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Generational Tensions in *Sturlunga saga*

Sturlunga saga, an early-fourteenth-century compilation of sagas written by thirteenth-century Icelandic historians concerning events leading up to the loss of Icelandic independence to Norway in the 1260s, bears the modern, but apt, name of a family noted for many remarkable men. For four generations, in and out of wedlock, the Sturlungs produced numerous male offspring who, despite eruptions of quarrels among brothers, cousins, uncles and nephews, consolidated the family wealth and political power through cooperation between fathers and sons. In accordance with the traditional reticence of Icelandic prose writing, the component sagas of the *Sturlunga* compilation illustrate, without troubling to discourse on, the remarkable vitality of most of the Sturlung men and their usually successful relations across generations, and do this so repeatedly and consistently as to thematize the family virility and traditional successful bonding between father and son.

The first piece in the compilation, *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns* (*The Story of Geirmundr Hell-skin*), illustrates the theme in its positive and exemplary aspect. This particular *þáttur*, or short narrative, stands as a sort of narrative prologue to the rest of the compilation. Just as a typical family saga opens with several chapters set in the Settlement Era that provide both genealogical information and succinct introductory treatment of what will become major themes of the saga, so too in *Sturlunga saga* do we find *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns* providing the genealogical information that the compilation's first audiences expected while at the same time anecdotally introducing the thematic material, which is what interests us here.¹

¹ Marlene Ciklamini (1981a) similarly sees the *þáttur* as establishing the themes of the compilation. Other readers, such as Stephen Tranter (1987), have focussed instead on the way the *þáttur* establishes the contrast between the ideal, Settlement-Era hero and

The narrative — and thus the entire compilation — opens with a legendary ætiological account of how the Hell-skin twins got their by-name. While the king (of an unspecified north Norwegian kingdom) was from home, the queen gave birth to monstrously ugly twins, so large and black, and therefore, in this society, hideously repulsive, that she secretly exchanged them for a pretty, blond infant slave, whom she passed off as the king's son and hers. When the twins, living in the court as slaves, are three years old, however, their true noble natures are seen, first, by a visiting skald, Bragi, and then by the king their father, who recognizes them as his sons and heirs. The boys grow up to become the mightiest vikings of their day, and then, following the usual maturation process for the Settlement generation, sail off to Iceland where they take land and become rich and powerful homesteaders and patriarchs. The anonymous compiler of *Sturlunga saga*, writing a full four hundred years after the events he recounts, is in fact one of their descendants, as are the Sturlungs themselves.

The opening narrative in *Sturlunga saga*, then, posits the existence of inherited, innate character traits that may be obscured by superficialities (here, literally the skin) for female observers, even for the mother, but that are obvious to a (male) skald (the skald being not only a poet in the modern sense but in a preliterate society also the repository of the culture) and to the good father. By pronouncing his paternity against the plain facts of the children's monstrosity, the king behaves in a properly manly and fatherly fashion to his heirs and they grow up to become the patresfamilias of families extending more than a dozen generations to the writer's time. In this legendary anecdote, the tension of the father losing his sons and the sons their father is literal. In the sagas that follow, the tension will be largely symbolic. Where fathers recognize and raise their own sons to replace them, the family waxes strong, and this is largely the pattern among the Sturlungs as it is in the Family Sagas. In contrast, in families with which the Sturlungs are at odds, and occasionally among the later-generation Sturlungs as well, where the father is absent or repudiates or simply neglects a son, the boy fails both to continue the family blood line and to assume positive adult social roles. In these narratives, there is no "male authority" *deus ex machina* to step in and claim the boys as there is in the legendary tale of the Hell-skins. It is with these cases

the contemporary figures in the rest of the compilation. Of course these views are compatible: the *þáttur* establishes some of the motifs and themes of the book through several techniques, of which providing foils is one.

gone wrong that the present study concerns itself, with the boys who are not claimed or reclaimed by their fathers and who do not experience successful paradigmatic socialization as sons and men. These are the men who demonstrate what I call Generational Tensions: tensions both between generations, that is, with their fathers, and concerning the act of generation, that is, with becoming fathers. And these are the men largely responsible for driving the violent action of *Sturlunga saga*.

