hlǫðr tries unsuccessfully to avenge himself against Angantýr. It is therefore a reasonable contention that heroic poem and saga have a basic structural identity. They both adhere to a heroic literary pattern, from which they derive the same standard of values and the same sense of dramatic pitch. It is plausible to suppose that this structure and this sense are a legacy from the older heroic poetry to the younger prose saga.

Rhetorical Patterns

A heroic lay does not tell a story but gives a vivid projection of a few scenes from it. It does not have the epic breadth of the saga and does not set out the detail with such circumstance. In fact, most of the story is taken for granted and is provided by the reader's knowledge rather than by the poet. In view of this divergence of genre there can be only an approximate structural similarity between saga and heroic lay, though the similarities become greater when the heroic lay is expanded into the heroic legend or story by adding all the narrative details it presupposes. This is what happens to some extent in the *Codex Regius*, because of the prose inserts, and to a larger extent in the prose resolution in *Vǫlsunga saga*. But the lays are epic and comparable to the sagas only when they appear as a cycle or as a prose paraphrase. The similarity is in the fable and not in the form.

The difference in scope also inhibits a rhetorical comparison of the two genres on the basis of the categories set up in the last chapter. Since the elaborate form of the *conflict* section in the saga has no equivalent in the heroic lay, which launches directly into the climactic action, all those rhetorical features of the saga conflict, *scaffolding*, *escalation*, *retardation*, and *symmetry*, find no model in earlier heroic literature. These are devices which, with

their deliberate and sometimes complicated unfolding of plot, are the characteristic achievement of the broader prose epic. They are genuine innovations in Norse narrative style.

The same is not true of those rhetorical features subsumed under the general heading *staging*. Since these apply only to the climactic phase of a saga, that is, that phase which corresponds rather well to the scope of the heroic lay, there is no difficulty in making a comparison. The comparison turns out to be rewarding and shows that almost every staging device in the saga has its prototype in the lays of the *Edda*. To begin with, let us review once more the substance of the best and, by common consent, most classical of the heroic lays in the *Codex Regius*, the *Atlakviða*.

Atli sends a messenger to lure Gunnarr and Hǫgni to his court (stanza 1). The air is heavy with apprehension as they sit in the hall and listen as the messenger breaks the silence with hollow promises of rich gifts if they visit Atli (2–5). Gunnarr turns to Hǫgni and catalogues their own wealth, which far exceeds whatever they might receive from the Huns. Hǫgni responds by pondering aloud on what their sister could have meant by sending a ring braided with wolf's hair (6–8). Relatives and counselors alike advise against the invitation, but Gunnarr suddenly announces his decision to go, in the form of a baleful prediction about the fate of his realm should he not return (9–11). The Burgundians accompany Gunnarr and Hǫgni on their way weeping (12). Their steeds thunder over the mountains, woods, and plains to Hunland, where they espy Atli's high hall guarded by his watchful sentinels, who are ready to warn of their arrival (13–14). As they enter the hall, Gudrun warns them that they are betrayed, but their response is cool and ironical (15–17). The Huns fetter Gunnarr and overcome Hǫgni after he has put seven of them to the sword and tossed an eighth into the fire (18–19). When they try to extract the location of the hidden Burgundian gold, Gunnarr asks first to have Hǫgni's heart placed in his hand. He is offered instead the heart of the cowardly Hjalli, but he sees the ruse. Then Hǫgni is seized and laughs aloud as he is cut to the quick. Gunnarr recognizes his heroic heart and exults in the certainty that he alone guards the secret of the gold, which will now never

be revealed to the Huns (20–27). Gunnarr is put in the snakepit and dies striking a harp (28–31). Atli returns to feast in his hall and is received by Gudrun with a false grace, only to be told that he has feasted on his own sons (32–38). To complete her grim vengeance Gudrun stabs Atli in his bed and burns him and his entire following in the hall (39–43).

Many of the devices here should be familiar. The use of the deceitful messenger to bring the hostile parties together (his villainy is even further emphasized in Atlamál) is reminiscent of the rascal's provocative offices in the sagas (compare Gizurr Grýtingaliði's function in *Hlǫðskviða*). All the foreshadowing techniques are deployed, the brooding atmosphere of foreboding at the Burgundian court, Gudrun's warning token twisted in wolf's hair, the advice of friends and relatives, the baleful prediction, the psychic farewell when the Burgundians weep at the leave-taking. The attention to the route followed by the horses to Hunland suggests the topographic detail used by the sagas to frame fateful trips. The sighting of Atli's hall at a distance and the mention of his watchmen visualize the final approach, as in the sagas. Gudrun's announcement of their betrayal and their cool response correspond to the final warning of a saga hero and his disdain. The overcoming of Hǫgni only after he has taken eight lives is typical of the last stand taken by the saga hero; even the grim-picturesque touch of pitching one assailant into the fire anticipates the theatrical callousness cultivated by the sagas. Again, Hǫgni's laugh under the knife and Gunnarr's stoic plucking of a harp are analogous to the posturing in the sagas. To these stereotyped touches in *Atlakviða* the longer version in *Atlamál* adds a quantity of ominous dreams (stanzas 14–28) and a heroic dialogue just prior to the engagement outside of Atli's hall (42–44), two conceits which also reappear as the saga author's stock in trade.

Chapter Two isolated the following features of *staging*: intelligence, inciting, assembling, reconnoissance, strategy, omens, warnings, attention to topographic detail, sighting of the enemy, flouting of danger, dismissal of aid, heroic dialogue, and a prodigious defense at hopeless odds. Most of these phases have

equivalents in the heroic material, but not all of them. Intelligence (or spying), for example, is too mean and trivial a detail to fit comfortably into the grand rapture of the heroic lay. The same applies to reconnoissance and strategy. The heroic fables move in a royal orb where there is a certain omniscience that scorns procedural trivia and the exact sorting of information, matters which the earth-bound saga takes a delight in expanding. But the other phases of saga staging pertain more to the spirit and are a part of the heroic tradition. That inciting, the familiar *hvǫt*, belongs to this tradition was already noted by G. Vigfússon. His example was the inciting of Hamðir and Sǫrli in *Guðrúnarhvǫt* and *Hamðismál*, to which might be added Borghildr's urging of Sinfjǫtli and Brynhildr's inciting of Gunnarr. The assembling of men before the climax normally plays no part in the heroic lay, partly because it is, like the tactical matters, too unexalted a detail, and partly because the heroic lay deals in such small numbers. The only exception is *Hlǫðskviða*, which makes express mention of the gathering of forces on both sides, the gathering of Hunnish forces in stanza 16 and of Gothic forces in the connecting prose.[29]

The rich use of foreshadowing in the sagas is a particularly transparent loan from heroic usage. Though the variety of *Atlakviða* and the multiplication of portents in *Atlamál* is not matched elsewhere, the technique is constant. The story of Sigurðr is forecast by Grípir and grows under the shadow of the curse on Andvari's gold, while Sigurðr's personal fate is foreshadowed by the dream in the lost *Traumlied*. In *Hamðismál* the brothers set off with a prediction of doom (stanza 10):

ocr scaltu oc, Guðrún, gráta báða,
er hér sitiom feigir á mǫrom, fiarri munom deyia.

Now, Guthrun, as well for us both shalt thou weep,
We sit doomed on our steeds, and far hence shall we die.

The description of the route taken by the aggressors before the final clash is used in the sagas to visualize the climactic scene. It gives weight to the central episode by depicting the approach

to it and gradually reducing the time and distance separating the reader from the climax. Within their narrower confines the heroic lays make use of the same device. Thus in *Atlakviða* the Burgundians approach the Huns to the beat of their horses' hooves resounding on the mountains, woods, and plains, while in *Atlamál* they are pictured on a sea voyage, straining at the oars until the oarlocks break. The equivalent passage in *Hlǫðskviða*, in which the Huns ride to join battle with the Goths, is rather close to *Atlakviða:* "When the army had assembled, they rode through the forest called Myrkviðr, which divides the lands of the Goths and Huns. And when they emerged from the forest, there were large settlements and level plains, and on the plain stood a fair hall."[30] The same attention to the route recurs in *Hamðismál*, where the brothers are also pictured on horseback crossing the open spaces (stanza 11):

Gengo ór garði, gorvir at eiscra,
liðo þá yfir, ungir, úrig fiǫll,
mǫrom húnlenzcom, morðz at hefna.

From the courtyard they fared, and fury they breathed;
The youths swiftly went o'er the mountain wet,
On their Hunnish steeds, death's vengeance to have.

These trips usually end with the sighting of the goal, just as in the sagas the threatened man regularly perceives his enemy at a distance and is given time to ponder the consequences. There is no room for pondering aloud in the heroic lays, but the peril of the situation is implicit in their suggestive brevity. Even if the heroes do not pause to reflect on what pass their journey has brought them to, the less heroic reader *does* pause to be startled at their recklessness, and the poet has achieved his effect. Their recklessness is further emphasized by the forbidding aspect of what they perceive. *Atlakviða* concentrates on details of military preparedness, warriors, shields, and spears (stanza 14):

Land sá þeir Atla oc liðsciálfar diúpar,
Bicca greppa standa á borg inni há,
sal um suðrþióðom, sleginn sessmeiðom,

bundnom rǫndom, bleicom sciǫldom,
dafar, darraða;

Then they saw Atli's halls, and his watch-towers high,
On the walls so lofty stood the warriors of Buthli;
The hall of the southrons with seats was surrounded,
With targets bound and shields full bright.

Atlamál is without these details but adds an ominous creaking of the hinges when Hǫgni thrusts open the gates (stanza 38):

Litlo oc lengra —loc mun ec þess segia—
bœ sá þeir standa, er Buðli átti;
hátt hricþo grindr, er Hǫgni kníði.

Not long was it after —the end must I tell—
That the home they beheld that Buthli once had;
Loud the gates resounded when Hogni smote them;

More ominous by far is the sight that meets Hamðir and Sǫrli at their destination (stanza 17):

Fram lágo brautir, fundo vástígo
oc systor son sáran á meiði,
vargtré vindkǫld vestan bœiar;

On their road they fared and an ill way they found,
And their sister's son on a tree they saw,
On the wind-cold wolf-tree west of the hall . . .

This appears to be a reference to the hanging of Svanhildr's lover Randvér, not an encouraging portent for her avengers, especially since Ermanaric promptly greets their presence with threats of similar treatment. *Atlakviða* (stanza 14) and *Hamðismál* (stanzas 18–19) further heighten the atmosphere of hostility with the mention of sentinels:

enn þar dracc Atli
vín í valhǫllo; verðir sáto úti,
at varða þeim Gunnari, ef þeir hér vitia qvœmi
með geiri giallanda at vekia gram hildi.

Mid weapons and lances did Atli his wine
In the war-hall drink, without were his watchmen,
For Gunnar they waited, if forth he should go,
With their ringing spears they would fight with the ruler.

Glaumr var í hǫllo, halir ǫlreifir,
oc til Gota ecci gerðot heyra,
áðr halr hugfullr í horn um þaut.

Segia fóro Iǫrmunrecci,
at sénir vǫro seggir und hiálmom:

In the hall was din, the men drank deep,
And the horses' hoofs could no one hear,
Till the warrior hardy sounded his horn.

Men came and the tale to Jormunrek told
How warriors helmed without they beheld:

These sentinel passages are paralleled in *Hlǫðskviða* by the Gothic vanguard under Hervǫr.

The saga heroes invariably reject any suggestion of hostility and proceed on their way with the obliviousness inspired of perfect courage. Part of this gesture of unconcern is the dismissal of unimplicated companions in order to face the danger alone; the greatest hero is the most solitary hero. This act of dismissal is not precedented in the heroic lays because their skeletal cast allows no room for superfluous companionship. But the sagas may well have learned the notion that heroic grandeur is solitary grandeur from the heroic lay. Sigurðr dies alone among his enemies, Gunnarr and Hǫgni venture alone among the Huns in *Atlakviða* and Hamðir and Sǫrli are alone in the attack on Ermanaric's hall. Though there are no cases of dismissed companions in order to underscore the hero's isolation, there is a curious episode in *Hamðismál* which may be a reflexion of the same heroic psychology. On the way to Ermanaric's court Hamðir and Sǫrli kill their half brother Erpr for no visible reason, but on the assumption that he will be of no help to them. It turns out that they are

able to sever Ermanaric's hands and feet and that Erpr would have finished the job by severing the head, had he been alive. Though the motif remains clouded, it is clearly a case of the wanton elimination of help out of heroic recklessness and therefore in line with the dismissal scenes in the sagas. This is not yet an adequate explanation of the episode, but it does explain its psychological function in the poem.

Part of the ritual acted out by the doomed hero in the sagas is a dialogue in which he gives verbal shape to his mettle. Gísli, Skarpheðinn, Helgi Droplaugarson, Bolli Þorleiksson, Bjǫrn hítdœlakappi, Helgi Harðbeinsson, and Þorkell hákr are all practitioners of the dying quip. Their words are equivalent to a moral victory. This is also the sense of Gunnarr's loud exultation in *Atlakviða* over the gold that the Huns will never see. He lies in fetters and still carries the day against his apparently triumphant enemy, just as the verbal displays in the sagas serve to rob the victor of any sense of victory. The situation is even more sagalike in *Atlamál*, where Gunnarr and Hǫgni are deliberately provocative just before battle is joined, again in order to display their own indifference to their fate and to gall their enemy (stanzas 42–43):

Flycþuz þeir Atli oc fóro í brynior,
gengo svá gorvir, at var garðr milli;
urpuz á orðom allir senn reiðir:
'Fyrr várom fullráða at firra yðr lífi.'

'Á sér þat illa, ef hǫfðot áðr ráðit;
enn eroð óbúnir, oc hǫfom einn feldan,
lamðan til heliar, liðs var sá yðvars.'

Atli summoned his men, in mail-coats they hastened,
All ready they came, and between was the courtyard.
Then came they to words, and full watchful they were:
"Long since did we plan how soon we might slay you."

Hogni spake:
"Little it matters if long ye have planned it;
For unarmed do ye wait, and one have we felled,
We smote him to hell, of your host was he once."

The tone is the same in *Hamðismál* (stanzas 20–24):

Hló þá Iǫrmunreccr, ...
'Sæll ec þá þœttomc, ef ec siá knætta
Hamði oc Sǫrla í hǫllo minni;
buri mynda ec þá binda með boga strengiom,
góð born Giúca, festa á gálga.'

Hitt qvað þá Hamðir, inn hugomstóri:
'Æstir, Iǫrmunreccr, occarrar qvámo,
bræðra sammœðra, innan borgar þinnar.
Fœtr sér þú þína, hǫndom sér þú þínom,
Iǫrmunreccr, orpit í eld heitan.'

Then Jormunrek laughed, ...
"Happy, methinks, were I to behold
Hamther and Sorli here in my hall;
The men would I bind with strings of bows,
And Gjuki's heirs on the gallows hang."

Then did Hamther speak forth, the haughty of heart:
"Thou soughtest, Jormunrek, us to see,
Sons of one mother seeking thy dwelling;
Thou seest thy hands, thy feet thou beholdest,
Jormunrek, flung in the fire so hot."

The tenor of these dialogues is always the same, to undermine the superiority of the victor and re-establish the prestige of the loser, to make clear that the victor emerges as such only because of a numerical advantage, and narrowly at that, while the loser, even in defeat, enjoys a permanent and intrinsic edge in spirit, which is more real and lasting than the momentary advantage of force.

The same principle governs the prodigious last stands at impossible odds, which are a feature of saga and lay alike. In *The Short Lay of Sigurðr* the hero, even though he is stabbed in his sleep, responds quickly enough to cut his murderer in two with

one stroke. In *Atlakviða* Hǫgni slays eight before he is subdued in Atli's hall and in *Atlamál* the brothers, with the aid of Gudrun, fight all day and into the next, until the field is awash with blood. Their dying postures have already been noted. In *Hamðismál* the heroes all but accomplish their revenge in the face of a thousand Goths (stanza 22):

mega tveir menn einir tío hundruð Gotna
binda eða beria í borg inni há?

By two heroes alone shall ten hundred of Goths
Be bound or be slain in the lofty-walled burg?

No more likely source for the tradition of prodigious last stands in the sagas can be found than in these Eddic passages.

It is apparent that the heroic lay is able to account for a good number of the staging devices which play such a prominent part in the climax of the saga. The rhetoric of the saga is therefore, in this respect at least, a continuation of the rhetoric in the heroic lay and it becomes clear why this central and climactic part of the saga has such a heroic air about it. It is not because there are occasional correspondences in motif between saga and lay, but because the style and framework of the lay has been borrowed and adapted for use in the sagas. There are to be sure gaping differences, especially in the application and quality of detail. "The Sagas differ from all other 'heroic' literatures in the larger proportion that they give to the meannesses of reality."[31] But the tradition and some of the habits are the same.

Summary

The comparison of heroic poetry with the sagas has usually been on the basis of a somewhat random selection of similarities in motif (Vigfússon, Liestøl), or it has been restricted to an evident but intuitive statement of spiritual affinity (Ker), or it has concentrated on heroic traces in a single saga such as *Gísla saga* (M. Olsen), *Laxdœla saga* (van Ham, Bouman), *Heiðarvíga saga*

(Sprenger), or *Heimskringla* (Fleischhauer). These similarities are largely uncontroversial, but they show only an occasional and to some extent fortuitous continuity.

By extending the comparison to less specific structural and rhetorical features common to most of the family sagas I have tried to generalize on the nature of the continuity. There are some very fundamental structural and thematic correspondences which link the saga with the lay. Both conceive of the plot as a personal conflict, animated by the same causes, love or covetousness, built around a bloody climax, and justified by the demands of vengeance. Both reduce the plot to a conflict, both reduce the cast to the two conflicting parties, and both reduce the drama to a single carefully construed climax. Both are cast in the same fatalistic atmosphere through the use of the same foreshadowing devices, dreams, omens, warnings, predictions. Both stage the all-important climax with the same devices: inciting, topographic detail, graphic approach, flouting of danger, acid dialogue, courageous last stand, and heroic posturing. This structural and rhetorical evidence is neither surprising nor overwhelmingly detailed, but it is sufficient to justify Ker's derivation of the saga from the heroic tradition.

In view of the evidence it seems more fruitful to regard the literary form of the saga as an adaptation of heroic models rather than as history, as an older generation held, or as a novelistic innovation, as a newer generation believes. The narrative material may be historical, or at least traditional, and some of the techniques are unprecedented, but the author's mode of thought and many of his stylistic habits are certainly heroic. His interpretation of the action as conflict and climax and his polarization of the conflict are a clear legacy from the heroic pattern. A recognition of this literary line clarifies some of the saga's uniqueness and some of the mystery surrounding the sudden appearance of such a fully contrived form. The saga authors did not need to create an entirely new literary type, but were able to elaborate on a traditional literary mold, the heroic mold.

PART II: *Analysis*

Part II provides the material on which the generalizations in Part I were based. Each saga is dealt with separately under three headings: synopsis, outline, and comment. The detailed exposition in this section is intended to convey as clearly as possible the content of each saga and to show how it relates to the general theory.

The synopses are self-contained and are designed for readers who are not necessarily familiar with the sagas; they are as brief as possible without excluding anything essential to the plot.

The outlines apply the structural pattern isolated in Chapter One to the individual sagas and test the thesis proposed there. They are likely to be comprehensible only to readers already familiar with the plots or when used in conjunction with the synopses. The system of indentation is intended to bring out the relative importance of the episodes in each subsection; the more important and dramatic moments are at the margin and the lesser details of the action are indented according to their narrative weight. Since it is typical of saga action that it begins with minor incidents and gradually builds up momentum, the outline of a given section will frequently begin far in on the page and gradually work out to the margin.

The comments are designed to counterbalance the somewhat doctrinaire impression left by the outlines; they concentrate on what is peculiar to a given saga and sets it apart. In other words, the comments try to make at least token amends for whatever violence has been done to the individuality of the sagas in the course of the theoretical discussion.

Egils saga

Synopsis

The saga opens at the time of Harald Fairhair's conquest of Norway and describes the part played by Egill's ancestor Kveld-Úlfr and his sons Grímr and Þórólfr in this upheaval. As Harald advances, King Auðbjǫrn of Firðafylki prepares to organize the resistance and summons Kveld-Úlfr to arms, but Kveld-Úlfr foresees the outcome and remains at home. King Harald in turn sends for Kveld-Úlfr, but both he and his son Grímr refuse to obey the summons. Their friend Qlvir hnúfa placates the king by offering to persuade Kveld-Úlfr, but he too is unsuccessful and must be content with Kveld-Úlfr's prediction that his second son Þórólfr will prove more amenable when he returns from a viking expedition. Þórólfr fulfills this expectation and on his return is eager to take service with the king despite his father's warning that no good will come of it.

Þórólfr joins the king's service at the same time as a certain Bárðr Brynjólfsson. Bárðr's grandfather had in his old age taken a concubine named Hildiríðr and had two sons by her. On his death his son Brynjólfr excludes Hildiríðr and her sons from the inheritance because of her morganatic marriage and on Brynjólfr's death Bárðr continues the same policy. At Harald's court Þórólfr and Bárðr become close companions and when it is apparent that Bárðr will succumb to wounds received in the Battle of Hafrs-fjǫrðr, he makes Þórólfr his heir. Þórólfr marries his widow Sigríðr and takes over all of Bárðr's property and titles, including

a royal commission to collect tribute from the Lapps. The sons of Hildiríðr now renew their claim on the inheritance, but Þórólfr refuses on the ground that the claim had already been rejected by Brynjólfr and Bárðr.

Þórólfr is now a powerful man. He collects the Lapp tax, enriches himself at the expense of the marauding Kylfingar, and becomes increasingly prosperous. When King Harald visits him in Hálogoland, Þórólfr receives him in a grand manner and prepares a sumptuous feast for him. The king takes offense at the display of magnificence, but he is placated when Þórólfr gives him a ship as a parting gift and explains that the splendor was only intended to enhance the king's prestige. However, his doubts are rekindled when the sons of Hildiríðr in turn entertain the king and accuse Þórólfr of plotting his death. Harald is therefore angry and taciturn when Þórólfr's first Lapp tax is delivered, but he is reconciled once more, this time by the size of the tribute and the good words of Þórólfr's friends. Þórólfr undertakes a second expedition to Finnmark, collects the Lapp tax as before, and wins private wealth by defeating the Kirjálar. The sons of Hildiríðr continue their slander by claiming that he held back part of the previous Lapp tax, but Þórólfr delivers the second tax and justifies himself before the king. Harald proposes that he remain at court where there is less latitude for suspicion, but Þórólfr is unwilling to part with his followers and leaves for home. The king therefore revokes his fief and turns it over to the sons of Hildiríðr, to whose lot it now falls to collect the Lapp tax. They do so while Þórólfr is on another private raiding expedition among the Kirjálar and when the king criticizes the size and quality of their revenue, they claim that they were hindered in their mission by Þórólfr. As proof they signal a ship loaded with Lapp goods (taken from the Kirjálar), which Þórólfr had sent to England to trade. Two of the king's agents intercept and confiscate the ship, but Þórólfr absorbs the loss without reducing his style of living and retaliates by seizing two of the king's vessels and burning the farm of his agents. He visits his father, who warns him against competing with the king and anticipates that this will be their last meeting. The king's agents now impor-

tune him for permission to take vengeance on Þórólfr, which he finally grants while predicting that they will be no match for him. The agents are, as it turns out, delayed by adverse winds and King Harald, anticipating them with an overland short cut, attacks Þórólfr in his house. Þórólfr puts up a valiant defense and penetrates to within three strides of the king before he is overcome and slain.

Þórólfr is duly avenged. His relative Ketill Hœngr takes revenge by killing the sons of Hildiríðr, then emigrates with his family to Iceland. Qlvir hnúfa presses Harald to grant some form of compensation for Þórólfr's death and the king is not averse if Kveld-Úlfr and Grímr (or Skalla-Grímr) appear in his presence. Qlvir persuades Skalla-Grímr to come to court and the king offers him compensation in return for service, but Skalla-Grímr refuses and escapes the king's wrath narrowly. Together with Kveld-Úlfr he then makes preparations to sail for Iceland, but before leaving they intercept and kill Harald's two nefarious agents. Kveld-Úlfr dies on the way to Iceland and, following his directions, Skalla-Grímr settles at Borg, where his father's coffin washes ashore. In Iceland Skalla-Grímr's wife gives birth to two sons, Þórólfr and Egill. Þórólfr takes after his uncle and namesake and is light-complexioned and handsome, while Egill is dark and ill-favored like his father.

There follows the somewhat unrelated episode of Þóra lacehand. Bjǫrn, the son of a *hersir* in Sogn, kidnaps Þóra, who is the sister of Skalla-Grímr's foster brother Þórir Hróaldsson, and when Bjǫrn's father, Brynjólfr, refuses to sanction a wedding against Þórir's will, Bjǫrn abducts Þóra to the Shetlands and marries her. Under the king's ban he then sails on to Iceland and lands at Borg. Skalla-Grímr makes him welcome when he learns that Þóra, his foster brother's sister, is aboard, and Bjǫrn accepts his hospitality without revealing the clandestine marriage. However, Skalla-Grímr hears of the situation from Norway and is angered at having unwittingly sheltered the enemy of his foster brother, but Þórólfr manages to appease him and persuades him to negotiate a settlement with Þórir. Skalla-Grímr's messengers are successful and Bjǫrn returns to Norway accompanied by Þórólfr but leaving his daughter Ásgerðr behind to be fostered at Borg.

In Norway Þórólfr wins the friendship of Erik Bloodaxe, who reconciles him with his father King Harald. Þórólfr follows Erik on an expedition to Bjarmaland (Perm), where he marries Gunnhildr. On his return to Iceland Þórólfr brings his father an axe as a gift from Erik, but Skalla-Grímr breaks the axe when he slaughters two oxen with it, presumably signifying the fragility of Erik's friendship. In the spring Þórólfr, this time accompanied by Ásgerðr, makes ready to return to Norway despite his father's presentiments that they will not see each other again.

In the meantime Egill has grown up to become a particularly stubborn and self-willed personality, whose self-assertiveness is apparent already in his childhood games. As a young child he kills a competitor and at the age of twelve he is matched, together with a friend, against his father, who becomes so embittered by their stubborn resistance that he kills Egill's friend, is about to lay hands on his own son, and finally kills a maidservant who comes to Egill's defense. Egill avenges her by killing his father's foreman. When Þórólfr prepares to leave Norway, Egill asks to accompany him. Þórólfr refuses for obvious reasons, but Egill cuts his ship loose in a storm and forces compliance by threats of even worse things to come.

Þórólfr brings Ásgerðr to her father Bjǫrn and is betrothed to her. At the same time Egill is befriended by Þórir's son Arinbjǫrn. During his stay with Þórir he accompanies Þórir's steward Qlvir on his rounds. Their business brings them to a certain Bárðr, who shows frugal hospitality until Erik arrives with his wife Gunnhildr. The new guests are entertained more lavishly and invite Qlvir and his followers to join the feast. Egill chides Bárðr in barbed stanzas for his former meanness and drinks enormous quantities of ale. Bárðr brings him a poisoned horn brewed by Gunnhildr, but Egill carves a runic charm that splits the horn. Late in the evening Egill and Bárðr guide the intoxicated Qlvir out of the hall and Egill uses the darkness to run his sword through Bárðr. He then escapes by swimming to a nearby island and, when Erik ransacks the island, he kills two of the searchers and makes off with their boat. Þórir is able to bring about a nominal reconciliation, but Erik refuses to have Egill in his realm.

Egill and Þórólfr conduct a viking expedition in the Baltic during which Egill is momentarily captured. On their return to Norway Arinbjǫrn invites Egill to spend the winter. His father Þórir is apprehensive because of Erik's injunction, but he is able to appease the king despite Gunnhildr's hostility. Gunnhildr then sets her brothers Eyvindr and Álfr the task of killing Egill and Þórólfr, but they are unsuccessful and Eyvindr kills one of their companions instead. They seek out Eyvindr in Denmark the following summer and seize his ship, though he himself escapes.

Egill and Þórólfr see that they can no longer remain in Norway and take service with the English king Aðalsteinn, who, on his accession to the throne, is faced with rebellious vassals. Óláfr, king of the Scots, attacks Northumbria and Aðalsteinn makes preparations for a battle at Vínheiðr, where Þórólfr and Egill lead one contingent to victory in a preliminary encounter. In the main engagement Aðalsteinn wins the day, but Þórólfr falls.

Egill, richly rewarded for his service, sails to Norway to attend to Þórólfr's estate. He marries his brother's widow Ásgerðr and takes her to Iceland, but on the death of her father Bjǫrn another son-in-law, Berg-Qnundr, seizes the entire inheritance. Egill returns to Norway to claim his share, but Berg-Qnundr refuses on the ground that Ásgerðr's mother was not properly married. Egill issues a summons for the Gulaþing and is about to win his case when Erik, spurred by Gunnhildr, scatters the jury and drives Egill from the Thing. Egill escapes, killing one of Erik's men in the process, and before setting sail for Iceland he finds the opportunity to kill Berg-Qnundr and Erik's son Rǫgnvaldr, together with a large number of their followers. As a final act of disdain he plants a scorn-pole directed at Erik.

In Iceland Egill falls heir to Borg after the death of his father Skalla-Grímr. Then he sets sail once again, but is blown off course and shipwrecked at the mouth of the Humber. When he learns that Erik is nearby in York, he sees no possibility of escaping and decides to go to York in disguise and seek the advice of Arinbjǫrn, who is present in the king's retinue. Arinbjǫrn takes the bull by the horns and advises Egill to sue for mercy on the pretense that he came from Iceland for that sole purpose.

Erik rejects the appeal, but on Arinbjǫrn's petition delays Egill's execution until the next morning. In the meantime Arinbjǫrn advises Egill to compose a panegyric in the hope of appeasing the king at the eleventh hour. In the morning Arinbjǫrn again pleads before King Erik and Egill recites his "head-ransom." Erik allows him to depart in peace, though without granting any pardon, and Egill rejoins King Aðalsteinn.

Egill's Norwegian inheritance now falls into the hands of Berg-Ǫnundr's brother Atli inn skammi and Egill decides to renew his claim. He travels to Norway with Arinbjǫrn's nephew Þorsteinn Eiríksson, who also has an inheritance outstanding, and both lay their cases before Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, now king of Norway. The king grants Þorsteinn's petition readily and Egill's reluctantly. On the way north to his properties Egill defeats the berserk Ljótr inn bleiki, then challenges Atli inn skammi to a duel, kills him, and recovers his property.

Egill returns to Iceland and settles down at Borg, where he has five children by Ásgerðr. On the news of Erik's death he returns to Norway to visit Arinbjǫrn. During his stay he becomes dejected on learning that King Hákon has confiscated the property which he won from Ljótr inn bleiki. He asks Arinbjǫrn to petition the king, but Arinbjǫrn is unsuccessful and reimburses Egill from his own purse.

During the summer Egill and Arinbjǫrn undertake a raid in Frisia, at the conclusion of which Arinbjǫrn joins Haraldr gráfeldr in Denmark while Egill returns to Norway and spends the winter with Þorsteinn Eiríksson. Hákon learns of Arinbjǫrn's desertion to Haraldr gráfeldr and retaliates by sending word to his nephew Þorsteinn that he must choose between exile and a hazardous journey to Värmland to collect delinquent taxes. Egill volunteers to undertake the mission in his place and the king's messengers deem him an equally agreeable victim. The troop comprises eight of the king's messengers in addition to Egill and three companions. They are overtaken by a snowstorm and the king's men return surreptitiously while leaving Egill directions to the farm of a certain Ármóðr skegg, plainly intending that Egill should succumb in the blizzard. Egill miraculously reaches his destination and is entertained at first frugally with milk and then

with great quantities of drink served for the apparent purpose of intoxicating the visitors and rendering them helpless. Egill drinks everything in sight, shows his disdain by vomiting on his host before retiring for the night, then maims Ármóðr before leaving in the morning. The following night he stays with a farmer named Þorfinnr and cures his daughter with a runic charm. The next day he bypasses one ambush set by Ármóðr and beats off a second, then spends the following night with a farmer named Álfr. At the conclusion of his journey he is successful in collecting the tax, but Arnviðr jarl posts ambushes along his return route. During the fighting Egill and his men kill twenty-five of thirty assailants and make good their retreat. Egill then delivers the tax to Hákon and returns to Iceland.

The remainder of the saga is concerned with Egill's last years in Iceland. He composes a poem in memory of his drowned son Bǫðvarr, another in honor of his friend Arinbjǫrn, and cultivates the friendship of the younger skald Einarr skálaglamm. His son Þorsteinn comes of age and becomes involved in a quarrel over pasturage with Steinarr Ǫnundarson. He kills first one then another of Steinarr's herdsmen and is finally hailed before the Thing, but Egill abridges the proceedings by appearing with a large armed following and assuming the role of arbiter, only to banish Steinarr from his property. Steinarr makes three unsuccessful attempts on Þorsteinn's life and is finally banished from the district entirely. Egill now becomes old and blind and the sport of his maidservants. Before dying he gives vent to his contrariness once more and buries the treasure given him by King Aðalsteinn without revealing the hiding place to anyone. He dies and is buried. Bones thought to be his are later unearthed; they are outsized and the skull so hard that it cannot be split with an axe.

Outline

Introduction[1]

Conflict[1]

Harald Fairhair begins his conquest of Norway

Kveld-Úlfr and Grímr refuse to join him

The king is angered and Qlvir hnúfa mediates

Þórólfr joins the king's service despite his father's warning

Bjǫrgólfr takes a concubine, Hildiríðr, who bears him two sons

Bjǫrgólfr's son Brynjólfr excludes them from the inheritance and his son Bárðr follows suit

Þórólfr becomes Bárðr's bosom companion and heir; on Bárðr's death he too rejects the claim of Hildiríðr's sons

Þórólfr inherits Bárðr's property and titles and takes over his administration of the Lapp tax

Þórólfr collects the first Lapp tax and prospers

King Harald is offended by his display of splendor, but Þórólfr appeases him with a ship and fair words

The sons of Hildiríðr slander Þórólfr before the king, but he is again appeased, this time by the size of the tribute

Þórólfr collects a second tribute and continues to prosper

The sons of Hildiríðr slander him again, but Þórólfr justifies himself

Þórólfr refuses to remain at court at the king's behest

Harald revokes his fief and gives it to the sons of Hildiríðr, who assume responsibility for collecting the third tribute

When the king is dissatisfied with the tribute, the brothers place the blame on Þórólfr

Climax[1]

The king's agents confiscate Þórólfr's ship

Þórólfr seizes two of the king's ships and burns the agents' farm

Kveld-Úlfr foresees the end

The king surprises Þórólfr and kills him

Revenge[1]

Ketill Hœngr kills the sons of Hildiríðr

Skalla-Grímr seeks compensation and provokes the king's wrath

Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr kill the king's agents before sailing for Iceland

Introduction[2]

Skalla-Grímr's colonization and family

Þórólfr's personality

Bjǫrn abducts Þóra and brings her to Iceland

At Þórólfr's urging Skalla-Grímr effects a reconciliation with Þóra's family

Þórólfr goes to Norway and wins the friendship of Erik Bloodaxe

Egill's personality

Egill is a precocious skald

He commits his first slaying at the age of twelve

He quarrels with his father and kills his foreman

Conflict[2]

Egill forces Þórólfr to take him to Norway

Egill kills Bárðr and two of Erik's men

There is a nominal reconciliation, but Egill is banished

Egill goes on a viking expedition, but returns to Norway despite the ban

There is another nominal reconciliation

Gunnhildr's brothers kill one of Þórólfr's and Egill's companions

They retaliate by seizing a ship

Climax[2]

They take service with King Aðalsteinn and Þórólfr falls

Egill marries Þórólfr's widow

Berg-Qnundr seizes her inheritance

Egill summons him to the Gulaþing, but Erik quashes the case

Revenge[2]

Egill kills one of Erik's men

Egill kills Berg-Qnundr, Erik's son Rǫgnvaldr, and a number of his followers

Egill plants a scorn-pole

Reconciliation

Egill, shipwrecked at York, recites a "head-ransom" before Erik and is reprieved

Aftermath
- Egill's Norwegian claims
  - He renews his claim to Ásgerðr's inheritance and Hákon grants him the protection of the law
  - He defeats Ljótr inn bleiki
  - He kills Atli inn skammi and recovers Ásgerðr's inheritance
  - He lays claim to Ljótr inn bleiki's property
  - Hákon rejects the claim, but Arinbjǫrn pays it from his own purse
- Egill's last years
  - The mission to Vārmland
  - "Sonatorrek," "Arinbjarnarkviða," Einarr skálaglamm
  - The feud between Þorsteinn and Steinarr
  - Egill's old age and death
  - Family notes

Comment

Egils saga inspires a set of impressions that are not easy to verify. It seems cooler, more detached, more literary, less immediately in touch with its subject than most sagas. The matter seems more diversified and less of a piece than elsewhere. Both the temporal and local framework is dilated much beyond the norm. With respect to the element of time the saga tarries at great length in the colonization period, which is disposed of with a retrospective glance in the first chapter of most sagas, and then moves leisurely through four generations. Geographically the narrative bounces nervously between Norway, Iceland, and England and shoots tangents out to Russia, Lappland, Sweden, the Baltic, Denmark, Frisia, and the Shetland Islands. The feeling persists that so much time and place undoes the saga and when the author still somehow manages to subdue his matter, the result is skillful but artificial. The molecules of narrative are impatient of their structure. There is no genuine or inherent focus. Egill is the proper subject, but the first fourth of the saga is devoted to Þórólfr's

proleptic clash with King Harald and the final fourth is undigested biography. Even the central part of the saga concerned with Egill's conflict with Erik is diluted and made bland by a quantity of episodic scatterings about the Norwegian court, the colonization of Iceland, and viking raids abroad. In fact Egill's conflict is handled with less address and considerably less dramatic intensity than Þórólfr's. It lacks any true climax such as the depiction of Þórólfr's monumental fall three strides from his royal antagonist. When I press the scene at the Gulaþing into service as a climax, it is only because this is the final break between Egill and Erik. The rebalancing of the conflict at York is also hazy and precarious. As has been pointed out frequently enough, this scene is so surrounded by improbabilities and seems so arbitrary that it is divested of some of its dramatic effect. It produces no clear decision for either party and no clear reconciliation.

Nor is the motivation for Egill's conflict as compelling as for Þórólfr's. Þórólfr conforms to the saga's heroic ideal, correct and generous in his behavior but persevering in the defense of his rights and his dignity. His downfall can only be attributed to an uncompromising adherence to the dictates of honor and loyalty. Egill is not so much persevering as contentious, over-assertive, and given to magnifying minor slights. Willfulness is the sum of his behavior toward his playmates and his family during his childhood and remains so during the rest of his career right up until his flouting of moderation in Þorsteinn's behalf and his malicious plan to sow discord by sowing silver at the Thing—a senile whim, but true to character. His conflict with Erik is by no stretch of the imagination a result of unjust persecution, as in Þórólfr's case, but self-inflicted. His behavior at Bárðr's feast is wanton, as is his slaying of Rǫgnvaldr and his planting of a scorn-pole. At several junctures Egill is free to drop the quarrel, but he chooses to cultivate it quite beyond what a normal sense of tact would allow, and for less than handsome reasons. The motive that keeps the conflict kindled is the same one that reconciles Egill to the loss of his brother in the well-known and somewhat cynical scene at Aðalsteinn's court. It is Egill's characteristic avarice. As a man of means and propertied in Iceland he has no real need of his

wife's legacy in Norway, but he presses his claim with ferocious persistence under both Erik's reign and that of his successor Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri. Even Ljótr inn bleiki's minor inheritance is enough to spoil Egill's temper. That the issue here is not honor but simply the jingle of coin is apparent from the fact that Egill happily accepts compensation from his friend Arinbjǫrn when Hákon proves deaf to his representations.

There is no real life in the conflict. Egill is brutish, Erik is redeless, and avarice is no proper motive on which to build a saga conflict. The structure of the conflict is in fact incomplete and unshaded enough to appear dubious. One is inclined to think that the traditions about Egill provided no conflict at all and that the author of the saga was obliged to devise one on the basis of a few hints. Given the evidence of a falling out with Erik in *Hǫfuðlausn* and the evidence of avarice in the Vínheiðr stanzas he elaborated an inheritance story (the theme is standard in the sagas) to support and motivate the conflict with Erik, then prefaced this story with Þórólfr's conflict in order to provide the necessary narrative tension. In this case it is of course curious that Þórólfr's story is brought off so well while Egill's story is dull and long-winded in comparison. A possible explanation of the paradox is that the author was handicapped by too much information in his treatment of Egill and was unable to absorb it into his inheritance conflict. Even as the saga stands, it is clear that he could not integrate *Sonatorrek*, *Arinbjarnarkviða*, the friendship with Einarr skálaglamm, and the mission to Värmland.

If this surmise is anywhere near the truth and the conflict is in fact superimposed on tradition, *Egils saga* is an exception which proves the rule in a real sense. The author had no conflict on which to build but felt it incumbent on himself to make one. In other words he responded to the aesthetic instinct that a saga must be based on a conflict and formed the biography of his hero to satisfy this instinct.

The result is lacking in drama, but the conflict is no ordinary one. It is a superconflict. Elsewhere in the family sagas the antagonists are peers, two Icelandic farmers. Only in *Egils saga* is an Icelander pitted against a king so that the action unfolds on an

entirely different plane. The dimensions are political and the stage is international, a deviation from normal practice which can only serve to confirm the increasingly attractive hypothesis that the Icelandic statesman-skald Snorri Sturluson was the author.

Despite its unusual length *Egils saga* is perfectly clear in its composition. The only innovation (shared with *Njáls saga*) is a departure from the one-climax principle in favor of a dual structure with two climaxes, Þórólfr's death and Egill's break with Erik. But unlike *Njáls saga* the two conflicts are plainly harmonized, so that the question of dual authorship has never arisen. Þórólfr's conflict with Harald is intended to foreshadow the enmity between the men of Borg and the Norwegian crown, specifically the conflict between Egill and Erik. Each conflict contains independently the requisite subsections of conflict, climax, and revenge so that the saga as a whole needs only to frame them with a little genealogical matter at the outset and a lengthy biographical suffix at the conclusion. Within this framework the plots unfold symmetrically. Þórólfr's fate is intuitively foreseen by his father, prepared by his inherited enmity with the sons of Hildiríðr, set in motion by their increasingly effective slander on three occasions, and sealed when his patience is exhausted and he is drawn into an open breach with the king, first by leaving the court and then by giving tit for tat and seizing the king's property. The stages of Egill's conflict are similar. It is forseen by Skalla-Grímr (the broken axe), latent in Egill's own unruly nature, activated by his behavior at Bárðr's feast, and maintained by his subsequent contentiousness. His revenge is threefold: the slaying of Berg-Ǫnundr, the berserk attack on Rǫgnvaldr, and the outrage of the scorn-pole. The avenging of Þórólfr was likewise threefold: the slaying of Hildiríðr's sons, an arrogant demand for compensation, and the slaying of the king's agents. But unlike the sudden finality of Þórólfr's death there is in Egill's case no clear climax. There is only an uneasy peace reached at York with a gradual tapering of action and an epilogue during which Egill, with awesome obstinacy, manages to claim his Norwegian legacy to the last cent in the teeth of royal opposition and retire victorious if not serene from his challenge to the crown.

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Hœnsa-Þóris saga

Synopsis

Hen-Þórir, an indigent and unpopular man without roots, acquires wealth as a peddler. In order to secure his position he offers to foster the son of the chieftain Arngrímr, Helgi, in exchange for protection. Arngrímr is loath to enter into an agreement with such a disreputable person, but when Hen-Þórir proposes to give Helgi half his wealth, Arngrímr succumbs to temptation. Under his protection Hen-Þórir prospers increasingly.

The Norwegian merchant Qrn lands in the district of the chieftain Tungu-Oddr but refuses to comply with the latter's customary demand to set the prices on merchant goods sold in his district. In retaliation Oddr places a ban on him and his goods. Hersteinn, the son of the respected farmer Blund-Ketill, speaks with Qrn and reports the situation to his father, who recognizes in Qrn the son of a former acquaintance and offers him hospitality despite Tungu-Oddr's ban. Tungu-Oddr initiates no action for the time being.

A dry summer results in a hay shortage and Blund-Ketill takes measures to meet the crisis. He asks for rent from his tenants in the form of hay, in order to build up a reserve for the ensuing winter, and determines how many animals they are to slaughter, in order to assure the proper ratio of fodder to livestock. His quotas are ignored; first one, then two more of his tenants apply to him because their hay is exhausted and he supplies the needed hay at the expense of slaughtering additional animals of his own.

However, when still two more tenants appeal to him for hay, he transmits the request to Hen-Þórir, who is known to have a surplus. Hen-Þórir accords him a hostile reception and refuses to sell despite generous offers, so that Blund-Ketill is finally left with no alternative but to take what can be spared and leave payment. Hen-Þórir claims theft and appeals first to Arngrímr, then to Tungu-Oddr, for help. Both turn to his foster son, Helgi, for confirmation of the story and when Helgi fails to corroborate Hen-Þórir's version of theft, they decline to intercede.

Tungu-Oddr's son Þorvaldr now returns to Iceland from abroad and Hen-Þórir, alerted by his relative Víðfari, sets out once more to appeal for help. He offers Þorvaldr half his wealth if he will take charge of the case against Blund-Ketill. His money proves to be irresistible once again and Þorvaldr agrees.

Hen-Þórir, accompanied by Þorvaldr and Arngrímr and their followers, rides out to summon Blund-Ketill. Despite repeated and generous efforts at conciliation Þorvaldr, prompted by Hen-Þórir, rejects all offers and delivers a sharply worded summons. To avenge this insult to his host Qrn shoots an arrow into Þorvaldr's following and kills the boy Helgi. Hen-Þórir quickly puts his ear to the boy's mouth and claims that his dying words were to burn Blund-Ketill. Accordingly Þorvaldr's men withdraw until nightfall and until Blund-Ketill's followers have dispersed, then return to do the deed. After Hen-Þórir once more rejects all terms, they burn Blund-Ketill with his entire household.