As the opening example of the legendary *Geirmundar þáttur heljar-skinns* suggests, the present essay is a study of a literary text and some of the characters that people it, not of any residual historical record that may be found in the compilation and certainly not a psychological case study of the historically attested men themselves. It has been established that while *Sturlunga saga* may reasonably be seen to include more genuine historical material than the Family Sagas, set in the tenth and eleventh centuries, could, it does not follow that it is any less literary.² Among the literary aspects of *Sturlunga saga* are the selectivity, placement, and treatment of its plot elements from the much larger pool of historical events. While *Sturlunga saga* selects episodes of horrific cruelty to depict a society wracked by the kind of explosive but premeditated violence that can only be described as sickening, it omits to recount many other activities known, from external sources, to have been undertaken by the same people at the same times and places. For example, Snorri Sturluson, between the killings and mutilations narrated *ad nauseam* in this compilation, wrote the multi-volume history of the kings of Norway, *Heimskringla*, the learned book of poetics and mythology, *Edda*, and what is perhaps the finest Settlement-Era saga ever written and clearly a labor of love, *Egils saga*. These works by Snorri depict and assume many different narrative worlds, and none is even remotely like the narrative world of *Sturlunga saga*. The difficulty we have in accepting that the Snorri we see in *Sturlunga* — a wealthy, unscrupulous politician with no aesthetic interests apparent — and the Snorri we know as a scholar and artist are one and the same person — and they certainly are — suggests just how selectively and consistently the compilation has been shaped.

² Úlfar Bragason (1982, 1991), Marlene Ciklamini (1981b, 1988, 1994), and Jesse Byock (1986). Jón Jóhanesson (1946: xiii) earlier had warned that the compilation is shaped by the authors' outlooks and attitudes: "Þær bera glögg einkenni höfunda sinna, eru mótaður af lífsskoðunum þeirra og viðhorfum til atburðanna, sem þeir voru stundum riðnirvið sjálfir".

Literary themes and motifs having to do with father-son relations are quite common in the saga literature in general and must therefore have been of wide interest to the society that produced the sagas. The theme of father-son affection plays a major role in *Egils saga*, for example, where Snorri shows one of his ancestors, the berserk and werewolfish Kveldúlfur, hugging an adult son with whom he is having a serious political disagreement, and another, Egill himself, writing his finest poem on the death of two of his sons. These displays of affection are all the more poignant as they are interspersed with scenes showing the darker side of the father figure. In an important essay on what he calls the Generation Gap theme, Paul Schach (1977) has defined the popular motif of the elderly, irascible, retired viking who makes life miserable for his more practical and pacific Icelandic-born son, and has shown that this motif illustrates perceived moral and ideological differences between two eras. For the present study, what's important about the Generation Gap, which Snorri used in depicting the elderly Egill at odds with his sole surviving son, Þorsteinn, is that these irascible fathers are nevertheless motivated by affection for their sons and concerns for their honor and well-being. As an extreme example of the Generation Gap (though Schach would probably not admit it under his narrower definition) we have the scene in which Skallagrímur, playing ball with his twelve-year-old son Egill and growing in strength as the day wears into evening (a trait he inherits from his werewolf father), nearly kills the boy in the game. The incident causes a falling out between father and son, but it is perfectly clear that Skallagrímur would never intentionally have hurt the child and he is depicted throughout as an admirable, though thoroughly old-fashioned, father, husband, and householder.

While superficially resembling the Generation Gap theme in the portrayal of unhappy father-son relationships, the Generational Tensions theme is not the dark side of affection or the frightening aspect of the essentially benevolent father. On the contrary, it is the cancellation of the father. Rather than persecuting his son with his old-fashioned values, the father, in this theme, abandons him. The Generational Tensions theme is a reflex of a popular thematic concern in the Icelandic literature of this period, but not one we would normally associate with the idyllic Family Saga world where men were fathers and boys grew up to be heroes. Instead, it's a theme that will bring families to a grinding halt: a theme for the era of the end of the Freestate.

A study of Snorri as scholar-author, social and political player, and

textual character would be of the greatest interest in that it would activate a large number of historical and textual threads as well as tell us something about the figure modern scholars find most compelling, but for this very reason he is unsuitable as a focus for the present study, which selects instead three diverse lesser characters, permitting Snorri a couple of cameo appearances only. In illustrating and constructing the type character stymied by *Generational Tensions*, the present essay also shows that the boy not claimed by his father, later the man who never becomes one, is often made narratively responsible for moving the most gruesome action of *Sturlunga saga*.

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Einarr Þorgilsson plays the role of major antagonist in *Sturlu saga*, the story of the patriarch Sturla of Hvammr. Positioned among shorter pieces near the beginning of the compilation, *Sturlu saga* probably dates to the first quarter of the thirteenth century and provides the background for Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*. As a biographical saga, however, it reads well independent of the compilation.

The details of Einarr's family situation, boyhood, and youth are presented in typically terse saga fashion in the first six chapters of *Sturlu saga*, where we find them sandwiched between the usual neighborhood introductions, the story of Sturla's first marriage to the most beautiful woman in Iceland, the widow Ingibjörg, and the careful detailing of the events leading up to the killing of one of Sturla's *þingmenn* 'clients' by a seedy foreigner in the service of Einarr's father. Einarr was born around 1121, the second son in a family of two sons and seven daughters. The elder son is clearly named for his paternal grandfather, Oddi, while Einarr's name appears to be novel in both the paternal and maternal lines. As was the usual practice among families of this status, both boys are put out to be fostered. Fosterage as practiced in medieval Iceland could ideally provide various benefits to all parties: the one aspect that concerns us here is that boys could grow to physical and psychological maturity under a surrogate father who would absorb some of the normal generational tensions attendant on puberty and restore the newly matured young man to an untroubled relationship with his natural and legal father. Given the importance of the fosterage for a boy's subsequent social persona, it is curious that the brothers are sent to such dramatically different foster families. The elder, Oddi, goes to Sæmundr *fróði* 'the Wise', a priest

and historian who studied at Paris and is today considered an important scholar. Sæmundr *fróði* was established at Oddi, the family seat for many generations, and the future location of one of the first schools in Iceland, which was to be established by his son. His grandson, Jón Loptsson, would be known as a peacemaker and in that role would foster Snorri Sturluson, whose fine education can be attributed to the school and library there, as well as to the culture of learning in his foster family. This, then, is the information readers must bring with them to understand where Einarr's brother spent his formative years. Einarr, meanwhile, is sent to be fostered by a certain Þorgeirr Sveinsson of Brunná, a man otherwise little known and a household with a reputation, we later learn, for harboring petty thieves and bastard seasonal laborers whose loose morals result in disputes between the *goðar* 'chieftains' who are responsible for them. The son of Einarr's foster father, in fact, will initiate several of the early disputes of the saga. While these two fosterages are not explicitly contrasted, the juxtaposition makes it difficult to imagine two that would be more unlike. In accordance with their different fosterages (whether as cause or effect is irrelevant to the narrative), the two brothers are described as having nearly opposite characters. While Oddi is known as intelligent and an eloquent speaker (in law suits being implied: "hann var vitr maðr ok manna snjallastr í máli"), Einarr is known as a daring man with a speech impediment, and therefore no lawman ("Hann skorti ok eigi kapp né aræði. Engi var hann lagamaðr ok blestr í máli", Ch. 6).

By 1148, Oddi, still apparently unmarried although he must be at least twenty-nine years old and most likely well into his thirties, has settled on his own homestead and Einarr, also still unmarried though now twenty-seven, is living in yet another household. Judging by the life cycles of the vast majority of male characters in *Sturlunga saga*, for the family's both sons to live away from home unmarried would have been unusual enough to raise speculation about the conditions that prompted it. These conditions, about which the saga is silent, could only have been that the father was unwilling to give up his position as head of household and his control of its resources and the sons were unwilling to live at home as his dependents in their middle age. The narrative is perfectly clear in indicating that the father was properly attentive in marrying off his seven daughters and by this means creating important alliances for all family members, a responsibility that must have cut deep into the family resources. That the elder son was meanwhile being groomed for the *goðorð* (chieftaincy) there can be no