Hersteinn, who has been staying with his foster father Þorbjǫrn, is advised of the burning in a dream. Þorbjǫrn petitions Tungu-Oddr for assistance, but Tungu-Oddr responds only by taking possession of Blund-Ketill's property on the ground that it is abandoned (presumably a form of posthumous revenge against Blund-Ketill). Þorbjǫrn makes himself invisible and in a trice rounds up all the animals and packs all the remaining movable possessions before riding off with Hersteinn to enlist allies. They ride first with their herds to Þorkell trefill, who supposes that they need only pasturage and readily offers help and hospitality. When he is told the news of Blund-Ketill's burning and realizes that he is now implicated in a feud, he regrets his hasty offer, but he is un-

willing to renege and consents to lend assistance. Joined by Þorkell, Þorbjǫrn and Hersteinn now ride to Gunnarr Hlífarson, rouse him at night, intimidate him, and persuade him to betroth his daughter Þuríðr to Hersteinn. Only then do they convey the news of Blund-Ketill's burning. Joined now by Gunnarr they ride on to Hvamm, where Gunnarr persuades Þórðr Gellir to confirm the betrothal of Þuríðr, his niece, and hold the wedding feast at Hvamm. Þórðr is loath but consents. Only at parting does he learn that he too is caught in Þorbjǫrn's net. At the wedding feast Hersteinn and Gunnarr vow to outlaw Arngrímr and Þorvaldr respectively, but they are unable to persuade Þórðr to commit himself against Tungu-Oddr.

The winter passes and the following spring Hersteinn and Gunnarr summon Arngrímr, Hen-Þórir, and Þorvaldr. Both sides gather forces in anticipation of the legal struggle, but Tungu-Oddr outnumbers his opponents and blocks the Thing. Þórðr retreats and plans to prosecute at the Allthing. Both sides gather forces once again. This time Þórðr has the advantage and blocks the approach to the Allthing, forcing Oddr to camp outside the Thinggrounds. In the meantime Hen-Þórir tries to lure Hersteinn, who has remained behind because of illness, into an ambush, but Hersteinn discovers the trick, collects his men, and slays Hen-Þórir together with his party. Then the scene reverts to the Allthing, where all those implicated in the burning are outlawed except Þorvaldr, who is exiled for three years.

The saga concludes with an epilogue to the main action. Tungu-Oddr's son Þóroddr asks for the hand of Gunnarr Hlífarson's daughter Jófríðr, but he is refused because of the hostility between the two families. In the meantime Gunnarr and Hersteinn have exchanged properties so that Gunnarr now occupies the land seized by Tungu-Oddr after Blund-Ketill's burning. Tungu-Oddr is still rankled and decides to press his claim. In order to harass Gunnarr he sends his cattle to graze on his land, but Þóroddr sees a way to win his would-be father-in-law's favor and diverts the cattle in order to avoid a conflict. Tungu-Oddr then plans a direct attack on Gunnarr, but Þóroddr arrives on the scene first and offers a reconciliation in exchange for the hand of Jófríðr.

In view of the imminent attack Gunnarr grudgingly gives in and when Tungu-Oddr arrives, he is obliged to recognize the reconciliation. After the marriage Þóroddr goes abroad to free a brother enslaved in Scotland and when he fails to return, Jófríðr is married to Þorsteinn Egilsson.

Outline

Introduction (cast and characterization)

Conflict
- Blund-Ketill disregards Tungu-Oddr's ban
  - Blund-Ketill meets a request for hay from his own reserves
  - He meets a second request by sacrificing his own animals
  - He meets a third request by bidding for Hen-Þórir's hay
    - He offers the price in addition to gifts,
    - repayment in kind the following summer,
    - payment in silver,
    - payment in goods of Hen-Þórir's choosing,
      - to transport these goods,
      - to pack them against spoiling,
      - to store them himself
- Blund-Ketill seizes Hen-Þórir's hay and leaves payment
  - Hen-Þórir appeals to Arngímr,
  - Tungu-Oddr,
  - Þorvaldr
- Þorvaldr summons Blund-Ketill and Qrn slays Helgi

Climax
- The burning
- The expropriation

Revenge
- Hersteinn and Þorbjqrn enlist aid from Þorkell

- Gunnarr
- Þórðr Gellir

The vows at the wedding feast
- Hersteinn vows to outlaw Arngrímr
- Gunnarr vows to outlaw Þorvaldr
- Þórðr Gellir refuses to make a vow

Armed encounters
- The skirmish at Hvítá
- The skirmish at the Allthing

The execution of the vengeance
- Hersteinn kills Hen-Þórir
- Þórðr Gellir outlaws the *brennumenn* (arsonists)

Reconciliation
- Þóroddr woos Jófríðr unsuccessfully
- Þóroddr forestalls Tungu-Oddr's encroachment on Gunnarr's land
- He forestalls Tungu-Oddr's attack on Gunnarr

Reconciliation and betrothal

Aftermath
- Þóroddr's disappearance
- Jófríðr's marriage to Þorsteinn Egilsson

Comment

Hœnsa-Þóris saga might more appropriately have been entitled *Blund-Ketils saga* since it is Blund-Ketill who stands at the center of the stage and it is his fate that is described. His story develops in three stages (his contravention of Tungu-Oddr's ban, his removal of Hen-Þórir's hay, and Qrn's slaying of Helgi) and culminates in his burning and the seizure of his property. The rest of the saga is given over to his avenging, which is similarly effected in three stages—the recruitment of allies by trickery, moral armament in the forms of vows, and the initial skirmishes between the contending parties before the final action. The revenge itself is

twofold (the slaying of Hen-Þórir and the outlawing of the arsonists) just as the original misdeed was twofold (the burning of Blund-Ketill and the seizure of his property). With the vengeance accomplished a reconciliation is effected between the hostile factions through a matrimonial alliance.

The dramatic elements are assembled from the outset in the form of personality contrasts. Tungu-Oddr is overbearing and Blund-Ketill and Hen-Þórir stand in diametric contrast; one is rich and the most popular man in the district, while there is hardly a more disliked man than the beggarly Hen-Þórir. All three personalities are familiar saga types: the paragon of patience, the overweening chieftain, and the worthless mischief-maker (often a vagabond), who puts the others at loggerheads.

The notion that the sagas characterize objectively has no place in *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, where the chiaroscuro is extreme. The hero, Blund-Ketill, undergoes something akin to an apotheosis. Though he is in a sense the aggressor, it is made clear that no guilt attaches to him; it is Tungu-Oddr's truculence that is at the root of the difficulty. Blund-Ketill incurs no moral censure for welcoming Qrn, indeed he would be guilty, as well as cowardly, only if he refused to grant hospitality to the son of a friend. In his dealings with Hen-Þórir he is even more painfully scrupulous. He exhausts his own reserves and sacrifices a large number of his own livestock before approaching Hen-Þórir. During the negotiations he overlooks the latter's calculated discourtesy and surly, fabricated excuses, an exhibition of patience which is all the more impressive because it serves no self-interest but only the interest of tenants who have forfeited his good will by ignoring his directives. The humiliation of a wealthy landowner obliged to bargain with a rootless upstart, who insults him at every turn, is unique in the sagas and in saga ethic, but Blund-Ketill displays an almost unlimited ingenuity in the distasteful task and when he finally exhausts all possible avenues, he is still in possession of the same even tone and temper that characterized his initial request. The unimpeachability of his conduct is acknowledged by both Arngrímr and Tungu-Oddr when they refuse to take Hen-Þórir's part, on the ground that they would have acted just as

Blund-Ketill did. More testimony to his universal popularity is provided by Helgi, who quite unhesitatingly supports Blund-Ketill against his own foster father. Wherever the judges are impartial, Blund-Ketill's character emerges brightly. It is only the meanness of Hen-Þórir and the haughtiness of Tungu-Oddr that are proof against the justness of his conduct.

In the final phase of the conflict Blund-Ketill's patient rehearsal of his offers to Þorvaldr and his silent acceptance of the roughly worded summons show a Njáll-like long-suffering. The famous non sequitur with which Þorvaldr responds to the final, irrefutable concession ("It looks to me as though there is no choice but to summon.") simply shows that Blund-Ketill is not vulnerable on a rational level and can only be reached when all norms of social and legal communication are abandoned. Hen-Þórir was able to carry verbal casuistry to considerable lengths in putting off Blund-Ketill, but Þorvaldr, whose chief characteristic is simplicity, is obliged to give up the pretenses almost immediately and resort to a witless illogicality in order to compass his ends. It is as if he had prepared these words in advance, expecting Blund-Ketill to provide the opening for them, but when the opening fails to appear, he is unable to adapt his tactics and can think of nothing better than to pronounce his prepared text anyway.

Even now the conflict could be resolved peaceably except for Qrn's impulsiveness, which contrasts vividly to Blund-Ketill's self-control and shows what the normal reaction to the situation would be, and could be, since Blund-Ketill's adherents have rallied spontaneously and await only a word from Blund-Ketill to drive off the intruders. This voluntary gathering of Blund-Ketill's Thingmen is both a mark of his popularity and a mark of his forbearance, since he fails to use them. Qrn's interference is also double-edged. It serves on the one hand to absolve Blund-Ketill from any guilt, direct or indirect, in the final act of the conflict, and is at the same time another testimonial to his popularity. In the course of one summer Qrn has become so attached to his host that an insult to him causes the guest to flare up in anger. His ill-considered act makes the conflict irrevocable

and Blund-Ketill becomes the victim of the loyalty that he inspires in those around him so that popularity, which is the keynote of Blund-Ketill's personality, becomes in a real sense his undoing. But it is also the means for his avenging since his son Hersteinn is enabled to assemble allies partly by virtue of his father's friendships and reputation. Þorkell observes the approach of Þorbjǫrn with the words "those are my friends the Þverhlíðingar" and acts accordingly. Gunnarr consents to the betrothal of his daughter partly because: "I have only good reports of this man and his father and this is a matter for serious consideration."

Blund-Ketill is portrayed as an innocent victim, but spinelessness is no concomitant of his guiltlessness. He is conciliatory but not weak. He shows no hestitation and no apprehensiveness about receiving Qrn despite Tungu-Oddr's ban and none about removing Hen-Þórir's hay once all negotiations have broken down. Tungu-Oddr declines to take action against Blund-Ketill because he is not only popular but *kappsamr*, that is, firm. This quality emerges most effectively in the final sequence. Blund-Ketill's men react immediately to the danger presented by Þorvaldr's posse, but Blund-Ketill himself is immune to the excitement and receives the summoners with a seemingly ingenuous invitation to dinner. When the summoners ride off, Blund-Ketill dismisses his men without another thought—innocence is guileless. At the *brenna* (burning) itself there is no begging for mercy. Once Blund-Ketill has ascertained that no terms are available, there is only dignified silence. The scene is less elaborately pathetic and for that reason perhaps more impressive than Njáll's extreme moments.

Blund-Ketill is one of the most consistently positive and clear-browed of the saga heroes. The very expression saga hero is inappropriate because his heroism is too discreet to qualify as such. It is a strictly moral heroism without bravado. Unpathetic in his actions, Blund-Ketill is nonetheless pathetic in his predicament, a victim of his own sense of obligation toward his friends and tenants. The theme is not unwittingly contracted guilt but real guiltlessness. The author of the saga has so carefully substantiated this guiltlessness throughout the conflict that he must

have been preoccupied with the question of how even perfect scrupulousness can be futile. Again the comparison with Njáll suggests itself. There is the same tragic aura about Blund-Ketill, less fully developed but equally unstained. Together they are the most fatalistically conceived of the saga figures. Their tragedy lies in the maximum disparity between their actions and their fate.

The characterization of Blund-Ketill's opponents is equally clear. Tungu-Oddr is introduced as an *ójafnaðarmaðr* and fulfills his promise very promptly. On the arrival of the Norwegian merchants his assertion of his chieftain's prerogatives is peremptory and probably in excess of what the law prescribed. In reacting to Blund-Ketill's infraction of his ban, he bows not to the justifiability of the infraction but to the firm resistance he anticipates from Blund-Ketill. That his forced acquiescence rankles becomes clear from the vengefulness he exhibits after Blund-Ketill's death. Here he is guilty of two-faced dealing, when he first promises assistance and then shamelessly robs his petitioner. The same combination of underhandedness and violence characterizes his behavior in the postscribed episode, where he first proceeds with petty harassment and then quite without warning gathers an expedition with the clear purpose of slaying the unsuspecting Gunnarr.

If Tungu-Oddr is choleric and unpredictable, Hen-Þórir is the very soul of meanness. He exhibits the worst traits of the fourbe come to fortune. He is stingy, hard-mouthed, obstinate, unrelenting, sneaky, whining in adversity, and a consummate liar. He fabricates seven excuses for not selling his hay in as many breaths, gives a falsified account of his dealings with Blund-Ketill to Arngrímr and Tungu-Oddr, and puts words in the mouth of the expiring Helgi. At the burning his malice turns to downright bloodthirstiness when he rejects all terms and burns Blund-Ketill's entire household though it was customary on such occasions to give women and children free exit. Hen-Þórir belongs to a large contingent of a rascals and scalawags in the sagas, but he is the worst of his ilk. This is almost necessarily so; since Blund-Ketill is the most faultless of men, it takes a nearly perfect scoundrel to engineer his downfall.

The drama of the saga is standard. It is governed by the climax (Blund-Ketill's burning) in chapter nine, the keystone chapter of seventeen. Everything else in the saga pertains to the climax as build-up or aftermath. The phases are arranged in series with a crescendo effect. Blund-Ketill's reception of Qrn has no immediate effect other than a vague stirring of the peace reflected in public opinion ("people said he [Blund-Ketill] had crossed him [Tungu-Oddr]") and in the apprehensiveness of Hersteinn and Qrn. Blund-Ketill's seizure of the hay is more serious and is embarked on only after the sacrifice of Blund-Ketill's own hay and animals and elaborate if futile negotiations with Hen-Þórir. The upshot is correspondingly more serious and brings legal proceedings. However, the legal machinery is put in motion only after Hen-Þórir has prevailed on Þorvaldr to take his part, after first being frustrated in his appeals to Arngrímr and Tungu-Oddr. These maneuvers constitute two contrasting sets of epic triads with final stress: three requests for hay, two successful and the last one not, and three requests for legal aid, two futile and the last one not. The final phase supersedes legal means and brings open conflict and bloodshed with its inevitable demand for vengeance. There is in this conflict the frequently observed progression from friction to litigation to feud. The thickening of the conflict is signaled not by dreams and portents, as so frequently, but by the apprehensions of the characters, first Hersteinn and Qrn, then the warning of Arngrímr to Þorvaldr and finally Þorvaldr's own belated realization of his foolish commitment.

The architecture of revenge is similar: the recruitment of three allies, three oaths (a broken epic three since the last one is not sworn), and the contrasting skirmishes at the Hvítá and Allthing before the final dénouement. There is also a progression here; first a manpower commitment, then a moral commitment, and finally the armed conflict before the solution is arrived at with a combination of sword and scales

The structure of *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* is transparent. No part is uneconomical or left unaccounted for in terms of the plot. Everything is part of a pattern of gradual intensification and climax followed by gradual extenuation and restored balance.

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Gunnlaugs saga

Synopsis

Þorsteinn Egilsson lodges the Norwegian merchant Bergfinnr during the winter. The following summer Bergfinnr accompanies him to the Allthing to help repair his Thingbooth. It is a warm day and when the work is completed, Þorsteinn falls asleep and dreams. In his dream he sees a swan on his gable. Two eagles approach it from opposite directions, settle next to it, and fight over it until both fall dead from the gable. Then a falcon comes from the west, settles in their place, and finally flies off with the swan. Bergfinnr interprets the dream to mean that Þorsteinn's wife is pregnant and will give birth to a beautiful daughter, for whom two men from opposite directions will compete and die, after which a third man from the west will marry her. Þorsteinn scoffs at the prediction but gives directions that his wife Jófríðr expose the child she is expecting in the event it is a girl. Jófríðr gives birth to a girl of such unusual beauty that she cannot bring herself to follow Þorsteinn's orders and sends the child to her sister-in-law Þorgerðr to be raised in secret. Some years later at a feast Þorgerðr reveals the truth to Þorsteinn, who is immediately taken by his beautiful daughter and calls her Helga the Fair. She returns to live with her parents at Borg.

The saga now turns to the inland farm of Gilsbakki, where Gunnlaugr is born and raised. At the age of twelve he asks his father Illugi svarti to subsidize a voyage abroad and when he refuses, Gunnlaugr rides off to Borg and spends the winter with Þorsteinn

taking legal instruction from him. The last point of law to be learned is the betrothal formula and this Gunnlaugr learns by going through a mock betrothal to Helga.

At this juncture Gunnlaugr's future rival Hrafn is introduced and a disconnected episode is told in which Gunnlaugr has an encounter with a farmer whose hired man he has knocked unconscious.

Six years elapse and Gunnlaugr, now eighteen years old, repeats his request to go abroad. This time his father agrees, but while the preparations are underway, Gunnlaugr shows more interest in conversing with Helga than in loading his ship. When Þorsteinn offers to make him a present first of one horse, then another, he refuses each time and finally asks why Þorsteinn does not offer what he really wants, namely his daughter Helga. This Þorsteinn refuses to do because he finds it contradictory for Gunnlaugr to court and leave the country at the same time, but when Illugi supports his son's suit, Þorsteinn consents to a tentative betrothal with a waiting period of three years until Gunnlaugr returns to Iceland.

Gunnlaugr visits first the court of Jarl Erik in Norway. When the jarl comments on the fact that he does not limp despite a boil on his foot, Gunnlaugr answers that he has no intention of limping as long as his legs are the same length. One of the jarl's men jibes at his brashness and Gunnlaugr retorts with a barbed stanza. When order is restored, Erik suggests that Gunnlaugr is not likely to live another eighteen years, to which Gunnlaugr promptly responds by advising that Erik would do better to reflect on his own death and wish himself a better one than his father's (Hákon jarl, slain by his thrall in a pigsty). Gunnlaugr's life is saved by the intercession of his friends, but he is permanently banished from Norway.

Gunnlaugr next travels to England, recites a *drápa* before Ethelred the Unready, and becomes his follower. One day he meets a berserk named Þórormr and lends him money. When Þórormr refuses to pay the debt, Gunnlaugr challenges him to a duel and is able to kill him with a ruse suggested by the king. He then requests and receives permission to leave England on the condition that he return the second autumn.

From England Gunnlaugr travels to Dublin, the Orkney Islands, and Sweden and recites panegyrics before Sigtryggr silkiskegg, Jarl Sigurd of the Orkneys and Jarl Sigurd of Gautland. At the Christmas festivities in Gautland twelve messengers from Jarl Erik engage the Swedes in an argument over the respective merits of their chieftains. Gunnlaugr serves as a mediator and recites a conciliatory stanza which satisfies everyone, but more especially the Norwegians. When Erik receives the report of his favorable mediation, he lifts his ban on Gunnlaugr.

On a visit to the Swedish king Óláfr Gunnlaugr is seated next to his compatriot Hrafn Qnundarson. Both recite panegyrics before the king and exchange unflattering comments on each other's poetry. Gunnlaugr reproves Hrafn for reciting a less elaborate *flokkr* instead of a *drápa* and before departing Hrafn promises revenge. In Iceland he accordingly asks for the hand of Helga and when Gunnlaugr fails to return at the appointed time, Þorsteinn consents, after first consulting Illugi.

Gunnlaugr eventually returns to Iceland after renewed visits in England and Norway. He sprains his foot wrestling so that he arrives at home when the wedding feast at Borg is already underway. Everyone advises against his going to Borg and he stays at home.

The wedding is celebrated, but the bride is downcast. Hrafn dreams that he is slain and Helga immediately guesses that Gunnlaugr has returned. She feels cheated and from this moment on the marriage fails. At a winter feast Gunnlaugr talks at length with Helga and provokes Hrafn by forcing him to jump out of the way of his horse. At the summer Thing Gunnlaugr challenges Hrafn to a duel, but a slight scratch inflicted on Gunnlaugr provides the apprehensive relatives with a pretext to abridge the duel after the first blow. Gunnlaugr returns home but awakens one morning to discover Hrafn, who issues a challenge to a duel in Norway, where there will be no interference from relatives. Hrafn travels directly to Norway while Gunnlaugr spends some time on the Orkneys and at the court of Jarl Erik in Norway. Erik prohibits the duel, but when Gunnlaugr finds two Norwegians enacting a sham duel under the names Gunnlaugr and Hrafn to the merriment of the assembled onlookers, he is provoked to action

and asks leave to depart. He finds Hrafn in the interior and they fight together with their followers. Hrafn receives a mortal wound and asks for water, but when Gunnlaugr approaches with the water, Hrafn betrays him and inflicts a severe head wound. Gunnlaugr kills Hrafn, but succumbs to his own wound three days later.

Both Illugi and Qnundr have dream premonitions of their sons' deaths. Illugi demands compensation because Hrafn betrayed his son; when none is forthcoming, he kills one relative and severs the feet of another, while Gunnlaugr's brother Hermundr takes separate revenge by killing yet another. Qnundr does not retaliate.

Þorsteinn marries Helga to Þorkell Hallkelsson, but she is unable to forget Gunnlaugr and when she is carried off by an epidemic, she dies holding his gift (a cloak presented to him by King Ethelred) in her hands.

Outline

Introduction (Þorsteinn's dream adumbrates the action of the saga)
- The birth and intended exposure of Helga to avoid the fulfillment of Bergfinnr's prophecy
- Genealogy and characterization of Gunnlaugr
  - Gunnlaugr's first plan to go abroad
  - The mock betrothal to Helga
- Genealogy and characterization of Hrafn
  - Gunnlaugr's second plan to go abroad
    - First offer of a horse
    - Second offer of a horse
  - Gunnlaugr's suit
    - Þorsteinn's refusal
    - Illugi's intercession
    - Þorsteinn's consent to a waiting period

Gunnlaugr's tour abroad

Norway
Gunnlaugr's insolence and banishment
England
Gunnlaugr's duel with Þórormr
Dublin
The Orkneys
Gautland
Gunnlaugr's mediation between Erik and Sigurd
Sweden
Gunnlaugr's meeting with Hrafn
Conflict
Gunnlaugr and Hrafn compete before Sigurd
Gunnlaugr's recital
Hrafn's critique
Hrafn's recital
Gunnlaugr's critique
Hrafn vows vengeance
Hrafn's betrothal to Helga
The wedding feast (Hrafn's dream intimating death)
Climax
Gunnlaugr provokes Hrafn
Gunnlaugr challenges Hrafn to a duel
The first duel is indecisive
Hrafn challenges Gunnlaugr to a duel in Norway
Erik's prohibition
The sham duel galvanizes Gunnlaugr
The second duel is decisive
Hrafn's death
Gunnlaugr's death
Revenge
Illugi demands compensation
Qnundr refuses
Illugi slays one of Qnundr's relatives
He maims another

Hermundr slays yet another
Aftermath
Helga's marriage to Þorkell
Her death

Comment

There are several peculiarities in the structure of *Gunnlaugs saga*. In the first place, a dream anticipating the whole course of the plot is unusual and has at most an analogy in Gudrun's elaborate dream in *Laxdœla saga*. It serves as a kind of prefixed synopsis and goes against the principle of gradual revelation (*Enthüllung*) generally practised in the sagas. The preliminaries proceed normally enough with the introduction of the main characters, Helga, Gunnlaugr, and Hrafn, who are then fused to produce the plot of the story. The fusion of Gunnlaugr and Helga takes place in two symmetrically constructed sequences, the second of which intensifies the first; Gunnlaugr's unrealized plan to go abroad and his mock betrothal to Helga are followed by his realized plan to go abroad and his real, if provisional, betrothal to Helga. The introduction of Hrafn is sandwiched between these sequences and we would now expect him to enter the picture. His entry is delayed, however, because the preliminaries, which in most sagas are brief, are extended by the inclusion of Gunnlaugr's visits to the northern courts. This extension of the saga's first phase is desultory and makes Gunnlaugr's tour appear digressive and unintegrated. It is, in structural terms at least, an intercalation. Only the last visit to the Swedish court is functional since it provides the stage for the quarrel between Gunnlaugr and Hrafn.

After this lengthy prelude the conflict is disproportionately brief, especially by comparison to the protracted and circumspect scaffolding in a *Heiðarvíga saga* or a *Bjarnar saga hítdœlakappa*. The climax is prepared in two escalated stages. The first comprises the quarrel at the Swedish court (accented by Hrafn's vow of vengeance), Hrafn's betrothal to Helga (which Gunnlaugr learns of in Norway), and the wedding feast (which Gunnlaugr

experiences near at hand). The second stage, the outcome of which is foreshadowed by Hrafn's dream, comprises Gunnlaugr's provocation (without result), the duel at the Allthing (with a truncated result), and the duel at Dinganes (with a decisive result).

The revenge is even more simplified; it is prepared only by a refusal of compensation and takes the form of an entirely undramatized report of two slayings and a maiming. There is no official reconciliation at all, only a cessation of hostilities.

The classification of *Gunnlaugs saga* is not straightforward. It would be wrong to call it a love story, or a biography of Gunnlaugr, or the story of a conflict. It partakes of all three. It is a biography in the sense that it provides much more information about Gunnlaugr than about anyone else and that the author's sources plainly centered around Gunnlaugr to the extent that he could not absorb them all functionally into his plot. The encounter with a farmer and the tour of northern European courts constitute gratuitous biographical information which remains dramatically unharnessed. It is a love story in the sense that Gunnlaugr and Helga are a thwarted romantic pair. It is also a triangle with a nice symmetry since Hrafn is a victim of Helga's love for Gunnlaugr, which impels him to seek a bloody solution, while Gunnlaugr is a victim of Hrafn's love for Helga, which inspires the unchivalrous deathblow. At the same time the saga is plainly constructed as a conflict between the two men Gunnlaugr and Hrafn. The genre indices are indeed so confusing that the author apparently had no very unified principle in mind. Gunnlaugr's court visits belong to the biography. His youthful love, Helga's beauty, her pining passivity, her incurable love for Gunnlaugr and loyalty to his memory, Hrafn's insuperable jealousy, which ends by breaking his integrity, these things belong to the love story. Gunnlaugr's verbal exchange with Hrafn, the bride-theft, the provocation of Hrafn, the sequence of duels, Gunnlaugr's death, and his avenging all belong to the conflict story. Which slant is primary is hard to say. Whether the grand tour is original and attested by genuine stanzas or a late historian's admixture remains uncertain. Whether the love story or the conflict story is primary is a subject for specu-

lation. In arguing that the conflict probably formed the nucleus of the tradition one can only suggest that the conflict pattern is typologically older, that the love story is made to grow out of the conflict and not vice versa (Hrafn shows interest in Helga only after his falling out with Gunnlaugr), and that the motifs surrounding Helga's birth along with her fabled beauty, her languishing, and her lovelorn death look like late romantic accretions.

The author of the saga shows little talent for characterization. Helga is beautiful but pale; it is only her image that catches the imagination. She is strong enough to reject Hrafn when the deceit comes to light, but in her relationship to Gunnlaugr she is sad-eyed and futile. In the final chapter the author gives her a kind of winning submissiveness, but otherwise she is largely without contours. Hrafn is at best ambivalent. There is manliness in his vengeance vow, but pettiness in his choice of bride-theft as a means. Again, there is nobility in his renewal of the challenge, but a meanness in his betrayal of Gunnlaugr, which would only be forgivable if his begrudging of Helga's love were better motivated. Indeed, we learn so little of his feelings for Helga that his marriage initially appears to be purely a result of vengefulness, until his challenge leads the reader to suspect some hidden despair at balked love. This is then borne out in the final scene, where Hrafn acquires a new dimension, a blend of ignobleness bred of passion and a tragic candor in his quick confession of overriding love.

The only figure on which the author lavishes characterization is Gunnlaugr. The initial description is fuller than most. We learn that Gunnlaugr was "very imperious by nature, aggressive at an early age, hard and unyielding, a great skald and rather abusive." These characteristics are apparent from the outset in Gunnlaugr's headstrong opposition to his father, his cantankerousness at Þorsteinn's refusal of his suit, and his scornful treatment of the farmer in the fifth chapter. The picture is completed by Gunnlaugr's behavior at the Norwegian and English courts. In Norway his conduct is arrogant and when he is called to order for it, he retaliates with an unsubtle and abusive stanza. When the jarl registers some mild disapproval, Gunnlaugr counters with

one of the most deadly and intemperate insults to be found in the sagas, rich as they are in edged words. In England he reveals another side of his impetuousness. Quick to lend money to an unprepossessing stranger, he is equally quick and unhesitating when it comes to collecting the delinquent debt and completely unabashed at taking up arms even at disastrous odds. We are therefore prepared for his performance at the Swedish court, his contentious self-assertion and ill-considered undercutting of his rival. Until this point Gunnlaugr is all of one piece, but in the remainder of the saga he loses some of his élan and consistency. His delay in returning to Iceland and his absence from the wedding feast at Borg are out of character and rather reminiscent of Kormákr's indecisiveness. Also somewhat unexpected is his sacrifice of the initiative to Hrafn after the first duel. It is Hrafn who issues the second challenge and while he proceeds directly to Norway to meet the appointment, Gunnlaugr follows a circuitous route, arrives late, bows without apparent impatience to Erik's interdiction, and has his sense of honor revived only by the scorn of the Norwegians.

There is contrast in the characterization of Gunnlaugr and Hrafn, one mercurial and impulsive, the other sterling but a little stolid, but there is no natural interplay or interlocking of personalities as in many sagas. They do not quicken one another but move in separate spheres. Hrafn does not bring out the impetuousness in Gunnlaugr, it is there from the outset and would have reacted in a patented way to any analogous situation. Nor does Gunnlaugr condition Hrafn in any way. It seems rather to be Hrafn's frustrated marriage that determines his response to Gunnlaugr's challenge. The characterization in the saga is thus neither full (except in the case of Gunnlaugr), nor consistent, nor meshed. Compared to the art of characterization in almost any other saga it leaves a distinct sense of incompleteness.

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Bjarnar saga hítdœlakappa

Synopsis

The saga begins with the introduction and characterization of the protagonists, Þórðr, Bjǫrn, and Oddný. Bjǫrn moves to Borg and stays with Skúli Þorsteinsson rather than at home in order to avoid the malice of Þórðr. At the same time he begins to turn his attention to Oddný and there is talk of a match between them.

A Norwegian trading ship arrives in Borgarfjǫrðr and Bjǫrn decides to take passage to Norway. Skúli agrees and equips him for the voyage, but before leaving Bjǫrn asks for Oddný's hand and the betrothal takes place with the stipulation that it will be void if Bjǫrn fails to return within three years. Skúli gives him tokens to Jarl Erik, who receives him into his following.

Þórðr also travels abroad and visits Jarl Erik's court, where he manages to live on amicable terms with Bjǫrn. One day, when the drink has flowed freely, Bjǫrn entrusts Þórðr with a message and a ring to be delivered to Oddný. Þórðr carries out the commission, but he adds the falsified detail that Bjǫrn has made him heir to his betrothed in the event that he himself should not return to Iceland.

Bjǫrn now travels east, takes service in Russia, and gains fame by overcoming a pretender to King Valdimar's throne. He recovers slowly from his wounds and returns to Norway after the three years have elapsed, only to find that the last ships bound for Iceland have already departed. When he prepares to set sail the following spring, he gets unexpected intelligence from Iceland. The previous summer Þórðr had heard of Bjǫrn's

wounds from merchants and had paid them to rumor his death, then, after the expiration of the third year of Bjǫrn's term, he had married Oddný. When Bjǫrn hears of this, he is unwilling to return to Iceland and spends two years with Canute the Great in England, killing a dragon among other exploits, then three years on viking expeditions.

In Iceland Þórðr's marriage to Oddný turns out to be successful. He leaves Iceland to collect a legacy in Denmark, sailing first to Norway, where he stays with King Olaf, then to Denmark. On the return trip he is intercepted by Bjǫrn and tries unsuccessfully to hide on an island. Bjǫrn confiscates ship and goods but spares Þórðr's life out of respect for King Olaf, whose guest he had been. He promises that the next meeting will be more hazardous. Both men later appear before King Olaf, who mediates their quarrel. He decides that the injuries are equal: Þórðr is to retain Oddný, but Bjǫrn retains the money taken from Þórðr. However, Bjǫrn is accorded greater honor when King Olaf learns that he spared Þórðr's life for his sake. Thus when one day at the bath Bjǫrn inadvertently puts on the king's leg-thongs, he is allowed to keep them and wear them to his dying day. (When his bones are later translated to another church, the thongs are found on him undecayed.)

Bjǫrn returns to Iceland and when Oddný learns of his arrival, she has harsh words for her husband. Þórðr invites Bjǫrn to spend the winter with him, apparently as a conciliatory gesture toward Oddný, and Bjǫrn accepts. It goes well enough until both men begin to rake up the quarrel with malicious stanzas and petty harassments. Bjǫrn has brought a dog and two horses with him. Þórðr objects to his feeding his dog at table, but when he reduces the food in order to discourage the waste, Bjǫrn pretends not to notice and the grumbling of the hired hands soon obliges Þórðr to restore full rations. When Þórðr also fails to keep a promise of good grazing for the horses, Bjǫrn incites the farm hands to spoil his host's hay and forces Þórðr to make good his promise. They continue to exchange invidious stanzas and when Bjǫrn leaves in the spring, the parting is less than cordial. [There is a lacuna of one and one-half leaves at the end of this chapter.]

There follows a long and symmetrical series of insult and counterinsult, assault and counterassault. Þórðr is bitten while catching a seal and Bjǫrn ridicules the incident in verse, but Bjǫrn is caught in a similarly grotesque posture when he picks up a new born calf in his barn and Þórðr answers the ridicule in kind. Bjǫrn prosecutes and Þórðr is obliged to pay a fine. It is furthermore stipulated in the settlement that anyone reciting the stanzas in Bjǫrn's hearing can be slain with impunity. Next, two wooden likenesses of men in a configuration suggesting sodomy are found on Þórðr's property and Bjǫrn composes a stanza on the find. He in turn is prosecuted and pays a fine. From defamation the conflict moves to violence. Two of Þórðr's relatives from Norway ambush Bjǫrn but are killed. Þórðr accuses Bjǫrn of using a legal dodge to dispossess Kálfr illviti and persuades Kálfr's son Þorsteinn to waylay him, but Þorsteinn is strangled in the attempt. Bjǫrn offers compensation, though Þorsteinn's ambush makes any award forfeit, and Kálfr refuses. Bjǫrn overhears Þorkell Dálksson reciting Þórðr's calf stanzas and kills him. Þórðr prosecutes the case, but again no indemnity is paid because, according to the previous stipulation, Þorkell is beyond the pale of the law for having recited the offensive stanzas. Bjǫrn reverts to verse himself and recites a stanza in which he implies that he is the real father of Þórðr's son Kolli. Þórðr then prosecutes Bjǫrn for harboring outlaws and Bjǫrn pays the fine. Þórðr in turn harbors outlaws, but when he provides them with money and passage abroad, Bjǫrn intercepts and kills them, keeping the money for himself. At a horse-match Bjǫrn and Þórðr exchange stanzas about each other's wives. During the contest they come to blows, but are separated without further incident. Þórðr commissions assassins, but Bjǫrn is forewarned and returns them to Þórðr with their hands tied behind their backs. Þórðr himself ambushes Bjǫrn with five men, but the encounter is broken off after Bjǫrn kills one man and wounds two others, including Þórðr, slightly. Þórðr ambushes Bjǫrn a second time, but his victim escapes with minor wounds after killing two men, including one of Þórðr's sons.

Þórðr and Dálkr now enlist Þorsteinn Kuggason's aid against

Bjǫrn, but Þorsteinn is caught in a storm and obliged to seek refuge with Bjǫrn at Hólmr. Bjǫrn's reception is cool at first, to avoid the impression that he is ingratiating himself, but after the first night he offers lavish hospitality. Relations become increasingly cordial and when at parting Þorsteinn offers to mediate the dispute with Þórðr, Bjǫrn accepts. Þorsteinn puts the proposal to Þórðr, who agrees with much reluctance. The mediation is in a fair way of succeeding when Þórðr insists that all the stanzas composed during the dispute be recited in order to determine who has composed most. It turns out that Bjǫrn is one up, and when Þórðr insists on evening the score, the negotiations break down. It is felt that Þórðr was responsible for the failure and Þorsteinn now becomes more closely bound to Bjǫrn. They agree that in the event one of them is slain, the surviver will avenge him or prosecute the slayers.

Þórðr and his friends (Kálfr and Dálkr) learn that Bjǫrn is alone at home and make preparations to attack him. They plan an encirclement and ambush the four approaches to Hólmr. When Bjǫrn leaves home to clip the manes of some horses despite ominous dreams and warnings, he is attacked by his enemies and falls after a heroic defense.

The report of Bjǫrn's death is brought first to his wife and then to his mother, who taunts Þórðr by implying that the news will have more effect on his own wife Oddný. This is borne out when Oddný swoons and becomes permanently infirm. Þórðr tries to make quick and easy terms with Bjǫrn's brother Ásgrímr, but Þorsteinn intervenes, outlaws all those accessory to the slaying, and imposes a huge settlement on Þórðr.

Outline

Introduction

- Bjǫrn's betrothal to Oddný and trip to Norway
- Þórðr's trip to Norway
- Bjǫrn's and Þórðr's companionship at the Norwegian court
- Þórðr goes west to Iceland with Bjǫrn's tokens

Bjǫrn goes east to Russia, is wounded and delayed
Þórðr rumors Bjǫrn's death and marries Oddný

Conflict
Bjǫrn's first encounter with Þórðr (Brenneyjar)
King Olaf mediates the quarrel
Bjǫrn spends the winter with Þórðr in Iceland
Malicious stanzas and Bjǫrn's testing of Þórðr's hospitality
The first set of stanzas
Bjǫrn feeds his dog at table
Bjǫrn forces better grazing for his horses
The second set of stanzas
Three *níð*
Þórðr's seal bite and Bjǫrn's stanza
Bjǫrn's calf lift and Þórðr's stanza
The obscene wooden figures and Bjǫrn's stanza
Three slayings by Bjǫrn
Two of Þórðr's relatives ambush Bjǫrn and are slain
Þorsteinn Kálfsson waylays Bjǫrn and is slain
Þorkell Dálksson recites Þórðr's calf stanza and is slain
Two sets of erotic stanzas and two outlaw episodes
Bjǫrn claims to be the father of Þórðr's son Kolli
Þórðr prosecutes Bjǫrn for harboring outlaws
Bjǫrn slays two outlaws harbored by Þórðr
Bjǫrn and Þórðr exchange stanzas about their wives at a horse-match
Three ambushes
Þórðr hires two assassians but they are frustrated
Þórðr ambushes Bjǫrn but is beaten off
Þórðr ambushes Bjǫrn again, but Bjǫrn escapes
Þorsteinn Kuggason's mediation
Þórðr enlists Þorsteinn's aid
Bjǫrn wins Þorsteinn over to his side
Þorsteinn's mediation fails

Climax
Þórðr and his friends prepare the final ambush
The assembling of men
The reconnoissance
The strategic distribution
Bjǫrn awakens on the last morning
His dreams
His wife's warnings
His necrology
Bjǫrn is attacked and falls after a heroic defense

Revenge
Exultation before Bjǫrn's wife and her retort
Exultation before Bjǫrn's mother and her retort
Oddný's swoon and permanent infirmity
Þorsteinn outlaws the slayers and imposes heavy compensation on Þórðr

Comment

Of all the sagas, *Bjarnar saga* comes nearest to the pure conflict pattern. Unlike *Gunnlaugs saga* it has little of the love story and less of the biography, and unlike most sagas its cast of active characters is reduced to the bare minimum of two. Again unlike *Gunnlaugs saga* the author is not interested in the personalities of the antagonists but in the antagonism itself. Sixty-five percent of the saga is preoccupied with the acts of hostility that comprise the conflict, eighteen separate acts in all, a rare interest in the purely episodic. The contrast between Bjǫrn and Þórðr is not a case of personality contrast but a confrontation of black and white. Bjǫrn is cast as the hero and Þórðr just as surely as the scoundrel. This opposition is varied in theme, but in principle it is retained with monotonous consistency. The author gives Þórðr no quarter; before the saga ever begins, he has a record of injuriousness not only toward Bjǫrn but toward "many others." This is the only saga in which the conflict is stated before the plot is divulged, and with

a clear ascription of responsibility. As the conflict unfolds, practically each new phase reveals a new unloveliness in Þórðr. His theft of Bjǫrn's bride betrays the calculating deceiver (it does not have the sanction of vengeance as in *Gunnlaugs saga*), his first encounter with Bjǫrn on the Brenneyjar betrays the coward, an image faithfully adhered to in all the subsequent armed encounters with Bjǫrn, in which Þórðr uses friends and relatives as a shield wherever possible, his winter hospitality shows niggardliness, his inciting of Þorsteinn Kálfsson and his hoodwinking of Ásgrímr betray the sharpster, in his frustration of Þorsteinn Kuggason's mediation he is intractable, and his behavior after Bjǫrn's death is shabby and unchivalrous.

Bjǫrn is not idealized like a Blund-Ketill or a Njáll; the author of *Bjarnar saga* is concerned with the mettle of his hero but shows no interest in taking the measure of his spirit. Nevertheless his portrayal is positive from the outset and increasingly so toward the end of his career. We learn that before the saga begins, Bjǫrn has found it better to live away from home because of Þórðr's conduct, a discretion which the saga teaches us to understand not as weakness but as conciliatoriness. That his courage cannot be doubted is clear from his encounter with Kaldimarr in Russia and with the dragon during his service in England. In his relations with Þórðr at the Norwegian court he is open without being gullible, his misplaced trust being excused by alcohol and almost immediately regretted. In general the saga tries, initially at least, to hold a moderate line in regard to Bjǫrn, moderation being perhaps the most overlooked virtue of the genuine saga hero. In his first hostile encounter with Þórðr he shows restraint in sparing his enemy's life, an act which stands him in good stead with King Olaf. He seems also inclined to abide by the king's arbitration and accepts Þórðr's invitation to spend the winter with him in apparent good faith. But from this point on he becomes increasingly ensnared in the conflict and increasingly unyielding in his conduct of the rivalry. His stanzas are at least as scurrilous as Þórðr's, so that it is by no means clear from them why the tradition or the author was so much more favorably disposed toward Bjǫrn than toward his antagonist. From the status

of a passive butt at the beginning, through the status of a dupe at Erik's court, Bjǫrn gradually passes into the status of an aggressor. The feeding of his dog and the spoiling of Þórðr's hay are clearly provocative acts, though perhaps excused by Þórðr's scrimping. The seal stanzas are gratuitous and the *tréníð* (slander) goes beyond what is permissible in polite feuding. Þórðr thus provoked is no longer content with litigation and begins open hostilities with a series of ambushes.

In the first sequence Bjǫrn embarks on a long series of slayings: first two of Þórðr's relatives, then Þorsteinn Kálfsson, and Þorkell Dálksson, as usual a mark that the conflict is irretrievable and craves a bloody resolution. The first three slayings are justified as self-defense, but in killing Þorkell Dálksson Bjǫrn, while remaining within his rights from a legalistic point of view, oversteps the unwritten law of moderation. Þorkell is clearly innocent in spirit since he recites the calf stanzas against his will and is sympathetically depicted by the author in his steadfast conduct toward Bjǫrn once he has been discovered. His slaying is legal but unjust. As Styrr is told after his similarly thinly motivated killing of Þórhalli: "People think that you had little cause to kill Þórhalli . . . and everyone knew that his guilt was unwitting and not intentional . . ." (*Heiðarvíga saga*, p. 231, if Jón Ólafsson is to be trusted.) Even now the net has begun to close around Bjǫrn because it is the fathers of Þorkell Dálksson and Þorsteinn Kálfsson who become Þórðr's allies and plot Bjǫrn's death. In the next series of slayings Bjǫrn becomes more fatefully entangled because he touches Þórðr more closely. In the first ambush Þórðr himself is slightly wounded and in the second ambush his son Kolbeinn is slain. Þórðr is now committed to revenge beyond withdrawal and it is small wonder that Þorsteinn Kuggason's effort at a solution falls short; Bjǫrn's brief return to a conciliatory mood is too late.

At this juncture there begins a part of the saga that might be labeled the hero's rehabilitation. It is a section in which a once truculent hero marked for imminent discomfiture acquires at the last moment some winning features. It has parallels in other sagas, the best examples being *Grettis saga* and *Droplaugarsona saga*.

The change in character usually becomes apparent in a gentler relationship to someone else in the saga. In this case it is Þorsteinn Kuggason, whom Bjǫrn first receives with maximum discourtesy as a display of self-reliance, whom he then wins over to his cause, and to whom he finally develops such an intimate relationship that they swear a pact of mutual revenge. It is in the spirit of the rehabilitation that Bjǫrn's courage is also exalted at the last moment. He leaves home on the last morning despite dreams and predictions, adopts the familiar heroic stance of feigned ignorance about the intentions of his attackers ("The more helpers we have, the easier it will be to catch the horses." and "Don't make too much of it, perhaps they're just herdsmen."), and refuses to flee. In line with the heroization is also the final description of Bjǫrn as he sallies forth; it is as if the author wished to refocus his hero once more before his death: "Bjǫrn was a big man and a handsome one, freckled, with a red beard and curly hair, near-sighted, and an excellent fighter." Self-consciously situated just before Bjǫrn's passion, this description has the effect of a premature necrology.