doubt, what with his fosterage at Oddi and his interim bachelor homestead, for which only his father could have given him a stake. To Einarr, however, who would share the *godorð* with his brother, the narrative suggests minimal attention, and this may be ascribed to his lisp. Since a speech impediment of any severity at all would have weighed heavily against a man in the conduct of his lawsuits and thus in carrying out some of the important duties of a *goði* to his client householders, family investment in Einarr was likely to have been minimal.³ If either of the brothers took concubines, a common practice but another matter on which the saga is silent, they engendered no children of the left hand either — as far as the narrative is concerned.

It is not until two years later that the father finally gives up the homestead and moves north, and both sons return to share the residence and the *godorð*. The following year, an epidemic takes the lives of both the popular older brother and the father, leaving the aggressive, lisping, ill-fostered and therefore ill-allied, middle-aged bachelor Einarr in sole possession of the residence, the *godorð*, and the rest of the inheritance, including the family friends and enemies. The saga gives no indication whatever of how Einarr may have felt about his situation, emotions being, *pace* Miller, a modern concern. Instead, having indicated the father's neglect and the probable reasons for it, the narrative simply unfolds the action that might be expected to follow from the circumstances.

The first decade of Einarr's chieftaincy is marked by small-minded, low-stakes, meager-reward feuding with Sturla. There is, for example, a conflict over grazing rights, and a conflict over the loose men (migrant hirelings attached to no household) kept by Einarr's seedy foster brother, mentioned earlier. In all episodes, the narrative poses as strictly neutral, but in fact, of course, silently assigns Sturla the higher moral ground. The two adversaries are of an age, Sturla being only about five years Einarr's senior, but while Sturla fathers, in succession, five bastards, two legitimate daughters, then, as a widower, two more bastards, and finally, on his second wife, Guðný, when he is in his fifties and sixties, the Sturlusynir — Þorðr, Sighvatr, and Snorri (Sturla is sixty-three when Snorri is born) — and a couple more daughters,

³ See Bragg (1997) on the implications of the capsule portraits (cited above) of Einarr and his brother, which emphasize their relative speaking abilities, and Bragg (1994) on the narrative significance of a disfigurement or disability such as Einarr's lisp, the speech impediment of Þorgils *skarði*, and the lameness of Guðmundr *goði*.

Einarr directs his whole attention to sparring with, first, Sturla, and then Sturla's step-son (Einarr Ingibjargarson) and bastard son (Sveinn), both about twenty-four years younger than Einarr. It is interesting to note here that Sturla recognizes and supports his bastard children and commands a father's respect and loyalty from his wife's son, while Einarr in contrast is burdened with his foster family's riff-raff, men, the author takes care to explain, who belong to no families themselves, men such as Geirr, a thief who was fathered by an irresponsible farmer on a vagrant woman. The patterns that Einarr learned during his fosterage are the ones he perpetuates as a *goði*, and they do not include the traditional family values we see at Hvammr. Einarr was to die before any of Sturla's legitimate sons reached his majority at fourteen.

A few examples of Einarr's *modus operandi* will illustrate the pattern. At one point in the ongoing feud, Einarr and Sturla have both ridden off for the *Alþing* (the annual General Assembly), leaving their homesteads in the hands of their womenfolk. Einarr doubles back to Sturla's farm, chases Sturla's women into the church, and then, without male opposition, loots and burns Sturla's homestead. Sturla's response is an aloof and sarcastic witticism ("hann kvað Einar mundu elt hafa frýjulaust eina nótt", 'he said that this was one night Einarr succeeded in lighting a proper fire', Ch. 10, a taunt that makes reference to Einarr's general incompetence with perhaps sexual overtones) and a prompt rebuilding. Other episodes feature Einarr attempting to assassinate the foster father of the wife of Sturla's step-son, just to give the Sturlungs a taste of their own medicine ("gera þeim nökkura ákenning sinna verka", Ch. 11) but stabbing the wrong man by mistake, or attempting a nighttime sheep raid on horseback but falling into a pot-hole when his horse stumbles in the dark. (Since thefts carried out at night were crimes and considered disgraceful, while daylight raids could bring honor to the successful raider, Einarr's choice of raiding under cover of darkness reflects on his character.) The final phase of the feud (final because fatal to Einarr) is initiated by Einarr's purchase of the inheritance rights of a girl (to whom he had no obligation, this being a strictly monetary venture) whose parents divorced and subsequently entered into second marriages. In the legal role of this girl, he attempts not only to get the disputed inheritance but also, apparently just for spite, to break up the father's happy second marriage.

As these examples indicate, Einarr's pattern of executing his social responsibilities includes the following: 1) avoidance of direct confron-

tation with peers, in favor of 2) attacks on women and on men who are either much older, much younger, or far beneath him socially, 3) these outbursts of aggression coincident with his antagonists' enjoyment of sexual relations with women, and 4) almost slapstick incompetence in the execution of his aggressions, even on the playing fields he himself draws up. We see this pattern clearly in the episode concerning the love affair of Einarr's widowed sister. When this sister forms an attachment with an unmarried man of her social station who happens to be the brother of Sturla's wife — and thus a suitable match as well as a suitable vehicle for family alliance — Einarr, rather than demanding a wedding to end the gossip and perhaps even the feud, attempts to end the affair. This dim-witted strategy results only in his humiliation. That his own sister defies and outwits him is bad enough, but she does it by cutting her hair and dressing as a man — that is, by symbolically usurping the male role — to escape to Norway with her lover, leaving Einarr impotently to sue Sturla, of all people, as an accomplice to the elopement. A last anecdote from a pitched battle between Einarr's camp and Sturla's exemplifies the relative moral positions of the two *gøðar*: When one of Sturla's men finds himself face to face with a namesake and sworn friend in Einarr's camp, he suggests a personal truce between the two of them, only to have Einarr's man attack him the moment he lets his shield down. But the false friend, Einarr's man, is fatally axed and Einarr, who has been wounded but has done no wounding himself, has to give back to Sturla everything he has taken up to this point. In this fashion, Einarr and his camp are consistently associated with both the use of dirty tricks and losing anyway.

Einarr dies childless in 1185, at the age of about 64, two years after his nemesis Sturla. Sturla had died of natural causes at home with his wife after founding a large and prosperous family. Einarr, in contrast, dies in a home managed by his housekeeper, from wounds received while attacking, with a band of seven of his men, a farmstead occupied solely by women and children. In a remarkable scene that reinforces the motifs of puerility and maternal ties, the attacked housewife holds Einarr from behind, while two boys deliver the fatal wounds. Einarr's sisters inherit.

That Sturla was capable of similar childishness at the end of his life, however, is shown in his feud with Páll *prestr* 'the Priest' Sǫlvason, a man so pacific and therefore so unaccustomed to carrying weapons that when he is advised to carry an axe to defend himself against

Sturla, he always forgets it and leaves it behind in his church (Ch. 34). During the course of this feud, in which Páll is entirely in the right and his adversaries, supported by Sturla, entirely without a legal case, Sturla is wounded by Páll's wife, who attacks him with a knife at the *Alþing*. Sturla's immediate response is manfully to make little of any injury inflicted by a woman, but later, given self-judgement, he imposes such an unreasonably excessive fine on Páll that Jón Loptsson has to intervene to restore justice. *Sturlu saga* ends with an amusing anecdote in which Sturla retires to his bed when he learns of the death of Páll's wife — not because he grieves for her, but rather because her death has deprived him of his reason for continuing to persecute Páll and his sons: “Annat berr ok til þess, at mér eru eigi allhæg at, því at ek virði svá sem aldri væri saklaust við sonu Páls ok Þorbjargar, meðan hon lifði. En nú samir eigi vel at veita þeim ágang, er hon er önduð” (Ch. 36). As funny as this story is, it shows Sturla as not just a cantankerous old man but also as a man who takes the greatest pleasure in a long-drawn-out vengeance against a social inferior. His behavior here in his last feud, and the only one in his saga that doesn't involve Einarr, looks a great deal more like Einarr's typical behavior than that we have come to expect from Sturla. Thus, not only does Einarr shape Sturla's character and the events of his long social and political life, witnessed by Þórðr and Sighvatr growing up at home, but also seems to serve as a model of childish behavior when Sturla is up against a man of far greater dignity than any he can muster and finds the roles reversed. It was the fatherly intervention and resolution by Jón Loptsson of the feud with Páll that took the three-year-old Snorri Sturluson from his natural father and sent him to Oddi to be fostered. That Snorri later as an adult exhibits many of the character traits of the type established by Einarr is unsurprising, narratively speaking, for he was sent away as the result of the uncharacteristically puerile and misogynistic behavior of his father. That he does not exhibit all of these traits and remains a character far more complex than any other in *Sturlunga saga* is equally unsurprising, again narratively speaking, in light of his being fostered by the cycle's paradigmatic good father, Jón Loptsson.