The saga both begins and ends abruptly. It begins without the usual genealogical circumstances because the beginning is extant only in a redaction intercalated in an *Óláfs saga*. It is foreshortened by the absence of aftermath. The reconciliation is part and parcel of the revenge, which in this saga is achieved purely by legal means, and there are no suffixed notes or personalia at all. Otherwise the saga is scored as usual. The introduction sets the stage in two acts, an apparent reconciliation followed by a falling out. Bjǫrn is betrothed, comes to terms with Þórðr in Norway, but returns to Iceland to discover that he has been duped and has lost his bride. The conflict that follows is much protracted but not structureless. It is bracketed by two attempts at mediation, King Olaf's temporarily successful effort and Þorsteinn Kuggason's fiasco. Between them are ranged seventeen encounters, which fall comfortably into five distinct sequences, three of them in an a-b-c pattern and two in an a-b-b-a pattern. Three sequences entail taunts, verbal or otherwise, chiefly offensive stanzas, and two others involve armed encounters. As pointed out above these irritants tend to become more and more extreme and irretractable,

the insults culminating in the *trénið* and again in Bjǫrn's alleged paternity to Kolli, and the clashes culminating in Bjǫrn's slaying of Þórðr's son.

The most dramatic part of the saga is the climax itself, the final encounter between the two belligerents, effectively prepared by Þórðr's carefully mapped strategy and Bjǫrn's heroic posture. The revenge is brief and bloodless, but complete in its humiliation of Þórðr, effected first of all by the barbed retorts of Bjǫrn's wife and mother, then by Oddný's coma, which so negates the effect of Þórðr's triumph that he wishes it undone, and finally by the mortifying settlement which Þorsteinn imposes. Blood vengeance is omitted, but the substance of revenge is contained in Þórðr's complete demise.

Supplementary Reading

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Heiðarvíga saga

Synopsis

The saga begins abruptly with the slaying of a man named Atli, who is promptly avenged by Víga-Styrr Þorgrímsson. The main plot follows.

Styrr's brother Vermundr travels to Norway in quest of lumber. He is well received by Hákon jarl, who gives him two berserks, Halli and Leiknir, as a parting gift. The berserks are dissatisfied with their new master and the farm work assigned to them and become too rambunctious for Vermundr to handle. He therefore persuades the more warriorlike Styrr to take them off his hands. Styrr uses the berserks to settle an old score with a certain Þorbjǫrn kjálki and they are better satisfied with this sort of work. In less homicidal moments Leiknir expresses interest in Styrr's daughter and Halli in Vermundr's daughter, but Styrr asks them to prove themselves before he consents to give his daughter in marriage. After consultation with Snorri goði he sets them the task of building a road and when the road is completed and they are faint from exertion, he kills them in an overheated bathhouse. Styrr's daughter Ásdís is then married to Snorri.

Styrr now becomes more and more aggressive. He prosecutes and expropriates a man named Einarr, then kills him when he goes into hiding and tries to leave the district. Next he prosecutes the two farmers who had sheltered Einarr while he was in hiding. Both pay fines and one of them, Þórhalli, must in addition provide

hospitality for Styrr whenever demanded. During one stay at Þórhalli's farm he is served a sheep which he discovers to be, contrary to the law, unbranded. Fearing the consequences Þórhalli tries to move from the district but is intercepted and slain by Styrr. Þorleikr, Þórhalli's successor on the farm Jǫrvi, urges Styrr to give Þórhalli's son Gestr some compensation for his father's death, but Styrr offers the boy only a sickly lamb. (In a digression from the main strand Styrr settles a quarrel between a certain Halldórr and a certain Hǫskuldr in favor of his friend Halldórr.) During his next stay at Jǫrvi Gestr plunges an axe into Styrr's head and eludes his pursuers by leaping over a river. Snorri goði fetches the corpse, but on the way home he spends a night on a farm, where one of the farmer's daughters, overcome by curiosity about Styrr, looks at the corpse, goes mad, and dies the next morning. On the second day the corpse becomes increasingly cumbersome and must be buried temporarily until it can be recovered the following spring.

Gestr escapes to Borgarfjǫrðr and is sheltered alternately by Þorsteinn Gíslason, Illugi svarti, and Kleppjárn. Snorri goði gathers men in the spring in order to prosecute the case, but the Borgfirðingar match him and he is unable to force Gestr's extradition. Gestr's friends eventually procure passage to Norway for him, but Styrr's son Þorsteinn follows him and makes three unsuccessful attempts to kill him, two in Norway and one in Constantinople. Each time Gestr saves his assailant's life, the first time by rescuing him from a capsized boat and the other times by interceding in his behalf after the abortive attempts on his life. They are finally reconciled on the condition that Gestr never return to the north. Snorri is dissatisfied with this result and plans to take revenge on the Borgfirðingar.

He carries out his plan by invading Borgarfjǫrðr and slaying Þorsteinn Gíslason together with his son Þorvarðr. In the ensuing litigation Þorsteinn's slaying is balanced against Styrr's, and Þorvarðr's indemnity is paid by Snorri. The sons of Hárekr (nephews of Kleppjárn) try in turn to avenge Þorsteinn Gíslason by slaying Kolskegger (one of the participants in Snorri's expedition to Borgarfjǫrðr) in Norway. Kolskeggr escapes with the aid of Hallr

Guðmundsson and Hallr is slain in his stead. The sons of Hárekr die in a shipwreck off Jutland's coast.

Hallr's companion Þorgils announces his fate at the Allthing and his brother Barði undertakes the prosecution. Barði first seeks the advice of his foster father Þórarinn and is told to press for composition at the Allthing. Barði does so patiently but without results for two years. The third year Þórarinn tells him to direct his appeal to the hotheaded Gísli Þorsteinnsson (son of Þorsteinn Gíslason slain by Snorri?). Barði does so and Gísli responds with an elaborate insult. His insolence contrasts to Barði's patience and estranges public opinion.

At the same Thing Barði's companion Þórðr loses two horses (a mystery clarified later) and Barði, following Þórarinn's instructions, acquires the services of the ne'er-do-well Narfi. Þórarinn has Narfi procure a certain sword from one of his relatives. (This is the point at which Jón Ólafsson's transcript from memory terminates.) Þórarinn tells Barði exactly what men to assemble for his revenge and Barði enlists their help. Þórðr melrakki taunts Barði for his tardy revenge, but Barði does not flinch and assigns him the job of gathering provisions. Þórðr collects the provisions and delivers them to Barði's sister and foster mother. Þórarinn now produces the horses lost by Þórðr at the Allthing and returns them to him. It transpires that he had removed them in order to have a pretext for sending messengers south, allegedly to inquire about the horses while in reality keeping an eye on developments in Borgarfjǫrðr. At this point Barði collects his allies. His mother Þuríðr incites her sons by serving them each a third of an ox's leg ("Hallr was carved no smaller and caused no comment") and a stone ("no harder to digest than Hallr's death"). The brothers ride off in a wrathful mood and Þuríðr tries to follow in case they should need more urging. Barði sends men ostensibly to help her but in fact to sever her saddle girth and dump her in a brook so that she is obliged to return home. Þórarinn and his sons join the party and Barði collects the provisions already prepared by his sister and foster mother. The latter probes him to determine whether he will be wounded and pronounces him sound. She gives him a necklace to wear around

his neck as a further precaution. Þórarinn outlines the plan of the campaign in exact detail before Barði leaves. The party spends the night at a farmhouse and they whet their weapons. Two men are sent out to reconnoiter and observe men mowing hay on the field Gullteigr. The scene now shifts to the camp of the intended victims, who we learn are the sons of Þorgautr (probably a cousin of the Þorsteinn Gíslason killed by Snorri). It is the morning of the attack. Þorbjǫrn Brúnason, a relative of Þorgautr, has premonitions of the coming fight and his own death; he sees blood in his food, the cheese tastes like earth, and he sees water flowing through the house. Þorgautr's sons (Gísli, Þormóðr, Ketill brúsi) set out to mow Gullteigr. Gísli tells of a dream in which wolves attacked them on the meadow, but they take no heed. Barði and five companions now appear and descend on the mowers, two of whom escape while the third, Gísli, is caught and killed. Barði then urges a quick retreat, but his men are dissatisfied with the revenge and out of pique pause to eat before withdrawing.

Ketill and Þorbjǫrn send for men to pursue Barði and when Barði's men perceive their pursuers, they are eager to join battle. Barði urges them to ride on to the battle site projected in Þórarinn's plan, but they are adamant and Barði is forced to make do with an inferior site. With Barði and his men brought to bay the southerners opt to wait for reinforcements, but they soon respond to the taunts of the enemy and attack. Barði kills Þorgautr, Ketill, and Þorbjǫrn. The southerners receive reinforcements in two groups and renew the fight each time. After the third encounter the losses stand at eight to three in favor of the northerners, but when yet another reinforcement appears on the horizon, they retreat.

Barði escapes pursuit in the darkness and makes preparations for maintaining a larger following in anticipation of a counter-attack. His father-in-law refuses to contribute anything and in retaliation Barði divorces his wife Guðrún. Þorgísl Arason (an in-law of Kleppjárn's and therefore allied with the Borgfirðingar) arrives from his wedding in the north with Snorri goði and a large following. Barði and his men join the party under cover of darkness and apprise Snorri of the latest developments. Snorri, never at a loss for a stratagem, praises Þorgísl's eloquence and induces

him to speak the legal truce formula over the whole body. Snorri then divulges the situation and Þorgísl is unwilling to break the truce he himself has pronounced. (Here a leaf is missing from the MS.) The case is ultimately settled at the Thing. Five of the slain southerners are balanced off against four northerners and the other northerners who participated in the battle are exiled for three years. Barði sails for Norway but is shipwrecked before he clears Iceland. Eyjólfr Guðmundsson persuades his father (Guðmundr inn ríki) to offer him and his men hospitality and Barði and his companions spend the winter with Guðmundr. (Eiríkr skáld commemorates the battle on the heath in three stanzas.) In the spring Barði again sets sail and spends one winter with Saint Olaf and one winter in Denmark before returning to Iceland, where he is again treated handsomely by Eyjólfr Guðmundsson. He then weds Auðr, the daughter of Snorri goði, and travels to Hálogaland, where, however, he divorces her because of a blow given in a playful tussle. From Norway he travels to Constantinople, takes service in the Varangian Guard, and dies in the forefront of battle.

Outline

Conflict
- Þormóðr (?) kills Atli
- Styrr kills Þormóðr (?)
- Vermundr acquires two berserks
- Styrr takes them off Vermundr's hands
- Styrr kills Þorbjǫrn kjálki with the aid of the berserks
- Styrr kills the berserks in an overheated bath
- Styrr kills Einarr
- Styrr prosecutes two farmers who sheltered Einarr
- Þórhalli is obliged to give Styrr hospitality
- Þórhalli is found with an unbranded sheep
- Styrr kills Þórhalli
- Þorleikr asks Styrr to compensate Þórhalli's son Gestr
- Styrr offers only a sickly lamb
- Gestr kills Styrr
- Snorri fetches the corpse
- A young girl becomes insane and dies after viewing the corpse
- The corpse becomes too heavy to move
- Gestr is sheltered by the Borgfirðingar
- Snorri's attempt at extradition is checked
- Gestr escapes to Norway
- Þorsteinn Styrsson tries to kill Gestr in Firðafylki
- Second attempt in Raumaríki
- Third attempt in Constantinople
- Snorri slays Þorsteinn Gíslason and his son Þorvarðr
- Litigation and composition
- The sons of Hárekr slay Hallr Guðmundsson
- Barði Guðmundsson assumes responsibility for the case
- First appeal for composition at the Allthing
- Second appeal
- Third appeal
- A. Þórarinn plans reconnoissance
- B. Þórarinn acquires a sword through Narfi
- C. Þórarinn's plan of action
- D. Enlisting of allies
- E. Þórðr melrakki's taunt
- F. Stocking of provisions
- A.² Reconnoissance
- D.² Assembling of allies
- E.² Þuríðr's taunt
- F.² Fetching of provisions
- G. Good omen
- C.² Þórarinn's outline of the campaign
- B.² Whetting of swords
- A.³ Reconnoissance
- G.² Ill omens

Climax
- Barði kills Gísli Þorgautsson

Revenge
- Barði's men dawdle
- Ketill and Þorbjǫrn organize the pursuit
- Meeting and taunts
- First encounter
- Second encounter
- Third encounter

Reconciliation
- Barði prepares against a counterattack
- His divorce
- Barði neutralizes Þorgísl Arason with the aid of Snorri
- The case is settled at the Allthing

Aftermath
- Barði spends the winter with Guðmundr
- Eiríkr's stanzas on the Battle of the Heath
- Barði in Norway
- Barði in Denmark
- Barði returns to Iceland
- Marriage to Auðr
- Trip to Hálogaland
- Divorce from Auðr
- Barði in the Varangian Guard
- Barði's death

Comment

Heiðarvíga saga is the purest example of a feud saga. No emphasis is placed on personalities, either on personality conflicts, or on personal qualities, or even on biographical information. The only character that emerges from the saga is Barði's and here it is not so much a question of a carefully delineated personality as of a

character hardened in conflict and for conflict. Barði grows gradually from his entrance on the stage after his brother's slaying until his own death in Constantinople, but the sum of his growth is that he becomes a brave and at the same time sagacious fighter, a maximally efficient instrument of conflict and admirable chiefly in his efficiency. He is not a man of such parts as to distract the reader's attention from the central issue, which is, first and last, the conflict. Indeed, nothing in the saga distracts from the conflict. The participants are not animated by mischief-making as in *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, by personal animosity as in *Bjarnar saga*, by competition as in *Gunnlaugs saga*, or by a mission of vengeance as in *Gísla saga*. There is a certain detachment and noncommittal air about the saga; the actors are caught up in a pattern of feuding without becoming personally involved. *Heiðarvíga saga* records the conflict *an sich*, shorn of the human dimensions.

The importance of the conflict is apparent from the proportions of the saga. Eighty pages in the *Fornrit* edition develop the conflict and precede the climax, thirty pages are devoted to the aftermath. The phases of the feud appear complicated because they are multiplied beyond the norm and the vengeance is often carried out obliquely, that is to say that the aggressor himself is spared and the victim is chosen from his family, or following, or friends, so that there is no clear line in the series of vendettas. In simplified form the feud comprises five acts.

1) Styrr commits a sequence of five slayings
2) The son of the last victim, Gestr, kills Styrr
3) Snorri kills one of Gestr's protectors, Þorsteinn Gíslason
4) The sons of Hárekr, nephews of another of Gestr's protectors, seek to kill one of Snorri's companions, but their vengeance falls on Hallr Guðmundsson
5) Hallr's brother Barði kills Gísli Þorgautsson, a relative of Snorri's victim Þorsteinn Gíslason

This chain reaction is set off by the standard device of a defective character. Styrr is a paradigmatic example of an *ójafnaðarmaðr*, who at best twists the law to serve his purposes and at worst gives free rein to his violent whims. Once his antisocial behavior has

unbalanced the situation and introduced the necessary element of instability, the feud uncoils automatically. The plot then develops in three high points, so that there can be some doubt as to what is really climax and what is backlash. Styrr's slayings should probably be seen as a preparation and build-up for Gestr's revenge. Gestr's portion of the saga comes to a temporary resting point in his agreement with Þorsteinn Styrsson in Constantinople. The plot is re-engaged by Snorri, fed by the retaliation of the sons of Hárekr, and culminates in Barði's slaying of Gísli Þorgautsson. That this is the true climax of the saga is suggested by the unparalleled detail with which it is constructed (forty pages). The sagas offer no other example of "staging" approximately as elaborate as this one. The tension surrounding the clash of arms is nowhere cultivated so fondly and with such ingenuity as here. The third and final climax is the battle on the heath, after which the saga is named. It is less cunningly built and more ambivalent in its function and position. It can be seen as a continuation of the engagement on Gullteigr, which gives no real satisfaction, while the bloodletting on the heath fulfills every dictate of revenge. Or it can be seen as the first stage in Barði's parrying of the expected counter-thrust from Borgarfjǫrðr, followed then by his preparations for defense, his hoodwinking of Þorgísl Arason, and his successful conduct of the litigation. The saga concludes with a rather full account of Barði's subsequent career and death.

The section of the saga that invites special comment is the preparation of Barði's revenge. Aside from the fact that it is long and detailed, it is doubled and refracted by being given as advice from Þórarinn before it is translated into action by Barði. The build-up is preceded by three unsuccessful appeals at the Allthing, the last capped by an insult which galvanizes revenge, a classic epic three with final stress. The build-up itself comprises a double series of preparatory moves: reconnoissance, arming, strategic planning, enlisting of allies, harangues in the form of taunts, and provisioning. This is the principle of series, but it is supplemented by the principles of repetition and escalation. Each of the above preparatory moves (B-F) is given in two varieties, first one form and then a second. The arrangement is indicated

by the letters B-F in the *Outline*. The order of the series is not identical; the order B, C, D, E, F is followed by the order D^2, E^2, F^2, C^2, B^2, but one series is completed before the next is begun and the arrangement is neatly intersected by three intelligence maneuvers: the preparation of intelligence, which is not at first transparent (A), the gathering of secondhand intelligence through agents (A^2), and finally firsthand reconnoissance (A^3). In addition, the second phase of each move is regularly an intensification of the first: the acquisition of a special weapon (B) is suggestive, but the whetting of the swords just before the attack (B^2) is unambiguously ominous, Þórarinn's general plan of action (C) is followed by a more exact outline and prognosis of the campaign (C^2), the enlisting of allies (D) is followed by their actual assembling (D^2), Þórðr melrakki's taunt (E) is less drastic than Þuríðr's elaborate counterpart (E^2), and, finally, the careful stocking of provisions (F) serves as a prelude to their actual collection just prior to departure (F^2). In addition there are contrasting portents, which bode well for Barði (G) and ill for his quarry (G^2).

The effect of this structure is at once to concentrate and tease the reader's interest. It concentrates his interest because the sense of the preparations is at once apparent and becomes more so with each succeeding detail. All of these details point in only one direction, the act of vengeance, on which the reader's mind therefore becomes almost hypnotically fixed. It teases because each succeeding detail also acts to retard the already anticipated outcome and catches the reader in his stride with unexpected complications. This is, in miniature, the paradox of saga narrative, to be simultaneously transparent and opaque, transparent in its aim but circumstantial and fastidious in its exposition of the aim. The sense is clear, but the plot is puzzled, and the sense retains its interest only because the woof of the plot is difficult. On the other hand, the plot, which in this saga particularly is on the brink of being garbled, is unified and made palatable only by the clarity of the design into which it fits. The conclusion is foregone, the direction is clearly staked out, and the saga's art is to resurrect an expired story with a lively arrangement of preludes, an art of manner and

not of matter. It is not only the more obvious devices of portent, prediction, dream, and taunt that quicken the pulse of the story, but all the indifferent details about legal maneuvering, alliances, logistics, espionage, and strategy are arranged so as to tantalize the reader's curiosity and make it taut.

Supplementary Reading

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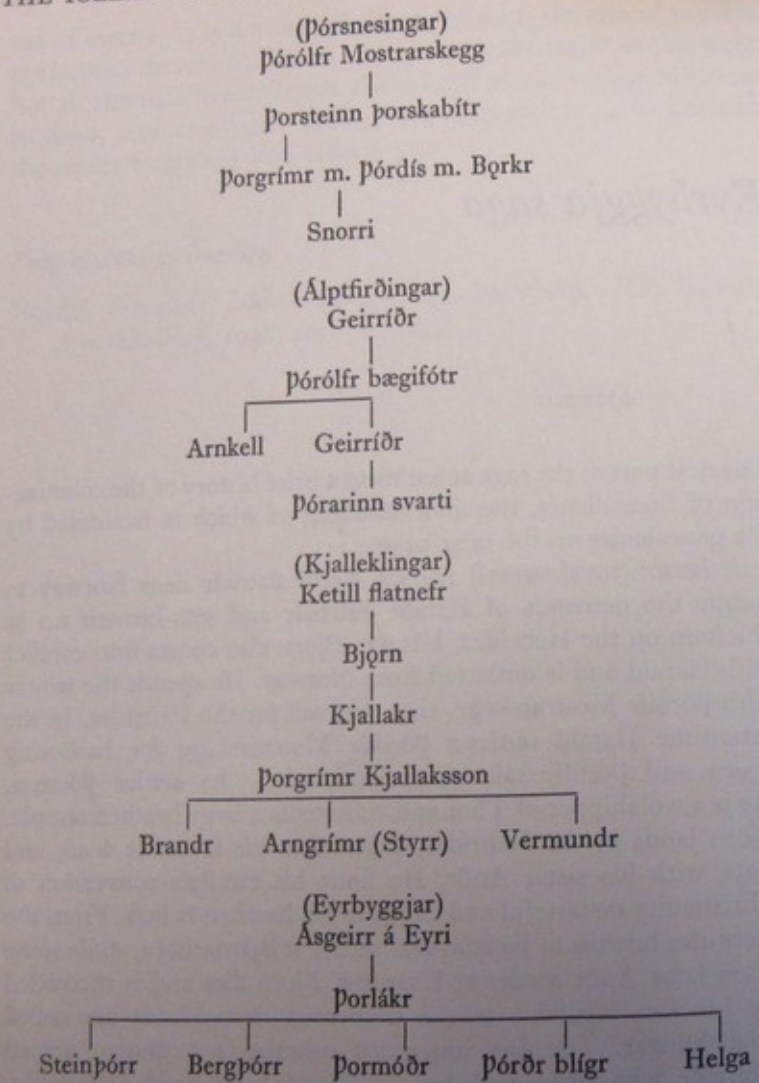
Eyrbyggja saga

Synopsis

The first part of the saga amounts to a brief history of the colonization of Snæfellsnes, the understanding of which is facilitated by the genealogies on the next page.

A *hersir* (royal vassal) named Ketill flatnefr flees Norway to escape the demands of Harald Fairhair and sets himself up as chieftain on the Hebrides. His son Bjǫrn also comes into conflict with Harald and is outlawed from Norway. He spends the winter with Þórólfr Mostrarskegg, then sets sail for the Hebrides. In the meantime Harald outlaws Þórólfr Mostrarskegg for harboring Bjǫrn and Þórólfr sails to Iceland, where he settles Þórsnes. He is a worshipper of Thor and constructs a large heathen temple. Bjǫrn lands in the Hebrides, learns that his father is dead, and stays with his sister Auðr. He finds his family's conversion to Christianity distasteful and clings to his heathen beliefs. From the Hebrides he sails to Iceland and settles at Bjarnarhǫfn, while some years later Auðr settles at Hvammr. Bjǫrn dies and is succeeded by his son Kjallakr, whose numerous descendants are called Kjalleklingar. The last important colonist is a woman named Geirríðr, who settles with her son Þórólfr bægifótr in Álptafjǫrðr. Þórólfr Mostrarskegg dies and is succeeded by his son Þorsteinn Þorskabítr on Þórsnes. Trouble begins in the district when the Kjalleklingar become aggressive and vow to disregard the sanctity of Þórólfr's templegrounds. This leads to a pitched battle between



Kjalleklingar and Þórsnesingar, which is eventually mediated by Þórðr gellir.

At this point the saga falls more into a pattern and most of the succeeding episodes revolve around Þórólfr's great-grandson Snorri.

Snorri's uncle Bǫrkr equips him for a trip to Norway and on his return he feigns extreme poverty. Some time later, when his mother attempts to avenge her brother Gísli (as in *Gísla saga*), Snorri intercedes for her against Bǫrkr and his relations with his uncle become strained. He then discountenances Bǫrkr completely by using his pretense of poverty to trap him into selling the farm Helgafell for a nominal sum.

Snorri's nephew Gunnlaugr (the son of a half sister) makes frequent visits to Geirríðr, the daughter of Þórólfr bægifótr, to learn from her. The widow Katla is jealous and tries to deflect his visits to herself. After one such visit to Geirríðr Gunnlaugr is found beaten and unconscious and Katla's son Oddr spreads the rumor that Geirríðr's witchcraft is responsible. Snorri and Gunlaugr's father, Þorbjǫrn digri, prosecute her but lose the case. (It later becomes clear that Katla was the real witch.)

Snorri supports Illugi svarti in a successful case against the Kjalleklingar.

Þorbjǫrn digri accuses Þórarinn svarti (Geirríðr's son) of stealing horses and a battle is fought in which Þórarinn kills Þorbjǫrn and a number of his men. Þórarinn then seeks aid from his uncle Arnkell and from the Kjalleklingr Vermundr Þorgrímsson in anticipation of Snorri's revenge for the death of his brother-in-law Þorbjǫrn digri. During the battle between Þorbjǫrn digri and Þórarinn, Katla's son Oddr had cut off the hand of Þórarinn's wife Auðr. Þórarinn and Arnkell learn of this and kill the sorceress Katla and her son. Þórarinn is not in a position to pay the indemnities of all the slain men and decides to go into voluntary exile rather than risk proceedings at the Thing. He sets sail with Vermundr, then Snorri has him outlawed in absentia and collects what compensation he can from the unsold property.

A quarrel breaks out between two shepherds in the employ of Snorri and a certain Vigfúss Bjarnarson. Vigfúss' shepherd is wounded, but Snorri pays no compensation and quashes the case at the Thing.

At the same Thing Erik the Red is exiled and discovers Greenland. At Víga-Styrr's request Snorri does not join a proposed attack on Erik.

Vermundr returns to Iceland from Norway with the two berserks Halli and Leiknir. He is unable to manage them and asks his brother Styrr to take them off his hands.

Vigfúss sends an assassin to kill Snorri, but the assassin misses the mark and is apprehended. Snorri kills Vigfúss. His widow Þorgerðr seeks assistance among the Álptfirðingar, Kjalleklingar, and Eyrbyggjar. (Vigfúss is related to both the Álptfirðingar and the Kjalleklingar.) Arnkell finally agrees to prosecute the cases and imposes penalties on Snorri at the next Thing.

Styrr now kills his two berserks in an overheated bath on Snorri's advice and cements the alliance by marrying his daughter Ásdís to Snorri.

Snorri marries his sister Þuríðr to a certain Þóroddr. When Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi seduces her, Þóroddr attacks him with four companions, but Bjǫrn kills two of his assailants and puts the others to flight. He is outlawed for the slayings and goes abroad to join the Jómsvíkingar.

Arnkell's father Þórólfr takes hay from his neighbor Úlfarr and Úlfarr appeals to Arnkell for help. Arnkell reimburses him and takes an equivalent value from his father. Þórólfr then incites his thralls to burn Úlfarr, but Arnkell foils the plan and hangs the thralls. Þórólfr persists and bribes Snorri with a gift of wooded land to prosecute Arnkell for the hanging, but the fines won by Snorri are only enough to irritate Arnkell without satisfying Þórólfr, who now hires an assassin to kill Úlfarr. The sons of Þorbrandr in Álptafjǫrðr dispute Arnkell's claim to the property of the deceased and appeal to Snorri for aid, but Snorri declines to be drawn into the quarrel and Arnkell makes good his claim. Þórólfr then tries to recover his woods from Snorri and seeks his son's assistance, but Arnkell declines to enter a dispute with Snorri. Þórólfr graciously dies but haunts the valley until Arnkell removes the corpse and buries it at a safe distance the following spring. Arnkell now sees Snorri's use of the woods acquired from Þórólfr as an impingement of his inheritance. He pursues thralls sent by Snorri to collect timber, is attacked by one, and kills him. Snorri prosecutes, but Arnkell has the man declared forfeit. Snorri sends an assassin to Arnkell, but Arnkell frustrates the

attempt on his life and kills the assassin. Snorri, incited by Þorleifr kimbi, finally joins with the sons of Þorbrandr to kill Arnkell. The prosecution of the case results only in exile for Þorleifr kimbi because it is conducted by a woman. Þorleifr kimbi takes passage to Norway on the same ship with Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi's brother Arnbjǫrn. They quarrel and Þorleifr promises revenge.

Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi and Arnbjǫrn return to Iceland and Bjǫrn continues his visits to Snorri's sister Þuríðr. Her husband Þóroddr dares not intervene directly but hires a sorceress to conjure up foul weather around Bjǫrn on his way home. Bjǫrn spends three days lost in the storm.

Þorleifr kimbi asks for the hand of Helga Þorláksdóttir but is refused because of the unavenged incident with Arnbjǫrn. The upshot is a fight between the sons of Þorbrandr (Álptfirðingar) and the sons of Þorlákr (Eyrbyggjar), which is mediated by Snorri and Steinþórr. The sons of Þorbrandr try with no success to kill Arnbjǫrn, then send their thrall Egill to kill one of the Breiðvíkingar, but Egill trips on his shoelace at the crucial moment and is discovered and killed. The Breiðvíkingar and sons of Þorlákr assemble to deliver the thrall indemnity required by law. Steinþórr delivers the indemnity and a battle breaks out between the sons of Þorlákr and the sons of Þorbrandr seconded by Snorri until a temporary truce is concluded between Steinþórr and Snorri. A second encounter ends with the defeat of the sons of Þorbrandr, all of whom are seriously wounded. Snorri nurses them back to health and Vermundr mediates the quarrel at the next Thing.

Snorri fails in his attempt to kill Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi and must be content to dissuade him from further visits to his sister.

The careers of the sons of Þorbrandr are accounted for and Iceland is converted.

A woman from the Hebrides named Þórgunna arrives in Iceland. She has particularly fine belongings and Snorri's sister Þuríðr offers her hospitality in the hope of acquiring some of them. Þórgunna dies and her death is accompanied by portents. She leaves instructions to destroy her belongings, but Þuríðr keeps some of them notwithstanding. A half-moon appears on the wall at

Fróðá foreshadowing death and Fróðá is accordingly attacked by pestilence and apparitions. Þóroddr and his companions are drowned and haunt Fróðá while the pestilence and apparitions continue. On Snorri's advice Þórgunna's belongings are burned, the ghosts of the departed are conjured, and order is finally restored.

Snorri's revenge and litigation against the Borgfirðingar after the slaying of Styrr is told approximately as in *Heiðarvíga saga*.

A certain Óspakr Kjallaksson makes off with portions of a whale belonging to, among others, Þórir Gull-Harðarson and Snorri goði. Þórir intercepts Óspakr on another raid and puts him to flight, but when Snorri outlaws Óspakr and his men, they take to piracy. They kill Þórir, raid the neighboring farms, and then withdraw into a stronghold. The victims of the raids appeal to Snorri, who besieges the outlaws and forces them to surrender.

Þórólfr bægifótr begins to spook again and Þóroddr Þorbrandsson burns the corpse. One of his cows conceives after licking the funerary ashes and gives birth to the bull Glæsir. Five years later Glæsir gores Þóroddr to death.

Icelanders shipwrecked in Ireland are saved by a chieftain who sends gifts to Þuríðr at Fróðá and her son Kjartan. He is thought to be Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi.

The saga concludes with a listing of Snorri's descendants.

Outline

Introduction

- Colonization of Þórsnesingar, Álptfirðingar, Eyrbyggjar, and Kjalleklingar
- Quarrel of the Þórsnesingar and Kjalleklingar over Þórólfr Mostrarskegg's templegrounds

Conflicts

- Snorri's tricking of Bǫrkr and acquisition of Helgafell
  - Gunnlaugr is mysteriously beaten
- Snorri prosecutes Geirríðr for sorcery

- Snorri supports Illugi svarti against the Kjalleklingar
  - Þorbjǫrn digri accuses Þórarinn svarti of stealing horses
  - Þórarinn kills Þorbjǫrn
- Þórarinn seeks aid from Arnkell and Vermundr
- Þórarinn and Arnkell kill Oddr and Katla
- Þórarinn goes into exile to escape legal proceedings
- Snorri outlaws Þórarinn in absentia
- Snorri's shepherd quarrels with Vigfúss Bjarnarson's shepherd
- Snorri quashes the case at the Thing

S — Snorri allies himself with Styrr

- Snorri kills Vigfúss' assassin
- Snorri kills Vigfúss
- Arnkell wins substantial compensation

S — Snorri cements his alliance with Styrr

B — Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi seduces Þuríðr

B — Þóroddr ambushes him

B — Bjǫrn kills two of Þóroddr's followers

B — Snorri exiles Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi

- Snorri aids Þórólfr bægifótr against his son Arnkell
- Snorri and Arnkell avoid being drawn into a conflict
- They quarrel over possession of land
- Arnkell kills one of Snorri's thralls
- Arnkell wins the litigation
- Arnkell frustrates an attempt at assassination
- Snorri kills Arnkell
- Þorleifr kimbi quarrels with Arnbjǫrn

B — Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi continues to visit Þuríðr

- Snorri supports the sons of Þorbrandr against the sons of Þorlákr
- Þorleifr kimbi's unavenged incident with Arnbjǫrn leads to a marriage refusal and a quarrel
- The sons of Þorbrandr attack Arnbjǫrn in his house
- They dispatch an assassin to the Breiðvíkingar, but he is killed
- The delivery of the indemnity leads to a battle
- The battle is broken off but renewed when Snorri finds

that his son is wounded
A third battle during the winter ends with the defeat of the sons of Þorbrandr

B Snorri dissuades Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi from further visits to his sister
The careers of Þorbrandr's sons
Iceland is converted
The story of Þórgunna

S Snorri avenges Styrr (as in *Heiðarvíga saga*)
Óspakr seizes whale meat belonging to Þórir, Snorri, et al.
Óspakr and Þórir clash
Snorri outlaws Óspakr
Óspakr kills Þórir and raids neighboring farms
He retires to a stronghold
Snorri forces the stronghold and reduces Óspakr

Aftermath
Þórólfr bægifótr spooks and his corpse is removed and burned by Þóroddr Þorbrandsson. One of his cows licks the ashes and gives birth to a bull that gores him to death.
Shipwrecked Icelanders discover Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi as an aged chieftain in Ireland
Snorri's descendants

Comment

Eyrbyggja saga is the most amorphous and troublesome of the family sagas. Genealogically and geographically it is strenuous reading and structurally it has been compared to the disorderliness of *dróttkvætt* syntax. There is indecision about whether the saga is a regional history dealing with the families on Snæfellsnes or the story of Snorri goði. The latter seems preferable since Snorri's ubiquity in the saga is in fact the only discoverable principle. The substance of the saga can be focused as a sequence of ten contests in which Snorri is either a principal or a potent counselor.

As a whole *Eyrbyggja saga* lacks entirely the centering and direction of the other sagas. There is no climax, single, double, or otherwise. The saga rather makes the impression of a compilation. The only structural norm among those deduced in the first chapter which is kept intact is the principle of conflict. Snorri's career is described as a series of clashes with the neighboring chieftains and families. In the course of these conflicts Snorri emerges not as a standard saga hero, as the tragic chieftain who succumbs in the end and despite exemplary behavior, or the overbearing chieftain who carries all before him, but as a shrewd, politic chieftain who is not afraid to assert his authority, but who knows the limits of his power. His career is not a progression of triumphs building up to a position of unchallenged supremacy or a web of circumstances leading to a noisy fall, but an alternation of nicely weighed successes and inconclusive setbacks. Snorri's attitude both in success and in defeat is characterized by caution and moderation. He exposes himself neither to a loss of reputation through excessive yielding nor to retribution through excessive aggressiveness. Most of his victories are mixed with some gall. He is successful in outwitting his uncle Bǫrkr, but unsuccessful in his prosecution of Geirríðr. He is successful in his support of Illugi svarti, but he is robbed of most of his success in outlawing Þórarinn svarti. He kills Vigfúss, but loses the ensuing litigation to Arnkell. He exiles his sister's seducer, but ultimately he gets no more than a draw with him. He overcomes Arnkell, but must be content with the defeat inflicted on his foster brothers by Þorlákr's sons. His revenge for Styrr is balked before finally being carried out and even his victory over the outlaw Óspakr is not unmitigated. What Snorri is most notable for is his political stamina and his ability to navigate the shoals of contention while managing to stay out of personal danger.

Each one of the conflicts in *Eyrbyggja saga* would be, if properly expanded, enough to constitute in itself a saga. The result of telescoping ten of them in one medium-sized saga is that none of the episodes is fully developed. Some of them are barely reported (Bǫrkr, Illugi svarti, Styrr), some of them are slightly dramatized (Geirríðr, Þórarinn svarti, Vigfúss, Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi,

Óspakr), and others take on the dimensions of miniature sagas (Arnkell, the conflict between the sons of Þorbrandr and the sons of Þorlákr). But the dramatic devices are the usual ones: accusations of theft, quarrels between farm hands, hired assassins, quarrels over land, seductions, marriage rejections, ambushes, attacks, counterattacks, summons, legal maneuvering, slayings, revenge.

What is puzzling in the saga is the involution of the conflicts. The Vigfúss, Styrr, Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi, and Þorbrandssynir strands are picked up and dropped, sometimes twice, before finally being unraveled. This interweaving of plots is not normal saga procedure and there is no apparent reason for it. It could in fact easily be eliminated: if the Styrr (S) and Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi (B) plots were gathered together, the narrative would be straightened and a normal order restored. Perhaps the author had chronological sources that called for the interspersing of these episodes.

Supplementary Reading

Hollander, Lee M. "The Structure of Eyrbyggja Saga," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 58:222–27 (1959).

Laxdœla saga

Synopsis

Laxdœla saga is prefaced with a rather full account of the emigration of the Norwegian *hersir* Ketill flatnefr. Ketill and his sons decide to flee Norway because of the tyranny exercised by King Harald Fairhair. Ketill sails to the British Isles with his daughter Unnr and other relatives while his sons proceed directly to Iceland. After her father's death Unnr sails on, stopping in the Orkneys and Faroes and arriving finally in Iceland, where she settles at Hvammr. She marries her granddaughter Þorgerðr to a certain Kollr and gives them the land in Laxárdalr. Their son is Hǫskuldr. After provision has been made for her other followers, Unnr's last act is to marry off her youngest grandson Óláfr feilan; during the wedding feast she passes away in matriarchal dignity. Kollr soon follows her and Hǫskuldr takes over the homestead, which is named Hǫskuldsstaðir. His mother, Þorgerðr, travels to Norway and marries a certain Herjólfr, by whom she has the son Hrútr. Herjólfr dies early and she returns to Iceland and remains with Hǫskuldr until her death. Hǫskuldr then takes over the inheritance, in which Hrútr has a half part. Hǫskuldr marries and has four children, Þorleikr, Bárðr, Hallgerðr, and Þuríðr. He promises assistance to his neighbors against the troublemaker Víga-Hrappr, then sails to Norway to buy timber. While in Norway he buys in addition the mute slave Melkorka, who on his return to Iceland gives birth to a son Óláfr and reveals herself as an Irish princess.

At this point the complications begin. Two farmers, Hallr and

Þórólfr, quarrel over a catch of fish and Þórólfr kills Hallr. He is harbored by his relative Vigdís, but Hallr's brother discovers his hiding place and bribes Vigdís' weak husband Þórðr to betray the fugitive. However, Vigdís frustrates the plan, sends Þórólfr out of harm's way, and divorces Þórðr for his shabby behavior. Her family plans to take half of the conjugal property, but Þórðr avoids the loss by turning over his property to Hǫskuldr and fostering his son Óláfr.

Víga-Hrappr now dies and haunts the district until Hǫskuldr removes his corpse. His property passes into the possession of Þorsteinn surtr and when Þorsteinn surtr drowns with a number of relatives, Þorkell trefill acquires his property by bribing a survivor to give false testimony about the sequence of drownings. The land is left fallow.

Hrútr comes to Iceland from Norway and Hǫskuldr withholds his share of their maternal legacy. After three years of patient litigation Hrútr seizes some of Hǫskuldr's livestock and kills some of the men sent in pursuit, but Hǫskuldr's wife persuades her husband to give his brother recognition and the quarrel is settled.

Hǫskuldr's children come of age and Melkorka sends her son Óláfr to visit relatives in Ireland. He stays with Haraldr gráfeldr in Norway, visits his grandfather Mýrkjartan in Ireland, spends another winter with Haraldr gráfeldr, and returns to Iceland. His father proposes a match with Egill's daughter Þorgerðr and this is duly arranged. Óláfr acquires Hrappr's land from Þorkell trefill and builds Hjarðarholt. Hrappr spooks once again until his corpse is disinterred and burned.

Hrútr settles one of his freedmen on Hǫskuldr's land, but Hǫskuldr's son Þorleikr kills him and reannexes the land. Þorleikr's wife gives birth to a son Bolli. When Hǫskuldr dies, his admission of Óláfr to the inheritance galls Þorleikr. A magnificent wake is held for Hǫskuldr and Óláfr seeks a reconciliation with Þorleikr by fostering his son Bolli. At the same time his wife Þorgerðr gives birth to a son Kjartan and the two boys grow up together. Óláfr now goes to Norway for timber and returns with a certain Geirmundr, who asks for his daughter Þuríðr in marriage.

Óláfr is opposed, but Geirmundr wins the support of Þorgerðr and the wedding is celebrated. After three years Geirmundr abandons Þuríðr and sails for Norway, but not before Þuríðr absconds with his most prized possession, the sword Fótbítr. Geirmundr lays a curse on the sword and Þuríðr eventually gives it to Bolli. Óláfr slaughters his ox Harri and a woman appears to him in a dream, threatening the death of his son in revenge for the death of her son Harri.

The saga turns next to Gudrun, who has a series of meaningful dreams. She submits them to Gestr Oddleifsson and he interprets them as representations of her four future marriages. Sometime later he sees Kjartan and Bolli and forecasts that Bolli will kill Kjartan. Gudrun's first marriage ends in divorce and Þórðr Ingunnarson, having also divorced his wife Auðr, marries her. Auðr avenges herself by attacking Þórðr while he lies defenseless in bed. He survives this assault but is eventually drowned in a storm conjured up by the sorcerer Kotkell. Gestr causes Kotkell and his sons to be driven from their property, but Þorleikr Hǫskuldsson resettles them in return for a gift of horses. A certain Eldgrímr takes the horses from Þorleikr but is intercepted by Hrútr and slain. Þorleikr regards this as an invasion of his privilege of revenge and asks Kotkell to harass Hrútr. Kotkell consents and casts a spell that kills Hrútr's youngest son. Hrútr appeals to Óláfr and they kill Kotkell, but Óláfr forbids any further proceedings against Þorleikr. The remaining sorcerers are then killed and Óláfr persuades Þorleikr that it is wisest for him to go abroad.

Kjartan begins to visit Gudrun, but his father has ominous presentiments. Before reaching a definite agreement with Gudrun, Kjartan sails to Norway and is converted by Óláfr Tryggvason. He is asked to take the Christian mission to Iceland but chooses to remain at court while Þangbrandr wrestles with the heathens. The following summer Bolli returns home, but Kjartan stays behind in Norway. Bolli tells Gudrun that a match between Kjartan and the king's sister Ingibjǫrg is rumored and later in the summer he asks for her hand, but Gudrun rejects the thought of marriage as long as Kjartan is alive. Bolli then enlists the aid of Gudrun's father and brothers and she consents to the marriage reluctantly.

Kjartan leaves Norway though Óláfr and Ingibjǫrg are loath to part with him.

On his return Kjartan learns of Gudrun's marriage and woos Hrefna. A feast is held at Gudrun's home Laugar and Kjartan's father persuades him to attend. The feast proceeds without incident, but Kjartan refuses Bolli's parting gift. Shortly thereafter he marries Hrefna. At the next feast Kjartan's sword disappears, but is recovered. At a third feast Hrefna's headdress disappears and is not recovered. The thefts are apparently instigated by Gudrun and Kjartan avenges himself by locking the household at Laugar in for three days, then purchasing by force land previously promised to Bolli. Gudrun incites her brothers and Bolli to ambush Kjartan and they set out, Bolli with the utmost reluctance, in company with the sons of a certain Þórhalla. Bolli enters the ensuing fray only when his companions prove no match for Kjartan. At this moment Kjartan throws away his weapons, is struck down by Bolli, and dies in his arms.

Óláfr pá's sons slay Þórhalla's sons in revenge and Óláfr pá makes himself sole arbiter of the case. He outlaws Gudrun's brothers for as long as Kjartan's brothers and son are alive, but takes composition from Bolli. Kjartan's brothers vent their wrath by killing a man who knew of the ambush and failed to warn Kjartan. Þorgerðr, not content, incites her son Halldórr to further revenge and he makes plans and recruits supporters. The attack is brought off and Bolli is slain alone in his house, but Gudrun keeps exact count of the slayers.

Bolli Bollason is born posthumously and Gudrun exchanges homesteads with Snorri goði. Her future husband Þorkell Eyjólfsson undertakes to kill the outlaw Grímr. He fails, becomes reconciled with Grímr, and consults with Snorri, who suggests that he marry Gudrun but first spend a summer abroad. Gudrun prepares her sons and wins the assistance of Þorgils Hǫlluson by swearing an equivocal oath to marry him. Two of the participants in Bolli's slaying are given the choice of joining in the slaying of a third participant, Helgi Harðbeinsson, or being slain themselves. They acquiesce. The expedition sets out and Þorgils reconnoiters the terrain. Helgi guesses the identity of his assailants from the

description given by a herdsman, but is unable to escape and is slain.

Gudrun reveals her false oath to Þorgils and he rides off in dudgeon, only to be slain as he counts out the silver for Helgi Harðbeinsson's indemnity. Arrangements are made for Gudrun's marriage to Þorkell Eyjólfsson and the wedding is celebrated at Helgafell. During the feast Gudrun shows her authority by taking the part of her outlaw Gunnarr Þiðrandabani against her bridegroom.

Þorleikr now goes abroad and stays with King Olaf in Norway while Bolli marries Snorri's daughter Þórdís. Snorri arranges a final settlement of Bolli's slaying between Þorleikr and Bolli and the sons of Óláfr pá. Bolli also plans to travel abroad and spends one winter in Norway with Þorleikr, then Þorleikr returns to Iceland while Bolli travels on to Denmark and Constantinople. Þorkell in turn travels to Norway to find church timbers and returns. He and his relative Þorsteinn try to force Halldórr Óláfsson to sell his land, but they are unsuccessful. Þorkell ultimately drowns, ending Gudrun's fourth marriage. In her old age she becomes increasingly devout. Bolli returns to Iceland from Constantinople, Snorri dies, Gudrun becomes Iceland's first nun and dies at an advanced age.

Outline

Introduction

- Ketill flatnefr's emigration and Unnr's colonization of Iceland
- Hǫskuldr, Unnr's great-grandson, takes over the hereditary property
- His mother Þorgerðr goes to Norway and marries Herjólfr
  - She gives birth to Hrútr
  - She returns to Iceland after Herjólfr's death
  - Hǫskuldr inherits her property, in which Hrútr has half part
- Hǫskuldr goes to Norway and buys the slave Melkorka
  - She gives birth to Óláfr and reveals herself as an Irish princess

Two farmers, Hallr and Þórólfr, quarrel over fish
Þórólfr kills Hallr
Þórólfr is harbored by his relative Vigdís
Hallr's relatives bribe her husband Þórðr to betray the fugitive
Vigdís frustrates the plan and divorces Þórðr
Her family plans to take half the common property
Þórðr avoids the loss by putting his property under Hǫskuldr's protection and fostering Óláfr
Hrappr dies and haunts the district until the corpse is removed
Þorsteinn surtr acquires his land
Þorsteinn dies and Þorkell trefill acquires the land by fraud
The land is left fallow
Hrútr comes to Iceland and Hǫskuldr withholds his share of the legacy
Hrútr employs legal means for three years to get satisfaction
He finally seizes some of Hǫskuldr's livestock and kills some of the men sent in pursuit
Hǫskuldr is persuaded to settle the dispute
Óláfr comes of age
He travels to Norway and Ireland
He returns to Iceland and marries Þorgerðr Egilsdóttir
He acquires Hrappr's land and builds Hjarðarholt

Conflict

Hrútr settles one of his freedmen on Hǫskuldr's land
Hǫskuldr's son Þorleikr kills him and takes possession of the land
Þorleikr's wife gives birth to Bolli
Hǫskuldr dies and his admission of Óláfr to the inheritance angers Þorleikr
Óláfr seeks a reconciliation by fostering Þorleikr's son Bolli
His wife Þorgerðr gives birth to Kjartan and the two boys are raised together
Óláfr goes to Norway and returns with Geirmundr

Geirmundr marries his daughter Þuríðr but abandons her
Þuríðr takes his prize sword Fótbítr and he lays a curse on it
Þuríðr gives the sword to Bolli
Óláfr is warned of the death of his son in a dream
Gudrun is introduced
Gestr interprets her four dreams as four marriages
He foresees that Bolli will kill Kjartan
Gudrun's first marriage ends in divorce
Þórðr divorces his wife Auðr and marries Gudrun
Auðr avenges herself
Þórðr is drowned in a storm conjured up by the sorcerer Kotkell
Gestr has Kotkell driven from his property
Þorleikr resettles him in return for a gift of horses
Eldgrímr takes the horses but is slain by Hrútr
Þorleikr asks Kotkell to harass Hrútr
Kotkell casts a spell that kills Hrútr's youngest son
Hrútr and Óláfr kill Kotkell and his family
Kjartan visits Gudrun, but reaches no agreement with her
He and Bolli sail to Norway
Bolli returns alone
Bolli rumors a match between Kjartan and Ingibjǫrg
He woos Gudrun and is rejected
He enlists the help of her family and she reluctantly consents
Bolli and Gudrun are married
Kjartan returns and marries Hrefna

Climax

At one feast Kjartan refuses Bolli's parting gift
At a second Kjartan's sword disappears
At a third Hrefna's headdress disappears
Kjartan locks Bolli's household in for three days
He purchases land promised to Bolli
Gudrun incites her brothers and Bolli to ambush Kjartan
Kjartan is slain

Revenge
- Þórhalla's sons are slain
- Óláfr outlaws Gudrun's brothers and takes composition from Bolli
- Kjartan's brothers slay a man who failed to warn Kjartan
- Þorgerðr incites her sons
- Halldórr plans his revenge and recruits supporters

Bolli is slain

Counterrevenge
- Bolli Bollason is born and Gudrun exchanges homesteads with Snorri
- Þorkell Eyjólfsson fails to kill the outlaw Grímr
- Snorri suggests that he marry Gudrun but first go abroad
- Snorri and Gudrun plot revenge
- Gudrun incites her sons
- She wins the assistance of Þorgils Hǫlluson with an equivocal oath
- Two of the participants in Bolli's slaying are coerced into joining the plot
- The expedition sets out
- Þorgils reconnoiters
- Helgi identifies his assailants

Helgi Harðbeinsson is slain
- Gudrun reveals her deceit to Þorgils
- Ósvífr and Gestr die
- Þorgils is slain
- Gudrun marries Þorkell Eyjólfsson
- She protects the outlaw Gunnarr Þiðrandabani
- Þorleikr goes abroad
- Bolli marries Snorri's daughter Þórdís

Reconciliation
- Snorri arranges a final settlement

Aftermath
- Bolli and Þorleikr travel abroad

- Þorkell goes to Norway for church timbers
- Þorkell tries unsuccessfully to wrest land from Halldórr Óláfsson
- He drowns
- Gudrun becomes devout
- Bolli returns to Iceland
- Snorri's death
- Gudrun's old age and death
- Her descendants

Comment

Those who have written about *Laxdœla saga* have recognized a particular quality of attitude and temper in it. It is one of the longest sagas, but its peculiarity is not one of length but of tempo. It moves more deliberately and the action is more fully clothed than in most sagas. It dwells more patiently on detail and the descriptions are ampler. It is not breathless and concentrated like *Heiðarvíga saga* or *Eyrbyggja saga*; its folds are more generous and modulated, one loses nothing by skipping a page here or there, and when one has read it several times, there is a temptation to skip pages. Along with this generosity of narrative dimension there goes a generosity of personal dimension. The characters are not cut small, there are no rascals on the order of Hœnsa-Þórir, no ambiguous and ugly giants with viking propensities like Egill or Grettir or Þorgeirr, no chieftains of dubious character like Guðmundr inn ríki or Tungu-Oddr or even the Snorri goði of *Eyrbyggja saga*, but men and women with a conservative and dignified standard. They are not flamboyantly drawn, but large, handsome, quiet people, handsome to look at, handsomely garbed, and handsomely mannered. The other sagas offer nothing quite so statuesque as Unnr djúpúðga, Gudrun, Óláfr pá, and Kjartan, both in appearance and conduct. Unnr presides over a banquet on her dying day, Gudrun is the grandest lady in Iceland, Óláfr pá's herds form an unbroken parade from one farm to another, Kjartan wrestles on even terms with Óláfr Tryggvason, and even

Þorkell Eyjólfsson is prepared to rival Saint Olaf in church-building. In fact those same Norwegian monarchs who can be unpredicatable in their reception of an Egill, a Gunnlaugr, a Hallfreðr, or a Grettir are regularly little less than awed by the men who come to them from the pages of *Laxdœla saga*. But there is nothing aggressive or provocative about them. They are accepted partly because there is no one to challenge them and partly because they act with an imposing self-assurance that permits no query.

These ample and ambling qualities tend at first to obscure the fact that *Laxdœla saga* is one of the more streamlined and clearly constructed of the family sagas. The central event is Kjartan's death and around this are arranged the less momentous events.

The first section is devoted to Kjartan's ancestry, Ketill flatnefr's flight from Norway, Unnr's settlement in Iceland, Hǫskuldr's career, and the career of Kjartan's father Óláfr pá. This background is not passed over briefly, but gives a good deal of biographical information, both about Hǫskuldr and Óláfr, and takes up seventy pages, or nearly one third of the saga. The material is only functional in that it sets the stage for the birth of Kjartan and Bolli, and some sections are less functional than others. The digression on Hrappr can be justified on the basis that it provides information on the land where Hjarðarholt is later built, Kjartan's home and the scene of much of the saga. On the other hand, the explicit detailing of the quarrel between Hǫskuldr and Hrútr has no apparent function.

The conflict section, however, is built with near-perfect economy. It comprises three parts. The first tells of the birth of Bolli, the background of his fostering at Hjarðarholt, and the birth of Kjartan. Thus the principals are assembled and placed under one roof as foster brothers. The second part gives a series of increasingly specific omens about the course of the ensuing action: a cursed sword in Bolli's possession, Óláfr's dream forecasting the death of a son, the interpretation of Gudrun's dreams, and finally Gestr's unequivocal prediction of Kjartan's death at the hands of Bolli. There remains to set the stage for the conflict, the immediate cause of which is the rivalry over Gudrun. This is arrived at

slowly through the sequence of Gudrun's marriages, first to Þorvaldr, told very briefly, then to Þórðr, told in greater detail, and finally to Bolli, in the face of the tacit understanding that she was to wait for Kjartan. When Kjartan returns to Iceland, the atmosphere is charged. The discharge is brought about by a series of irritants, Kjartan's rejection of a gift, the theft of his sword and of Hrefna's headdress, Kjartan's humiliation of Bolli's household and, lastly, his purchase of land promised to Bolli. These irritants culminate in Gudrun's inciting and the ambushing of Kjartan.

The death of a saga hero is almost always avenged and the avenging of Kjartan is commensurate with his pre-eminence. It is carried out in four phases, the slaying of Þórhalla's sons, the outlawing of Gudrun's brothers, the slaying of a man who failed to warn Kjartan, and the slaying of Bolli. It might be noted that revenge of this nature is usually selective and strikes only one or a few of the participants in a slaying, but in Kjartan's case the board is swept clean. All those in any way implicated in the slaying are affected by the revenge.

This would be sufficient in most sagas, but the revenge has struck a man of such calibre that it craves a counterrevenge. The object of the backlash is Helgi Harðbeinsson, who gave Bolli his fatal wound. It is effected through the characteristic narrative devices of planning, incitement, and recruitment, and it is staged with the usual technique. The obligatory settlement of the quarrel is arranged by Snorri goði and the saga is then completed with an average amount of aftermath. *Laxdœla saga* thus differs from the standard structure only in having rather more background material than usual and in providing a doubled revenge section.

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Gísla saga

Synopsis

The introduction to the saga is concerned with Gísli's family history in Norway. His grandfather Þorkell skerauki has three sons, Ari, Gísli, and Þorbjǫrn. Ari marries a girl named Ingibjǫrg but is killed in a duel. Gísli procures the sword Grásíða, avenges Ari, and marries Ingibjǫrg, but he is slain when he refuses to return Grásíða to its owner. The third brother Þorbjǫrn takes over the inheritance and has four children, Þórdís, Þorkell, Gísli, and Ari. A certain Bárðr seduces Þórdís and is slain by Gísli against the will of his older brother Þorkell. Þorkell urges Hólmgǫngu-Skeggi to woo Þórdís, but she is committed to a certain Kolbjǫrn and Skeggi is turned down. Skeggi therefore challenges Kolbjǫrn and when Kolbjǫrn fails to come at the appointed time, Gísli takes his place and defeats Skeggi. Skeggi's sons accompanied by Kolbjǫrn seek vengeance by burning Gísli in his house, but Gísli escapes and turns the tables on his assailants. He then emigrates to Iceland with his parents, his brother Þorkell, and his sister Þórdís. The parents die and their sons take over the property at Sæból in Haukadalr. Þorkell marries Ásgerðr, Gísli marries Auðr, and Þórdís is married to Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson Þorskabíts. Þorgrímr settles at Sæból while Þorkell and Gísli settle the adjoining property at Hóll.

Gestr Oddleifsson predicts that the friendship among the Haukdœlir will not last three years and when they hear of this,

Gísli proposes to counteract the forecast by swearing blood-brothership. At the ceremony Þorgrímr balks at including Gísli's brother-in-law Vésteinn and the plan comes to nothing. Two Norwegian merchants have a disagreement with Þorgrímr's son Þóroddr, kill him, and are killed in turn by Þorgrímr. The Haukdœlir travel to Norway in two's, Þorgrímr and Þorkell together and Gísli and Vésteinn together. When Gísli and Vésteinn part company in Denmark, Gísli makes a coin in two halves, which can be ingeniously fitted together, and gives one half to Vésteinn. It is to be used as a sign only when the life of one holder or the other is in peril. Gísli has a premonition that it will be needed even if they do not meet themselves.

Þorkell, Þorgrímr, and Gísli return to Iceland. One day Þorkell overhears a conversation between Gísli's wife Auðr and his own wife Ásgerðr, in which it comes to light that Ásgerðr has an attachment to Vésteinn and Auðr a former attachment to Þorgrímr. Þorkell is irate, forces Gísli to agree to a division of property, and moves to Sæból to live with Þorgrímr. Gísli prepares a feast at which Auðr misses her brother Vésteinn, but Gísli wishes fervently that he not return because of the impending threat. In the meantime Þorgrímr has the fragments of the heirloom Grásíða forged into a spear. Gísli now learns that Vésteinn has arrived in Iceland and sends men with the agreed-on token to warn him against coming to Haukadalr. The men pass Vésteinn by mischance and by the time they catch up with him, he refuses to turn back and continues to Hóll despite repeated warnings. He gives Gísli a gift of tapestries and Gísli tries unsuccessfully to appease Þorkell by making him take a share of the gifts. Gísli has nightmares for two successive nights, then on the third night during a violent storm Vésteinn is slain at Hóll with the spear Grásíða.

Vésteinn is buried and Þorgrímr, in a truculent mood, observes the otherwise unknown practice of tying his "Hel-shoes." Þorkell is conciliatory and Gísli agrees to restore the old relationship if Þorkell will behave in like fashion should he suffer a similar loss. Sometime later Gísli and Þorgrímr quarrel during a game. They both prepare feasts at Sæból and Hóll respectively, and Þorgrímr sends a servant to borrow Gísli's tapestries. Gísli

agrees, but asks the servant to leave the doors at Sæból unlocked that night. He does so and Gísli is able to invade Sæból during the night and wreak his vengenace on Þorgrímr, again with Grásíða. Þorgrímr is buried in a ship, which Gísli ballasts with a huge stone as a reply to Þorgrímr's tying of Vésteinn's "Hel-shoes." Þorkell holds the peace.

Þórdís now marries Þorgrímr's brother Bǫrkr, who pays the sorcerer Þorgrímr nef to cast a spell which will bring the slayer to light, and in an unguarded moment Gísli recites a stanza in Þórdís' hearing in which he admits to the slaying. The potential conflict between Gísli and Bǫrkr is then made more imminent by an unrelated incident. A sorceress named Auðbjǫrg kills one of Bǫrkr's followers in a landslide in revenge for a blow suffered by her son. Gísli protects her son, but Auðbjǫrg is slain by Bǫrkr. In retaliation Gísli kills Bǫrkr's protégé Þorgrímr nef. Þórdís now reveals Gísli's stanza to Bǫrkr and Þorkell warns his brother that the secret is out. Gísli asks for help, but Þorkell promises only to keep him informed and no more. Bǫrkr sets out to summon Gísli, but Þorkell warns him again. Gísli again asks Þorkell what kind of aid he can expect and receives the same answer. He escapes by using a thrall as a decoy, is pursued in the woods, and kills two of Bǫrkr's men. He then moves south to Geirþjófsfjǫrðr. He is subsequently outlawed and seeks aid from various chieftains, but he is unable to find asylum because of the spell cast by Þorgrímr nef.

Bǫrkr charges Eyjólfr inn grái with Gísli's apprehension. Eyjólfr's man Njósnar-Helgi is sent out to reconnoiter and thinks he has discovered Gísli, but Eyjólfr's ensuing search is to no avail. Two women begin to appear in Gísli's dreams, one good and the other bad. The good one shows him seven fires representing his life span, some of which are burned down and some of which burn brightly. Njósnar-Helgi is again sent out, again finds a trace, and Eyjólfr is again unable to track down the fugitive. He tries without success to bribe Auðr. Gísli now appeals for the third time to Þorkell and receives the same reply as before. He then spends the winter with the mother of Gestr Oddleifsson and his dreams become more ominous. He asks for Þorkell's aid for the

fourth and last time and receives only a boat. At parting he predicts that this will be their last meeting and that Þorkell will be slain before he is. In an effort to delude his pursuers into thinking him dead he capsizes his boat and takes refuge with his relative Ingjaldr on Hergilsey. He spends three years with Ingjaldr, using his time on various carpentering projects. His carpentering is so skillful that people wonder at it, since Ingjaldr is known to be a clumsy craftsman.

The suspicion arises that Gísli may be alive after all and Helgi is once more sent out to spy. He finds evidence that Gísli is hidden on Hergilsey and sounds the alarm. When Bǫrkr and his men arrive, Ingjaldr and Gísli are out fishing. Gísli escapes detection by exchanging clothes with a fool and acting the part, then escaping to shore so that Bǫrkr is forced to abandon the pursuit. Þorkell is slain by Vésteinn's son and Gísli is now the only remaining member of the original quartet. Vésteinn's slayers escape and seek shelter from Auðr, but Gísli refuses to harbor his brother's slayers. His dreams become disquieting again. Helgi is sent out once more, this time together with a certain Hávarðr, a relative of Gestr Oddleifsson. Helgi spots Gísli and marks the spot with a cairn, but Hávarðr removes the cairn and Eyjólfr inn grái is once more frustrated in his search. He tries again to bribe Auðr to betray her husband, but she bloodies his nose with the proffered silver and sends him away in disgrace. Gísli is now visited only by his wicked dream woman and as his dreams become more and more unequivocal, he becomes sleepless and afraid of the dark. When Eyjólfr finally tracks him down in the morning dew, he takes refuge with Auðr and her foster daughter on a ridge. In the first onslaught Gísli kills Helgi and Auðr knocks Eyjólfr from the ridge. Gísli continues to defend himself bravely, kills three more men, and forces a pause in the action. The attack is renewed and in the last confrontation Gísli kills four more assailants (some die later of their wounds) before finally succumbing. Eyjólfr returns to Bǫrkr with the news and Þórdís tries to avenge her brother by stabbing him, but she succeeds only in inflicting a wound. When Bǫrkr takes Eyjólfr's part, she divorces him.

The saga concludes with final notes on the survivors.

Outline

Introduction
- Þorkell skerauki's family in Norway
  - Ari is slain
  - Gísli avenges him
  - Gísli is slain when he refuses to return Grásíða
- Þorbjǫrn's family
  - Bárðr seduces Þórdís
    - Gísli slays Bárðr against his brother Þorkell's will
      - Hólmgǫngu-Skeggi woos Þórdís, who is committed to Kolbjǫrn
      - Skeggi challenges Kolbjǫrn
      - Gísli defeats Skeggi when Kolbjǫrn fails to show up
    - Skeggi's sons and Kolbjǫrn burn Gísli in his house
      - Gísli escapes and kills Kolbjǫrn, Skeggi, and his sons
    - Gísli, Þorkell, and Þórdís settle in Iceland and marry

Conflict
- Gestr Oddleifsson predicts strife among the Haukdœlir
  - Gísli proposes blood-brothership to strengthen the bonds
  - The ceremony breaks down when Þorgrímr rejects Vésteinn
- Þorgrímr avenges the slaying of his son by killing two Norwegians
- Þorkell and Gísli go abroad separately
- Gísli divides a coin with Vésteinn for use as a sign of peril
  - Þorkell overhears the conversation between Auðr and Ásgerðr
  - Gísli and Þorkell part company
  - Þorgrímr forges the fragments of Grásíða
  - Vésteinn returns and Gísli warns him
  - Lúta's warning "vertu varr um þik"
  - Þorvaldr's warning "vertu varr um þik"
  - Geirmundr's warning "ver varr um þik"
- Gísli tries to appease Þorkell with Vésteinn's gifts and is refused

Gísli has nightmares the first night
and the second night
The third night brings a storm of unnatural violence
Vésteinn is slain
Þorgrímr ties Vésteinn's "Hel-shoes"
Þorkell agrees to overlook a parallel loss
Þorgrímr sends a servant to borrow tapestries from Gísli
Gísli agrees but has the servant leave Sæból unlocked that night
Þorgrímr is slain
Gísli ballasts Þorgrímr's burial ship
Þorgrímr nef casts a spell to bring the slayer to light
Gísli's stanza revealing his guilt is overheard by Þórdís
Auðbjǫrg kills one of Bǫrkr's followers
Bǫrkr kills Auðbjǫrg
Gísli kills Þorgrímr nef in retaliation
Þórdís reveals Gísli as the slayer of Þorgrímr
Þorkell warns Gísli and Gísli asks him for help
Bǫrkr sets out to summon Gísli
Þorkell again warns Gísli and Gísli repeats his request
Gísli is outlawed

Climax

Njósnar-Helgi's first mission and Eyjólfr's failure
Gísli's first dreams
Njósnar-Helgi's second mission and Eyjólfr's second failure
Eyjólfr tries to bribe Auðr
Gísli appeals to Þorkell for the third time without success
His dreams degenerate
He appeals to Þorkell for the fourth and last time and predicts his death
Njósnar-Helgi's third mission and Bǫrkr's failure
Þorkell is slain
Gísli's dreams continue to worsen

Njósnar-Helgi's fourth mission and Eyjólfr's third failure
Eyjólfr tries again to bribe Auðr
Gísli's dreams take on their darkest hue
Gísli is hunted down
Gísli's last stand and fall

Revenge

Þórdís stabs Eyjólfr, but is unable to kill him
She divorces Bǫrkr

Aftermath

Notes on the survivors

Comment

Gísla saga is easily the most intricately and self-consciously composed of the family sagas. A revealing analysis of the parallels and echoes within the structure is given in Franz Seewald's study, the only completely satisfying structural analysis to date. It is the saga which retains the reader's interest longest because the inner relationships are least exhaustible. Each new reading brings to light compositional features which a previous reading had failed to notice and suggests new constellations within the author's intention. It is also the most economic of the sagas, the one in which the parts cohere best. It is neither overly complex in execution like *Heiðarvíga saga*, nor overdrawn like *Bjarnar saga*, nor ruminating like *Laxdoela saga*, nor information-laden like *Egils saga*. The central plot is unilinear and unencumbered, the introductory matter is formed in such a way as to foreshadow the main theme (as in *Egils saga*) and the aftermath is reduced to a bare minimum so as not to detract from the weight of the story. At the same time *Gísla saga* cultivates texture beyond what is found in other sagas. It is a saga with a peculiar atmosphere of pathos and melancholy, achieved with a more deliberate and insistent use of the usual fatalistic devices both in characterization and plot. Gísli knows all from the outset and has inevitably been compared to the well-worn protagonist of heroic poetry who

knows his fate and acquires his heroic stature by standing against it. The plot is not so much a sequence of action as a sequence of inklings, dreams, forebodings, and warnings, which lead up to the hero's predestined fall.

With his gift for atmosphere the author of *Gísla saga* combines a gift for staging. The saga has more than its share of dramatically conceived and executed scenes, Vésteinn's lonely ride to Dýrafjǫrðr punctuated by "warnings and portents and evils imminent," the stormy night of Vésteinn's murder, Gísli's silent and calculated penetration of Sæból with the breathless extinguishing of lights and the cold-blooded device for making Þorgrímr turn toward his wife to meet the spear (a form of cruelty which, incidentally, makes Þórdís' betrayal of her brother more understandable), Ingjaldr's faithful support of Gísli and Gísli's duping of Bǫrkr off Hergilsey, a scene in which the comic elements focus the heroic ones, the second bribing of Auðr with its apotheosis of the faithful wife and its pillorying of the knave Eyjólfr, and finally Gísli's dew-marked path to his last encounter with his enemies. The only criticism that can be leveled against *Gísla saga* is that it is perhaps too sculptured and self-conscious, not only artistic but contrived. It perfects all the saga devices and is therefore the most manneristic representative of a mannered genre. One feels in any case that this is the upper limit of saga art.

The main lines of the structure are clear. The prelude falls into two parts corresponding to two generations, Þorkell skerauki's family and his son Þorbjǫrn's family. The first part centers around the sword Grásíða which becomes an object of strife and brings about the death of the older Gísli. We know the symbolic use of weapons from other sagas, the sword acquired by Þórarinn in *Heiðarvíga saga*, the cursed sword Fótbítr in *Laxdœla saga*, the broken axe in *Egils saga*, the coat, spear, and sword given Glúmr by his grandfather in *Glúms saga*. Grásíða, transformed into a spear, is destined to become the bane of Vésteinn and Þorgrímr and thus indirectly the downfall of both Þorkell and Gísli. The second part of the prelude tells the story of Þórdís' love entanglements and Gísli's firm intervention despite Þorkell's opposition. It foreshadows the erotic motivation of the later conflict and the

frictions between Gísli and his brother and sister. At the same time it serves notice of Gísli's commanding personality.

The prelude is followed by the constellation of the protagonists, omens of strife, and conflict. Gísli, Þorkell, and Þórdís settle together in Iceland, each marries, which adds Gísli's brother-in-law Vésteinn to the number, and all the actors are assembled in short-lived family harmony. The fragility of the relationship is betrayed by Gestr's prediction and the abortive oath of blood-brotherhood. The following scene, in which Þorgrímr kills two Norwegians, is only significant if Þorgrímr is the slayer of Vésteinn and not Þorkell. If this is so, then this and the following scene in Denmark, in which Gísli divides a coin with Vésteinn for use in an emergency, point to the subject and the object of the first murder; Þorgrímr is depicted as a man whose weapons are to be feared and Vésteinn is marked as the man in peril.

The scene then shifts back to Iceland, where the conflict is joined. Þorkell overhears a conversation which gives him reason to be jealous of Vésteinn and he takes his measures. First he parts company with Vésteinn's advocate Gísli (already foreshadowed by their separate voyages abroad), then Grásíða is forged into a spear (forging or whetting of weapons is an ominous sign just as sitting with half-drawn weapons as in *Gísla saga* and *Ljósvetninga saga* is a sign of apprehension). These preparations are intertwined with Gísli's unavailing warnings and the warnings of others to the intended victim Vésteinn. Gísli tries at the last moment to appease Þorkell, then has intimations of death for two nights; on the third night an unnaturally violent storm breaks out and Vésteinn is slain in his bed.

The direction of the counterthrust is already given at Vésteinn's funeral when Þorgrímr vents his truculence by tying Vésteinn's "Hel-shoes." When Þorkell then gives tacit sanction for revenge and Þorgrímr gives further evidence of his arrogance by sending for Gísli's tapestries, the way is open for Gísli to invade Sæból and take his revenge.

But now Gísli is exposed. He succumbs to a fate curried by Þorgrímr nef's magic spell but also prodded by his own exultation, when he is unable to restrain himself from imitating Þorgrímr's behavior at the burial and when he cannot suppress a stanza of

triumph. That Bǫrkr is singled out as his adversary is indicated not only by his close relationship to the deceased but by his conflict with Gísli over the sorceress Auðbjǫrg. Þórdís, caught between brother and husband, gives way and betrays the former.

The execution of Gísli's fate is simple in outline. It consists of a series of expeditions by Eyjólfr inn grái or Bǫrkr and prepared by Njósnar-Helgi's spying. The expeditions are not escalated so as to give Gísli's fate an air of increasing imminence; his first scrape is as narrow as any of the succeeding and the last one leads to no confrontation at all. When he is finally hunted down, it happens so suddenly that it almost seems fortuitous. The expeditions are not intended for crescendo effect, but their multiplication is designed rather to give scope for Eyjólfr's and Bǫrkr's repeated humiliation and, by contrast, for Gísli's exhibition of courage and resourcefulness. With each expedition Gísli grows in stature and his adversaries shrink and are demeaned, finally and most effectively by Auðr. The crescendo leading up to Gísli's death is achieved not through a graduation of danger but through his appeals to Þorkell and his dreams. The appeals become increasingly urgent and give a heightened sense of jeopardy; Gísli knows that his fourth meeting with his brother is the last. The dreams also become increasingly ominous and create the requisite atmosphere of inevitability, an atmosphere intense enough to make an elaborate staging of Gísli's death unnecessary; the scene is foregone and quickly told.

A curious aspect of the saga is that a hero of such unusual dimensions goes unavenged. Þórdís' effort is partial and is composed beyond the letter of the law. Perhaps it was this failing that led the author to demean Gísli's adversaries so thoroughly as to constitute a kind of moral compensation: to depict Eyjólfr as a thorough scoundrel and a coward and to impose on Bǫrkr the indignity of a divorce. No other saga hero, no matter how well avenged, emerges so clearly as the moral victor as Gísli.

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Fóstbrœðra saga

Synopsis

Þorgeirr Hávarsson and Þormóðr Bersason become sworn brothers and are so troublesome in the district that the chieftain Vermundr uses his authority to banish Hávarr's family in order to separate the pair. Hávarr is subsequently slain and after avenging him Þorgeirr rejoins Þormóðr. One day bad weather forces the companions to take refuge with a widow named Sigrfljóð. Sigrfljóð urges them to kill her piratical neighbors Ingólfr and Þorbrandr and they oblige her. These men are under Vermundr's protection, but Sigrfljóð appeases him with a sum of silver. Sometime later Þorgeirr is forced to share food and lodging with Vermundr's relative Butraldi; the morning after an evening of silent hostility Þorgeirr kills him. When he kills yet another man after a quarrel over the division of a whale, he is outlawed. His arrogance now swells to the point of asking Þormóðr who would prove to be the stronger of the two if it came to a test; this brings about a parting of ways. On the way to his ship Þorgeirr kills two more men in a quarrel over a horse. He then sets sail and alternates between Iceland and Norway for six years.

Þormóðr visits Þórdís, daughter of the sorceress Gríma, and tongues begin to wag. When Þormóðr refuses to desist, Gríma sends her thrall Kolbakr to ambush him. Kolbakr, protected by Gríma's magic, succeeds in wounding Þormóðr. Bersi ransacks Gríma's house to search out the culprit, but she makes Kolbakr invisible. When he is outlawed, she procures passage for him to Norway. Þormóðr now honors Þórdís with a poem originally

dedicated to another lady, Þorbjǫrg Kolbrún. When Þorbjǫrg learns of the fraud, she afflicts Þormóðr with violent headaches and forces him to restore the original form.

During a stay in Iceland Þorgeirr quarrels with a certain Snorri and kills him together with two of his men. On his return to Norway Saint Olaf asks him to avenge an injury inflicted on one of his followers by an Icelander named Þórir. Þorgeirr again returns to Iceland and accomplishes the mission with his usual dispatch. His companion, the craftsman Veglágr, is found to be responsible for a quantity of thefts in the district, but Þorgeirr prevents his execution and procures him passage abroad. Þorgeirr stays at Saint Olaf's court once more, but seeks leave to return to Iceland and the king foresees that this will be their last parting. In Iceland Þorgeirr quarrels with Gautr Sleituson. First Gautr uses Þorgeirr's spear and shield as firewood, then Þorgeirr replies in kind. Gautr attacks him, but they are separated for the moment. That night Þorgeirr invades Gautr's tent and kills him. Þorgeirr and his shipmates meet a second ship commanded by Þorgrímr Einarsson and Þórarinn ofsi and conclude a truce. When Þórarinn hears of the death of Gautr, his relative, he decides to break the truce and begins by isolating and killing a few of Þorgeirr's men. Þórarinn and Þorgrímr then attack in force and kill Þorgeirr on his ship after a stout defense. They then part company and Þorgrímr goes to Greenland while Þórarinn rides off with Þorgeirr's head. The case is settled at the Thing and Þórarinn is later killed, presumably in a different connection. Þormóðr in the meantime goes to Norway and becomes King Olaf's liege man.

[Two foster brothers, Eyjólfr and Þorgeirr, slay each other in accordance with a seeress's prediction.]

Þormóðr asks leave to go to Greenland and Óláfr grants it, assuming that Þormóðr intends to avenge Þorgeirr. An unidentified man named Gestr takes passage on the same ship and there is some antagonism between him and Þormóðr. In Greenland Þormóðr is lodged by the chieftain Þorkell Leifsson. His relationship to a servant girl causes the thrall Loðinn to be jealous and when Þormóðr is manhandled by the thrall, he kills him in revenge. He then accomplishes his mission, killing Þorgrímr Einarsson at a

Thing in the midst of a group of people who are listening to his account of his encounter with Þorgeirr. He manages to escape and hide out in a cave, from which he then issues once more in disguise to kill three of Þorgrímr's sons. Badly wounded he is found by his companions and is lodged with a certain Gríma, who is skilled in the art of healing. His hideout is revealed to Þorgrímr's wife Þórdís in a dream, but Gríma makes Þormóðr invisible and the search comes to nothing. Þormóðr recovers and now undertakes to kill Þorgrímr's nephew Ljótr. He capsizes his boat (blind motif) before setting out, is wounded in the attempt, and takes to the water again. Pursued by Þorgrímr's widow, he capsizes his boat once more and takes refuge on an island, where he hides in the reeds. He is exhausted and only able to swim part way to shore, but King Olaf appears in a dream to the farmer Grímr and orders him to rescue his follower. As a token he reveals the identity of Grímr's lodger Gestr (Þormóðr's earlier companion on shipboard), in reality a man named Steinarr also seeking to avenge Þorgeirr. When the identification proves correct, Grímr sets out and rescues Þormóðr, who now recovers from his second wound and finishes his revenge against Ljótr. He then returns to Norway, becomes Olaf's faithful skald, and dies with him at Stiklastaðir.

Outline

Introduction

Þorgeirr and Þormóðr become sworn brothers

Conflict

Þorgeirr's father is slain

Þorgeirr avenges his father

Sigrfljóð incites Þorgeirr and Þormóðr

They kill Ingólfr and Þorbrandr

Sigrfljóð appeases Vermundr

Þorgeirr and Butraldi are forced to share food and shelter

Þorgeirr kills Butraldi

Þorgeirr claims half of Þorgils Másson's whale

Þorgils refuses and is slain

Þorgeirr challenges Þormóðr hypothetically

They part company

A certain Bjarni takes Þorgeirr's horse without leave

Þorgeirr kills him and a follower

[Þormóðr's romantic interlude]

A certain Snorri chases Þorgeirr's horses from his yard

Þorgeirr kills Snorri and two of his men

King Olaf asks Þorgeirr to avenge an injury to one of his followers

Þorgeirr kills the perpetrator

Þorgeirr's companion Veglágr is convicted of theft

Þorgeirr prevents his execution and sends him abroad

King Olaf foresees Þorgeirr's death

Climax

Gautr Sleituson uses Þorgeirr's weapons as kindling

Þorgeirr responds in kind

They come to blows but are separated

Þorgeirr slays Gautr in his tent

Þorgeirr concludes a truce with Þorgrímr Einarsson and Þórarinn ofsi

Þórarinn learns of Gautr's death and plans revenge

He and Þorgrímr kill some of Þorgeirr's men

They attack and kill Þorgeirr on his ship

Þorgrímr goes to Greenland

Þórarinn rides off with Þorgeirr's head

The slaying is composed

Þórarinn is later killed in another connection

Revenge

Þormóðr goes to Greenland

He quarrels with Gestr on shipboard

He quarrels with the slave Loðinn in Greenland

He kills Loðinn

He slays Þorgrímr Einarsson at a Thing

He hides in a cave
He issues forth in disguise and kills three of Þorgrímr's sons
His wounds are healed by Gríma
Gríma saves him from his enemies by making him invisible
He capsizes his boat to hide his tracks (?)
He attacks Ljótr but is wounded
He escapes by capsizing his boat and taking refuge on a reeded islet
He is rescued by the intervention of King Olaf through Gestr
He kills Ljótr

Aftermath
He returns to Norway, becomes King Olaf's faithful skald, and falls at Stiklastaðir

Comment

Fóstbræðra saga is striking chiefly because of its paradoxes. The opening pages read like a translation from a Latin vita and the author enjoys a certain notoriety among saga-writers for his hyperbolic outbursts about matters not quite germane to the subject and certainly not in the spirit of saga neutrality. At the same time the hero, Þorgeirr, is one of the most purebred (to the point of parody, as Laxness has brought out) viking personalities, more glowering and relentless than Egill and not streaked in his warrior compactness by a poetic vein. Some of the scenes are as telling and vivid as any to be found in the sagas: Butraldi's slaying, the quarrel with Gautr, and the final scene at Stiklastaðir. The dialogue is often ground to a fine edge, as for example in Þorgeirr's avenging of his father. These contradictions will continue to perplex and doubtless continue to breed theories about interpolation, dual authorship, or incongruent sources.

The structure is among the most primitive. The protagonists, Þorgeirr and Þormóðr, are brought together without further ado, Þorgeirr is exposed to a series of hazardous adventures, interspersed only by two erotic episodes from Þormóðr's career, is slain and then avenged systematically by his sworn brother. The

inner structure is as simplified as the general outline. In most sagas the elements of the conflict are interrelated, lead into one another and up to the climax. In *Fóstbræðra saga* none of the episodes in the conflict bear any relationship to each other except the last two (the conflicts with Gautr and his relative Þórarinn ofsi relate as slaying and vengeance). After each episode the narrative must take a breath and begin anew. Furthermore each episode is in itself undeveloped. There is a simple, two-beat rhythm comprising an irritation of some kind (a slaying, incitement, or quarrel) and Þorgeirr's reaction to it, usually sanguinary. This sequence of conflicts is not only unintegrated but also unaccented. They stand in no climactic relationship, are unescalated (Þorgeirr seems equally unimperiled throughout), and give no sense of urgency. The usual dream-portent-warning apparatus is absent. The only tricks used to quicken the beat and mark Þorgeirr's end are his falling out with Þormóðr, which is, however, unelaborated, and Olaf's premonition just before the fatal collision with Gautr.

It is in fact misleading to speak of a conflict at all, or rather, there is a conflict only in a special sense. Most sagas conceive the conflict as a confrontation between two men (Gunnlaugr/Hrafn, Egill/Eiríkr, Kjartan/Bolli) or between two groups of men (as in *Heiðarvíga saga*, *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, or parts of *Eyrbyggja saga*). *Fóstbræðra saga* places Þorgeirr in no direct opposition to any single person or group. His conflicts are, it seems, fortuitous and disconnected, often sparked on the spur of the moment with no background of hostility. The only connecting theme is his own self-assertiveness. The conflict is not between Þorgeirr and an adversary but between Þorgeirr's character and the community at large. His antisocial behavior culminates in the arbitrary and autocratic protection of the archthief and parasite Veglágr, which is significantly the last act that he commits without suffering the consequences.

The revenge section suffers from the same incoherencies as the conflict. The incident with the thrall Loðinn has no apparent function in the story and the slaying of Ljótr is motivated only by a retrospective allegation of bad treatment, the basis for which is not clear. Þormóðr justifies his prodigal slayings to King Olaf on

the grounds of Þórdís' insult to his manhood, but this occurs only after his attack on the final victim. There are several other lame motifs, the most obvious of which is the first capsizing of Þormóðr's boat. In addition there are a number of persons in the saga who are quite superfluous. The role of the ill-fated foster brothers Eyjólfr and Þorgeirr is unexplained, a certain Helgi selseista is introduced with some circumstance only to run away and disappear entirely on the occasion of Þorgeirr's last stand, and the figure of Gestr/Steinarr, with whom Þormóðr quarrels at sea, who is a would-be avenger of Þorgeirr (how and why?), and who is finally used only as a mode of confirmation for King Olaf's apparition, remains mysterious.

Fóstbræðra saga is a curious work, obvious and single-minded in plot but broken with undigested material, stylistically atypical in some respects but with dialogue of laconic classicism, primitive in structure but with occasional refined staging; on the whole a saga with special problems and not without its own special interest.

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Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings

Synopsis

Hávarðr's son Óláfr recovers lost sheep and returns them to their owners, including a certain Þorbjǫrn Þjóðreksson. Þorbjǫrn's nephew Vakr rewards him by spreading the rumor that he is seducing his uncle's housekeeper Sigríðr, and the second year, when Óláfr again returns lost sheep, he is received ungraciously. Þorbjǫrn's household now adds the rumor that Óláfr intends the third year to steal sheep or search them for a fee and Óláfr's father needles him with the insult. Óláfr enhances his reputation by wrestling with the revenant of the sorcerer Þormóðr in a scene reminiscent of Grettir's match with Glámr. By way of contrast Þorbjǫrn evinces his ill will by coercing the lawman into giving him possession of a whale belonging by rights to Hávarðr. After Óláfr has disposed of Þormóðr at sea in a second wrestling match, Hávarðr decides to move his household in order to escape Þorbjǫrn's truculence. At the same time Þorbjǫrn marries Gestr Oddleifsson's sister, having first agreed to Gestr's condition that he be more amenable in the future. There seems to be a turn for the better, but it is short-lived. Óláfr goes out to collect sheep once more and meets Sigríðr, who warns him in vain to avoid Þorbjǫrn. Þorbjǫrn and Vakr turn up and, after deceptive overtures, attack him, but they are only able to kill him with the reluctant aid of Vakr's brother Skarfr.

On hearing the news of his son's death Hávarðr goes to bed for a year. At the expiration of the year his wife Bjargey sends him to

Þorbjǫrn to ask for composition, but Þorbjǫrn only mocks him by offering a nag and Hávarðr goes back to bed. After another year Bjargey sends Hávarðr to the Thing to seek composition again, but gives him exact directions to avoid composition if possible so as to leave the way open for blood vengeance. Hávarðr's appeal at the Thing is rejected until he enlists the aid of Gestr Oddleifsson. Gestr appoints himself arbiter and condemns Þorbjǫrn to pay a threefold indemnity, but Þorbjǫrn strikes Hávarðr with the teeth taken from Óláfr's skull, just before completing payment. Hávarðr breaks off the settlement and goes to bed for a third year and Gestr annuls the marriage of his sister to Þorbjǫrn.

Bjargey meets Þorbjǫrn, sees a chance for revenge, and casts a spell on him. She then makes the round of her three brothers and asks for the loan of various tools, which turn out to be symbolical for her nephews, who are young and untested but of fighting age. Finally, she rouses Hávarðr from his apathy and he strides forth like a young man to assemble his wife's recruits. They arrive at Þorbjǫrn's farmstead in the evening and when Þorbjǫrn and his followers return home, the battle is joined. Hávarðr kills Þorbjǫrn, then decides to extend the vengeance to his brother Ljótr. Having done so, he makes plans to guard himself against reprisals.

First he seeks support from Steinþórr á Eyri and receives it. In the meantime another brother of Þorbjǫrn, Hólmgǫngu-Ljótr, is slain by the young sons of his neighbor in revenge for the theft of a meadow. The slayers take refuge with Steinþórr and are received into Hávarðr's following. Steinþórr runs short of provisions and takes, with his sister's leave, the necessary supplies from the hermitlike and miserly brother-in-law Atli. Steinþórr's sister uses her feminine wiles to appease Atli, who now parts with Steinþórr on the best of terms. While Steinþórr is away at a Thing, Atli offers to provide for his guests. He makes good his promise and receives Hávarðr and his following with ample hospitality. Þorbjǫrn's relatives decide to attend the Thing in force and at the same time dispatch a group to kill Hávarðr. Atli is apprised of the danger in a dream and makes preparations to meet it. In the ensuing battle Atli, Hávarðr, and their followers kill all but three of the assailants, whom they send home with tarred heads and

shorn ears. While this is in progress, Gestr Oddleifsson is able to mediate the quarrel at the Thing.

When all is done, Hávarðr fetes his supporters and distributes gifts, then travels abroad, visits Óláfr Tryggvason in his old age, is converted, and dies sometime after returning to Iceland.

Outline

Introduction
- Óláfr rounds up sheep the first year
- Rumor of seduction
- Óláfr rounds up sheep the second year
- Rumor of theft
- Hávarðr goads Óláfr
- Óláfr wrestles with Þormóðr's revenant
- Þorbjǫrn seizes a whale belonging to Hávarðr
- Óláfr disposes of Þormóðr in a second wrestling match
- Hávarðr decides to move
- Þorbjǫrn marries Gestr's sister and promises to mend his ways
- Óláfr sets out to collect sheep
- He is warned by Sigríðr
- He is attacked by Þorbjǫrn and Vakr, then Skarfr
- Óláfr is slain

Conflict
- Hávarðr goes to bed for a year
- Bjargey sends Hávarðr for composition
- Þorbjǫrn refuses and scorns him
- Hávarðr goes back to bed for a year
- Bjargey sends Hávarðr for composition again
- Þorbjǫrn refuses
- Hávarðr appeals to Gestr Oddleifsson
- Gestr condemns Þorbjǫrn to pay a threefold indemnity

Þorbjǫrn fails to complete payment and scorns Hávarðr again
Hávarðr goes back to bed for a year
Gestr annuls his sister's marriage to Þorbjǫrn

Climax

Bjargey reconnoiters and casts a spell on Þorbjǫrn
She recruits her nephews in three stages
She rouses Hávarðr
Hávarðr assembles his men in three stages
He waylays Þorbjǫrn
Þorbjǫrn is slain
The vengeance is extended to Þorbjǫrn's brother Ljótr

Revenge

Hávarðr gains the support of Steinþórr á Eyri
He takes the young slayers of Þorbjǫrn's brother Hólmgǫngu-Ljótr into his following
With his sister's aid Steinþórr gains the support of his brother-in-law Atli
Atli offers hospitality to Steinþórr's guests
Þorbjǫrn's relatives plan to slay Hávarðr
Atli is forewarned in a dream
Atli, Hávarðr, and their followers turn back the assault

Reconciliation

Gestr Oddleifsson mediates the case

Aftermath

Hávarðr fetes his supporters and distributes gifts
He visits Óláfr Tryggvason and is converted
He returns to Iceland and dies

Comment

Hávarðar saga enjoys a particular disrepute among scholars because of evidence that it is a late reconstruction of an earlier saga and because it contains demonstrable historical errors and unprepossessing stanzas. But seen from a compositional viewpoint

it is neutral and regular to an unusual degree. If one were to select one saga typical of saga structure and saga technique in general and not characterized by any particularly striking idiosyncracies, a kind of saga's saga, it might well be this one. The sections which constitute the normal saga are represented in paradigmatic fashion.