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A century elapses between the humiliating death of Einarr and the birth of the character who will betray Iceland to the quintessential —

and most ambivalent — “father” of the compilation, the king of Norway. Þorgils *skarði* ‘Notch’ Þoðvarson, born in 1226, is the eldest son of the eldest son of Hvamm-Sturla’s eldest (legitimate) son. Ironically, the eldest sons had been, until Þorgils, the most pacific: of the three Sturlusynir, the younger Sighvatr and Snorri were much more active than their older brother Þórðr, and thus on through each set of sons until Þorgils *skarði*.

Like Einarr, Þorgils is born into a large family of mostly girls, in his case three sons and five daughters. Also like Einarr, and despite his being the firstborn son, his name is novel in the family and unexplained in the narrative, the family name Sighvatr being reserved for the second son. Again like Einarr, and recalling Einarr’s lisp, Þorgils is physically impaired, with a harelip that would have caused a marked speech impediment as well as the facial disfigurement noted in his by-name. He is a man of few words (*fámæltr*) in contrast to his brother who, like Einarr’s brother Oddi, is “nökkut orðligr ok lagamaðr mikill” (‘somewhat talkative and a great lawman’, Ch. 1). Like his father’s father’s brother, Snorri, he is sent from home as a condition of resolution of a feud, in fact as a condition of reconciliation over Snorri’s death. Þorgils’s father, given a choice in arbitration between swearing an oath of loyalty to the current arch-enemy of the Sturlungs, Gizurr *jarl*, or handing over a hostage to him, chooses to hand over his own eldest son, the fifteen-year-old Þorgils.

Avoiding the retrojection of modern child psychology onto the family dynamics that shaped Þorgils’s character and focussing instead on plot motifs, readers will note that Þorgils, like Einarr, is presented as very definitely NOT the favorite son. Born with a gross disfigurement, he is not given a family name or sent to be fostered, indicating that he is being treated like a superfluous younger son because of his disfigurement. Important enough, by virtue of his birth, to serve as a hostage, Þorgils is still less important to his father than his father’s word. Þorgils later develops the character trait of being *fastheitinn* ‘true to his word’ to the extent that it becomes a kind of literalist tendency that takes the trait valued by his father to counterproductive extremes.

Once Þorgils takes up residency with Gizurr, the saga slows from summary to narrative, allowing us to observe Þorgils in his surrogate home. While Einarr’s fosterage could only be imagined, Þorgils’s sojourn as a hostage is given in some detail. The narrator tells us that “Þorgils var heldr illr viðrskiptis ok vandlyndr” (‘Þorgils was rather ill