The background of the confrontation between Þorbjǫrn and Hávarðr lies in the fate of Hávarðr's son Óláfr, the subject of the first part. Óláfr belongs to the blameless victim type (Kjartan, Gísli) and more especially to the type of blameless victim whose downfall is brought about by wanton mischief (Blund-Ketill, Njáll). Vakr's slander is motivated by pure spite and stands in direct contradiction to Óláfr's good deeds. In this respect the saga author works with the same black and white palette familiar from *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*. Óláfr's voluntary rounding up of his neighbor's lost sheep is set in relief against Þorbjǫrn's truculence and Vakr's slander. This deliberate contrast provides the key to the ghost and whale episodes: Óláfr demonstrates his good will by combating Þormóðr's revenant in the interest of the community —he is a kind of prototypical good citizen—while Þorbjǫrn demonstrates his ill will by his antisocial seizure of a neighbor's property. The roles of innocence and guilt are made quite clear in preparation for that frequent and dismal saga moral, according to which innocence must succumb. But before this inevitable conclusion is reached, the author inserts an apparent détente, which turns out to be the quiet before the storm. Hávarðr plans to move from the district and Þorbjǫrn promises reforms in return for the hand of Gestr's sister. The situation seems to be on the point of relief and this illusion is cultivated until the moment of the last encounter, when Þorbjǫrn's friendly overtures are suddenly dissipated by his unprovoked attack.

The principals now confront one another in the wake of Óláfr's death, but Hávarðr entertains no hope of gaining satisfaction from the powerful Þorbjǫrn and takes his despair with him to bed, perhaps the most striking example of the saga's fondness for the somatic representation of psychic ills. The story of the conflict is the story of Hávarðr's gradual reactivation through the

instrument of his wife Bjargey. She rouses him to a series of appeals for satisfaction reminiscent of Barði's appeals at the Allthing in *Heiðarvíga saga* or Hrútr's litigation against Hǫskuldr in *Laxdœla saga*. His efforts culminate, just as did Barði's, in a rejection accompanied by a drastic insult (the blow with Óláfr's teeth), which turns the tables on Þorbjǫrn and opens the way for a revenge justified by the merits of the case and sanctioned by public opinion, symbolized here by Gestr's withdrawal of support. The carrying out of the vengeance is not so elaborate as in *Heiðarvíga saga*, but it is similar in technique. It is prepared by Bjargey's reconnoissance, threefold recruitment, and incitement (she combines the functions of the sage counselor and the goad, Þórarinn and Þuríðr in *Heiðarvíga saga*), followed up by Hávarðr's threefold assembling of the recruits and his ambush strategy. The climax, which has been penned up and frustrated so long, now finds a double outlet in the slaying of Þorbjǫrn and his brother Ljótr, as if to compensate for both the injury and the insult. This double revenge is again somewhat analogous to the double action on Gullteigr and on the heath in *Heiðarvíga saga*.

The similarity is carried through the next section as well, where Hávarðr, like Barði, takes measures to neutralize the anticipated retaliation by seeking aid from powerful neighbors. There is even a close motival similarity in the key importance of provisioning the assembled forces, though the significance of the provisioning is probably obscured in the case of *Heiðarvíga saga* by a crucial lacuna. Hávarðr's resolute posture and that of his allies results in the complete discomfiture of his enemies and paves the way for a settlement on his terms through the mediation of Gestr Oddleifsson (Snorri goði in *Heiðarvíga saga*). The story closes with those anticlimactic details which frequently and fittingly cap the distinguished career of a distinguished saga personality: travel abroad and conversion at the instigation of Óláfr Tryggvason.

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Grettis saga

Synopsis

The viking Ǫnundr Ófeigsson harries in the British Isles and returns to Norway to stand against Harald Fairhair in the Battle of Hafrsfjǫrðr. Forced to flee Norway like the others who opposed Harald, he sails to the Hebrides and marries. Here he continues his exploits, defeating two vikings off the Hebrides and harrying in Ireland. Once more in Norway, he clashes with the king's men and decides to retire to Iceland. Unfavorable winds drive him off course, but when the wind shifts, he reaches land and stakes his claim. In Iceland he helps settle the slaying of his father-in-law and arranges the wedding of Óláfr feilan (Auðr djúpúðga's grandson) to a relative, then dies and is inherited by his sons Þorgeirr, Ófeigr, and Þorgrímr. The new generation quarrels with neighbors over the rights to a stranded whale, but the dispute is mediated. Þorgrímr's son Ásmundr marries in Norway and his wife gives birth to a son Þorsteinn. After her death Ásmundr returns to Iceland and remarries.

Ásmundr's second wife, Ásdís, gives birth to the sons Atli and Grettir and several daughters. Grettir is a difficult child and finds little favor with his father. A series of jobs assigned to him serve only as so many opportunities for drastic pranks: he kills or maims the geese he is set to tend, scratches his father's back with a carding comb, and flays the back of a horse given over to his care. During a ball game he comes to blows with a certain Auðunn and when he is beaten by the older boy, he vows revenge. On the way

to a Thing he then quarrels with a man, kills him, and is exiled. He takes passage to Norway and during the voyage he riddles his shipmates with scornful verses. In Norway he stays with the *lendr maðr* Þorfinnr and annoys him with his contrary behavior, but Þorfinnr is placated when Grettir brings him a treasure procured by breaking open a barrow and wrestling with a ghost. He further ingratiates himself by tricking and killing twelve berserks who attack Þorfinnr's house and women during his absence. A bear begins now to ravage the district. A certain Bjǫrn tries in vain to hunt it, then jeers at Grettir, who is moved to attack the bear singlehanded in its lair, kill it, and, mindful of the insult offered him, kill Bjǫrn as well. The slaying is composed through the intercession of Þorfinnr, but Bjǫrn's brother Hjarrandi attempts revenge, only to be slain together with three companions. A third brother, Gunnarr, attacks Grettir and is likewise slain together with his companions. For this bloodshed Grettir is banished from Norway and returns to Iceland.

Ásmundr's relative Þorgils is slain by Þorgeirr Hávarsson in a quarrel over a whale and Ásmundr outlaws him. Grettir seeks out his childhood rival Auðunn to wrestle with him. Barði Guðmundsson separates them and Grettir volunteers to accompany Barði on his mission of vengeance in the spring; Barði accepts, contingent on Þórarinn's approval.

Grettir handles his brother Atli's horse in a match and breaks three ribs in his opponent. The upshot is, sometime later, a skirmish in which Grettir kills several men.

Barði Guðmundsson, following Þórarinn's advice, fails to call on Grettir for assistance and Grettir seeks to avenge the slight without success.

A certain Þórhallr Grímsson finds it difficult to hire a shepherd for his haunted farm. A heathenish and ill-natured shepherd named Glámr finally takes the job, but is slain mysteriously at Christmas and becomes a revenant himself, killing two successors and forcing Þórhallr to abandon his farm during the winter. Grettir undertakes to go to Þórhallsstaðir and succeeds in overcoming Glámr in a wrestling match, but Glámr predicts outlawry, loneliness, and death for him.

One of Grettir's antagonists from the ill-fated horse-match, Þorbjǫrn ferðalangr, accuses him of cowardice. When he then extends his scorn to Grettir's father, he suffers the sanguinary consequences.

Grettir sails to Norway. During a stormy night on the coast of Norway he swims across an inlet to get fire from a house for his shipmates. When he enters, frosty and monstrous, he is taken for a troll and during the ensuing chaos he unwittingly sets the house afire and burns the inmates. His shipmates take the burning to be deliberate, broadcast the deed, and banish him from their company. He tries to attest his innocence by ordeal, but he strikes a boy who baits him in the church and is not allowed to carry out the test.

Grettir kills a berserk and meets with his half brother Þorsteinn, who promises to avenge him should the need arise.

Meantime in Iceland Ásmundr dies and his son Atli inherits the farm. Þorbjǫrn ferðalangr's companion Þorbjǫrn øxnamegin sends men to ambush Atli, but he thwarts the attack and kills a number of the attackers. The matter is arbitrated at the Thing, but when Atli harbors one of Þorbjǫrn's workers, Þorbjǫrn compasses his design and kills him.

Þórir Skeggjason, whose sons died in the fire caused by Grettir, has Grettir outlawed in Iceland. Grettir returns to Iceland and learns of the death of his father and brother and his own outlawing. He responds by killing Þorbjǫrn øxnamegin and his son.

The remainder of the saga describes the long and restless period of Grettir's outlawry. He takes refuge first with Þorsteinn Kuggason, Snorri goði, and Þorgils Arason at Reykjahólar, where Þorgeirr and Þormóðr are also lodged and where the host keeps his outlaws from each other's throats only with difficulty. During the litigation after Þorbjǫrn's slaying Skapti lǫgsǫgumaðr and Snorri goði try unsuccessfully to negotiate the lifting of Grettir's ban.

Grettir moves on to Ísafjǫrðr and sustains himself by raiding the farmers, but he is apprehended and is about to be hanged when he is rescued at the last moment by Vermundr inn mjóvi's wife Þorbjǫrg. He stays again with Þorsteinn Kuggason, then with relatives in the south. There he tries to hold up a certain Loptr, but proves to be no match for him. He retires to the wilderness in

Arnarvatnsheiðr and kills two assassins sent by his enemies. Since half measures are of no avail, Þórir Skeggjason mounts a full expedition to hunt him down, but this too Grettir turns back with the aid of Loptr (now called Hallmundr). He stays with Loptr for a time, then with Bjǫrn hítdœlakappi, whose neighbors he harasses, notably Þórðr Kolbeinsson. Þórðr incites Gísli Þorsteinsson to remove the menace, but Grettir chases Gísli over half a county and humbles him with a sound thrashing. Þórðr then organizes a full-scale attack, which is also beaten off by Grettir. Grettir now returns to the wilderness and stays in Þórisdalr for a winter. An outlaw named Grímr settles in his abandoned hut in Arnarvatnsheiðr. Hallmundr resents his presence, steals his fish, and is slain by him. Þórir Skeggjason sets out in search of Grettir, but Grettir disguises himself and misleads the searchers.

Grettir learns that Bárðardalr is haunted and goes to the farm Sandhaugar. A giantess invades the house and wrestles with Grettir until dawn when he finally kills her and pitches her into a waterfall. A short time later he descends into the fall and kills the giant as well.

Grettir is again beset by his enemies in Bárðardalr and is advised by Guðmundr inn ríki to take refuge on Drangey.

Snorri goði's son Þóroddr sets out to prove himself against Grettir, who wisely spares his life so as not to antagonize Snorri.

Grettir retires now to Drangey with his brother Illugi and a ne'er-do-well thrall named Þorbjǫrn, and the farmers who own shares in the island are unable to dislodge them by persuasion. Grettir goes to a Thing in disguise, hoodwinks his enemies into speaking a truce, then reveals his identity and engages in the wrestling. Þorbjǫrn ǫngull (one of the local farmers) buys up Drangey on the condition that he remove Grettir, but he too fails to persuade Grettir to leave the island. The thrall Þorbjǫrn lets the fire go out and Grettir is obliged to swim ashore to fetch fire. Þorbjǫrn ǫngull hires a certain Hæringr to scale the island and kill Grettir, but Illugi runs him off a cliff. Grettir's relatives try once more to rescind his outlawry, but it is determined that he has been outlawed for only nineteen of the required twenty years.

Þorbjǫrn now seeks the aid of his foster mother Þuríðr. She

accompanies him to Drangey and curses Grettir, then sets a charmed tree root afloat. It washes ashore on Drangey and is taken by Þorbjǫrn for firewood despite Grettir's misgivings. When he tries to split it, the axe slips and wounds him in the leg. The wound seems harmless at first, then swells and suppurates. Þuríðr now advises Þorbjǫrn to sail to Drangey despite heavy weather. He gathers men, consults his neighbor Halldórr, and sets out. As he does so, the weather slackens. The thrall fails to guard the ladder and thus delivers up his master to the enemy. Grettir falls after a heroic defense and Illugi chooses to die rather than to bind himself to a truce which would leave his brother unavenged. Þorbjǫrn's deed is universally condemned and people rally to the support of Grettir's mother Ásdís when he tries to execute a confiscation. Exiled for using magic and for killing a man already half dead and helpless, he goes to Norway, then to Constantinople when he learns of the presence of Grettir's brother Þorsteinn in Norway.

Þorsteinn follows Þorbjǫrn to Constantinople, kills him, and is imprisoned to await either ransom or execution. He is ransomed by the lady Spes and becomes her paramour, narrowly escaping detection by her husband three times. Spes frees herself from suspicion by swearing an equivocal oath and divorces her husband for slander. Þorsteinn then marries her and returns to Norway. At the end of their life they atone for their unchristian behavior with a pilgrimage to Rome, where they do penance and die in good repute.

Outline

Introduction
- Ǫnundr's adventures and colonization
- Ǫnundr's sons
- Ásmundr
  - First marriage and birth of Þorsteinn
  - Second marriage and birth of Atli and Grettir

Conflict
- *Grettir exiled from Iceland:*
  - Grettir's childhood pranks
  - His quarrel with Auðunn
  - His first slaying
  - His exile and passage to Norway
- *Grettir exiled from Norway:*
  - His stay with Þorfinnr in Norway
  - He opens a barrow
  - He kills twelve berserks
  - A bear begins to ravage the district
  - Bjǫrn jeers at Grettir
  - Grettir kills the bear singlehanded
  - He kills Bjǫrn
  - Bjǫrn's brother Hjarrandi attacks Grettir and is slain
  - A third brother Gunnarr attacks Grettir and is also slain
  - Grettir is banished from Norway
- *Grettir outlawed in Iceland:*

1 Ásmundr's relative Þorgils is slain by Þorgeirr Hávarsson
1 Ásmundr outlaws Þorgeirr
2 Grettir seeks out Auðunn and wrestles with him
2 Barði Guðmundsson separates them
2 Grettir promises to aid Barði in his revenge
3 Grettir injures an opponent in a horse-match
3 He kills several men in the ensuing skirmish
2 Barði Guðmundsson fails to call on Grettir for assistance
2 Grettir tries to avenge the slight, but is forced to withdraw
5 Þórhallr Grímsson's farm is haunted
5 His shepherd Glámr is killed mysteriously
5 Glámr becomes a revenant and kills his two successors
5 Grettir overcomes and kills Glámr
5 Glámr predicts outlawry, loneliness, and death for Grettir
3 Þorbjǫrn ferðalangr accuses Grettir of cowardice
3 He extends his scorn to Ásmundr

3 Grettir kills him
4 Grettir sails to Norway
4 He fetches fire for his shipmates and unwittingly burns down a house together with its inmates
4 He tries to attest his innocence by ordeal, but is prevented from completing the test
Grettir kills a berserk who challenges his host
5 His brother Þorsteinn vows to avenge him should the need arise
3 Þorbjǫrn ferðalangr's companion Þorbjǫrn øxnamegin ambushes Grettir's brother Atli unsuccessfully
3 The matter is settled at the Thing
3 Alti harbors one of Þorbjǫrn's workers and Þorbjǫrn kills him
4 Þórir Skeggjason, whose sons died in the fire set by Grettir, has Grettir outlawed in Iceland
3 Grettir kills Þorbjǫrn øxnamegin and his son
1 Grettir takes refuge with Þorsteinn Kuggason, Snorri goði, and Þorgils Arason
1 Þorgils harbors Þorgeirr and Þormóðr at the same time and keeps the outlaws in leash
3 During the litigation after Þorbjǫrn øxnamegin's slaying Snorri goði and Skapti Þóroddsson try unsuccessfully to lift Grettir's outlawry

Grettir's outlawry:

Grettir raids the farmers in Ísafjǫrðr and is apprehended
He is rescued by Þorbjǫrg in digra
He stays with Þorsteinn Kuggason, then with relatives in the south
He holds up Loptr (Hallmundr), but is no match for him
He stays on Arnarvatnsheiðr
He kills two assassins
He turns back Þórir Skeggjason's expedition with Hallmundr's aid
He stays with Bjǫrn hítdœlakappi and harasses Þórðr Kolbeinsson
Þórðr sets Gísli Þorsteinsson on him, but Gísli is discountenanced
Þórðr organizes a full-scale attack, which Grettir turns back
He stays in Þórisdalr

[Grímr kills Hallmundr]
Grettir eludes Þórir Skeggjason in disguise
Grettir goes to Sandhaugar
He kills a giantess
He descends into a waterfall and kills the giant as well
He is advised by Guðmundr inn ríki to go to Drangey
Þóroddr Snorrason attacks Grettir, who spares his life
Grettir goes to Drangey
The farmers of Skagafjǫrðr are unable to dislodge him by persuasion
Grettir goes to the Hegranesthing in disguise
Þorbjǫrn ǫngull buys up Drangey and promises to remove Grettir
He cannot persuade Grettir to leave the island
Grettir swims ashore to fetch fire
Hæringr scales the cliffs but is chased into the sea by Illugi
Grettir's relatives try unsuccessfully to rescind his outlawry

Climax

Þorbjǫrn seeks aid from his foster mother Þuríðr
She curses Grettir
She sends a charmed tree root to Drangey
The thrall brings it ashore, but Grettir casts it back
The thrall brings it a second time and Grettir wounds himself while chopping it
Þuríðr allays the wind and Þorbjǫrn sails to Drangey
The thrall sleeps on his guard and Þorbjǫrn comes ashore
Grettir and Illugi are slain

Revenge

Þorbjǫrn's deed is universally condemned
He is outlawed
He goes to Norway, then Constantinople
Þorsteinn kills him

Aftermath

Þorsteinn is imprisoned
He is ransomed by Spes and becomes her paramour
He escapes detection by her husband three times
Spes attests her innocence with an equivocal oath and divorces her husband
She and Þorsteinn marry and return to Norway
They do penance and die
Grettir's eulogy

Comment

Grettis saga necessarily invites comparison with Iceland's other great outlaw story, *Gísla saga*. The differences are considerable. *Gísla saga* is not only an incomparably more studied and chiseled formal production, but it is also the most metaphysical of the sagas. It is preoccupied not so much with the person of the hero as with the anatomy of his fate. *Grettis saga* is by contrast the most biographical of the sagas. Aside from an introductory section on Grettir's ancestor Qnundr and an epilogue on his avenger Þorsteinn it focuses exclusively on Grettir's life. *Gísla saga* looks at its subject, paradoxically, both with pathos and with a certain chilly perspective. *Grettis saga* has little of either. Not that the notion of fate is absent; it is, possibly inspired by *Gísla saga*, quite consciously worked in, but it is subordinated and to some extent lost in the wealth of biographical detail about Grettir. This makes it more difficult to find the dramatic line in *Grettis saga*, which looks at first like nothing more than a chain of incident. But the design is there, shaped not by the author's concern with abstract destiny but by his concern with personal misfortune. *Grettis saga* is not a study of fate but of ill fate. *Gísla saga* analyzes the behavior of the hero in the hands of impersonal forces, *Grettis saga* studies the hero at the mercy of personal adversity.

The plot is reminiscent of *Fóstbræðra saga* insofar as it is not a feud but a social conflict, in which the hero is pitted against a

sequence of people and against the social order rather than against an individual or a clan. The conflict can be divided into four parts for the sake of convenience: the events leading up to Grettir's exile from Iceland, the events leading up to his banishment from Norway, the events leading up to his outlawry in Iceland, and the story of the outlawry itself. The two exiles are simple in structure and foreshadow the outlawry, but the third section is complicated and intertwined in a way reminiscent of *Eyrbyggja saga*. It comprises five subplots marked 1–5 in the *Outline*. Four of these are concerned with Grettir's relationship to four men or groups: Þorgeirr Hávarsson (1); Barði Guðmundsson (2); Þorbjǫrn ferðalangr and his companion Þorbjǫrn øxnamegin (3); and Þórir Skeggjason (4). The fifth subplot is no plot at all, but the account of Glámr's curse and Þorsteinn's promise of revenge. Aside from these proleptic effects none of the episodes has a real meaning for Grettir's fate except the dealings with Þórir Skeggjason, who engineers Grettir's outlawry. The material gives the impression of being extraneous biography. This part of the saga is therefore not comprehensible in terms of dramatic tension. But there is an adhesive principle which joins the episodes together and gives them a consistent tenor. The principle involved is the establishing of Grettir as a victim of circumstance. His biography opens with his drastic childhood pranks, his quarrel with a playmate, and a youthful slaying from pure contentiousness, which brings about his first exile. All this is reminiscent of Egill's childhood, but whereas Egill remained cantankerous and truculent all his life, the picture of Grettir is carefully revised. His first slaying is his last unjustified slaying. He kills Bjǫrn after ample provocation and his two brothers in self-defense, his resumption of the wrestling match with Auðunn is not entirely bad-natured and no blood is shed, his confrontation with Barði Guðmundsson lacks the rancor one might expect, his slaying of Þorbjǫrn ferðalangr is justified by accusations of cowardice against himself and his father, his slaying of Þorbjǫrn øxnamegin is in revenge for his brother Atli, and his fateful arson is unintentional. Add to this his Beowulfian function as "land-cleanser," his slaying of twelve berserks in Norway and later a thirteenth, and his elimination of

Glámr, paralleled by his later activity at Sandhaugar, and the image is one not only of innocence but of social usefulness. To some extent Grettir belongs to the category of the innocent victim along with Blund-Ketill, Njáll, and Áskell, though not in such a pure and obvious form since his giant strength and youthful willfulness remind one rather of an Egill, a Þorgeirr, or a Glúmr.

The story of Grettir's outlawry is again simpler in outline. It is a succession of asylums with Þorgils Arason, in Ísafjǫrðr, with Þorsteinn Kuggason, on Arnarvatnsheiðr, with Bjǫrn hítdœlakappi, in Þórisdalr, at Sandhaugar, on Drangey. In each of his refuges he is pursued by his enemies, whom he is able however to hold off with more or less ease. There is none of the cliff-hanging that characterizes Gísli's breathtaking escapes from his pursuers. It is only on Drangey that the net closes in on him as a result of Þuríðr's sorcery and the three-fold failure of the thrall Þorbjǫrn. It is only in this final sequence, where the pursuit is abandoned in favor of witchcraft, that fate begins to hang heavy over the plot. It apparently belongs to the author's concept of the ultimate hero that he is proof against human agents and succumbs only to the black arts.

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Bandamanna saga (M)

Synopsis

As a young man Oddr leaves home because of a poor understanding with his father Ófeigr and gains fame and fortune on his own. At one point he takes a somewhat contrary fellow named Óspakr into his household and they develop a cordial friendship. Oddr's prosperity eventually leads to a *goðorð* (chieftainship) and when he decides to sail to Norway with his friend Váli, he entrusts his property and *goðorð* to Óspakr's keeping. On his return, however, Óspakr reveals his true colors and withholds the *goðorð* until Oddr repossesses himself by force. They separate and a short time later Oddr loses forty sheep. Váli ascertains that Óspakr is the thief and tries to settle the matter quietly, but Óspakr rejects his well-meant offices and Oddr sets out to deliver a summons. Váli rides ahead to make one more effort at mediation, but Óspakr mistakes him for Oddr and kills him. As he dies, Váli warns Óspakr to escape and he eludes the summoners. Oddr now prosecutes Óspakr, but chieftains who have become jealous of Oddr's prosperity and power find a technical flaw in the prosecution and disallow it. Luckily Oddr's old father Ófeigr turns up at the crucial moment and offers to save the day if his son provides the financing. He then moves the jury with word and coin to reconsider their previous disqualification and they now outlaw Óspakr. The chieftains are understandably provoked and eight of them band together to summon Oddr for bribery. Ófeigr undertakes a new countering maneuver and, having advised his son to

prepare a ship and embark all his movable property, he first exercises his wiles on the most vulnerable of the chieftains, Egill Skúlason. He persuades him that his share of the confiscation of Oddr's property will not amount to much, since only the land remains, and bribes him to defect from the common cause. He next approaches Gellir and detaches him from the conspiracy by offering a match between one of his daughters and Oddr. When the Thing then assembles, Ófeigr offers self-judgment on the condition that it be exercised by two of the chieftains chosen by himself. The associates, confident in their solidarity, agree, and Ófeigr plays the decision into the hands of his two defectors Egill and Gellir, who proceed to assign a ridiculously nominal fine, to the consternation of their companions. Oddr marks his triumph by celebrating his wedding with Gellir's daughter and rewarding his father and Egill extravagantly. Óspakr, now outlawed without appeal, takes revenge against those responsible by killing both men and animals, but in one such attack he is wounded and is later found dead.

Outline

Introduction
- Oddr's birth, youth, quarrel with his father, and departure
- His friendship with the rascal Óspakr
- He entrusts Óspakr with his property and *goðorð*

Conflict
- Óspakr witholds the *goðorð*, but Oddr regains it with threats
  - Óspakr steals forty sheep
  - Váli discovers the theft and tries to conciliate
  - Váli tries to conciliate a second time

Climax
- Váli is slain

Revenge
- Oddr prosecutes Óspakr
- The envious chieftains quash the prosecution

- Oddr's father Ófeigr intervenes and bribes and cajoles the jury into a change of heart
- Óspakr is outlawed
- The envious chieftains prosecute Oddr for bribery
- Ófeigr bribes Egill and Gellir into deserting the cause
- He plays the decision into their hands
- Oddr escapes with a mock award

Reconciliation
- Oddr is reconciled with his father and rewards Egill and Gellir

Aftermath
- One of the betrayed chieftains tries to avenge himself on Egill and is slain
- Óspakr takes revenge against those who outlawed him and is slain

Comment

Bandamanna saga occupies a special position among the sagas because it is the only comedy in the group. The author is not interested in the drama of tensions and frictions and though the saga can plausibly be analyzed as a conflict, this analysis misses the point. The author is a master of comic effects rather than of dramatic effects (*Heiðarvíga saga*), or pathetic effects (*Gísla saga*), or character effects (*Egils saga*). This comes as a surprise since we have no inkling elsewhere in the sagas (except for brief flashes in *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, *Ljósvetninga saga*, and *Njáls saga*) that their authors were also favored by the whimsical muse.

The skeleton of the story is a double conflict, one boxed in the other and providing the solution for it: a conflict between Oddr and his father Ófeigr framing a conflict between Oddr and his friend Óspakr. The conflict between father and son is no more motivated than it is in *Egils saga*, *Grettis saga*, or *Gunnlaugs saga*; it is simply an incompatibility of temperament. On the other hand, the conflict between Oddr and Óspakr is accounted for with standard devices, the withholding of a *goðorð*, a theft, a slaying. This is all commonplace and it is followed by the ritual litigation, which threatens to go against the hero and gives the author the

opportunity to play his trump. He uses the inner conflict as an opening for the outer conflict and reintroduces Oddr's rejected father as a friend in need to make up for his son's legal deficiencies. The old man turns out to be the most winning rogue in saga literature. The author delights in his wiles and in the foibles of his opponents. His maneuvering is not described as the legal hair-splitting familiar from *Njáls saga* or in terms of the sinuous subterfuges in *Glúms saga*. The interest is psychological. Ófeigr is the master persuader who knows how to uncover the weaknesses of his opponents, where to drive the wedges, and how to weave his arguments into a pattern of plausibility. There is none of the either/or attitude with which most saga debates make their points, usually from a position of strength. *Bandamanna saga* is the counterpoise to the cult of power in the sagas, an antiaristocratic document with popular sympathies, as has been pointed out. It not only exposes the weaknesses of the ruling chieftains but relishes them; the mocking dialogue is recorded complete, a kind of cat and mouse dialogue not to be found elsewhere in the sagas. By the time Ófeigr is through wheedling, the chieftains are thoroughly discomfited and sheepish and both conflicts are comfortably resolved.

Bandamanna saga belongs in part to the category of personal conflicts, but instead of a climax in victory or defeat it provides an almost jocular dénouement. At the same time it is reminiscent of the pattern in *Glúms saga* or *Hávarðar saga*, where excessive prestige and popularity lead to envy and the downfall of the hero. But here the downfall that one senses at the outset of Oddr's difficulties fails to materialize and dissolves into merriment. While Ófeigr is on the stage, there is no thought of tragedy or morality. Only after the happy conclusion does the author relapse briefly into the sagaman's sober vein in order to mete out Óspakr's well-deserved punishment.

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Vatnsdœla saga

Synopsis

The district belonging to the Norwegian chieftain Ketill raumr is beset by a highwayman and Ketill urges his son Þorsteinn to prove himself by eliminating the menace. Þorsteinn accordingly waylays the robber in his house and inflicts a mortal wound. Despite his wound the robber has it in his power to kill Þorsteinn, but seeing in him a man favored by fortune, he chooses rather to send him to his father Jarl Ingimundr of Gautland to woo his sister Þórdís. Þorsteinn returns home and is duly applauded for his deed, then travels to Gautland, is pardoned by Ingimundr, and marries Þórdís. On the news of his father's death he returns home once again.

Þórdís gives birth to a son named after his grandfather Ingimundr and Þorsteinn's friend Ingjaldr offers to foster the child together with his own sons Grímr and Hrómundr. When they come of age, the foster brothers harry during the summer and join forces with another viking named Sæmundr. Later they separate and Ingimundr supports Harald Fairhair in the Battle of Hafrsfjǫrðr while Sæmundr elects to absent himself. Harald rewards Ingimundr and by the same token promises not to forget Sæmundr's defection. Ingimundr warns his former companion of the king's hostility and Sæmundr escapes to Iceland. At a banquet held by Ingjaldr a seeress predicts that Ingimundr and his foster brothers will also settle Iceland. Grímr and Hrómundr acquiesce and emigrate while Ingimundr resists the prediction. But fate is not to be balked and

after the death of his father Þorsteinn and his own marriage, Ingimundr hires three Lapps to reconnoiter the region he is destined to settle in Iceland. When they report on their psychic exploration and describe the site, he decides to accept his lot and emigrate with his wife Vigdís, his four sons (Þorsteinn, Jǫkull, Þórir, and Hǫgni), and his two daughters (Þórdís and Jórunn). In Iceland they spend the first winter with Ingimundr's foster brother Grímr and the second winter in Víðidalr before finally settling the predestined spot in Vatnsdalr. Ingimundr acquires what are to become two family heirlooms, the ship Stígandi from King Harald during a visit in Norway and the sword Ættartangi by tricking a Norwegian merchant to whom he has extended hospitality in Iceland.

Sæmundr's ill-tempered nephew Hrolleifr comes to Iceland, stays one winter with Sæmundr, then establishes his own homestead and begins to harass his neighbors. When he asks for the daughter of his neighbor Uni in marriage, he is refused and threatens to seduce her. Uni's son Oddr attacks him, but Hrolleifr is protected by his mother's sorcery and kills his assailant. As a result he is exiled from the district, but Sæmundr persuades his foster brother Ingimundr to take him under his protection. In Vatnsdalr Hrolleifr and Ingimundr's sons get along so badly that Ingimundr is obliged to find a separate home for his unwelcome guest. Eventually a quarrel over fishing privileges leads to a battle between the young men and when Ingimundr intercedes, he is mortally wounded and only able to conceal his wound long enough to allow for Hrolleifr's escape. His sons then find him dead and resolve to avenge him, while two of Ingimundr's old friends betoken their grief by committing suicide. Hrolleifr takes refuge with Sæmundr's son Geirmundr, but Þorsteinn induces Geirmundr to turn Hrolleifr out and with a combination of his own wisdom and Jǫkull's strength they are able to trap Hrolleifr and kill him.

The brothers now divide their property and settle down to combat a series of peace-breakers. First the rascal and thief Þórólfr sleggja begins to disturb the district, but the citizenry appeals to Ingimundr's sons and they respond by killing Þórólfr. Next their relative Már, abetted by another rascal and sorcerer

named Þorgrímr skinnhúfa, occupies land of doubtful deed and the brothers settle the matter in a pitched battle. A third troublemaker, Þórólfr heljarskinn, marauds and menaces the district until he too is routed and killed by Jǫkull and his brothers.

The following episode is more elaborate. A certain Bergr inn rakki passes by Þorsteinn's farm on his way to his uncle Finnbogi without making the usual courtesy call and arouses attention by his arrogant behavior. Bergr subsequently jostles Þorsteinn at a wedding feast and is struck down by Jǫkull. They are separated for the moment, but Bergr vows revenge. He prosecutes and demands that Jǫkull compensate for the blow by passing under three earthen arches. Jǫkull refuses, but Þorsteinn substitutes for him. After the first arch Bergr insults him and he refuses to complete the penalty. Finnbogi and Bergr now challenge Þorsteinn and Jǫkull to a duel, but they fail to appear on the appointed day and Jǫkull and Þorsteinn mark their presence with a *níð*. Finnbogi and Bergr ride to Hof to take their revenge, but Þorsteinn is prepared and outnumbers them. Given the choice between a hopeless fight and banishment, they choose to leave the district.

Three other incidents are touched on more lightly. The brothers are invited to a banquet by two newly arrived sisters, but Þorsteinn is warned in a dream and advises against going. One of the ladies turns out to be still another sorceress, who now dies in an avalanche designed for the brothers. Þorgrímr á Kárnsá, a friend of the family, exposes a natural son, but Þorsteinn rescues him and raises him under the name Þorkell krafla. He is destined to take over the succession in Vatnsdalr. Þorsteinn's own son Ingólfr turns his attention to Óttarr's daughter Valgerðr. After vain protests Óttarr prosecutes the case, but Jǫkull and Ingólfr scatter the jury and Óttarr finds it wisest to leave the district.

After the death of Þorsteinn and his brothers, Þorsteinn's sons Ingólfr and Guðmundr divide the inheritance. When Ingólfr continues his visits to Valgerðr, Óttarr sends an assassin to kill either Ingólfr or Guðmundr. He makes an unsuccessful attempt on Guðmundr's life, is slain by him, and Óttarr is obliged to pay a fine. Óttarr sends a second assassin, who is successful this time and kills Guðmundr. Óttarr pays the indemnity and the matter is

settled. However, Ingólfr is not destined for a long life and succumbs to wounds received in an attack on a robbers' nest. Since his sons are not of age, the *goðorð* is left unoccupied.

A certain Þorkell silfri is on the point of becoming *goði* by means of sorcery, but Þorgrímr á Kárnsá offers his natural son Þorkell krafla recognition in exchange for killing the unwanted claimant. Þorkell does and so Þorgrímr takes over the *goðorð*. Þorkell then earns fame and fortune in the service of Jarl Sigurðr of the Orkneys, returns to Iceland, and, after avenging the insults of a certain Glœðir, becomes in turn chieftain of the Vatnsdœlir. He uses his authority to settle the slaying of Hallfreðr's brother Galti by Hermundr Ávaldason in revenge for Hallfreðr's seduction of his sister and, after an interlude in which Bishop Friðrekr comes to Iceland to preach the faith, he settles one more quarrel before dying a Christian death.

Outline

Þorsteinn Ketilsson
- Ketill incites his son to seek out the highwayman Jǫkull and Þorsteinn does so
  - He inflicts a mortal wound, but finds himself at Jǫkull's mercy. Jǫkull spares him and sends him to his parents in Gautland.
    - Þorsteinn is applauded for the deed
    - He travels to Gautland and is pardoned by Jǫkull's father Ingimundr
    - He marries Jǫkull's sister Þórdís

Ingimundr Þorsteinsson
- Þorsteinn's son Ingimundr harries with his foster brothers and allies himself with a viking named Sæmundr
  - He supports Harald Fairhair at Hafrsfjǫrðr; Sæmundr does not
    - Harald rewards Ingimundr and threatens Sæmundr
    - Sæmundr goes to Iceland

- A seeress predicts that Ingimundr and his foster brothers will settle Iceland
  - The foster brothers emigrate
- Ingimundr marries and hires three Lapps to reveal his destined home in Iceland
  - He emigrates
    - He settles in Vatnsdalr
    - He sails to Norway for timber and acquires the ship Stígandi
    - He acquires the sword Ættartangi

    - Sæmundr receives a nephew Hrolleifr
    - Hrolleifr disrupts the district and kills a neighbor
    - He is outlawed and Sæmundr sends him to Ingimundr
  - Friction between Hrolleifr and Ingimundr's sons
  - They quarrel over fishing privileges
  - During the fight Ingimundr is mortally wounded
- Ingimundr's sons find him dead
  - Two of Ingimundr's friends commit suicide on hearing the news
  - Hrolleifr takes refuge with Sæmundr's son Geirmundr, but Ingimundr's sons smoke him out
  - They kill him

Ingimundr's sons
- The thief Þórólfr sleggja besets the district
- The citizenry appeals to Ingimundr's sons
- They kill Þórólfr
  - Their relative Már, abetted by the sorcerer Þorgrímr skinnhúfa, occupies disputed land
- They fight a pitched battle and dictate their terms
  - Þórólfr heljarskinn turns robber
- Jǫkull and his brothers rout and kill him
    - Bergr inn rakki slights Þorsteinn as he passes by his house
    - He jostles Þorsteinn at a wedding feast and Jǫkull strikes him down

Bergr prosecutes and demands that Jǫkull pass under three expiatory earthen arches

Jǫkull refuses, but Þorsteinn takes his place

He refuses to complete the penalty when Bergr insults him and Bergr and Finnbogi now challenge Þorsteinn and Jǫkull to a duel

Finnbogi and Bergr fail to come and Jǫkull and Þorsteinn mark their presence with a *níð*

Finnbogi and Bergr ride to Hof to take revenge but are outnumbered

Given a choice between a hopeless fight and banishment, they choose the latter

Two sisters move into the district

One of them invites the brothers to a banquet

Þorsteinn is forewarned in a dream and they stay away

She is killed in the landslide prepared for Þorsteinn

Ingólfr and Guðmundr

Ingólfr flirts with Óttarr's daughter Valgerðr

Óttarr protests in vain

He prosecutes Ingólfr

Jǫkull and Ingólfr scatter the jury

Óttarr leaves the district

Ingólfr continues his visits to Valgerðr

Óttarr sends an assassin without success

His second assassin kills Guðmundr

Óttarr pays the indemnity and the matter is settled

Ingólfr attacks a nest of robbers and is mortally wounded

He dies

Þorkell krafla

After Ingólfr's death the *goðorð* is vacant

Þorkell, the natural son of a certain Þorgrímr and foster son of Þorsteinn, gains recognition from his father by killing his competitor for the *goðorð*

Þorkell earns fame and fortune in the Orkneys

He kills a certain Glœðir after repeated insults

He becomes chieftain of the Vatnsdœlir

He settles the slaying of Hallfreðr's brother Galti

He settles a second quarrel

He dies

Comment

Vatnsdœla saga, like *Eyrbyggja saga*, fails to conform to the structural pattern common to most sagas. It conforms not even to the first principle, namely that the saga is built around one climax. *Vatnsdœla saga* has no climax; the heroes suffer a straw-death with disappointing frequency and any possible drama is regularly foreshortened. The only dramatic piece is the death of Ingimundr, prepared as it is by the unfolding friction between Hrolleifr and his neighbors, but it is impossible to regard this as the pivot of the saga. Hrolleifr tends rather to be absorbed into the series of ill-fated sorcerers and scoundrels eradicated by several generations of beneficent Vatnsdœlir.

The saga is not a drama but a family chronicle, which records the chief milestones in the lives of five generations: Þorsteinn, Ingimundr, Ingimundr's four sons, Ingólfr and Guðmundr, and finally Þorkell krafla. There is more than a little monotony about these milestones. The Vatnsdœlir seem to have been put into the world for the purpose of unrooting the iniquity around them, which they do systematically and with great precision beginning with the highwayman Jǫkull in Norway, through Hrolleifr, Þórólfr sleggja, Þorgrímr skinnhúfa, Þórólfr heljarskinn, and up to and including the bandits exterminated by Ingólfr. The saga is a veritable rogues gallery and the bringing to account of these rogues, usually made doubly objectionable by their dabbling in the black arts, is the backbone of the story. Of more conventional family or personal conflicts there are only the stories of Jǫkull's and Þorsteinn's encounter with Bergr and Finnbogi, Ingólfr's seduction of Valgerðr, and Hermundr's slaying of Galti. Of these incidents the last two are suspect of being prompted by *Hallfreðar saga*, to which *Vatnsdœla saga* refers. If they are eliminated, there

is not much left but a series of landcleansings by the successive generations of Vatnsdœlir, a chronicle in form and a crusade in spirit. As such the saga is rather more rewarding to the historian of witchcraft than to the literary historian.

Supplementary Reading

Bååth, A. U. *Studier öfver Kompositionen i Några Isländska Ättsagor*, Lund, 1855, pp. 20–41.

Hallfreðar saga

Synopsis

Óttarr Þorvaldsson's father and foster father are burned in their house by the viking Sokki, but he himself escapes with his foster brother Ávaldi Ingjaldsson. They become wealthy in commerce with England and decide to sail for Iceland after avenging their fathers. They kill Sokki and maim his brother Sóti, then settle in Vatnsdalr and marry. Ávaldi has a daughter Kolfinna and Óttarr has two sons, Hallfreðr and Galti, and a daughter Valgerðr.

Þorsteinn Ingimundarson's son Ingólfr pays court to Valgerðr. Óttarr tries unsuccessfully to put an end to his attentions and finally prosecutes him for the composition of love verses. The disposition of the case is ultimately left up to Þorsteinn, who pays a small fine for his son's misconduct but banishes Óttarr from the district. His son Hallfreðr now pays court to Ávaldi's daughter Kolfinna and Ávaldi is in turn provoked. He resolves the problem by finding a suitor, Gríss Sæmingsson, for his daughter. Hallfreðr flouts Gríss with his courting and is captured, but is then released again by his father. Gríss and Kolfinna celebrate their wedding and Hallfreðr is urged to go abroad.

Hallfreðr travels to Norway, is converted by Óláfr Tryggvason, and quarrels with two of the king's followers (Óttarr and Kálfr). Having killed Óttarr, he is condemned to death, but the sentence is commuted by the king and he is given a chance to win full pardon by slaying or blinding the heathen Þorleifr spaki. He fulfills the condition to the extent of putting out one of Þorleifr's eyes, but

takes the other eye from Kálfr. The king lets the matter rest.

Hallfreðr now goes to Sweden and joins company with a certain Auðgísl. A highwayman offers his services as a guide and picks his moment to kill Auðgísl, but Hallfreðr calls on Christ and and the luck of King Olaf and overcomes him. He then stays with a certain Bjǫrn, who also makes an unsuccessful attempt on his life, only to be slain himself. Hallfreðr is about to do ritual atonement for this bloodshed but is saved by Auðgísl's wife Ingibjǫrg, whom he then marries. He goes to the Swedish court to recite a panegyric before the king and shortly thereafter he dreams that King Olaf bids him return to Norway. He does so and after his return Ingibjǫrg dies. He now requests permission to go to Iceland and no sooner has he arrived than he takes advantage of Gríss's absence to sleep with Kolfinna and entertain her with slanderous verses about her husband. The enraged Gríss pursues his tormentor, loses one of his men in the encounter, and institutes legal proceedings. Þorkell krafla offers to arbitrate the dispute, but before a settlement is reached Kolfinna's brother kills Hallfreðr's brother Galti. Hallfreðr now challenges Gríss to a duel, but King Olaf warns him against it in a dream. Both sides then agree to Þorkell's mediation.

After Óláfr Tryggvason's death at Svǫlðr, Hallfreðr plans vengeance against Jarl Erik. Olaf warns him in a dream that this is futile and that he should rather compose a panegyric. At Erik's court he is seized for the maiming of Þorleifr spaki, but Þorleifr intercedes in his behalf. After further travels in the east he returns to Iceland, but dies at sea. His body floats ashore on the Hebrides, where it is plundered and sunk in a fen. King Olaf reveals the desecration to the abbot of a nearby monastery in a vision and the abbot recovers the body and provides suitable burial for it.

Outline

Introduction
- Óttarr's father and foster father are killed

- He escapes with his foster brother Ávaldi
- They avenge their fathers
- They sail to Iceland and settle

Ingólfr pays court to Óttarr's daughter Valgerðr
- Óttarr prosecutes him
- Þorsteinn arbitrates
- Óttarr is banished

Conflict[1]

Óttarr's son Hallfreðr pays court to Ávaldi's daughter Kolfinna
- Ávaldi finds a suitor (Gríss) for his daughter
  - Hallfreðr flouts Gríss
  - Gríss seizes and binds him
  - Óttarr frees him again
  - Gríss and Kolfinna are married and Hallfreðr is urged to go abroad

The foreign interlude

Hallfreðr is converted by Óláfr Tryggvason

He quarrels with two of the king's followers (Óttarr and Kálfr) and kills Óttarr
- He is condemned to death, but the king reprieves him
- He is given a chance to win full pardon by slaying or blinding the heathen Þorleifr spaki
- He takes one eye from Þorleifr and one from Kálfr

Hallfreðr goes to Sweden
- His companion Auðgísl is slain by a robber
- He avenges him
  - He stays with a certain Bjǫrn, who attacks him and is slain
  - He is about to be sacrificed but is saved by Auðgísl's wife Ingibjǫrg
  - He marries Ingibjǫrg
    - He recites a panegyric at the Swedish court
    - He dreams that King Olaf bids him return
      - He does so
      - Ingibjǫrg dies

He requests leave to go to Iceland

Conflict[2]

Hallfreðr takes advantage of Gríss's absence to sleep with Kolfinna and slander her husband

Gríss pursues Hallfreðr, who slays one of his men

Gríss prosecutes

Þorkell krafla offers to arbitrate

Kolfinna's brother kills Hallfreðr's brother

Hallfreðr challenges Gríss to a duel

In a dream King Olaf warns him to desist

Reconciliation

Both sides agree to Þorkell's mediation

Aftermath

Hallfreðr seeks to avenge Óláfr Tryggvason after the Battle of Svǫlðr

King Olaf warns him in a dream not to

He is seized by Jarl Erik for maiming Þorleifr

Þorleifr intercedes in his behalf

Further travels in the east

Hallfreðr dies at sea on his way to Iceland

He washes ashore on the Hebrides

The corpse is plundered and sunk in a fen

The abbot of a nearby monastery is informed by King Olaf in a vision and provides a suitable burial

Comment

It is a curious fact that all the skald sagas are partially or wholly conceived as love stories. The only skald who is not in some way governed by the fair sex is the hopeless boor Egill Skallagrímsson. *Gunnlaugs saga*, *Kormáks saga*, *Bjarnar saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, and even *Gísla saga* are all constructed on a love conflict. Even the one section of *Fóstbræðra saga* concerned only with the skald Þormóðr and not with his pugnacious foster brother Þorgeirr is a love

episode. This is all the more curious since all the other sagas assiduously avoid the topic of love except where a seduction, a bride-theft, or a divorce serves as an irritant in an otherwise inflamed conflict. Were the skalds more accessible to feminine charms than their more prosaic compatriots? Did they make a point of immortalizing their amorous contretemps in verse while other heroes left their ladies uncelebrated and forgotten? The traditions about the Norwegian skalds give no indication of erotic preoccupations either biographical or poetic. Did the thirteenth century simply fancy the skald as a man peculiarly subject to the afflictions of love or is there something to the idea that this association of love and poetry can be traced to the impact of the French troubadour tradition?

The other peculiarity of the skald sagas is that their heroes spend more time abroad than most. The author of *Egils saga* managed to make this peripeteticism plausible in terms of the narrative structure by pitting his hero against the foreign monarch Erik and making his travels links in the conflict. The solution is not always so neat. It will be remembered that the thread of *Gunnlaugs saga* is broken by Gunnlaugr's tournée of the northern courts in such a way as to leave a structural residue. The reason for these travels is easy to find. Unless all our information about the skalds is spurious, they were usually attached to a king and made a point of court appearances. Since they left behind verse about their lords and their service abroad, the saga authors of a later day were obliged to do something with the information and fit it into the saga whether it broke the framework or not.

These two peculiarities, the erotic and the errant, explain the structure of *Hallfreðar saga*, which conforms to the structure observed in *Gunnlaugs saga*, *Kormáks saga*, and *Bjarnar saga hítdœlakappa*. A lover's conflict is joined on Iceland, interrupted by the hero's travels abroad and the account of his adventures, and is rejoined in Iceland, leading to a tragic dénouement (*Gunnlaugs saga*, *Bjarnar saga*), or reconciliation (*Hallfreðar saga*), or simple suspension (*Kormáks saga*). Thus, after a foreshadowing affair between Ingólfr and Valgerðr, Hallfreðr courts the favor of Kolfinna, but is frustrated by her marriage to Gríss and travels to

Norway. After his adventures there and in Sweden he returns to Iceland and renews his siege of Kolfinna. This brings the conflict to a head and it culminates in a challenge to a duel, but unlike *Gunnlaugs saga* the duel fails to materialize and the dispute recedes leaving the saga without a real climax or a satisfactory dénouement. Even more than *Grettis saga*, *Hallfreðar saga* leaves the impression of a biographical miscellany.

Supplementary Reading

Einarsson, Bjarni. *Skáldasögur*, Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1961, pp. 165–233.

Kormáks saga

Synopsis

Ogmundr, the son of a Norwegian chieftain in the days of Harald Fairhair, wins fame as a viking and marries the daughter of a jarl. When he fails to get along with Harald's successor Erik Bloodaxe, he settles in Iceland. His first wife having died, he remarries and has two sons, Kormákr and Þorgils, by his second wife Dalla. They fall heir to his property after his death.

Kormákr meets Steingerðr, is immediately attracted, and begins to pay her frequent visits despite Dalla's warning that her father Þorkell is likely to disapprove. Þorkell's man Narfi undertakes to discourage Kormákr's visits and receives only a blow on the head for his pains. Þorkell then sets the two sons of the sorceress Þórveig on Kormákr. He kills them and the bereaved Þórveig puts a curse on his love for Steingerðr. Despite these obstacles Kormákr and Steingerðr are betrothed, but Þórveig's magic causes Kormákr to repent and he fails to come to the wedding. Þorkell and his like-named son decide to avenge the dishonor done them and strengthen their hand against Kormákr by marrying Steingerðr to the warriorlike Bersi, secretly and without her foreknowledge.

Kormákr, informed of the marriage, sets out in pursuit, but fails to catch Bersi because he is given a leaky boat by Þórveig. Kormákr now challenges Bersi to a duel. He borrows a sword from Miðfjarðar-Skeggi for the purpose, but neutralizes its special powers by failing to follow Skeggi's directions. During the

combat Kormákr receives a slight wound on the finger and the duel is adjudged against him despite his protests and despite general dissatisfaction with the decision. Kormákr leaves the debt incurred by his defeat to be paid by his uncle Steinarr, and Steinarr, in a roundabout way, becomes the instrument of his revenge. Hostility having arisen between Bersi and his neighbor Þórðr because of some bruises inflicted by Bersi's son on Þórðr's sons, Þórðr incites Steinarr to challenge Bersi. He does so and Bersi is seriously wounded, much to Kormákr's gratification.

Þórðr subsequently heals Bersi's wound and their friendship is restored, but Steingerðr uses her husband's crippling as ground for divorce and asks her brother Þorkell to recover the dowry. Bersi refuses to return the dowry and Þorkell challenges him to another duel. Bersi first kills Þorkell and is about to take on Þorkell's second, Váli, when Þórðr intervenes and reconciles them. Two men, Oddr and Glúmr, argue the respective merits of Bersi and a certain Þórarinn rammi. Þórarinn is angered by his detractor Oddr and abducts his daughter Steinvǫr, but Oddr appeals to Bersi, who kills Þórarinn and his three sons and rescues Steinvǫr. Bersi offers to foster Óláfr pá's son Halldórr in order to strengthen his position in his old age and together with Halldórr he kills Váli, who has encroached on his pasturage.

Steingerðr now marries Þorvaldr tinteinn and before sailing abroad, Kormákr composes some injurious stanzas about her new husband. In Norway he harries with his brother, but his thoughts are with Steingerðr. He serves under Haraldr gráfeldr but continues to hark back to Steingerðr in his stanzas and decides to return to Iceland. He spends a day and a night with her, but is repulsed. During the following winter he visits her again. Her husband's brother Þorvarðr and his companion Narfi devise the plan of attributing to Kormákr an obscene stanza about Steingerðr in order to drive a wedge between them. The scheme works until Kormákr uncovers it and kills Narfi. Þorvarðr challenges Kormákr to a duel, but fails to appear at the appointed time. He later renews the challenge and both Þorvarðr and Kormákr apply to Þórdís spákona for aid. Both are made proof against steel, but Kormákr wins by breaking his opponent's ribs with his blunted sword.

Þorvarðr renews his challenge once again. This time only Þorvarðr takes advantage of Þórdís' services, but Kormákr again wins with a blunted blade, with which he breaks Þorvarðr's collarbone.

Kormákr prepares to leave Iceland and gives Steingerðr a couple of leisurely farewell kisses. He is condemned to pay a fine and leaves for Norway. Shortly thereafter Þorvarðr and Steingerðr also sail for Norway, are attacked by vikings, and saved by Kormákr. One day in Norway Kormákr meets Steingerðr on the street and gives her four more kisses. The king counts one for the rescue, one for a greeting, and fines him for the remaining two. Kormákr and Þorvaldr each take command of a ship under Haraldr gráfeldr. As they sail close together, Kormákr gives his rival a blow with the tiller. Steingerðr avenges the blow by ramming Kormákr's ship and capsizing it. The king judges that the insult and the injury are equal. Steingerðr is seized by vikings and Kormákr rescues her again. Þorvaldr now relinquishes his claim and bids Steingerðr go with Kormákr. Kormákr is willing, but Steingerðr rejects the exchange and he fails to press his chance.

Kormákr ends his life harrying in the British Isles, where he succumbs to wounds sustained in a fight against a giant in Scotland.

Outline

Introduction
- Ǫgmundr
  - Viking exploits and first marriage
  - Quarrel with Erik Bloodaxe and settlement in Iceland
  - Second marriage, birth of Kormákr and Þorgils

Conflict[1] (with Bersi)
- Kormákr meets Steingerðr and visits her
- At her father Þorkell's instigation his companion Narfi interferes and is rewarded with a blow
- The two sons of the sorceress Þórveig attack Kormákr and are killed
- Þórveig casts a spell on Kormákr

Kormákr and Steingerðr are betrothed, but the spell prevents

Kormákr from appearing at the wedding
Þorkell avenges the slight by marrying Steingerðr secretly to Bersi
Kormákr pursues Bersi without success
Kormákr challenges Bersi to a duel
He ignores the directions for assuring victory
He is slightly wounded and loses the duel
Kormákr leaves the debt to be paid by his uncle Steinarr
Hostility between Bersi and his neighbor Þórðr
Þórðr incites Steinarr to challenge Bersi
Bersi is seriously wounded
Steingerðr uses her husband's crippling as ground for divorce
Her brother Þorkell tries to recover her dowry
Bersi refuses and Þorkell challenges him to a duel
Bersi defeats him

Digression on Bersi
Oddr compares Þórarinn rammi unfavorably to Bersi
Þórarinn abducts Oddr's daughter Steinvǫr
Bersi kills Þórarinn and his three sons and rescues Steinvǫr
Bersi fosters Óláfr pá's son Halldórr
With Halldórr he slays the trespasser Váli

Conflict[2] (with Þorvaldr)
Steingerðr marries Þorvaldr tinteinn and Kormákr composes injurious stanzas about him
Kormákr goes abroad, but his mind is on Steingerðr
He returns and spends a day and a night with her
Þorvaldr's brother Þorvarðr and Narfi ascribe to Kormákr an obscene stanza about Steingerðr
Kormákr kills Narfi
Þorvarðr challenges Kormákr, but fails to appear
He renews the challenge
Both he and Kormákr apply to Þórdís spákona and are made proof against steel
Kormákr wins by breaking Þorvarðr's ribs
Þorvarðr renews the challenge

Only Þorvarðr applies to Þórdís for help
Kormákr wins by breaking Þorvarðr's collarbone
Kormákr prepares to leave Iceland and kisses Steingerðr
He is condemned to pay a fine
Þorvaldr and Steingerðr set sail for Norway
They are attacked by vikings and Kormákr saves them
Kormákr meets Steingerðr on the street and gives her four kisses
The king counts one for the rescue, one for the greeting, and extracts a fine for the other two
Þorvaldr and Kormákr each take command of a ship under the king
As they sail close together, Kormákr gives Þorvaldr a blow with the tiller
Steingerðr retaliates by capsizing Kormákr's ship
The king judges the injury equal to the insult
Steingerðr is seized by vikings
Kormákr rescues her
Þorvaldr relinquishes his claim

Climax
Steingerðr refuses and Kormákr acquiesces

Aftermath
Kormákr harries in the British Isles
He dies of wounds sustained in Scotland

Comment

It is curious how awkwardly the saga authors respond to the notion of love even when their narrative is primarily concerned with it. They recognize the phenomenon but are unable to regulate its expression. There is no love dialogue, no love psychology, no love analysis, no verbal play, and no homage to the mystery. The only outlet the men are able to find for their emotions is the composition of stanzas in the frosty court meter, stanzas which are more often calculated to injure a rival than to enhance a lady. While we sense a little more warmth in some of the women, they

too are curiously inexpressive. We never learn how Kolfinna feels about Hallfreðr and Steingerðr's feelings about Kormákr show more ambiguity than can be accounted for as mere feminine inscrutability. The only figure who betrays emotional committedness is Helga the Fair, and perhaps Oddný, though the lovesicknesses of both women lack motivation and come somewhat as a surprise.

The emotional tangents of a difficult situation have no charm for the saga author, or rather they have charm only when they can be translated into the hard passion and hard action of a Gudrun by the otherwise gentle author of *Laxdœla saga* or into the leonine devotion of the archwife Auðr in *Gísla saga*. The saga author is less well able to cope with partial or suspended or divided feelings. It is not only the author of *Kormáks saga* who failed to understand his hero, the authors of all the skald sagas could be charged with missing the point, or at least with failing to utilize a promising situation. The fissure in Gunnlaugr's character has been pointed out above. Bjǫrn hítdœlakappi seems decidedly more interested in prosecuting his quarrel with Þórðr than in recovering his bride. What interests the author of *Hallfreðar saga* is not his love affair but the justification of his cognomen *vandræðaskáld*. In fact, his love is reduced to a function of his difficult temperament; it is only one aspect of his unreasonable and contrary behavior.

All these sagas are centered on the masculine world of muscle and competition. *Kormáks saga* comes perhaps nearest to respecting what is problematical; his longing for Steingerðr is constant though unfulfillable and is a more conspicuous moment than in the other skald sagas. Nonetheless, this saga too adheres in outline to the male conflict pattern of *Bjarnar saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*. The most palpable difference in plot is that Kormákr competes not against one rival but against two, Bersi and Þorvaldr, two successive husbands to Steingerðr. By some magical or psychological inhibition Kormákr fails to attend his wedding and plays his bride into the hands of another. In this respect *Kormáks saga* is in line with *Hallfreðar saga* and not with *Bjarnar saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*, where the girl is lost by the deception of a rival and not by the indecisiveness of the hero. From this moment on

Kormákr wages a constant action against his guiltless rivals, but unlike Bjǫrn, Gunnlaugr, and Hallfreðr he is successful in both conflicts and manages to wrest Steingerðr first from one husband, then from the other. That he never wins her for himself is not due to any inadequacy in strength or will power, but only to his magic paralysis and fateful indecision vis-à-vis Steingerðr.

The main instrument of the conflict is the *hólmgangr*, the duel. Here Kormákr, despite an unpolitic disregard for superstitions, is consistently successful. After a fruitless pursuit of Bersi he issues a challenge and is defeated only on a technicality. He then adopts the devious tactic of placing the responsibility for a return duel in the hands of an uncle. The second duel results in such a compromising wound for Bersi that Steingerðr takes advantage of the public ridicule in order to divorce him.

The conflict with her second husband Þorvaldr is approached more obliquely. Kormákr begins by killing Þorvaldr's companion Narfi and defeating his brother Þorvarðr in two duels before he confronts Þorvaldr himself, who turns out to be a passive and unresponsive antagonist. Kormákr provokes him with stanzas and with liberties taken with his wife, but Þorvaldr is content to let the law arbitrate. When Kormákr cracks him on the head with a tiller, he lets his wife take revenge and the king make the settlement. Finally, when, in the face of his own cowardice, Kormákr rescues Steingerðr from pirates, Þorvaldr admits defeat and relinquishes her. Kormákr does not draw back, but he does accede with unfathomable good grace to Steingerðr's refusal. In the literature of action which the sagas constitute this inaction on the part of Kormákr remains a mysterious and perplexing anomaly.

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Víga-Glúms saga

Synopsis

Eyjólfr Ingjaldsson takes passage to Norway with the Norwegian merchant Hreiðarr, who offers him hospitality with some reluctance because his brother Ívarr takes unkindly to Icelanders. Eyjólfr is made sport of at first, but wins Ívarr's friendship by killing a bear and coming to the aid of his hosts against the berserk Ásgautr. He marries Ástríðr, the daughter of the *hersir* Vigfúss, and returns to Iceland.

After Eyjólfr's death his property is divided between his son Glúmr and the in-laws of another deceased son, Þorkell inn hávi and his son Sigmundr. Sigmundr marries into the clan of the Esphœlingar and begins to encroach on the interests of Glúmr and his mother Ástríðr. Glúmr decides to go abroad. He visits his maternal grandfather Vigfúss in Norway, goes unheeded at first, but gains recognition by killing a berserk. Vigfúss gives him a coat, spear, and sword and predicts that his honor will remain intact as long as these objects are in his possession.

Glúmr returns to his farm at Þverá to find that Þorkell and Sigmundr have appropriated the field Vitazgjafi as compensation for livestock which they have falsely accused Ástríðr's thralls of stealing. The livestock is found, but Þorkell and Sigmundr refuse to return Vitazgjafi and continue their harassments. Glúmr feigns indifference, but one day Ástríðr rouses him to the extent of driving cattle from his yard and warning Sigmundr against further encroachments. The same autumn he kills Sigmundr while he is

harvesting on Vitazgjafi. Þorkell prepares a case against Glúmr with the aid of the Esphœlingar, but Glúmr has Sigmundr's life declared forfeit and forces Þorkell to part with his land at half price. Before abandoning the land Þorkell sacrifices a propitiatory ox to Freyr with the wish that Glúmr may someday leave the land as unwillingly as he.

Glúmr marries Halldóra Gunnsteinsdóttir while Þorgrímr Þórisson (an Esphœlingr) asks for the hand of Þórdís Gizursdóttir and is turned down. Glúmr then negotiates the marriage of Þórdís to his nephew Arnórr, which leads to a pitched battle between the Esphœlingar and Glúmr. Peace is restored when Glúmr agrees to assist Þorgrímr in obtaining Gizurr's other daughter Herþrúðr. Þórdís gives birth to a son Steinólfr and Herþrúðr gives birth to a son Arngrímr. The two boys are fostered together and become good friends, but the seeress Oddbjǫrg predicts that the friendship will turn to enmity and have dire consequences for the district.

Glúmr's son Már befriends a certain Ingólfr, whom his father then hires as overseer. At a horse-match Ingólfr's horse Snækollr bests the entry of Kálfr, a friend of the Esphœlingar. The rivalry is later renewed and when Snækollr again has the upper hand, Kálfr strikes Ingólfr with his staff. Glúmr separates them and bids Ingólfr take no notice. Ingólfr begins to court Helga, the daughter of a certain Þorkell. When Ingólfr expresses a preference for Þorkell's friendship, Glúmr is irked and sends him to test his friendship by alleging the murder of Kálfr and asking protection. He is turned away and when it is discovered that Kálfr in fact *has* been murdered, Þorkell betrays the supposed culprit. Þorvaldr krókr (an Esphœlingr) prosecutes Ingólfr, but Glúmr quashes the case on the ground that it is directed against the wrong man. He now reveals himself as the real murderer and settles the case. In the meantime he has sent Ingólfr abroad after giving assurances that Helga will be unmarried when he returns. Accordingly he threatens Helga's swain Þjóðólfr with a duel unless he desists from his visits. Þjóðólfr desists. Ingólfr returns to Iceland and wins Helga's hand with Glúmr's aid.

Hostility develops between Glúmr and Víga-Skúta because the

latter divorces Glúmr's daughter. Skúta sends an assassin to ask Glúmr for protection and arrange a meeting at a sæter. When Glúmr arrives, Skúta lies in wait but is unable to kill him. Glúmr assembles men, but the pursuit is frustrated when Skúta impersonates a shepherd, escapes, and then takes refuge in an easily defended pass.

Halli inn hvíti loses a dozen sheep and suspects Hallvarðr, the foster brother of Glúmr's son Vigfúss. Halli and his son Bárðr make plans to prosecute Hallvarðr for theft. Glúmr, egged on by Vigfúss, reluctantly quashes the case and causes resentment in the district. After a second theft Bárðr kills Hallvarðr. Glúmr takes advantage of Vigfúss' absence to settle for a nominal indemnity and at the same time pay fines for the stolen sheep. Bárðr and Vigfúss abide by the agreement at first, but they clash at a horse-match and Bárðr insults his rival. His father urges him to leave Iceland for three years, but he returns after only one year. With the help of two Norwegians Vigfúss kills Bárðr while he is collecting timber. The Mǫðrvellingar and Esphœlingar now combine to outlaw the Norwegians and exile Vigfúss; when Vigfúss fails to leave Iceland, he too becomes an outlaw. Glúmr harbors him though it is forbidden to have an outlaw in the precincts of a temple dedicated to Freyr.

Relations become less cordial between the foster brothers Steinólfr and Arngrímr when the latter suspects Steinólfr of seducing his wife, but a reconciliation is effected and Arngrímr invites Steinólfr to stay with him. He subsequently kills Steinólfr (Glúmr's nephew's son) and takes refuge with the Esphœlingar. Glúmr collects forces, but is outnumbered and achieves nothing. He has premonitions of conflict and Már in turn sets out to summon Arngrímr. A certain Þorvarðr eggs on the opposing parties and sets them at each other's throats. Þórarinn (an Esphœlingr) sets out to declare Steinólfr's life forfeit, but Glúmr intercepts him and a full-scale fight breaks out, during which five Esphœlingar and four of Glúmr's adherents are slain. This leaves the Esphœlingar the option of prosecuting one man, and Þórarinn accordingly chooses to prosecute the slayer of his brother Þorvaldr krókr. In the meantime Glúmr has persuaded the twelve-year old son of the

troublemaker Þorvarðr that he is the slayer, and the prosecution therefore falls on relatively barren soil. Sometime later, however, Glúmr implies in a stanza that he himself was the killer. Þorvarðr spreads the story and persuades Þórarinn to reopen the case, but Glúmr disqualifies the prosecution on a technicality. The case is taken up again at the Allthing and an agreement is worked out whereby Glúmr is to swear a threefold oath that he did not kill Þorvaldr. Glúmr then swears an ambivalent oath to the satisfaction of Þórarinn, but Þorvarðr points out the trickery to him, and Þórarinn persuades Einarr Þveræingr to reinstitute proceedings. He is all the more willing because Glúmr has in the meantime parted with his grandfather's gifts and guarantees of honor. Einarr is successful in his prosecution and Glúmr is forced to leave his land and settle at Þverbrekka.

Glúmr comes into conflict once more with Þórarinn and Einarr and must be satisfied with a draw. As an old man with no eyesight Glúmr tries to entice Einarr and his brother Guðmundr into his house with peaceful overtures. He waits for them with a hidden dagger, but Einarr suspects mischief and persuades his brother to stay away. Glúmr is converted and dies three years after the Christianization of Iceland.

Outline

Introduction
- Eyjólfr Ingjaldsson
  - Hreiðarr in Iceland
  - Eyjólfr accompanies Hreiðarr to Norway
    - Hreiðarr's reluctant invitation
    - Ívarr makes sport of Eyjólfr
    - Eyjólfr wins Ívarr's respect by killing a bear
    - He defeats the berserk Ásgautr
    - He marries Ástríðr, the daughter of the *hersir* Vigfúss
  - Eyjólfr dies and his property is divided between his son Glúmr and the in-laws Þorkell inn hávi and Sigmundr

Conflict
- Sigmundr marries into the clan of the Esphœlingar; he and his father begin to harass Glúmr and Sigríðr
  - Glúmr visits his grandfather Vigfúss in Norway
  - He gains recognition by killing a berserk
  - Vigfúss gives him a coat, spear, and sword as talismans of honor
- Glúmr returns to find that Þorkell and Sigmundr have appropriated the field Vitazgjafi as compensation for lost livestock
  - The livestock is found, but Þorkell and Sigmundr refuse to return Vitazgjafi and continue their harassments
  - Glúmr drives cattle from his yard and warns Sigmundr against further encroachments
  - Glúmr kills Sigmundr while he is harvesting Vitazgjafi
    - Þorkell prosecutes, but Glúmr has Sigmundr's life declared forfeit and forces Þorkell off his land
    - Þorkell sacrifices an ox to Freyr with the wish that Glúmr may someday leave his land as unwillingly as he
- Þorgrímr Þórisson (an Esphœlingr) sues for the hand of Þórdís Gizursdóttir and is refused; Glúmr negotiates the marriage of Þórdís to his nephew Arnórr
  - Þorgrímr is angered and plunders Arnórr
  - A battle is fought between Glúmr and the Esphœlingar
  - Peace is restored when Glúmr assists Þorgrímr in obtaining Gizurr's other daughter Herþrúðr
    - Þórdís and Herþrúðr give birth to the sons Steinólfr and Arngrímr
    - Gizurr's wife Saldís fosters the two boys
    - The seeress Oddbjǫrg predicts that their friendship will turn to enmity with dire consequences for the district
- Glúmr hires a certain Ingólfr as foreman
  - Ingólfr's horse bests the entry of Kálfr, a friend of the Esphœlingar, in a horse-match
  - Ingólfr's horse again has the upper hand in a rematch and Kálfr strikes him with a staff
  - Glúmr separates them and bids Ingólfr take no notice

Ingólfr begins to court Helga, the daughter of a certain Þorkell

When he implies preference for Þorkell's friendship, Glúmr is irked and sends him to test his friendship by feigning the murder of Kálfr; Þorkell turns him away and divulges the secret when it appears that Kálfr has in fact been murdered

Þorvaldr krókr (an Esphœlingr) prosecutes Ingólfr, but Glúmr reveals himself as the real murderer and quashes the case

Ingólfr goes abroad after Glúmr promises to prevent Helga's marriage

Glúmr threatens Helga's swain

Ingólfr returns and marries Helga

Hostility between Glúmr and Víga-Skúta

Skúta sends an assassin to lure Glúmr into a trap

Skúta waylays him, but Glúmr escapes

Glúmr organizes a pursuit, but Skúta in turn eludes him

Halli inn hvíti and his son Bárðr prosecute Hallvarðr, the foster brother of Glúmr's son Vigfúss, for theft

Glúmr, egged on by Vigfúss, quashes the case and reaps resentment

After a second theft Bárðr kills Hallvarðr; Glúmr takes advantage of Vigfúss' absence to settle the matter fairly and regain his popularity

Bárðr insults Vigfúss

He leaves Iceland but returns too soon

Vigfúss kills Bárðr

The Mǫðrvellingar and Esphœlingar combine to exile Vigfúss

He fails to leave Iceland and becomes an outlaw

Glúmr harbors him near Freyr's forbidden temple-grounds

Arngrímr suspects Steinólfr of seducing his wife

A feigned reconciliation

Arngrímr kills Steinólfr and takes refuge with the Esphœlingar

Glúmr gathers forces but is outnumbered

He has premonitions of conflict

Þorvarðr eggs on the opposing parties

A fight breaks out in which four fall on Glúmr's side and five on the side of the Esphœlingar

Þórarinn chooses to prosecute the slayer of his brother Þorvaldr krókr

Glúmr deflects the prosecution on the twelve-year old son of Þorvarðr

Glúmr divulges in a stanza that he is the real slayer

Þorvarðr persuades Þórarinn to reopen the case, but Glúmr disqualifies the prosecution on a technicality

The case is reinstated at the Allthing and Glúmr agrees to cleanse himself with an oath

Glúmr swears an ambivalent oath

Þorvarðr reveals the trickery

Þórarinn persuades Einarr Þveræingr to prosecute once more and Einarr is willing, knowing that Glúmr has now parted with his talismans

Climax

Glúmr is forced to leave his land and settle at Þverbrekka

Revenge

Glúmr comes into conflict with Þórarinn and Einarr once more but must be content with an even settlement

As an old man he tries to entice Einarr and his brother Guðmundr into his house in order to stab one or the other, but Einarr is wary and warns Guðmundr

Aftermath

Glúmr is converted and dies three years later

Comment

Glúms saga is structurally an opaque saga. It is opaque partly

because it is narratively very compact, partly because the episodes crowd onto one another without clear demarcations or stage directions, and partly because Glúmr is a master of trickery and his tricks are elaborate enough to garble the plot. At the same time Glúmr is the laconic hero par excellence who betrays nothing that time will eventually reveal. These peculiarities make *Glúms saga* one of the more reticent compositions from the point of view of the reader; the strand of the story is harder to follow than usual, but it is perfectly clear once it has been isolated. The plot is in simplest terms the story of a conflict between Glúmr and the family of the Esphœlingar. The conflict is constructed as a series of episodes which might be abbreviated conveniently:

1) Initial conflict
2) Vitazgjafi
3) Arnórr
4) Ingólfr
5) Víga-Skúta
6) Vigfúss' slaying of Bárðr
7) Arngrímr's slaying of Steinólfr

The tenor of the episodes is constant, each one of them occasions a confrontation between Glúmr and one or several of the Esphœlingar. Only the Víga-Skúta episode departs from the rule and for this and other reasons is likely to be an interpolation.

Barring Víga-Skúta, the episodes conform to the rule of escalation, not in the usual sense that each conflict is successively more perilous, but rather in the sense that Glúmr becomes decreasingly scrupulous and more and more morally exposed. The first conflict is not even specified and Glúmr seeks to elude the issue by traveling abroad. After the seizure of Vitazgjafi he reacts with ample deliberation and with every justification but already with a hint of his later cunning, when he blunts Þorkell's prosecution and turns it against him. In the third episode Glúmr takes the part of his nephew Arnórr against his own better judgment. This episode serves in reality only as an introduction to the final phase and is suspended at the stage of an ill omen when the marriages engineered by Glúmr bode ill for the district. In the following episode Glúmr's cunning reaches its height when he is able to avenge Ingólfr, reprimand him, and mislead his enemy, with one and the same act. At this point Glúmr becomes both unprincipled in his resorting to

murder (rather than an open slaying) and somewhat dubious in his artful concealment of the deed. At the same time he makes raw use of his power in eliminating the competition for Helga's hand. This episode marks the turn in Glúmr's fortunes. In the following clash (omitting Víga-Skúta) his prestige is on the decline. He takes the part of the thief Hallvarðr and though he makes good this breach, he is unable to prevent a coalition between the Mǫðrvellingar and the Esphœlingar and the outlawing of his son Vigfúss. He is now wedged into an impossible position between family loyalty and the law, and when he harbors Vigfúss near Freyr's templegrounds, it is as if he has offended not only the secular authority but also the numinous powers. The breach between Steinólfr and Arngrímr foreseen by Oddbjǫrg now develops and produces the final phase of the conflict between Glúmr and the Esphœlingar. Glúmr summons up his whole reserve of wile in order to hold his advantage; he palms off his own slaying on a twelve-year old, disqualifies a case on a mere technicality, and fabricates an ambivalent oath, but all his subterfuges are not enough to divert his fate and in the end he is driven from his property by Einarr, the newly won ally of the Esphœlingar.

This mounting structure is as usual buttressed by omens, though in no such deliberate pattern as offered by *Laxdœla saga* or *Gísla saga*. Glúmr's prestige is bound to the talismans given him by his grandfather, his eventual loss of property is assured by Þorkell's sacrifice to Freyr, the immediate cause of his downfall is contained in Oddbjǫrg's prediction of strife between Steinólfr and Arngrímr, and just before the final and crucial battle Glúmr has foreboding dreams.

The other sections of the saga are very brief by comparison. The preliminaries provide the story of Eyjólfr's adventures in Norway, (where his slow gaining of recognition and his slaying of a berserk anticipate similar feats of his son) and the division of property which leads to the split between Glúmr and the Esphœlingar. The revenge section provides no revenge at all but only two frustrated attempts on the part of Glúmr to even the score. The aftermath is pro forma and offers nothing more than a conversion.

Supplementary Reading

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Valla-Ljóts saga

Synopsis

Sigurðr Karlsson ins rauða dies and is survived by his wife and three sons, Hrólfr, Halli, and Bǫðvarr. A certain Torfi proposes marriage to the widow, but Halli is opposed because Torfi is beneath her station. When Torfi gives vent to his resentment with a drastic insult, Halli ambushes and kills him, but the matter is composed peaceably with Torfi's chieftain Eyjólfr. Halli later becomes a prominent man and a firm supporter first of Eyjólfr, then of his son Guðmundr inn ríki; but at the age of forty he decides to move to Svarfaðardalr in order to find greater scope for his ambition. He purchases land and settles down without seeking the permission of the local chieftain Valla-Ljótr.

Halli incurs Valla-Ljótr's hostility by extracting a fine from him for a legal technicality. He visits Guðmundr, who has sanguinary premonitions and urges Halli to resettle in his own district, but Halli disregards the advice and returns to Svarfaðardalr, where he spends Christmas with his relative Þórir. He is not forbearing in his remarks about Ljótr and the latter learns of his remarks and of the time of his intended departure from Þórir's farmstead, through the medium of his shepherd. Þórir also learns of the shepherd's conversation and urges Halli to remain, but he sets out nonetheless. His companion sights twelve men, one in the blue mantle and with the crooked axe that generally signal Valla-Ljótr's intent to kill. Halli sends his companion away, faces Ljótr alone, and falls in the first onslaught.

Guðmundr inn ríki is obliged to settle for nominal composition, but Hrólfr takes revenge by killing one of Ljótr's relatives. This is likewise settled by composition.

Halli's third brother, Þorvarr, returns from Norway and transacts business which takes him to Svarfaðardalr. The weather prevents him from returning quickly and some of the Svarfdœlir (excluding Ljótr) prepare to ambush him. Þorvarr is warned but refuses to take heed and is killed in the ensuing battle together with several others. Ljótr reluctantly takes the part of the perpetrators.

Ljótr is now waylaid by Guðmundr but eludes him and exhibits exemplary self-restraint in persuading him to settle the dispute amicably. A settlement is reached despite an effort on Hrólfr's part to reopen hostilities and the saga ends with the honor of all parties intact.

Outline

Introduction
- Halli opposes the marriage of his mother
- He is insulted by Torfi and kills him
- He seeks greater scope by moving to Svarfaðardalr

Conflict
- Halli settles without Valla-Ljótr's leave
- He extorts a fine from Valla-Ljótr
  - Guðmundr warns him
- He makes incautious remarks about his feud with Ljótr
  - Þórir warns him
- He releases his escort
- He catches sight of Ljótr in a threatening posture and apparel
- He dismisses his last companion

Climax
- Halli is slain

Revenge
- Ljótr and Guðmundr compose the matter

- Hrólfr avenges his brother by subterfuge
- Ljótr and Guðmundr again compose the matter

Counterrevenge
- Halli's brother Þorvarr returns from Norway
- Business takes him to Svarfaðardalr
- The weather delays his return
- He is ambushed and slain

Reconciliation
- Guðmundr waylays Ljótr without success
- Ljótr refuses to be drawn into a conflict
- The case is settled to everyone's satisfaction

Comment

Valla-Ljóts saga is a miniature saga like *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*, much abbreviated in its proportions but classical in its construction. It falls short of completeness only in its lack of the most superfluous section, the aftermath.

The axiom of the plot is, as in all sagas, that action must have an instigator and conflict an aggressor. In most sagas the responsibility for the conflict is not equitably distributed between the antagonists but is borne by one while the other becomes entangled despite an impressive display of patience under stress. And so it is in *Valla-Ljóts saga*, where Halli bears the blame and Ljótr is morally inculpable.

The prelude to the saga is conceived in such a way as to map Halli's personality and motivate his later behavior. This is a technique familiar from *Egils saga*, *Gísla saga*, and *Grettis saga*, where childhood or youthful exploits foreshadow mature attitudes. The fatal flaw in Halli's character is that he is ambitious and covetous of honor beyond the limits imposed by his situation. This fault is illustrated by three episodes at the outset of the saga. In the first Halli opposes a marriage approved by his mother and brothers because the wooer carries insufficient prestige. In the

second he takes prompt and unconsidered revenge for a verbal slight to his own honor, and in the third he abandons a secure and respected position because he is not satisfied with any rank below that of the first man in his district. The background of his confrontation with Ljótr is therefore unambiguous.

The conflict is shaped as a direct challenge to Ljótr's authority. Halli first settles without abiding by the usual formality of seeking permission, then he seizes the first opportunity to embarrass Ljótr and undermine his prestige by tripping him on a legal technicality. Ljótr exhibits restraint, but Halli is not inclined to follow his example and when he exacerbates the situation with invidious words, the measure is full and Ljótr is ready to assert his authority. Halli is twice warned, first by Guðmundr and then by Þórir, but according to heroic practice he chooses to ignore the better part of valor. The final encounter is staged with the most stereotyped devices: the refusal and then the premature release of an escort by the marked man, the sighting of the ambush and the feigned ignorance of its design, and finally the dismissal of the last companions in the face of imminent attack. A brief dialogue precedes the passage at arms, which ends after the first exchange of blows.

The revenge section is doubled as in *Laxdœla saga* and *Reykdœla saga*; Hrólfr avenges his brother's death and Ljótr's followers counter by killing the third brother, Bǫðvarr. The reason for the doubling may, for all we know, be historical or traditional, but it also has an ethical justification. Halli is not the hero of the piece and his death craves no revenge. When he is avenged notwithstanding, the moral balance is still out of kilter and must be righted by a counterthrust. This is emphasized by the fact that Hrólfr's vengeance is unsportsmanlike. The whole design serves as a good illustration of the fact that the saga uses revenge not for revenge's sake or for gratuitous drama but for the purpose of reestablishing the moral and social equipoise. A saga is not felt to be complete as long as there is imbalance in either of these areas. If the saga were terminated after Halli's arrogance, compounded as it is by Hrólfr's skullduggery, the conclusion would be false. Hrólfr's deed does not constitute a restoration of equity and must be followed by a deed that does. The balance is correct after the

warranted death of Halli, incorrect after the unwarranted death of Þorvarðr, and correct again after the death of Bǫðvarr.

This balance is given ceremonial recognition by the settlement between Guðmundr and Ljótr. That the whole issue at stake is the balance of prestige, the social factor originally disturbed by Halli's search for more prestige, is stated in as many words at the conclusion of the saga, where Ljótr and Guðmundr are given equal honor: "and Ljótr was regarded as a very great chieftain," "and Guðmundr retained his respect until the very day of his death." If the saga has a theme and a lesson, it is the concept of the delicate social order which cannot be disturbed without triggering a corrective mechanism to restore the original and proper state. *Valla-Ljóts saga* is the conservative counterpart to the iconoclastic *Bandamanna saga*.

Supplementary Reading

Ciklamini, Marlene. "The Concept of Honor in *Valla-Ljóts Saga*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 65: 303–317 (1966).

Ljósvetninga saga

Synopsis

The first episode in the saga is acted out by Þorgeirr goði and his sons, Guðmundr inn ríki, and the two ne'er-do-well brothers Sǫlmundr and Sǫxólfr. Sǫlmundr gives notice of his character by trying to abduct a girl, while his brother betrays himself by defaulting on the payment for merchandise acquired from the Norwegian Sigurðr. In the process of summoning the delinquent debtor Sigurðr is slain, an act which leads to the outlawing of Sǫxólfr and the exiling of Sǫlmundr for three years. In Norway Sǫlmundr ingratiates himself with Hákon jarl and returns with royal gifts to secure the aid of Guðmundr inn ríki and Þorgeirr goði. Both are loath, especially Þorgeirr, whose sons and Thingmen are committed against Sǫlmundr, but they agree to cooperate on Sǫlmundr's behalf. Þorgeirr's sons are of a different mind and ambush the two chieftains as they attempt to bring Sǫlmundr to safety. They manage to kill Sǫlmundr, but lose their follower Arnórr in the encounter. As a consequence they declare Sǫlmundr's life forfeit and decide to press for Arnórr's indemnification. Both sides ride to the Thing in force to prosecute the dispute and Þorgeirr's sons push their case to the point of impeaching their father, but conciliation finally prevails and a settlement is reached, which meets their demands.

The second part of the saga tells the story of the slandering of Guðmundr inn ríki. Guðmundr's foreman asks him to arrange his wedding and attend the wedding feast. During the feast Guðmundr's wife Þórlaug engages in a comparison of husbands

with the wife of Þórir Helgason and the latter casts aspersions on Guðmundr's manhood, a rumor she claims to have heard from her husband and Þorgeirr goði's son Þorkell hákr. Þórlaug transmits the insult to Guðmundr, who seeks advice from his foster father Einarr Konálsson on ways and means of revenge. Einarr advises him to institute proceedings against Þórir Helgason's Thingmen at every opportunity and to collect the fines. The first occasion offers itself when one of Þórir's Thingmen, Þórir Akraskeggr, cheats a friend of Guðmundr and Guðmundr promises to take over the case for him. He begins by persuading his brother Einarr Þveræingr, a staunch friend of Þórir Helgason, to swear a pact of mutual support, thus neutralizing him for the coming conflict. He then summons Þórir Akraskeggr, who gains the support of Þórir Helgason with a gift of thirty goats, but the two are unable to balk Guðmundr and Þórir Akraskeggr is outlawed. At the confiscation of his property the gift of goats is discovered and Guðmundr now proposes to prosecute Þórir Helgason for taking property subject to confiscation. The money taken from Þórir Akraskeggr is in the meantime handed over to Einarr Konálsson for safe keeping. Þórir Helgason appeals to Einarr Þveræingr, who confirms his friendship and tries unsuccessfully to abrogate his pact with Guðmundr. At the Thing all attempts at conciliation are futile and when Guðmundr also refuses the arbitration of his brother Einarr, Þórir Helgason challenges him to a duel. Guðmundr's friend Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson proposes to counter the threat of a duel by challenging Einarr, assuming that the chieftains will then intervene to prevent the liquidation of both brothers, but when Guðmundr is unable to conceal his delight, Einarr becomes suspicious and recommends to Þórir that he agree to Guðmundr's terms. Guðmundr imposes a fine and exile. Having completed the first half of his vengeance, he now initiates an action against Þorkell hákr. He hires the vagabond Þorbjǫrn rindill and outfits him to spy on Þorkell. Þorkell is suspicious but is tricked by Þorbjǫrn's disguise and gives him lodging. During the night Þorbjǫrn unlatches the door to open the way for Guðmundr, who appears with twenty men and kills Þorkell after a stout defense and some stinging repartee.

Guðmundr then collects the money left with Einarr Konálsson and composes the slaying to the satisfaction of Þorkell's brothers Hǫskuldr and Tjǫrvi.

But Guðmundr does not succeed in pre-empting vengeance entirely and Þorbjǫrn rindill is slain by Þorkell's relative Eilífr. Eilífr seeks refuge from his pursuers with a certain Hlenni and is smuggled out of Guðmundr's reach hidden on a horse laden with hay. He then takes refuge with his brother Brúni. Brúni refuses to extradite him and Guðmundr sets fire to his house, but he is persuaded to extinguish it again when it turns out that his wife and son are also in the house. At this point he is obliged to give up the pursuit. He dreams of Þorkell hákr's head and the seer Drauma-Finni interprets the dream as fear of revenge. [In an unrelated incident Ófeigr Járngerðarson forces Guðmundr from his high-seat.] Guðmundr consults a seeress to learn whether the revenge for Þorkell will affect him and is told that he will be spared but not his sons. A certain Þórhallr comes to Drauma-Finni with a dream, but Finni perceives that the dream is lethal and rather than listening to it himself sends Þórhallr to Guðmundr. When Guðmundr hears the dream, he immediately loses his sense of feeling and dies.

Guðmundr's son Eyjólfr and Þorgeirr's grandson Þorvarðr agree to keep the peace barring interference by others, but the interference is not long in coming. Þorvarðr's son Hǫskuldr and his cousin Brandr are fostered by another cousin, Þorkell. One winter they flirt with a certain Friðgerðr, the daughter of Eyjólfr's Thingman Ísólfr. In the summer they travel to Norway and place their affairs in the hands of Þorkell. It then comes to light that Friðgerðr is pregnant by Brandr. After an unsuccessful appeal to Þorkell Ísólfr turns his case over to Eyjólfr. Eyjólfr arrives at a Thingmeeting too late to deal with Þorvarðr and calls Þorkell to account instead. Þorkell agrees to a trial by ordeal, but the test is ambivalent and both parties claim to be vindicated. The opposing camps now harden their positions and close ranks. In the meantime Brandr and Hǫskuldr return from Norway. Eyjólfr gathers an expedition and sends a man to reconnoiter, but the Ljósvetningar have also assembled men and frustrate his reconnoissance.

The maneuvers culminate in a skirmish in Fnjóskadalsá and after reinforcements have been gathered on both sides, a regular engagement is fought at Kakalahóll. The only principal to fall is Eyjólfr's brother Koðrán.

Eyjólfr refuses Þorvarðr's offer of composition for Koðrán and enlists supporters for the coming Thingmeeting. Both parties set out for the Thing, but an impending clash is avoided when Einarr Þveræingr cuts Eyjólfr's saddle girth and delays him. Eyjólfr outnumbers his opponents, but the prudent voices prevail and the matter is arbitrated by Gellir Þorkelsson on Eyjólfr's behalf and Skegg-Broddi on Þorvarðr's behalf. Koðrán's slayer Hallr is outlawed and Þorkell, Brandr, and Hǫskuldr are exiled. However, Eyjólfr remains dissatisfied.

The exiled men prepare to set sail. Eyjólfr plans to kill Þorvarðr, but a farmer well-disposed toward Þorvarðr misleads him into believing that they have already weighed anchor. On the way to Norway they rescue two boys related to Úlfr stallari from drowning and this stands them in good stead at the Norwegian court when a relative of Eyjólfr tries to complete the unfinished revenge. The threat is averted and they go on to Denmark, from where Hallr joins company with a certain Bárðr, while Þorvarðr, Þorkell, Hǫskuldr, and Brandr go on to Rome. Eyjólfr slays Þorvarðr's brother Þórarinn, but when his cousin Hrólfr prosecutes the case, Eyjólfr bows to the threat of a duel and pays composition. Þorvarðr learns of his brother's death in Saxony and dies shortly thereafter. Hallr is slain by a relative of the Mǫðrvellingar in Sweden during the conflict between Haraldr harðráði and Magnús, Brandr falls with Haraldr harðráði in England, and Hǫskuldr returns to Iceland.