to deal with and temperamental', Ch. 1), but Gizurr at first is well disposed to him, finds him well behaved, and seats him next to himself at table. Soon, however, Gizurr sees Þorgils displaying the social ineptitude that the narrator has described and that readers would expect from the facts of his biography thus far. In a game of *tafl* with another boy, who happens to be a kinsman of Gizurr's, Þorgils declines to allow his playmate to change a move to save a playing piece that the latter has clumsily exposed, and ends the spat, and the game, by picking up his playing pieces and stalking off. At first, Gizurr seems to approve this kind of stubborn, literal-minded, confrontational disregard of context and he reprimands his young kinsman for not having the courage to avenge himself, but Þorgils, content neither with having blown a boys' game out of proportion nor with having the *jarl* on his side, speaks provokingly ("heldr skapraunarsamliga", Ch. 1) to Gizurr and thus, in one of many instances of astonishingly self-destructive behavior, substitutes himself for his rival as the object of the *jarl's* wrath. Þorgils gains a number of things by this action, however, including, first, the attention and support of Gizurr's wife, who takes his part against her own husband and later makes Þorgils a gift of colored clothing, and second, the satisfaction of seeing himself capable of annoying his surrogate father and coming between the couple acting *in loco parentis*. This first fully narrated episode is emblematic of Þorgils's behavior throughout his brief career, as it features 1) his inability to modify his own rules to the requirements of the situation, 2) his rejection of any other relationship with male peers than one in which he completely dominates and humiliates the other, and 3) his refusal to recognize or submit to paternal authority in any situation, no matter that he has nothing to gain and everything to lose thereby, as well as 4) his tendency to compensate himself for all this self-induced alienation from male society by the encouragement of motherly attention from older women. As the story unfolds, we find that older women are virtually the only women with whom he has any interaction, and the only people who can influence his behavior.

This pattern is played out over and over during the next fifteen years of his life. At the age of eighteen, Þorgils goes to Norway where he seeks the hospitality of a certain Brynjólfr, the "ríkastr maðr" ('most powerful man', Ch. 2) of the district. Brynjólfr initially finds Þorgils well mannered, but soon, like Gizurr, experiences the youth's reckless inflexibility, his need to dominate other boys, his defiance of authority, and his habit of ingratiating himself with the lady of the house.

Things begin to sour when Þorgils beats his serving boy, who is a young kinsman of Brynjólfr, because the boy, like Gizurr's young kinsman, doesn't come up to Þorgils's inflexible standards. Later, Þorgils experiences an absurd jealousy of an elderly man in Brynjólfr's service who enjoys Brynjólfr's special friendship, which jealousy leads to a brawl at Brynjólfr's table. Not even the intercession of two of the king's men, who happen to be Brynjólfr's guests during this breaking of the host's peace, can persuade Þorgils to submit to his host. Brynjólfr's response to these episodes is merely to cool the friendship with his young guest, replacing his initial warmth with a polite formality. When Brynjólfr asks him, as a test, to run an errand, Þorgils refuses, stating that he will run errands only for someone "ríkari en Brynjólfr" ('more powerful than Brynjólfr', Ch. 3).

By this point, the adolescent Þorgils, ostensibly in search of advancement, has attached himself to two older men who are each the most powerful man, i.e., the chief authority figure, in his district, but has challenged each man's authority in his own household — and got away with it. Each has responded to the boy's impertinence by coolly withdrawing his affection and letting Þorgils move on. For this, Þorgils seems to have despised them, misinterpreting their weary paternalism as weakness. Shortly thereafter, Þorgils, still a beardless boy, meets King Hákon.

The king of Norway, as a literary character, is a frequently encountered figure in medieval Icelandic literature, appearing almost invariably in one of two stock roles. In the *þættir*, where a common plot motif has a young Icelander travel to Norway, the king notices and establishes the youth's true worth, which had gone unnoticed at home. In the Family Sagas of the tenth-century, however, King Haraldr *harfagri* 'Fair Hair' inevitably appears as the tyrant whom bold-spirited Norwegian men defy by emigrating, leaving their patrimonies behind. Virtually all of this literature was composed in Iceland in the thirteenth century when the kings of Norway were laying claim to Icelandic property and its disposition. Typically, at this time, the Norwegian king would make an Icelandic *goði* his man and then, upon the latter's death, claim his vast properties in Iceland, properties that the heirs considered theirs, not the foreign king's. These wealthy Icelandic *goðar* who imperiled their properties by swearing allegiance to the king of Norway were no rustic dupes, however: with eyes wide open, they sought the king's patronage in order to bolster their claims and power at home during their lifetimes, choosing to promote their own