Outline

Introduction

- Sǫlmundr tries to abduct a girl
- Sǫlmundr cheats the Norwegian merchant Sigurðr
- Sǫxólfr kills Sigurðr

Sǫlmundr an dSǫxólfr are outlawed
They come to Norway and win Hákon jarl's friendship
Sǫlmundr returns with tokens from Hákon to Guðmundr inn ríki and Þorgeirr goði; they assume responsibility for his protection
Þorgeirr's sons slay Sǫlmundr as he rides between Guðmundr and Þorgeirr
Their follower Arnórr is slain in the same encounter
They press for indemnification
The case is mediated

Conflict[1] (Guðmundr and the Ljósvetningar)
Guðmundr's foreman asks him to arrange his marriage
During the wedding feast Guðmundr's wife disputes with the wife of Þórir Helgason
The latter relays an accusation of sodomy against Guðmundr from her husband and Þorkell hákr
Guðmundr seeks advice from Einarr Konálsson and is advised to prosecute Þórir's Thingmen whenever possible
Þórir's Thingman Þórir Akraskeggr cheats a merchant befriended with Guðmundr and Guðmundr takes responsibility for the case
Guðmundr detaches his brother from Þórir's cause
Guðmundr prosecutes and outlaws Þórir Akraskeggr
At the confiscation he discovers an illegal gift to Þórir Helgason and institutes new proceedings
Þórir seeks conciliation without success
He challenges Guðmundr to a duel
Guðmundr's friend Vigfúss plans to counter with a challenge to Einarr
Einarr gets wind of the plan and advises Þórir to agree to Guðmundr's terms
Guðmundr exiles Þórir

Climax[1]
Guðmundr hires Þorbjǫrn rindill

He sends him to Þorkell hákr
Þorbjǫrn unlatches the door
Guðmundr breaks in and kills Þorkell
Guðmundr composes the slaying with Þorkell's brothers Hǫskuldr and Tjǫrvi

Revenge[1]
Þorkell's relative Eilífr kills Þorbjǫrn rindill
Hlenni smuggles Eilífr out of Guðmundr's reach
Brúni harbors his brother Eilífr
Guðmundr's wife and son intercede for him and Guðmundr is obliged to abandon the pursuit
Guðmundr dreams of Þorkell
He learns from a seeress that the revenge will spare him but not his sons
He dies after hearing the dream of a certain Þórhallr

Reconciliation[1]
Guðmundr's son Eyjólfr and Þorgeirr goði's grandson Þorvarðr agree to hold the peace if no one else interferes

Conflict[2] (Eyjólfr and the Ljósvetningar)
Þorvarðr's son Hǫskuldr and his cousin Brandr flirt with Friðgerðr, the daughter of Eyjólfr's Thingman Ísólfr
They travel to Norway and make Þorkell their plenopotentiary
It turns out that Friðgerðr is pregnant by Brandr
Ísólfr gets no satisfaction from Þorkell and turns the case over to Eyjólfr
Eyjólfr calls Þorkell to account and a trial by ordeal is agreed on
The test is ambiguous and produces no decision
Both parties assemble forces
Eyjólfr dispatches a man to reconnoiter
The Ljósvetningar frustrate the reconnoissance

The skirmish at Fnjóskadalsá

Climax[2]
The battle at Kakalahóll and Koðrán's death
Eyjólfr refuses Þorvarðr's offer of composition
Revenge[2]
Eyjólfr enlists supporters
Both parties set out for the Thing
A clash is avoided when Einarr Þveræingr cuts Eyjólfr's saddle girth
The matter is arbitrated by Gellir Þorkelsson and Skegg-Broddi
Hallr is outlawed and Þorkell, Høskuldr, and Brandr are exiled
The outlaws prepare to set sail and Eyjólfr plans to kill Þorvarðr
He is misled into believing that Þorvarðr has already departed
On the way to Norway the outlaws rescue two relatives of Úlfr stallari
Úlfr protects them against a relative of Eyjólfr at the Norwegian court
The outlaws go to Denmark, then Rome
Eyjólfr kills Þorvarðr's brother Þórarinn
Reconciliation[2]
Hrólfr prosecutes Eyjólfr for the slaying of Þórarinn
He threatens Eyjólfr with a duel
Eyjólfr pays composition
Aftermath
Þorvarðr learns of his brother's death in Saxony
Hallr is slain by a Møðrvellingr in Sweden
Brandr falls with Haraldr harðráði in England
Høskuldr returns to Iceland
Notes on other characters

Comment

The sagas are variously slanted. They can be preoccupied with

a moral issue (*Hœnsa-Þóris saga*), with the inscrutables of destiny (*Gísla saga*), with the balance of honor (*Valla-Ljóts saga*), with shining personalities (*Laxdœla saga*, *Njáls saga*), with the historical scene (*Egils saga*), with the artistic temperament (*Hallfreðar saga*, *Kormáks saga*), with love (*Gunnlaugs saga*), with the anatomy of a feud (*Bjarnar saga*), or with the wages of excess (*Fóstbrœðra saga*, *Hrafnkels saga*, *Glúms saga*). *Ljósvetninga saga* shares with *Heiðarvíga saga* a transcendent interest in the intricacies of plot. There is no visible concern with moral, ethical, temperamental, or metaphysical issues. The merits of the conflict between Ljósvetningar and Møðrvellingar are not the center of discussion, and characterization is quite neglected, to the extent that the personalities are pale or disjointed. Þorgeirr goði is a sequence of not quite consistent actions with no unifying principle. Guðmundr is a powerful and effective chieftain, but the justice of the charge against him is left unsettled so that he remains in a dubious light. Þórir Helgason does not emerge as a personality at all; he is futile without being pathetic in his futility or arousing respect or sympathy by his posture. Þorkell hákr is impressive in his death, but this is a flash in an otherwise undeveloped personality. Eyjólfr likewise has no coloring. Only Þorvarðr has some personal dimension. He is imbued with that combination of moderation and unflamboyant firmness particularly favored by the saga-writers (for example, Valla-Ljótr).

The subject of the saga is the conflict between two generations of Ljósvetningar and two generations of Møðrvellingar represented in the first generation by Guðmundr and in the second by his son Eyjólfr. The saga begins with an orientation on the background of the conflict, which is set in motion by the mischief-makers Sølmundr and Søxólfr. They disturb the peace at Ljósavatn by first attempting an abduction, then cheating a Norwegian merchant, and finally by killing him. They are outlawed in due course by the Ljósvetningar, but they are able to win the Norwegian king's support and buy the protection of Þorgeirr goði and Guðmundr. When the Ljósvetningar then kill Sølmundr before Guðmundr's very eyes, the ground for the hostility is laid.

It is a deep hostility which is not exhausted by one generation.

In fact, what lends the saga's structure its special quality is its distribution over two generations so that it is doubled and each section of the conflict repeated. There are two conflicts, two climaxes, two vengeances, and two reconciliations. The first conflict is precipitated by Þórir Helgason's and Þorkell hákr's slandering of Guðmundr. Guðmundr seeks advice from Einarr Konálsson and Einarr recommends that he prosecute the Ljósvetningar whenever possible, foreseeing that litigation will both provide an opportunity for revenge and funds for paying the necessary indemnities. Guðmundr begins by prosecuting Þórir's Thingman Þórir Akraskeggr and, just as Einarr foresaw, this leads to an opening for the prosecution of Þórir himself. Once Þórir is outlawed Guðmundr turns his attention to Þorkell hákr, whom he reaches through the device of an assassin sent to circumvent Þorkell's careful guard and open the house for Guðmundr's attack (somewhat analogous to Gísli's slaying of Þorgrímr). The revenge for this slaying is only partial; since Guðmundr himself is inaccessible, it falls on his worthless tool Þorbjǫrn rindill. That this is not enough is confirmed by the seeress's prediction that revenge will affect Guðmundr's son and by the wording of the reconciliation between Eyjólfr and Þorvarðr. When it is agreed to hold the peace barring the interference of others, this interference is as good as assured. In this way the two conflicts are interlocked; one is the continuation of the other.

The promised interference comes in the form of a paternity case brought by one of Eyjólfr's Thingmen and, eventually, by Eyjólfr himself against the Ljósvetningar. The conflict unfolds according to the well-rehearsed pattern of refused composition, recruiting of forces, reconnoitering, an initial skirmish, and finally the battle proper. True to the prediction made to Guðmundr the vengeance affects his son and Koðrán is slain in the battle. This unleashes the second revenge section, which entails first a legal settlement (outlawing and exile), then two frustrated attempts at blood vengeance, then the slaying of Þorvarðr's brother Þórarinn. The conflict is finally ironed out by a reconciliation according to which Eyjólfr is obliged to pay Þórarinn's indemnity.

The structure in itself is clear and standard, but the author is a master of the drawn-out and somewhat mystifying prelude. Who would suspect that the prosecution of Þórir Akraskeggr is designed to bring about the downfall of Þórir Helgason or that the hiring of Þorbjǫrn rindill is the key to the slaying of Þorkell hákr? The author plainly enjoys the manipulation of an intrigue and the fine threading of a plot. His forte is subtle planning, unexpected revelations, and legal and military jockeying. In this area he is outdone only by the author of *Heiðarvíga saga*.

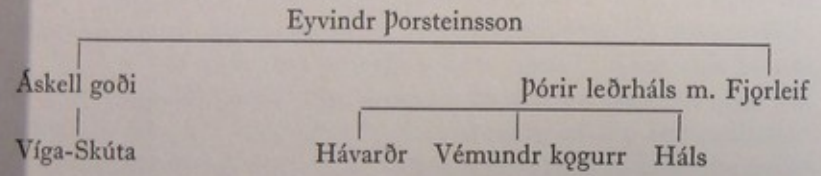
Supplementary Reading

Bååth, A. U. *Studier öfver Kompositionen i Några Isländska Ättsagor*, Lund, 1885, pp. 1–19.

Reykdœla saga

Synopsis

Reykdœla saga centers around the descendants of the Norwegian colonist in Reykjadalr, Eyvindr Þorsteinsson.



The opening episodes describe the thwarted misdeeds of a certain Eysteinn Mánason. Eysteinn takes firewood from Hávarðr's foster father, but is condemned to pay redress by Áskell, then cheats Áskell's nephew Þorsteinn bolstǫng, but is crippled by him in a duel, and finally plants sheep on Háls's property in order to outlaw him for theft, but the deception is discovered and he is himself outlawed by Áskell. Eysteinn sets his house afire, but the author is uncertain whether he did so to cover his escape or whether he died in the flames together with his household.

The larger part of the saga relates the incidents in a protracted rivalry between Vémundr kǫgurr and Steingrímr Qrnólfsson. The difficulty stems, as so often, from pure malice. The rascal Hánefr fosters Vémundr's child in order to win protection, then steals sheep from a certain Hrafn and when Hrafn gets evidence of the theft, Hánefr turns to Vémundr for help. Hrafn's relative Steingrímr outlaws Hánefr for the theft and makes preparations to kill

him, but Vémundr undertakes to ferry him abroad unharmed. As a result a battle breaks out between Steingrímr's and Vémundr's followers, in which Hánefr and four other men are killed. Áskell arranges the first in a long series of ill-fated settlements.

Vémundr goes to collect a catch of fish from Áskell's overseer Kálfr and it turns out that Kálfr has given the catch to Þorbjǫrn í Árskógi (a relative of Steingrímr) in exchange for a cow. Vémundr reproaches Kálfr, but Áskell takes his part. Vémundr similarly goes to collect a whale from Áskell's overseer Máni. When it turns out that Máni has sold it already (according to Áskell's directions), Vémundr, in order not to make the trip futile, seizes a whale belonging to Þorbjǫrn and his sons and Þorbjǫrn appeals to Steingrímr for help. Vémundr agrees to purchase timber for his brother Herjólfr and acquires by subterfuge timber belonging to Steingrímr. Steingrímr sends men to see to the wood, which they reappropriate after killing Vémundr's thralls. Áskell, on Vémundr's behalf, and Eyjólfr Valgerðarson, on Steingrímr's behalf, arbitrate the dispute. Vémundr agrees to abide by their decision, but feels that he has not been compensated for his thralls. He next seizes oxen belonging to Steingrímr. Steingrímr sends men to recover them, but they are intercepted; several men are killed and Vémundr slaughters the oxen in order to assure that Steingrímr will get no good of them. Áskell and Eyjólfr are again able to effect a settlement, but Vémundr still feels cheated. He therefore induces the "village idiot" Þorgeirr to strike Steingrímr with a sheep's head during a horse-match. Steingrímr immediately kills Þorgeirr, but both sides are dissatisfied and Áskell is unable to reach any kind of settlement. Steingrímr is now egged on by his foreman to take vengeance. He recruits men and makes plans to kill Vémundr, but when Vémundr is forewarned, the vengeance is deflected to his brother Herjólfr. Áskell and Eyjólfr again compose the matter, but Vémundr takes his own vengeance by killing or wounding several of the participants in the attack on Herjólfr. Áskell and Eyjólfr are able to settle this breach too, but Vémundr remains irreconcilable. He abducts the bride of Helgi, Þorbjǫrn ór Árskógi's son, with the aid of a sorceress, but Helgi enlists a sorcerer to countermand the magic and recovers his bride. Áskell

and Eyjólfr renew the peace. Vémundr then devises one final artifice, disguises himself, and hires himself out as a worker to the farmer Þórðr. He is set to work on Þórðr's Thingbooth and uses the opportunity to invite Steingrímr's men to remove turf from the site, thus damaging it. When Þórðr discovers what has happened, Vémundr reveals his identity and promises to prosecute Steingrímr for the damage. However, at Áskell's request he drops the charges.

Áskell sets out to reconcile his nephew Háls with his estranged wife and, with an inauspicious gesture, he points out the spot where he wishes to be buried. His party sees Steingrímr at a distance leaving a bath and Háls makes the caustic remark that he is again trying to wash away the insult inflicted by the sheep's head. Steingrímr is downwind and Áskell fears that the remark has been overheard. After the reconciliation between Háls and his wife has been effected, his fear proves justified and his party is attacked by Steingrímr. In the encounter both Steingrímr and Áskell are slain, but at Áskell's dying request the matter is composed peaceably.

Áskell's sons Þorsteinn and Skúta divide their inheritance and Skúta takes over the responsibility for avenging their father. But before he carries out his intention, the plot digresses.

A certain Þorbergr persuades three Norwegians who had previously accepted hospitality from Glúmr Geirason to stay with him instead. He then plants a mare in Glúmr's barn and summons him for theft. During the ensuing battle Þorbergr is wounded and his brother is slain together with the three Norwegians, but the dispute is ultimately arbitrated by Þorgeirr goði and Arnórr ór Reykjahlíð. In an appended episode Glúmr's brother Þorkell meets the *ójafnaðarmaðr* Þorsteinn varastafr in a duel and kills him with a sword taken from the barrow of one of the slain Norwegians.

Skúta now begins his vengeance by killing two men implicated in his father's slaying, then completes the mission by killing his father's slayer Þórir Ketilsson despite the protection of Þorgeirr goði and Eyjólfr Valgerðarson.

The remainder of the saga is taken up chiefly with efforts at

retaliation against Skúta. Þorgeirr, with Þorbergr's advice, sends an assassin to him, but Skúta has a byrnie under his cloak and emerges unscathed. Þorgeirr, again with Þorbergr's advice, hires a second pair of assassins to dispatch Skúta, but they are equally unsuccessful.

Glúmr Eyjólfsson's nephew Bjarni kills Skúta's uncle Þormóðr as the result of a quarrel at a horse-match and Þormóðr's son Eyjólfr takes revenge by killing Bjarni. Glúmr takes over the case and mounts an expedition against Skúta. After the preliminary recruiting and reconnoitering the two parties meet and a man is slain on either side. A settlement is reached, with a secret clause providing for the marriage of Glúmr's daughter Þórlaug to Skúta. Þórir Ketilsson's son looks for a way to avenge his father and carves a *níð* in Skúta's Thingbooth. Skúta promptly kills him and is sentenced to a fine. When Glúmr pays the fine for him, he is displeased and the relationship cools. Glúmr avenges the slight by sending for his daughter and marrying her to someone else. Skúta now sends an assassin to lure Glúmr into an ambush, but Glúmr eludes him and collects his men. Skúta escapes in turn by using a shepherd's disguise.

Þorbergr hǫggvinkinni bribes the carpenter Arnórr to hide two assassins in Skúta's house, but Skúta is too quick for them and kills both Arnórr and the assassins. Þorbergr sends another assassin to Skúta with the same result. Þorbergr now urges Þorgeirr goði to attack Skúta and they set out with a large party. Skúta learns of the expedition, enters the enemy's camp in disguise, and kills one of Þorgeirr's men before making good his escape. The matter is settled, but Skúta's luck has now run dry and the sons of Þórir Ketilsson obtain information about his house which enables them to penetrate his fortified bedroom and kill him. One brother is killed in the attack and the other is subsequently exiled.

Outline

Introduction (feud between the Reykdœlir and Eysteinn Mánason)

Eysteinn takes firewood from Hávarðr's foster father and Áskell forces him to pay composition

Eysteinn cheats Áskell's nephew Þorsteinn bolstǫng and is crippled by him in a duel

Eysteinn frames Áskell's nephew Háls for sheep theft and Áskell outlaws him

Conflict (feud between Vémundr kǫgurr and Steingrímr)

The rascal Hánefr fosters Vémundr's child

Hánefr steals sheep from Hrafn

Hrafn appeals to Steingrímr, who outlaws Hánefr

A battle breaks out between Vémundr and Steingrímr; Áskell arranges a settlement

Vémundr quarrels with Áskell's overseer Kálfr over fish sold to Þorbjǫrn í Árskógi

Vémundr quarrels with Áskell's overseer Máni over a whale and seizes one belonging to Þorbjǫrn; Þorbjǫrn appeals to Steingrímr

Vémundr buys timber previously sold to Steingrímr

Steingrímr's men kill Vémundr's thralls and recover the timber; Áskell and Eyjólfr Valgerðarson arrange a settlement

Vémundr seizes and slaughters oxen purchased by Steingrímr; Áskell and Eyjólfr arrange a settlement

Vémundr persuades Þorgeirr to strike Steingrímr with a sheep's head during a horse-match and Steingrímr kills him; Áskell is unable to arrange a settlement

Steingrímr's foreman eggs him on

Steingrímr recruits men

He makes plans to kill Vémundr

Vémundr is forewarned and the vengeance falls on his brother Herjólfr; Áskell and Eyjólfr arrange a settlement

Vémundr kills or wounds several of the participants in the attack on Herjólfr; Áskell and Eyjólfr arrange a settlement

Vémundr tries to abduct the bride of Þorbjǫrn í Árskógi's son, but Steingrímr recovers her; Áskell and Eyjólfr arrange a settlement

Vémundr incites Steingrímr's men to damage a Thingbooth, then plans to prosecute him; Áskell dissuades him from prosecuting

Climax

Áskell sets out to reconcile his nephew Háls with his estranged wife

He points out where he is to be buried

They see Steingrímr; Háls makes a caustic remark and Áskell fears the consequences

The parties clash; both Áskell and Steingrímr are slain, but a settlement is arranged at Áskell's dying request

Revenge

Áskell's sons divide their property and Skúta takes the responsibility for revenge

Þorbergr hǫggvinkinni detaches Glúmr Geirason's Norwegian guests from him

He frames Glúmr for theft

During the ensuing battle Þorbergr is wounded and his brother is slain together with the Norwegian guests; Þorgeirr goði and Arnórr ór Reykjahlíð compose the dispute

Glúmr's brother Þorkell kills Þorsteinn varastafr in a duel

Skúta kills two men implicated in his father's slaying

Skúta kills his father's slayer Þórir Ketilsson despite the protection of Þorgeirr goði and Eyjólfr Valgerðarson

Counterrevenge

Þorgeirr goði's attempts

Þorgeirr, with Þorbergr's advice, sends an assassin to Skúta

He sends a pair of assassins

The quarrel with Glúmr Eyjólfsson

Glúmr's nephew Bjarni kills Skúta's uncle Þormóðr

Þormóðr's son Eyjólfr kills Bjarni

Glúmr attacks Skúta; a settlement is reached according to which Glúmr's daughter Þórlaug is married to Skúta

Þórir Ketilsson's son carves a *níð* on Skúta's Thingbooth and Skúta kills him

Glúmr pays the fine for him and Skúta is displeased; their friendship cools

Glúmr avenges the slight by fetching his daughter home and marrying her to someone else

Skúta sends an assassin to lure Glúmr into an ambush; Glúmr turns the tables on him, but Skúta escapes

Þorbergr's attempts

Þorbergr hides two assassins in Skúta's house

He sends another assassin to Skúta

He sets out with Þorgeirr goði and a large party, but Skúta frustrates the attack; the matter is settled

The attempt by the sons of Þórir Ketilsson

They send men to reconnoiter Skúta's house

With the aid of the information they invade his bedchamber and kill him

Aftermath

One son is killed in the attack, the other is exiled

Comment

Knut Liestøl believed that *Reykdœla saga* best exemplified the oral saga, that is the saga in which the oral characteristics are least obscured by literary recasting. There are good reasons for his view. The saga is ingenuous in its narrative and unsophisticated in structure, unlike any other. An impression of dependence, not to say lameness, is conveyed by the constant references to an oral source or sources, by candid expressions of uncertainty about the correct version at several junctures of the saga, and by cross-references in the text, especially to what will be told later in the saga. The tone of these departures from the narrative suggests the conscientious but not very self-confident recorder at second hand rather than the wily artist hoodwinking his readers with fictitious verifications, in which at least one recent critic is inclined to believe.

The impression of ingenuousness is confirmed by the simplicity of the structure. The saga is divided fairly evenly into two, a *Reykdœla saga* (so-called by the author himself) and a *Skútu saga*. The division, which the author makes quite plain, is artificial since the second part is a natural continuation of the first. *Reykdœla saga* is the story of a feud between Vémundr kǫgurr and

Steingrímr Qrnólfsson and comprises eight episodes, strung one after the other, in which Vémundr clashes with Steingrímr. The saga provides a museum of irritants: the hostilities are brought about by disputes over sheep, fish, whales, timber, oxen, damaged property, and a stolen bride. In the first four episodes Vémundr systematically challenges Steingrímr and Steingrímr is able, more or less, to even the score. The first three times Áskell succeeds in arranging a settlement, but the fourth time Vémundr is not content with property damage and delivers a bloody insult. This time Steingrímr rejects any sort of minimum satisfaction and refuses settlement. The plot has reached the breaking point and a provisional climax is staged with the patented devices: Steingrímr is incited by his foreman (as in *Heiðarvíga saga*), recruits his men, and organizes an expedition to kill Vémundr. But the climax is thwarted and the vengeance falls off target. Vémundr escapes and his brother Herjólfr is slain, thus introducing a new phase of the conflict. Despite a renewed settlement of the dispute by Áskell Vémundr takes blood vengeance and forces yet another settlement. The matter could now be regarded as closed, but Vémundr re-engages the dispute with a new series of irritants, even more blatantly malicious than the earlier ones: an abduction and deliberate and elaborately premeditated damage to Steingrímr's Thingbooth. The first matter is settled by Áskell, but the second is left open and is followed by the second climax and the culmination of the feud. Again the retribution falls not on the perpetrator himself but on a relative, this time Áskell himself. This final climax is not prepared by strategic plotting but with the other standard staging device, a premonition of death on the part of the marked man. The clash is produced by a reminder of the sheep's head incident, which caused the preliminary climax and is therefore parallel to and reminiscent of it.

The avenging of Áskell falls to his son Skúta according to an agreement reached with his brother. He kills first two of the men involved in the slaying and then the slayer himself, Þórir Ketilsson. The remainder of the saga can be regarded as a counterrevenge carried out against Skúta, since it ends in the killing of Skúta by Þórir's sons. On the other hand, there is so much matter not

pertinent to the revenge that the section takes on the dimensions of a separate *Skútu saga*. It comprises conflicts with Þorgeirr goði, Glúmr Eyjólfsson, and Þorbergr hǫggvinkinni and, like the first part of the saga, contains an assortment of well-worn irritants, a quarrel at a horse-match, a *níð*, a divorce, and no fewer than eight (for the most part hapless) assassins. These conflicts are loosely tied to the central theme of vengeance against Skúta insofar as Þorgeirr goði was a sponsor of Þórir at the time of his death, Glúmr interferes in a case between Skúta and Þórir's son, and Þorbergr attacks Skúta in concert with Þorgeirr goði. But the connection remains loose and *Skútu saga* has more autonomy than the usual standard of strict saga composition permits.

Padding is in fact a regular feature of the plot. The opening three chapters have no visible connection with the saga and no function other than introducing Áskell and his family in a dramatic way. The feud with Eysteinn máni does not lead into or foreshadow the feud between Vémundr kǫgurr and Steingrímr. The prelude to *Skútu saga*, centered around Glúmr Geirason's three Norwegian guests, is likewise isolated and has no function other than to introduce the principals, Þorbergr, Glúmr, and Þorgeirr goði, dramatically. These loose ends reinforce the impression that *Reykdœla saga* is in a raw state; whether this is owing to a more or less direct recording of unrefined tradition cannot be determined, but it is an attractive thought. If so, the discrepancy between the composition of this saga and, let us say *Gísla saga*, gives an interesting measure of the author's contribution to a written saga, a contribution that would appear to be more of form than of substance.

The compositional ineptness is accompanied by a lack of subtlety in the characterization. No other saga, with the possible exception of *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, is quite so black and white. Vémundr is the most unprovoked and most unmotivated agitator on record, with no saving graces except a certain intrepidity. At the same time he manages to escape saga morality, which regularly demands that the scoundrel suffer the consequences. *Reykdœla saga* is amoral not only in permitting the blameless hero to be slain (there are precedents for this), but also in permitting the

scoundrel to go scot-free. But it is a bland amorality, of which the author seems to take no note. What he does emphasize, almost ad nauseam, is the inexhaustible good will of his hero Áskell, who is instrumental in eight reconciliations or attempted reconciliations, whose patience never flags, and whose justice is an object of general admiration. But even this is not enough; the author prepares a special apotheosis for him. Death overtakes him while he is on yet another mission of good will, this time to reconcile his nephew with his estranged wife. Áskell, who has effected so many peaceable settlements, now celebrates the supreme triumph of his charitable diplomacy; having suffered a fatal wound, he conceals it long enough to prevent further fighting and when it is discovered, he uses his authority to assure a final reconciliation after his death. The author, who is otherwise so reserved in his forming of the narrative, creates in Áskell a chieftain even nobler than Njáll or Blund-Ketill. But a noble heart is not a sign of deft characterization and Áskell is otherwise an unrevealing personality, an embodiment of virtue and nothing more.

This absence of dimension holds true for the rest of the saga. Vémundr's villainy is not taken advantage of to produce an interesting character and Skúta is as flat as it is possible for a man of action to be. The author's wants as a designer of men becomes particularly clear in the figure of Glúmr, who is not the harsh, dark, and somewhat problematical personality tinged with hubris of *Glúms saga*, but just another vehicle of plot, both ineffective and unimpressive as a person.

Supplementary Reading

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porsteins saga hvíta

Synopsis

Þorsteinn hvíti settles in Iceland, marries, becomes prosperous, and purchases a *goðorð*. His son Þorgils marries a certain Ásvǫr, whose brother Einarr forms a partnership with Þorsteinn fagri. Þorsteinn fagri is engaged to Helga Krakadóttir, but travels abroad with Einarr once more before the wedding takes place. On the voyage he becomes ill and is obliged to remain in Norway during the winter. Einarr scoffs at him, pays men to rumor his death in Iceland, and courts his betrothed Helga, whom he wins with the help of Þorgils Þorsteinsson. When Þorsteinn fagri returns, he at first feigns indifference and makes preparations for another voyage. But at the last moment he rides to Einarr's farmstead and demands compensation for the injury done him. When Einarr refuses, Þorsteinn kills him. Einarr's father Þórir gathers men, including Þorgils Þorsteinsson, and sets out to take revenge. They attack Þorsteinn's brothers Einarr and Þorkell. In the encounter both brothers, two of Þórir's followers, and Þorgils are slain. Þorsteinn fagri is then outlawed and spends five years abroad. On his return he goes directly to Þorsteinn hvíti, places his life in his hands, and offers settlement for the death of Þorgils. Þorsteinn hvíti takes him in his son's stead and they remain together for eight years, during which time he marries Helga. At the expiration of this period Þorgils' son Brodd-Helgi is full-grown and in a mood to avenge his father. Þorsteinn hvíti therefore advises Þorsteinn fagri to leave Iceland with his family. He does so and spends the remainder of his life in Norway.

Outline

Introduction
- Þorsteinn hvíti's genealogy and departure from Norway
- His colonization and prosperity in Iceland
- The marriage of his son Þorgils to Ásvǫr

Conflict
- Þorsteinn fagri joins a partnership with Ásvǫr's brother Einarr
- He is engaged to Helga
- He sails to Norway, becomes ill, and cannot return
- Einarr scorns Þorsteinn, rumors his death, and marries Helga
- Þorsteinn returns and feigns indifference
- Just before setting sail again he approaches Einarr and demands compensation
- Einarr refuses

Climax
- Þorsteinn kills Einarr

Revenge
- Einarr's father accompanied by Þorgils and others sets out to take vengeance
- They attack Þorsteinn's brothers and kill them, but Þorgils is also slain
- Þorsteinn is outlawed

Reconciliation
- Þorsteinn returns from exile and puts his life in the hands of Þorsteinn hvíti
- He is received in lieu of a son

Aftermath
- When Þorgils' son is full-grown and likely to avenge his father, Þorsteinn fagri returns to Norway and spends the rest of his life there

Vápnfirðinga saga

Synopsis

Helgi Þorgilsson is fostered by Þorsteinn hvíti and grows up to be a promising lad. He acquires the name Brodd-Helgi by fastening a *broddr* (spearhead) to the horns of his bull in order to give it the advantage in a fight. Two of Helgi's neighbors, Skíði and Svartr, quarrel and Skíði is slain. Helgi, having come of age, outlaws Svartr and when Svartr begins to poach, he kills him. But before dying Svartr puts a curse on him. Helgi develops a close friendship with the sons of Lýtingr in Krossavík, especially Geitir, whose sister Halla he marries.

The merchant Þorleifr inn kristni comes to Iceland with a Norwegian companion named Hrafn. Hrafn alienates Helgi by refusing his hospitality and then staying with Geitir. In the spring he is slain. Helgi and Geitir agree to divide his property, but Þorleifr snaps it up and returns it to Hrafn's heirs in Norway. The friendship between Helgi and Geitir cools because each suspects the other of having withheld a part of Hrafn's possessions. Þorleifr returns and Helgi tries to persuade a certain Ketill to prosecute him for failure to pay a temple assessment. Ketill delivers the summons but is forced to accept Þorleifr's hospitality because of bad weather and is dissuaded from prosecuting the case further. In the wake of this incident the hostility between Helgi and Geitir grows. Helgi, taking advantage of Halla's ill health and request for separation, remarries immediately, refuses to return her property, and forcibly quashes Geitir's litigation. When one of Helgi's Thing-

men quarrels with one of Geitir's Thingmen over pasturage and timber, Helgi supports his man by slaughtering his opponent's oxen and felling his timber. Geitir gives directions to summon him, but Helgi is prepared and drives off the summoners, killing some of them in the process. The relatives of the slain men are unable to recover the bodies for burial and appeal to Geitir, who succeeds in recovering them by using one group of men to distract Helgi while a second group loads the bodies on pack horses.

Halla's health now worsens and Helgi takes a graceless leave of her. Guðmundr inn ríki agrees to support Helgi in exchange for a payment, but when Helgi fails to make the payment, the agreement is terminated. Geitir in turn woos Guðmundr's support, but Guðmundr is unwilling to back a consistent loser. Helgi tries to detach one of Geitir's Thingmen first with an offer of hospitality, then with a gift of horses, but Geitir advises him to reject both. His Thingmen now serve him with an ultimatum: either he is to resist Helgi's encroachments or they will abandon him. Spurred by this threat Geitir consults Ófeigr Járngerðarson, Guðmundr inn ríki, and Qlvir inn spaki, and it is understood that some decisive action is in the offing. Helgi and Geitir then agree to ride to the Thing together and Helgi's foster mother has a foreboding dream just before his departure. [Lacuna: Geitir kills Helgi.]

Helgi's son Bjarni, egged on by his stepmother, avenges his father and kills Geitir. Þorkell Geitisson returns to Iceland from abroad, refuses the composition offered by Bjarni, and waits for an opportunity to retaliate. He sends out a spy to observe Bjarni's defenses, but Bjarni's counterespionage persuades him that it is not the right moment to attack. He then ambushes Bjarni, but Bjarni eludes him by putting a chopping block on his saddle and disguising it with a cloak, inducing Þorkell to pursue the dummy while he escapes. Þorkell next enlists Helgi and Grímr, the sons of Droplaug, for a regular attack on Bjarni, but he falls sick at the last moment and cancels the expedition. After these preliminary checks it finally comes to a pitched battle, which ends in a stalemate but in which both Bjarni and Þorkell are wounded. Þorvarðr læknir first heals Bjarni's wounds, then, at Bjarni's request, Þorkell's.

When a shortage of fodder makes it necessary for Þorkell to slaughter his cattle, Bjarni offers to supply his needs and opens the way for a reconciliation.

Outline

Introduction
- Brodd-Helgi's youth
  - His nickname
- Two of Helgi's neighbors quarrel; Svartr kills Skíði
  - Helgi outlaws Svartr
  - Svartr poaches sheep
  - Helgi kills him, but before dying Svartr puts a curse on him
- Helgi's friendship with Geitir
  - His marriage with Geitir's sister Halla

Conflict
- Þorleifr inn kristni and Hrafn come to Iceland
- Hrafn rebuffs Helgi and stays with Geitir
- He is slain
- Helgi and Geitir agree to divide his property
- Þorleifr seizes it and returns it to Hrafn's heirs in Norway
- Helgi and Geitir suspect each other of withholding a part of Hrafn's property
- Þorleifr returns
- Helgi persuades Ketill to prosecute him for an unpaid temple assessment
- Ketill is dissuaded by Þorleifr's hospitality
- The hostility between Helgi and Geitir continues to grow
  - Halla falls ill and asks for separation
  - Helgi takes advantage of this to remarry immediately
  - He refuses to return Halla's property
- Geitir prosecutes, but Helgi quashes the litigation
  - Helgi's and Geitir's Thingmen quarrel over pasturage and timber

- Helgi supports his man by slaughtering his opponent's oxen and felling his timber
- Geitir gives directions for summoning Helgi
- Helgi is prepared and kills some of the summoners
  - The relatives of the slain are unable to recover the bodies for burial
  - They appeal to Geitir
  - Geitir recovers the bodies by decoying Helgi's attention
- Helgi spurns Halla on her deathbed
  - Helgi wins Guðmundr inn ríki's support, then loses it
- Geitir tries without success to win Guðmundr over to his cause
  - Helgi tries to detach one of Geitir's Thingmen
- Geitir counters his effort

Climax
- Geitir's Thingmen threaten to abandon him unless he resists Helgi's invasions
- Geitir consults with various chieftains
- Geitir and Helgi agree to ride to the Thing together
- Helgi's foster mother has a portentous dream
- Geitir kills Helgi

Revenge
- Helgi's son Bjarni is egged on by his stepmother
- He kills Geitir

Reconciliation
- Þorkell Geitisson returns to Iceland
- He refuses Bjarni's offer of composition
- He waits for an opportunity for revenge
- Þorkell dispatches a spy, but Bjarni thwarts him
- Þorkell ambushes Bjarni, who escapes with the aid of a decoy
- Þorkell enlists the aid of Helgi and Grímr, the sons of Droplaug, but falls ill at the last moment and cancels the expedition
- An indecisive battle is fought, in which both Bjarni and Þorkell are wounded

Þorvarðr læknir heals Þorkell at Bjarni's request
Bjarni comes to Þorkell's aid during a hay shortage
The reconciliation is effected

Aftermath
Genealogical notes on Þorkell

Comment

Vápnfirðinga saga is of the paradigmatic sort and demonstrates almost every typical feature of saga composition.

The preliminaries comprise three sections. The first two concern Brodd-Helgi and are episodes calculated to illustrate the steel and harshness of his temper, his competitiveness, and unreconcilableness. The episodes are staggered, the second one culminating in a curse which places Helgi in the shadows before the main action is even engaged. The third part of the introduction tells of Helgi's marriage to Geitir's sister Halla. This places the two antagonists in the same family and provides for the subsequent confrontation of two disparate personalities, the truculent Helgi and the wise but weak and unassertive Geitir.

The conflict between these two poles of behavior is developed by three standard irritants: "the Norwegian," "the divorce," and "the Thingmen." Initial friendship is turned to mutual suspicion by the Norwegian's legacy, which each suspects the other of withholding. This is followed by Helgi's unlovely treatment of his wife (Geitir's sister), his withholding of her dowry, and high-handed suppression of Geitir's attempts to recover it. Suspicion and tacit hostility are then superseded by open conflict, the final stage of which is precipitated by a quarrel between two respective Thingmen. Whereas Helgi has already shown his fist mentality and disregard for justice in quashing Geitir's dowry litigation, he now throws over the reins entirely by simply destroying the disputed property and killing some of the men who summon him for his lawlessness. Geitir is left with the futile satisfaction of recovering the corpses Helgi has left in his wake. This is the point at which saga morality intervenes and begins to work against

Helgi. His heartless leave-taking of Halla is one of the more alienating scenes in saga literature and prepares the reader's mind for Helgi's fall from fortune. From now on his plans fail to prosper. He trifles away Guðmundr inn ríki's friendship with his own niggardliness and is unsuccessful in his effort at disrupting Geitir's ranks.

The initiative now passes into Geitir's hands. His Thingmen press him to act (a kind of *hvǫt*), he consults various chieftains (the exact function of the consultation is lost in the lacuna), and makes plans to accompany Helgi to a Thing, thus setting the stage for his vengeance. Helgi's fate is sealed with a portentous dream, then he is slain.

For a while it seems that the vengeance for Helgi will be averted by Geitir's moderation, but Bjarni yields to his step-mother's incitation and, almost unwillingly, he kills Geitir with the same remorse shown after Bolli's slaying of Kjartan in *Laxdœla saga*. Just as the revenge is superseded by apparent reconciliation, the reconciliation is now suspended by Þorkell's stubborn attempts at counterrevenge. Only after three frustrated schemes and a full-scale battle is a settlement effected. As in *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs* the reconciliation is brought about by the patience of one party, which eventually overcomes the revenge imperative in the opposing camp. The saga ends with the feud cycle complete and the original balance restored.

Supplementary Reading

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Hrafnkels saga

Synopsis

A man named Hallfreðr emigrates to Iceland in the days of Harald Fairhair. His son Hrafnkell settles at Aðalból, acquires the nickname *Freysgoði* for his devotion to the god Freyr, and becomes a powerful chieftain, but he is highhanded in his exercise of authority. He dedicates a horse, of which he is particularly fond, to Freyr and vows to kill anyone who rides it without permission. A certain Einarr takes service with Hrafnkell as a shepherd and, despite warnings, rides the horse. Hrafnkell is loath to kill him but does so to satisfy his oath. Einarr's father Þorbjǫrn seeks rectification and Hrafnkell, against his custom, offers generous provisions in lieu of composition, but Þorbjǫrn refuses charity and turns to his nephew Sámr for help. Sámr summons Hrafnkell and both ride to the Thing, where Sámr beleaguers the chieftains for assistance only to find that no one is willing to antagonize Hrafnkell. He finally persuades two chieftains from the West Fjord District, Þorkell and Þorgeirr, to espouse his cause and with their help he outlaws Hrafnkell. In addition they volunteer to accompany him home in order to carry out the confiscation of Hrafnkell's property. Sámr executes the confiscation, strings up Hrafnkell by the heels, and gives him the choice between death and expropriation. Hrafnkell chooses to sacrifice his property and leaves the district while Sámr takes over Aðalból and his chieftainship.

Hrafnkell thrives in his new homestead and regains his authority, but he enjoys greater popularity than in his former district. Sámr's

brother Eyvindr returns to Iceland from abroad and when Hrafnkell learns of his arrival, he takes delayed revenge by killing him. Sámr sets out in pursuit but is unable to overtake Hrafnkell, who then turns back, catches Sámr off guard, and gives him a choice between death and unconditional submission. Sámr chooses to submit, but Hrafnkell is content to re-establish the former balance of power and leave his enemy unharmed. Sámr appeals without success to his old friends Þorkell and Þorgeirr and must resign himself to the status quo.

Outline

Introduction
- Hallfreðr's settlement in Iceland
- Hrafnkell's settlement at Aðalból
  - His chieftainship
  - His devotion to Freyr
  - His domineering exercise of power

Conflict
- Hrafnkell's vow to kill anyone who rides Freyfaxi without leave
- He hires the shepherd Einarr
- Einarr rides Freyfaxi
- Hrafnkell kills Einarr
- Þorbjǫrn seeks composition without success
- He appeals to Sámr
- Sámr summons Hrafnkell
- Both parties ride to the Thing
- Sámr tries without success to win allies
- With the aid of Þorkell and Þorgeirr he outlaws Hrafnkell

Climax
- He humiliates and expropriates Hrafnkell

Revenge
- Hrafnkell moves
- He thrives in his new home and regains his authority

He enjoys greater popularity
Sámr's brother Eyvindr returns to Iceland
Hrafnkell is egged on to vengeance
He kills Eyvindr
He seizes Sámr and forces him to submit

Reconciliation
Sámr appeals to Þorkell and Þorgeirr without success
He gets no satisfaction and must acquiesce

Aftermath
Notes on Hrafnkell's death and descendants

Comment

Hrafnkels saga is the most obviously moralistic of the sagas. Many of them have more or less marginal or implicit moral preoccupations—*Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, *Grettis saga*, *Fóstbrœðra saga*, *Glúms saga*, *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*—but in *Hrafnkels saga* the moral of the story *is* the story. The concept of defective character, usually used only to set a plot in motion, is elaborated and placed at the center of the action. The saga is conceived not as the outgrowth of Hrafnkell's personality, but as the history and reform of his personality; he is purged by the action.

Hrafnkell's defectiveness is twofold, social and religious. Both aspects are exposed in the introduction, where his devotion to the heathen god Freyr and his domineering behavior as chieftain are described. At the end of the saga both faults are repaired; Hrafnkell learns of Freyfaxi's death and abandons his allegiance to Freyr and, in the wake of his fall from power, he becomes an exemplary chieftain. The phenomenon of the defective chieftain is familiar, but nowhere else is he remade into an effective chieftain. The religious angle is less familiar and looks like a Christian interpretation of the social failing, a religious extension of the civil theme. The abandoning of the heathen gods and the burning of the idols certainly suggest as much. Hrafnkell is not actually converted at the end of his life, as one might expect, but the author of the saga may have been restrained by the knowledge that Hrafnkell

died before the Conversion (somewhat after 960 according to saga chronology).

Hrafnkell's social inadequacy provides the background for his fall and his religious error provides the immediate cause. It is his arrogance which leads him to place such a strict injunction on the use of Freyfaxi, an act which amounts to a provocation of all those around him, and it is his intransigeance which causes him to fulfill his vow to the letter and kill Einarr. His subsequent behavior matches. He refuses to treat Þorbjǫrn as an equal, offering reparations only on terms of condescension, he ridicules the possibility of Sámr's revenge, and apparently it never occurs to him that Sámr can follow up the judgment of the jury. His pride is compounded with false security and the fall is quick. But no sooner has he fallen than Sámr emulates his immoderation and unconcern. He is immoderate in the form of humiliation he chooses to inflict on Hrafnkell and unguarded both in his failure to carry vengeance to its logical conclusion and in his failure to take precautions against retaliation. This prepares the way for another inversion of fortunes. But now Hrafnkell has learned his lesson; he is at once moderate in his revenge and moderate in the exercise of his authority once it has been restored. Most sagas tend to aim at a balance of power among the participants in a feud, a social and political equipoise. *Hrafnkels saga* seems not to enjoin a balance of power but a standard of behavior. The idea of balance still dominates, but it is ethical balance the author has in mind.

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Droplaugarsona saga

Synopsis

The Icelander Ketill þrymr travels to Norway and frees the enthralled chieftain's daughter Arneiðr, whom he subsequently marries. His property ultimately passes to his descendants, the widow Droplaug and her sons Helgi and Grímr.

The saga proper tells the story of a feud between Helgi Droplaugarson and the chieftain Helgi Ásbjarnarson. The trouble begins when Helgi Ásbjarnarson's freedman Þorgrímr torðyfill slanders Droplaug and is slain by her sons. Helgi Ásbjarnarson prosecutes Þorgrímr's slayers and exacts a fine, leaving Helgi Droplaugarson dissatisfied since the insult to Droplaug now remains unavenged. He takes instruction in the law and retaliates by litigating against Helgi Ásbjarnarson's Thingmen. (Droplaug is in the meantime remarried to the widower Hallsteinn despite her son's disapproval.) A new opportunity for reprisal presents itself when Helgi Ásbjarnarson's cochieftain, Hrafnkell, is unable to recover his share of the chieftainship and appeals to Helgi Droplaugarson for aid. Helgi responds by devising a legal trap and ousting his rival from office. He follows up his success by prosecuting one of Helgi Ásbjarnarson's protégés (the foster father of one of his children) for theft and imposing a heavy fine. He is then asked to intervene against Bjǫrn, the seducer of a relative and also a foster father to one of Helgi Ásbjarnarson's children. He twice makes representations in vain, then kills

Bjǫrn. Helgi Ásbjarnarson prosecutes, but Bjǫrn's life is declared forfeit for the seduction. Helgi Droplaugarson now turns to the matter of his unwanted stepfather Hallsteinn, whose death he plots together with his mother. The rumor of his complicity spreads and the slaying is unpopular; Droplaug leaves Iceland and her son is exiled by Helgi Ásbjarnarson, but he fails to heed the sentence and is outlawed. The hostility is further exacerbated by an exchange of threats between the two Helgis at a Thingmeeting.

The final phase of the conflict is initiated when Helgi Droplaugarson agrees to help his relative Rannveig effect a division of property with her husband. He declines to accompany Þorkell Geitisson on an expedition on the ground of illness and shortly thereafter sets out with Grímr to keep his promise to Rannveig. On the way he takes leave of his leman with premonitions of doom, has his sword whetted, and joins company with a certain Þorkell. He then gives the promised assistance to Rannveig, whose husband immediately appeals to Helgi Ásbjarnarson and goads him into action with a reminder of the threats at the Thing. Helgi Ásbjarnarson assembles men while Helgi Droplaugarson has an ominous dream and feels an itch on his jaw where he will be wounded. He ignores warnings and refuses to turn back; the information that might have saved him is lost when one of his men strikes an old woman, causing her to withhold the vital information. Helgi Droplaugarson dismisses his companion Þorkell, but Þorkell chooses to remain with him to the end. The anticipated attack is launched and Helgi makes a heroic stand before succumbing to Helgi Ásbjarnarson's superior numbers.

Helgi's brother Grímr appears to be dead but is restored to life and healed. He bides his time and constructs a hideout in case of need, then invades Helgi Ásbjarnarson's house at night and kills him in a scene reminiscent of Gísli's revenge. He withdraws first to his hideout, then takes refuge with Þorkell Geitisson. He is outlawed for the deed, hides with various friends in Iceland until the net begins to close, then takes ship for Norway. In Norway he kills the viking Gauss but dies of a wound inflicted in the duel.

Outline

Introduction

Ketill þrymr travels to Norway and acquires the enthralled chieftain's daughter Arneiðr

He settles in Iceland and marries Arneiðr

His property ultimately passes to his great-grandsons Helgi and Grímr together with their mother Droplaug

Conflict

Helgi Ásb.'s freedman Þorgrímr torðyfill slanders Droplaug

Helgi kills him

Helgi Ásb. prosecutes and fines Helgi Drop.

Helgi Drop. takes instruction in the law and prosecutes Helgi Ásb.'s Thingmen

The co-owner of Helgi Ásb.'s chieftainship is unable to recover his share and appeals to Helgi Drop.

Helgi Drop. devises a legal trap to oust Helgi Ásb. from his office

The foster father of one of Helgi Ásb.'s children commits theft

Helgi Drop. prosecutes him and imposes a heavy fine

Helgi is asked to intervene against another foster father to one of Helgi Ásb.'s children, who has seduced one of his relatives

Helgi warns him twice to desist

Helgi kills him

Helgi Ásb. prosecutes, but the slain man's life is declared forfeit for seduction

Helgi Drop. plots and compasses his stepfather Hallsteinn's death

The rumor spreads

Helgi Ásb. prosecutes and exiles Helgi Drop., but Helgi fails to leave Iceland and becomes an outlaw

Climax

Helgi Ásb. and Helgi Drop. exchange threats

Helgi Drop. agrees to help his relative Rannveig

He declines to join an expedition with Þorkell Geitisson

He sets out with Grímr

He takes leave of his leman and tells her of his premonitions

He has his sword whetted

He joins company with Þorkell

He helps Rannveig effect her divorce

Rannveig's husband appeals to Helgi Ásb. and eggs him on

He gathers forces

Helgi Drop. has an ominous dream

He ignores warnings to turn back

He loses vital information when one of his men abuses an old woman

He dismisses Þorkell, but Þorkell chooses to stay with him

Helgi Drop. is attacked by Helgi Ásb. and succumbs after a heroic defense

Revenge

Grímr appears to be dead, but is brought back to life

He bides his time and constructs an underground hideout

He invades Helgi's house at night and kills him

He withdraws to his hideout

He takes refuge with Þorkell Geitisson

He is outlawed and flees to Norway

Aftermath

Grímr kills the viking Gauss but dies of a wound suffered in the duel

Final notes on other persons

Comment

If one were deliberately to construct an artificial saga from the

most common structural and motival patterns, one could imagine the result being something rather akin to *Droplaugarsona saga*.

The hero (Helgi Droplaugarson) is introduced with a good deal of family history, after which his adversary is introduced more briefly. This sets the stage for the confrontation, which is effected through the medium of a rascal who indulges in what is, as far as one can see, entirely unmotivated and purely malicious gossip to the effect that Droplaug deceived her husband. Helgi re-establishes the family honor by killing the rascal, who, however, happens to be Helgi Ásbjarnarson's freedman, thus leading to a conflict between the interests of the two Helgis. As is customary in such conflicts, the opening phases are settled with legal weapons while the latter phases are decided with cold steel. Helgi Ásbjarnarson begins by exacting a fine for the death of his freedman and Helgi Droplaugarson is not slow to retaliate. He prepares himself for the coming legal tilt by taking instruction in the law and rehearses by litigating against Helgi Ásbjarnarson's Thingmen (*Ljósvetninga saga*). When the desired opening develops in the form of a quarrel over Helgi Ásbjarnarson's chieftainship (*Bandamanna saga*), Helgi Droplaugarson is legally equipped and maneuvers his opponent out of office. But he is not content with this very considerable victory and continues to seek out and exploit weaknesses in the opposing camp. His attacks fall on the foster fathers of Helgi Ásbjarnarson's children, one of whom he fines for theft and the other of whom he kills for the seduction of a relative. Helgi Ásbjarnarson is now spurred to seek restitution, but his prosecution is stranded on what seems to be another legal trick. He has now been discountenanced in three separate actions and a change of fortune is due. It comes when Helgi Droplaugarson plots the death of his stepfather, thus making himself in turn accessible to legal proceedings. Helgi Ásbjarnarson seizes the opportunity and puts his tormentor beyond the pale of the law. The conflict is now an open one and Helgi Droplaugarson's downfall is sanctioned. It has been constructed with the standard irritants of slander, legal harassment, theft, and seduction. It culminates through the use of one further irritant, divorce.

Helgi agrees to help Rannveig carry out divorce proceedings

and does so. This constitutes a challenge to her husband, who promptly allies himself with Helgi's natural enemy; Helgi Ásbjarnarson sees his chance and takes his vengeance. The sequence is interspersed with the "Somnia, terrores magici, miracula, sagae/Nocturni lemures, portentaque" and other staging effects dear to the saga author. In one of the more affecting scenes in this literature Helgi takes leave of his leman (cf. *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*) with premonitions of doom, then has his sword whetted (*Heiðarvíga saga*). Helgi Ásbjarnarson undergoes the all but indispensable *hvǫt* and gathers forces (cf. *Bjarnar saga*). There follows a shift of scene (e.g. *Laxdœla saga*) back to Helgi Droplaugarson, who now has a portentous dream, ignores a warning (e.g. *Vápnfirðinga saga*), loses vital information, dismisses his companion (e.g. *Laxdœla saga*), and makes a heroic last stand (e.g. *Gísla saga*). The whole situation is like a paper cutout, but effective nonetheless. The revenge is hardly less stereotyped. Grímr keeps a poker face (e.g. *Glúms saga*), waits patiently (e.g. *Hrafnkels saga*), and finally takes revenge in a scene which looks as though it is patterned on *Gísla saga*. There is no reconciliation, but only a cessation of hostilities followed by the curious story of Grímr's death in Norway, which has at most a distant parallel in *Kormáks saga*.

It is difficult to isolate the special character of *Droplaugarsona saga*, perhaps for the very reason that it is such an eclectic pattern of motifs. It is not a bad saga. On the contrary, it is tightly constructed and dramatically charged like *Heiðarvíga saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, *Gísla saga*, *Ljósvetninga saga*, or *Glúms saga*. But whereas these sagas have something beyond compositional virtues to recommend them, either by way of characterization or atmosphere, *Droplaugarsona saga* has no added dimension. Helgi Droplaugarson is neither the icy hero exemplified by Þorgeirr Hávarsson nor the pathetic hero exemplified by Gísli. There are signs of rehabilitation in the leave-taking from his mistress, his reproach of his companion for striking an old woman, the devotion of his newly found friend Þorkell, and the fact that he dies while helping a relative (cf. Áskell in *Reykdœla saga*), but these redeeming features are not worked out as clearly as in *Grettis saga*.

Helgi's slaying of his stepfather (cf. *Valla-Ljóts saga*) and his stubborn litigation are reminiscent of the hard line of saga-writing as we have it in *Fóstbrœðra saga* and *Glúms saga*, while his almost sentimental features at the end of the saga belong to the softer line represented by *Gísla saga* and *Laxdœla saga*. The action of *Droplaugarsona saga* is clearly designed, but the psychological thrust wavers.

Njáls saga

Synopsis

Part I

The theme of the prelude to *Njáls saga* seems to be mismarriage. After the introduction of the principal actors (Mǫrðr gígja and his daughter Unnr, the two brothers Hrútr and Hǫskuldr, and Hǫskuldr's daughter Hallgerðr) and a prophetic scene, in which Hrútr discovers that his niece Hallgerðr has thief's eyes, there follow descriptions of Hrútr's ill-fated marriage to Unnr and Hallgerðr's equally ill-fated marriages to two successive husbands.

Hrútr is betrothed to Unnr but delays the wedding three years in order to collect a legacy in Norway, where he becomes Haraldr gráfeldr's follower and the queen mother Gunnhildr's paramour. With the aid of his royal patrons he sets out to recover his legacy from the pirate Sóti, but in the meantime Gunnhildr has Sóti slain and recovers the legacy for him. Hrútr now longs for Iceland though he hides the reason from the jealous Gunnhildr. She gives him leave to depart, but she suspects the truth and puts a curse on his intended marriage, which is duly celebrated but doomed from the outset because of her magic spell. Unnr complains to her father that Hrútr is unable to consummate the marriage and he advises her how to carry out a divorce procedure. She follows his directions and leaves Hrútr, but when Mǫrðr tries to recover the dowry, Hrútr forces him to back down by challenging him to a duel.

Hallgerðr comes of age and is betrothed to a certain Þorvaldr without being consulted. She is dissatisfied with the match and

plots secretly with her foster father Þjóstólfr. Once married she wastes her husband's substance and accuses him of niggardliness into the bargain. He eventually loses his temper to the point of slapping her, and Þjóstólfr, plainly according to plan, kills him. Þorvaldr's father is unable to track down Þjóstólfr and take revenge, but he is given composition by Høskuldr. Hallgerðr then consents to a second marriage, this time with a certain Glúmr. The wedding is celebrated and the marriage appears to be successful, but the balance is overturned when Høskuldr dismisses Þjóstólfr from his home and he goes to stay with Hallgerðr. Þjóstólfr wastes no time in fomenting a quarrel between Glúmr and Hallgerðr, as a result of which Glúmr strikes her. Hallgerðr tells Þjóstólfr not to avenge the blow, but he is undeterred and kills Glúmr anyway. Hallgerðr sends him to Hrútr, allegedly for asylum, but Hrútr guesses her intention and kills him.

At this point the two main protagonists, Gunnarr and Njáll, are introduced into the action. Gunnarr is a relative of Unnr and after her father's death she turns to him for help in recovering her dowry from Hrútr. Gunnarr agrees and seeks legal advice from Njáll, who conceives an elaborate plan according to which Gunnarr is to disguise himself as a peddler, visit Hrútr, bring up the matter of Unnr's dowry, wheedle the correct procedure out of Hrútr, and summon him as if in jest. Gunnarr carries out the plan, but when a legal knot develops at the Thing, he puts aside the legal pretenses and extracts the money from Hrútr by challenging him to a duel.

More marriages are now contracted. Unnr marries Valgarðr inn grái and gives birth to a son named Mǫrðr after her father. Njáll's sons Skarpheðinn and Grímr also marry and Njáll makes plans for the marriage of a third son, Helgi. At the same time he fosters the bride's brother, Þórhallr Ásgrímsson, who becomes under his tutoring the foremost legal expert in Iceland.

Gunnarr prepares to sail east with his Norwegian guest Hallvarðr. He harries in the Baltic, spends time with Harald Bluetooth in Denmark, then returns to Norway and eventually Iceland.On his return he rides to a Thing, meets Hallgerðr, and woos her. A double wedding is held, in which Gunnarr marries Hallgerðr and his relative Þráinn Sigfússon marries Hallgerðr's daughter

Þorgerðr. But no sooner have the weddings been celebrated than trouble begins anew. During a feast at Bergþórshváll, Hallgerðr and Njáll's wife Berþóra quarrel over a matter of precedence and Hallgerðr avenges herself by having one of Berþóra's men killed. Gunnarr pays Njáll the fine. Bergþóra promptly retaliates by having one of Hallgerðr's workmen killed and Njáll returns the original fine. Hallgerðr cuts another notch and Gunnarr pays again. Bergþóra then evens the score and Njáll repays the previous indemnity. Hallgerðr plots yet another slaying and the victim this time is the foster father of Njáll's sons. The matter is composed once more and Gunnarr pays a double indemnity, but Hallgerðr adds insult to injury by calling Njáll's sons "dungbeardlets" and Njáll himself "the beardless fellow." Beggarwomen convey the slander to Bergþóra, who uses it to incite her sons. They respond by killing the slayers of their foster father, but after a three-year delay the matter is settled once again.

All this is a prelude to the main action of Part I, which is the conflict between Gunnarr on the one hand and the friends Otkell and Skammkell, and Mǫrðr Valgarðsson, who for unexplained reasons is envious of Gunnarr, on the other. Otkell refuses to sell Gunnarr provisions during a time of need, but he does sell him the thievish thrall Melkófr. Hallgerðr finds scope for her malice by sending Melkófr to steal food from Otkell. Gunnarr, suspecting the truth, slaps her and she, true to form, promises to avenge the blow. In the meantime Skammkell discovers a knife and belt lost by Melkófr at the scene of the theft and Hallgerðr's complicity is exposed. Gunnarr makes generous offers of settlement, but at Skammkell's instigation Otkell refuses all offers in favor of consulting Gizurr Teitsson and Geirr goði. Skammkell is charged with this consultation and falsely reports back that Gizurr and Geirr have advised summoning Gunnarr. Otkell serves the summons, but Skammkell's deceit is revealed at the Thing and Gunnarr is given self-judgment. He balances Hallgerðr's theft against the insult offered him by the summons.

A certain Runólfr invites Otkell to his farm and on the way Otkell rides through a field in which Gunnarr is working and cuts him with his spur. The cut is unintentional, but Skammkell

uses it to fan the flames. As a result Gunnarr, together with his brother Kolskeggr, kills Otkell, Skammkell, and six companions. Njáll foresees that this is the beginning of a blood feud and predicts Gunnarr's death unless he abstains from killing more than one man in a given family and observes faithfully the terms of all settlements made. Gizurr and Geirr prepare to prosecute him, but after some legal jockeying at the Thing the case is arbitrated and settled peaceably.

Gunnarr's next opponents are the brothers-in-law Starkaðr and Egill and their sons. The sons of Starkaðr challenge Gunnarr to a horse-match, Njáll foresees bloody consequences, and predictably enough the contest ends in blows. When Gunnarr is invited to the farm of Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson, Njáll warns him to be cautious and the warning proves to be well advised because Starkaðr and Egill prepare an ambush of thirty men on his return. Gunnarr is forewarned of the attack in a dream and kills fourteen assailants, but he loses his brother Hjǫrtr. Njáll counsels Gunnarr on how to counter the anticipated prosecution while Þorgeirr Starkaðsson seeks legal counsel from Mǫrðr Valgarðsson. Preparations are made on both sides, but Njáll outwits Mǫrðr and the case is mediated to Gunnarr's advantage.

Þorgeirr Starkaðsson now consults Mǫrðr again on how best to reach Gunnarr and Mǫrðr advises him to ally himself with Þorgeirr Otkelsson and attack Gunnarr in such a way that his ally is slain. This will mean that Gunnarr has killed twice in the same family and will lead to his downfall according to Njáll's prediction. The two Þorgeirrs plan the attack, but they nap on the way to Hlíðarendi and Njáll is made aware of their presence by a dream and by a shepherd. He warns Gunnarr to gather men, then disperses his assailants by announcing Gunnarr's approach. In the ensuing litigation he assesses heavy fines against the conspirators.

Mǫrðr devises a new plan of attack. Gunnarr again has the best of the encounter, but he kills Þorgeirr Otkelsson and has now shed blood twice in the same family. Gizurr hvíti prosecutes him, but Njáll disqualifies the prosecution and the matter is mediated. According to the terms of the settlement Gunnarr is to spend three years in exile and Njáll warns him again to abide by the

terms. But Gunnarr fails to go into exile and becomes an outlaw. His enemies plan in concert to attack him. They approach Hlíðarendi, lure his dog away, and kill him after a memorable defense and only after Hallgerðr, mindful of the slap, refuses the assistance that would have saved him.

Skarpheðinn and Gunnarr's son Hǫgni plan their revenge, kill four of Gunnarr's assailants, and extract self-judgment from Mǫrðr. The case is settled and a reconciliation reached, by which all parties abide. Gunnarr's brother Kolskeggr travels to Denmark, then south, and ends his career in the Varangian Guard.

Part II

The second part of the saga revolves around a conflict between Njáll's sons and the family of Þráinn Sigfússon. The dispute originates in Norway, where Þráinn arrives first and distinguishes himself at the court of Hákon jarl. He is followed by Njáll's sons Grímr and Helgi, who survive an attack by vikings with the aid of Kári Sǫlmundarson before arriving safely. These future antagonists are then joined in Norway by a certain Hrappr, the instigator of the quarrel. He marks his presence by seducing his host's daughter and killing his foreman, which leads to a royal edict of outlawry. As Þráinn and Njáll's sons are about to set sail from Norway, Hrappr seeks to escape Hákon's pursuit by taking passage with them. Þráinn takes him aboard and sails to Iceland, but Hákon suspects Njáll's sons of complicity in Hrappr's hiding and seizes them. They manage to escape and take refuge with Kári, who effects a reconciliation with the jarl, returns to Iceland with Grímr and Helgi, and marries their sister Helga.

Njáll's sons now seek compensation from Þráinn for their humiliation at the hands of Hákon jarl, but they are refused and insulted into the bargain. They are prompt to react to the slight and kill Þráinn, Hrappr, and two companions. Further bloodshed is avoided for the moment through the mediation of Þráinn's brother Ketill. In the aftermath Ketill fosters his deceased brother's son Hǫskuldr, but this duty is later assumed by Njáll. When Hǫskuldr comes of age and is betrothed to Hildigunnr, the niece of the chieftain Flosi, on the condition that he acquire a

chieftainship himself, Njáll creates the necessary district for him through a legal reform and the wedding is celebrated.

But the feud is only temporarily set to rest and is rekindled when Þráinn's in-law Lýtingr kills Njáll's natural son Hǫskuldr. Hǫskuldr's mother lets Skarpheðinn close the dead man's eyes by way of singling him out as the avenger and the upshot is that Njáll's sons wound Lýtingr and kill his two brothers. Njáll's foster son Hǫskuldr arranges another settlement, but this too is short-lived. [Digression on the conversion of Iceland.] The revenge is ultimately completed by Hǫskuldr Njálsson's blind son Ámundi, who miraculously regains his sight long enough to avenge his father and kill Lýtingr.

It now transpires that the chieftainship established for Hǫskuldr Þráinsson cuts into Mǫrðr Valgarðsson's constituency. Valgarðr advises his son to avenge himself by sowing dissension between Hǫskuldr and Njáll's sons. Accordingly Mǫrðr cultivates the friendship of Njáll's sons, fetes them, gives them rich gifts, and creates ill will between them and Hǫskuldr by slander. As soon as the situation is ripe, he incites them to kill Hǫskuldr and they assent. As a consequence of the deed Njáll predicts the destruction of his family.

Mǫrðr prepares the prosecution against Njáll's sons in secret league with them. Flosi assembles men for the impending Thing-meeting and Hildigunnr incites him to take blood vengeance. Njáll and his sons ride to the Thing and make the rounds of the chieftains urging support, but Skarpheðinn's sharp rejoinders hinder their cause. He does, however, win the support of Guðmundr inn ríki by imposing the greatest loss of face on his enemy Þorkell hákr. Njáll's foster son Þórhallr Ásgrímsson then disqualifies the prosecution because the prosecutor (Mǫrðr) is also a guilty party. Njáll proposes mediation and Flosi is persuaded to acquiesce. A settlement is arranged by arbitrators, but Flosi and Skarpheðinn wrangle over the payment at the last moment and it comes to nothing.

Flosi and his allies now conspire to attack Bergþórshváll late in the summer. The portents commence: an old woman in Njáll's household has a premonition of the burning and a certain Hildi-

glúmr Runólfsson also sees a portent of the coming conflagration. Flosi assembles his men, but Njáll's sons Helgi and Grímr learn of the massing from beggarwomen and return home. Bergþóra prepares the evening meal with the premonition that it will be the last one and Njáll sees bloody omens. Flosi and his men approach. Njáll advises his men to retire into the house against the better knowledge of Skarpheðinn and when Flosi perceives that he can make no headway with weapons, he decides on fire. Njáll and his immediate family die in the flames and only Kári escapes.

Flosi learns of Kári's escape and anticipates bloody vengeance, but Kári's pursuit is, for the moment at least, to no purpose. Flosi then returns to his home in the east and gives all the conspirators shelter. The bodies are recovered from the ashes of Bergþórshváll and Njáll's friends take stock. Flosi has a dream which names the men in his party who are fey. He enlists allies in the east while Kári's party makes preparations and Mǫrðr Valgarðsson assumes responsibility for the prosecution of the conspirators. Flosi and his men taunt Njáll's friend Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson by stopping at his house and consuming his substance, then both parties muster at the Thing. Flosi bribes a certain Eyjólfr Bǫlverksson to become his legal counsel and Kári's party wins the support of Snorri goði and Guðmundr inn ríki.

The charges are brought formally. Eyjólfr advises Flosi to change his official domicile so that the prosecution will be conducted in the wrong court and be void. The legal jockeying begins with disqualifications and counterdisqualifications, but the prosecution seems on the point of carrying the day. Eyjólfr makes a final attempt to disqualify the prosecution on the basis of Flosi's change of residence. The prosecution counters the move, but after another series of machinations Eyjólfr seems on the point of winning the upper hand. With its legal arsenal exhausted the prosecution finally resorts to a battle royal, which is only halted by the intercession of several powerful chieftains. The matter is given over to an arbitrating commission, but Þorgeirr skorargeirr and Kári exclude themselves from the settlement and prepare to

take revenge. They kill five of the conspirators, then a settlement is effected between Þorgeirr and Flosi, but Kári is not yet satisfied. He stays with a certain Bjǫrn hvíti in Þórsmǫrk and when he learns that several of the conspirators will pass through Þórsmǫrk, he succeeds, with Bjǫrn's mock-heroic backing, in killing another five, then a few more to boot. In the meantime Flosi goes abroad, is shipwrecked in the Orkneys, and becomes Jarl Sigurðr's follower. Kári sails to Friðarey and learns of the presence of Flosi and his men on the Orkneys. He follows them there, enters the jarl's hall while one of the arsonists is giving a biased account of Njáll's burning, and kills him. [Digression on the Battle of Clontarf.] He then kills one final arsonist before his mission is complete.

Flosi now seeks absolution in Rome and returns to Iceland. Kári follows in his footsteps, is also absolved in Rome, and returns to Iceland. Flosi welcomes him with open arms and they are reconciled.

Outline

Part I

Introduction

Hrútr comments on Hallgerðr's thief's eyes

Hrútr is engaged to Unnr, the daughter of Mǫrðr gígja

He goes to Norway to collect a legacy

He becomes Gunnhildr's paramour but hides his betrothal from her

On his departure she puts a curse on his intended marriage

He marries Unnr, but the marriage goes badly

Unnr complains to her father and he gives her directions for effecting a divorce

Unnr divorces Hrútr

Mǫrðr tries to recover the dowry, but Hrútr forces him to back down by challenging him to a duel

Hallgerðr is married without her consent

She wastes her husband's substance and he slaps her

She incites her foster father Þjóstólfr to kill him

Hǫskuldr pays the indemnity

Hallgerðr is married a second time with her consent

She quarrels with her husband and he slaps her

Þjóstólfr kills him against her will

She sends Þjóstólfr to Hrútr, who guesses her intent and kills him

Unnr asks Gunnarr to recover her dowry from Hrútr

Gunnarr consults Njáll, who conceives a plan

Gunnarr carries out the plan and summons Hrútr

A legal knot develops at the Thing

Gunnarr extracts the dowry by challenging Hrútr to a duel

Gunnarr harries in the east

Gunnarr meets Hallgerðr and woos her

A double wedding is held in which Gunnarr marries Hallgerðr and Gunnarr's relative Þráinn Sigfússon marries Hallgerðr's daughter Þorgerðr

Hallgerðr and Bergþóra quarrel over a matter of precedence

Hallgerðr has one of Bergþóra's workmen killed and Gunnarr pays the indemnity

Bergþóra retaliates and Njáll returns the indemnity

Hallgerðr cuts another notch and Gunnarr pays

Bergþóra evens the score and Njáll repays

Hallgerðr has the foster father to Njáll's sons slain and Gunnarr pays a double indemnity; Hallgerðr vilifies Njáll and his sons

Bergþóra incites her sons and they avenge their foster father

After a three-year delay the matter is settled once again

Conflict

Otkell and Skammkell are introduced

Otkell refuses to sell Gunnarr provisions

Otkell does sell him the thievish thrall Melkófr

Hallgerðr sends Melkófr to steal provisions from Otkell
Gunnarr slaps her and she promises to avenge the blow
Her theft is exposed
Gunnarr offers generous compensation
At Skammkell's instigation Otkell refuses and seeks advice from Gizurr and Geirr
Skammkell misrepresents the advice and Otkell summons Gunnarr
Skammkell's deceit is revealed and Gunnarr is given self-judgment
Otkell receives an invitation
On the way he rides through Gunnarr's field and cuts him with his spur
The cut is unintentional, but Skammkell fans the flame
Gunnarr attacks and kills Otkell and Skammkell
Njáll foresees a bloody feud
Njáll advises Gunnarr never to slay two men in the same family and to observe all settlements faithfully
The case is arbitrated and settled peaceably
Gunnarr is challenged to a horse-match
Njáll foresees dire consequences
The match ends in blows
Njáll warns Gunnarr to be cautious
His enemies prepare
He is forewarned in a dream
Gunnarr kills fourteen assailants
Njáll counsels him on how to counter the prosecution
His enemies consult Unnr's son Mǫrðr
Njáll outwits Mǫrðr and the case is mediated to Gunnarr's advantage
Gunnarr's enemies consult Mǫrðr again
Mǫrðr advises that they attack Gunnarr in such a way that he will kill a relative of Otkell and thus have killed two persons in the same family
They advance on Hlíðarendi but nap on the way
Njáll is warned of their presence in a dream

He warns Gunnarr
He disperses them by announcing Gunnarr's approach
Njáll assesses heavy fines against the attackers
Mǫrðr devises a new plan of attack
Gunnarr kills Otkell's son and has now shed blood twice in the same family
Gunnarr is prosecuted
Njáll disqualifies the prosecution and the matter is mediated
The terms entail Gunnarr's exile

Climax

Gunnarr fails to observe the terms and becomes an outlaw
His enemies attack him in his house
Hallgerðr, mindful of the slap, refuses him a strand of her hair to string his bow
Gunnarr falls

Revenge

Gunnarr's son Hǫgni and Njáll's son Skarpheðinn kill four of the assailants and extract self-judgment from Mǫrðr

Reconciliation

The case is settled and the parties abide by the decision

Aftermath

Gunnarr's brother Kolskeggr travels east and ends his career in the Varangian Guard

Part II

Introduction

Þráinn Sigfússon goes to Norway
Njáll's sons Grímr and Helgi go to Norway
Hrappr goes to Norway
He seduces his host's daughter, kills his foreman, and is outlawed
He is pursued by Hákon jarl and seeks refuge first with Njáll's sons, then with Þráinn
Þráinn takes him aboard his ship and sails to Iceland
Hákon seizes Grímr and Helgi for complicity in Hrappr's escape

They escape and take refuge with Kári
Kári returns to Iceland with them

Conflict

Grímr and Helgi seek compensation from Þráinn for their seizure by Hákon jarl
They are refused and insulted
They kill Þráinn, Hrappr, and two companions
Þráinn's brother Ketill mediates a settlement
Njáll fosters Þráinn's son Hǫskuldr
Hǫskuldr is betrothed to Flosi's niece Hildigunnr on the condition that he acquire a chieftainship
Njáll creates the chieftianship for him and the wedding is celebrated
Þráinn's in-law Lýtingr kills Hǫskuldr Njálsson in revenge for Þráinn's death
Njáll's sons wound Lýtingr and kill two brothers
Hǫskuldr Þráinsson arranges a settlement
Hǫskuldr Njálsson's blind son Ámundi miraculously regains his sight long enough to kill Lýtingr
Hǫskuldr's chieftainship cuts into Mǫrðr Valgarðsson's constituency and Valgarðr advises his son to sow dissension between Hǫskuldr and Njáll's sons
He incites Njáll's sons to kill Hǫskuldr
They follow his advice
After elaborate preparations and litigation a new settlement is arranged, but it comes to nothing when Flosi and Skarpheðinn wrangle at the last moment

Climax

Flosi and his men conspire to attack Bergþórshváll
An old woman in Njáll's household has a premonition of the burning
Another man sees a portent of the burning
Flosi assembles his men
Grímr and Helgi learn of the massing and return home
Bergþóra foresees that the evening meal will be the last
Njáll sees bloody omens

Flosi and his men approach
Njáll retires into the house against Skarpheðinn's better knowledge
Flosi is unable to storm the house and decides on fire
Njáll and his family succumb in the flames; only Kári escapes

Revenge

Flosi anticipates revenge
Kári sets out in pursuit to no avail
Flosi dreams of the men in his party who are fey
He enlists allies and sets out for the Thing
Elaborate litigation climaxes in a battle
The case is finally mediated, but Kári and Þorgeirr skorargeirr exclude themselves from the settlement
Kári and Þorgeirr kill five of the arsonists
A settlement is effected between Þorgeirr and Flosi
In company with Bjǫrn hvíti Kári kills five more arsonists
He kills still others
Flosi and Kári go abroad and meet on the Orkneys
Kári kills still another arsonist
Both Flosi and Kári seek absolution in Rome

Reconciliation

Kári and Flosi are reconciled in Iceland

Aftermath

Final notes on Flosi's death and Kári's descendants

Comment

Njáls saga is the most frequently and fully analyzed of all the family sagas and consequently inspires the commentator with the greatest inhibitions. I am therefore not tempted to venture a thumbnail characterization, but will simply point out to what extent *Njáls saga* complies with the compositional principles observed in the other sagas.

The crux criticorum used to be the unity of *Njáls saga*, whether

it was one saga or two sagas artificially joined. There is now universal agreement that it was conceived and written as one saga, and there can be little doubt that this is so. However, the outline above shows that in structure at least it is very definitely twofold. It has two climaxes, the death of Gunnarr and the burning of Njáll, and each of the climaxes is cradled in the standard six-part structure. The division between the two parts is perfectly clear and comes after the eighty-first chapter (out of 159). For the sake of convenience we can therefore speak of a *Gunnars saga* and a *Njáls saga* or Part I and Part II.

Gunnars saga begins with a quantity of prefatory matter about Hallgerðr's thief's eyes, Hrútr's marriage to Unnr, her divorce, and the recovery of her dowry, and Hallgerðr's marriages and quarrel with Bergþóra. The function of all this material is not equally apparent. The thief's eyes are clearly proleptic since it is Hallgerðr's thievishness that precipitates the fatal quarrel between Otkell and Gunnarr. Hallgerðr's sequence of marriages is also clearly a staging effect. The pattern established in her first two marriages—quarrel, blow, vengeance, and the death of her husband—foreshadows the pattern of her third marriage. The quarrel with Bergþóra has no such immediate function, but seems to grow partly out of the author's predilection for series and partly out of a wish to characterize Hallgerðr and show her contentiousness, unyieldingness, and vengefulness. It is more difficult to fathom the intent behind the story of Hrútr and Unnr. It provides, to be sure, an occasion for Gunnarr to prove his mettle with his firm intervention in Unnr's behalf, but it is rather overelaborate as a means for such self-evident characterization. It might be expected to set the stage in some way for the ensuing conflict, but in this respect it is illogical. Gunnarr might justifiedly be expected to have earned Unnr's gratitude and that of her son Mǫrðr, yet when the quarrel breaks out between Otkell and Gunnarr, we find Mǫrðr aligned with Gunnarr's enemies. This is motivated with the otherwise unexplained statement that Mǫrðr envied Gunnarr greatly. The story might, on the other hand, justifiedly be expected to cause hostility between Gunnarr and Hrútr and Hrútr's family. Yet Gunnarr promptly marries into the family

and the relations are most cordial. This is the one part of the saga that hangs in the air.

The arrangement of the introductory matter shows a slight degree of the intertwining we have learned to associate with *Eyrbyggja saga*; the story of Unnr and Hrútr is told up to the time of the divorce, Hallgerðr's first two marriages are described, Unnr returns to the scene long enough to recover her dowry with Gunnarr's help, and finally Hallgerðr's third marriage and quarrel with Bergþóra are picked up.

The actual conflict does not grow out of this prefatory matter but makes use of two new characters, Otkell and Skammkell, whom Hallgerðr antagonizes. The quarrel is developed in five steps, each of which ends with litigation in Gunnarr's favor. Only in the last legal encounter is he forced to concede even a compromise, in this case his own exile. The irritants are familiar: refusal of provisions (as in *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*), a theft, an injury, a slaying, two foiled ambushes, a second slaying, and finally the legal remedy (Gunnarr's exile). Gunnarr then fails to observe the terms of the settlement in accordance with Njáll's warning and falls forfeit to the law. The climax comes when Hallgerðr, as we have been led to expect by her first two marriages, avenges a blow and refuses to give Gunnarr the strand of hair that would save his life.

The final three sections are extremely brief, occupying only three short chapters out of eighty-one. Gunnarr's son Hǫgni and Njáll's son Skarpheðinn kill four of Gunnarr's assailants, then are reconciled with the rest. The aftermath is restricted to a report of Kolskeggr's fate in the east.

The second part of the saga, *Njáls saga* proper, is better balanced. The preliminaries are less drawn-out and better integrated and the revenge section is substantial enough to be a counterpoise to the conflict section.

The actual conflict is between Njáll's sons on one side and Þráinn Sigfússon and his son Hǫskuldr on the other. It is brought about by an episode in Norway, as a result of which Njáll's sons bear the brunt of the king's wrath when it should properly have fallen on Þráinn. The opening section gives the background with model economy. The protagonists sail to Norway, then the

catalyst, the rascal Hrappr, follows them and brings them together by seeking refuge from the king first with one, then with the other. Since Njáll's sons fall innocently victim to the king's wrath while Þráinn and Hrappr go scot-free, there is a natural resentment. The rest of the saga describes the bloody consequences of the resentment.

Njáll's sons first seek some kind of compensation for the injury done them and when they are unsuccessful, they kill Þráinn and Hrappr. A settlement is arranged but broken when Þráinn's in-law Lýtingr kills Njáll's natural son Hǫskuldr. Njáll's sons retaliate and another settlement is reached. But this too is broken when Mǫrðr, in the same role of advocatus diaboli as in the first part, sets Njáll's sons and Þráinn's son Hǫskuldr against one another. Hǫskuldr is slain and this time an attempt at a settlement fails.

The climax is symmetrically constructed, a series of preparatory moves by Flosi interspersed with omens and portents at Bergþórshváll. The revenge comprises a partial settlement at the Thing, after elaborate legal maneuvering, and Kári's monumental vengeance, first in the company of Þorgeirr skorargeirr, then of Bjǫrn hvíti, then alone. When the vengeance is felt to be sufficiently ample, and the dimensions are unprecedented, a reconciliation is effected between the surviving conspirators and Njáll's avenger. As in the first section of the saga, the aftermath is vestigial, two small paragraphs of particulars about Flosi's later fate and Kári's progeny.

Supplementary Reading

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Bouman, Arie C. *Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature*, Leyden: Universitaire Pers, 1962, pp. 3–13.

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Hauch, Carsten. "Indledning til Forelæsninger over Njalssaga og Flere med den Beslægtede Sagaer," *Afhandlinger og Æsthetiske Betragtninger*, Copenhagen, 1855, pp. 411–67.

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CONCLUDING NOTE

This volume has concerned itself with a descriptive analysis of the family sagas. The descriptive approach is a departure from common practice inasmuch as the great bulk of saga study has been historically oriented and has addressed itself to the problem of how the sagas originated. The problem of genesis has been so dominant that it cannot properly be ignored in any general work on the family sagas and it seems wisest to draw whatever conclusions are suggested by the present study lest they be drawn by others in a sense not intended.

The origin of the family sagas is shrouded in complete mystery. There are no documents outside of the texts themselves to aid our conjectures. As a result, the latitude of speculation has been considerable.[32] Some have felt that the family sagas are a literary creation of gifted men in the thirteenth century and others have felt that they are a literary continuation of highly developed oral stories reaching back two or three centuries to the time of the events described. But scholars of both persuasions have felt that, in the absence of a written tradition between the events and the composition of the sagas, there must have been some sort of an oral tradition to account for the survival of the narrative matter. The disagreement has been not so much about the existence of oral tradition as about its form and its relationship to the written sagas. Some have believed that it consisted of fragments and particles used arbitrarily by the saga authors to create novels of the Saga Age while others have believed that the sagas were preceded by fully developed oral stories.

As the scholarly literature clearly shows, there seems to be no

satisfactory way of bridging the gap between these alternatives. The nature of the impasse is illustrated by a conversation between two eminent French scholars, Joseph Bédier and Ferdinand Lot, who debated the same issue, not as it applies to the sagas but as it applies to the chansons de geste. After Bédier's death in 1938 Lot wrote a small book in honor of his deceased colleague. In the book he describes their last meeting and their last debate during a garden party in June, 1938. On this occasion Bédier had taken Lot aside and had expounded his view once more. Lot writes: "After an hour or more we separated recognizing that our positions were irreducible. He was persuaded that there is a spontaneous birth of literary works: 'All literature,' he repeated, 'begins with a masterpiece, which has no past.' I objected that the masterpiece is born in a pre-established framework and that it was this framework that was under discussion."[33]

The positions are exactly the same for the saga and equally irreducible. My own persuasion is that Lot was correct and that there is a pre-established framework. The form of the family saga is too elaborate to have been invented in a vacuum at the beginning of the thirteenth century. There must have been an artistic continuity between the preliterary and literary periods and the written saga must have derived much of its form and technique from the oral stories that went before. The best way to account for the structural and stylistic uniformity of the family sagas is to suppose that structure and style were inherited from the oral period and were traditional features. What is characteristic of the written saga is likely to have been characteristic of the oral saga as well and the perennial question about the form of the oral tradition might tentatively be answered in terms of what is common to the written sagas. Having defined the written family saga as a gradually mounting conflict culminating in a dramatic climax followed by some form of revenge and ultimately resolved by a reconciliation between the conflicting parties, I am therefore inclined to believe that in a broad sense this definition might also serve to describe the oral stories that must have preceded and preconditioned the written sagas.

A LIST OF FAMILY SAGAS IN TRANSLATION

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The Vatnsdalers' Saga, trans. Gwyn Jones. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944.

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There are no English translations of *Bjarnar saga hítdœlakappa*, *Reykdœla saga*, and *Valla-Ljóts saga*. The Norse sagas are conveniently translated into German in *Thule: Altnordische Dichtung und Prosa*, 24 vols., ed. Felix Niedner. Jena: Eugen Diederich, 1911–30. The family sagas appear in volumes III–XII. These volumes were revised and reissued in 1963–64 and contain useful bibliographies of critical literature.

NOTES

1 William Paton Ker, *Epic and Romance* (London, 1897), p. 214.

2 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, "Íslendingasögur," *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder*, 7: 508 (1962).

3 Ker, *Epic and Romance*, p. 235.

4 Ker, *Epic and Romance*, pp. 228–29.

5 *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, eds. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Frederick York Powell, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1883), I, 565–66. Cf. Johannes van Ham, *Beschouwingen over de Literaire Beteknis der Laxdœla Saga* (Amsterdam: Uitgevers-Maatschappij Holland, 1932), p. 42.

6 *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, II, 501–08.

7 *Pauli Historia Langobardorum*, ed. Georg Waitz (Hanover, 1878), I, 23–24, pp. 70–71.

8 Cf. an analogy between the duel in *Waltharius* and a scene in *Kormáks saga* (*Íslenzk Fornrit*, VIII, 258) in Friedrich von der Leyen, *Die Deutschen Heldensagen* (Munich: Beck, 1923), p. 193.

9 *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, II, 507.

10 Magnus Olsen, "Gísla Saga og Heltediktningen," *Festskrift til Finnur Jónsson* (Copenhagen: Levin og Munksgaards Forlag, 1928) pp. 6–14.

11 Reinhard Prinz, *Die Schöpfung der Gísla saga Súrssonar* (Breslau: F. Hirt, 1935), pp. 127–32, did not go beyond Olsen, while Walther Gehl, *Ruhm und Ehre bei den Nordgermanen* (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1937), p. 77, minimized the influence of heroic poetry on *Gísla saga*.

12 H. M. Heinrichs, "Nibelungensage und Gísla Saga," *Beiträge zur Deutschen und Nordischen Literatur: Festgabe für Leopold Magon* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1958), pp. 22–29.

13 Ker, *Epic and Romance*, p. 209.

14 van Ham, *Beschouwingen over de Literaire Beteknis der Laxdœla Saga*, pp. 38, 44–45, 87–90, 134–42. Cf. *Íslenzk Fornrit*, V (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1934), xlv–xlvii.

15 Arie C. Bouman, *Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature* (Leyden: Universitaire Pers, 1962), pp. 133–47.

[16] Knut Liestøl, *The Origin of the Icelandic Family Sagas*, trans. A. G. Jayne (Oslo: H. Aschehoug, and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), p. 169.

[17] See A. Hruby, *Drei Studien zur Technik der Isländischen Saga* (Leipzig and Vienna: F. Deuticke, 1936), pp. 13–14, for further analogies between *Grettis saga* and the *Poetic Edda*.

[18] Liestøl, *The Origin*, pp. 174–76.

[19] This and other dreams led Andreas Heusler to postulate a *Traumlied* in the lacuna of the *Codex Regius*: "Die Lieder der Lücke im Codex Regius," *Germanistische Abhandlungen Hermann Paul zum 17. März 1902 Dargebracht* (Strasbourg, 1902), pp. 39–48. Cf. Sigurður Nordal, *Íslenzk Fornrit*, III, (1938), lii–liii.

[20] Liestøl, *The Origin*, pp. 179–80.

[21] Ulrike Sprenger, *Praesens Historicum und Praeteritum in der Altisländischen Saga* (Basel: Schwabe, 1951), pp. 118–19. The following quotations are on pages 119 and 17.

[22] Wolfgang Fleischhauer, *Kalf Arnason: Die Berührungen zwischen Heldenlied und Königssaga* (Cologne: Orthen, 1938), p. 9.

[23] Fleischhauer, *ibid.*, pp. 78–89.

[24] Elsewhere, Helga Reuschel traced similarities in motif between heroic poetry and the legendary sagas. "Man wird sagen dürfen, dass die Fas. der heroischen Dichtung näher ist, was den Stoff angeht, die Is. aber im Ethos." *Untersuchungen über Stoff und Stil der Fornaldarsaga* (Bühl-Baden: Konkordia A. G., 1933), p. 18.

[25] Comments on more general similarities are rare. I have noted the following two exceptions, both concerning the use of dialogue: August Gödecke, *Die Darstellung der Gemütsbewegungen in der Isländischen Familiensaga* (Hamburg: Friederichsen, de Gruyter & Co., 1933), p. 42: "Das Heldenlied, das seinen Höhepunkt in der leidenschaftlich gesteigerten Rede, in welche es Gemütsbewegungen umsetzt, erreicht, kennt nicht die breite, beschauliche Schilderung. Diese typische 'epische Kürze' im Ausdruck findet sich auch in den Familiengeschichten. Daraus folgert, dass sich die Rede der Sagamenschen auf das Allernotwendigste konzentriert." Margaret Jeffrey, *The Discourse in Seven Icelandic Sagas* (Bryn Mawr, Pa., 1934), p. 37: "In considering the discourse of our seven sagas, we come to the conclusion that the murders and combats about which the plot centers are important not only as exciting outward events, but also, and perhaps in the first place, important as the expression of the clash of wills, of inner conflicts, of psychological processes. This is equally true of the heroic lay and the saga, and we may see in this fact a typically Germanic characteristic."

[26] Ker, *Epic and Romance*, p. 202.

[27] Dietrich von Kralik, "Die Geschichtlichen Züge der Deutschen Heldendichtung," *Wiener Wissenschaftliche Vorträge und Reden*, 8: 15

(1943): "Schliesslich die Nordgermanen des Mittelalters, sie haben kein eigentliches Heldenepos hervorgebracht, an dessen Stelle trat hier der Prosaroman und eben auch der Prosaroman heldischen Inhalts." Otto Höfler in *Zur Germanisch-Deutschen Heldensage: Sechzehn Aufsätze zum Neuen Forschungsstand*, ed. Karl Hauck (Bad Homburg vor der Höhe: Gentner, 1961), p. 72: "Die grossartige Objektivität der germanischen Heldendichtung ist dieselbe wie die der nordischen Saga." Wolfgang Mohr, *ibid.*, p. 83: "Man kann an vielen Stellen zeigen, wie nahe sich Heldenlied und Saga berühren." Felix Genzmer, *ibid.*, p. 107: "Auf die geschichtlichen Sagas haben Heldenlied und Heldensage eingewirkt. . . Diese Sagas haben daher Züge angenommen, die die Heldensage kennzeichnen: das Zurücktreten des Staatlichen vor dem rein Menschlichen, Ehre und Sippenpflicht als Beweggründe und der Rachegedanke, die Frau als Aufreizerin."

[28] All Eddic quotations are from: *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst Verwandten Denkmälern*, ed. Gustav Neckel, 3rd rev. ed. by Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1962). The translations are those of Henry Adams Bellows, *The Poetic Edda* (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation and London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1923). The stanzas quoted from Bellows appear on the following pages: 361–62, 374, 487–88, 512–14, 548–49, 549, 551–53.

[29] Kuhn, *Edda*, p. 311.

[30] Kuhn, *ibid.*, p. 306.

[31] Ker, *Epic and Romance*, p. 231.

[32] The literature on the subject has been reviewed by Marco Scovazzi, *La saga di Hrafnkell e il problema delle saghe islandesi* (Arona: Paideia, 1960) and the present author, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964). A good supplement to these reviews is Peter G. Foote, "Some Account of the Present State of Saga-Research," *Scandinavica*, 4:115–26 (1965). Of special interest is Lars Lönnroth, *European Sources of Icelandic Saga-Writing: An Essay Based on Previous Studies* (Stockholm: Seelig, 1965).

[33] Ferdinand Lot, *Joseph Bédier, 1864–1938* (Paris: E. Droz, 1939), p. 15.

HARVARD STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

1 Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe. By George Santayana
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