greed over their sons' futures. Because the king's patronage was historically both sought and resisted, it is not surprising to find the literary representations of the king split in two. On the one hand, there is the good father of the *þættir* who recognizes his "sons" by their true nobility, as does the good father in *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns*. On the other hand, there is the evil father of the family sagas who takes the inheritances of his "sons", a figure lightly foreshadowed in *Sturlunga saga* by Einarr's father, who kept his sons as social children into their middle age. In *Porgils saga skarða*, the king's narrative roles demonstrate the typical dichotomy. On the one hand, King Hákon is the good father who recognizes the true value of Porgils, a youth who was thought back home to be not worth his father's or Gizurr's trouble. At the same time, with respect to others among the Sturlungs, he is the evil father who withholds inheritances.

Porgils, having found his challenges to paternal authority met with cool indifference, has now worked his way up the scale of powerful men to the king, who offers him a probationary period after which he might become eligible for selection as one of the king's men. Porgils's response to this offer is swift: he doesn't care to wait out any probationary period. When Hákon responds with only a smile, Porgils ratchets up the challenge by writing a letter to the king. Hákon interprets the mode of communication as evidence of the youth's arrogance, and it is; but as so often the arrogance stems from the young man's inadequacies, here it surely stems from his speech impediment in particular. Lacking eloquence, Porgils cuts a better figure in writing than in speech. Called before the king again, he accepts a place on a footstool next to the queen, who, like the wife of Gizurr *jarl*, defends his behavior to her husband as typical of youth: "Slikt verðr oft ungum mönnum" (Ch. 5).⁴ Once again Porgils is manipulating an authority figure by appealing to the mothering impulses of that man's wife. This strategy, as always, proves successful: he is made a retainer of the king and receives a gift of colored cloth from the queen (recall here the gift of clothing from Gizurr's wife) as well as the marks of adult manhood, weapons, from the king. To underscore the figurative import of the gift of weapons, the narrator explicitly states that Porgils hadn't had any weapons prior to this gift.

The first test of loyalty and obedience to the new "father" comes

⁴ Cf. Egill Skallagrímsson's mother defending the boy's behavior to his father as evidence of *vikingsefni* (Ch. 10).

with a fire. King Hákon tells Þorgils precisely where to stand and what to do, but Þorgils goes further forward into the flames than instructed, an act of disobedience that is later rewarded with praise. Meanwhile, the fire is extinguished by covering it with a wet sail, a bit of cleverness the narrative attributes to Hákon. Although Þorgils's courage and disobedience were both for naught, the fire being extinguished by intelligence rather than bravery, Þorgils is once again rewarded with a piece of cloth from the queen. We might notice here how cloth runs through the beginning chapters of this saga as a motif: a material good produced by women, it is used in this saga to mend ruptured relationships between men. As a maternal web that smothers a fire that cannot be brought under control by either male cooperation or individual male bravery, so it smothers the sparks of conflict created by Þorgils in his continual efforts to butt heads with authority.

Some time after the fire, when Þorgils is apparently basking in his favored-son status at court, the king finds time to wonder why the young man's family never had his harelip mended. Þórðr *kakali*, his father's young cousin (and a man with his own speech impediment) happens to be at court at the time and tells the king he will spare no expense to mend the split. In a scene often adduced as evidence for sophisticated surgical techniques in thirteenth-century Norway, the operation is performed by a foreign surgeon (a certain Vilhjálmr, who would have been a Norman or Anglo-Norman) in front of the court. Thereafter, Þorgils remains for several years with Hákon but "þóttist vera haldinn ok kunnir því illa" ('felt himself to be kept there and was ill-pleased by it', Ch. 7).

Why does Þorgils feel trapped and unhappy? Although he has achieved both social prominence and material comfort far greater than could reasonably be expected for an Icelander so young and so lacking in support from his own father, and although he has found the favored-son status that had eluded him in his own family, he is ill content not only because he has run out of challenges but also, I think we are to understand, because of the surgery. While Þorgils had been searching for a "father" big and strong enough to handle him, he doesn't appear to have bargained for one who would force him to grow up by remaking his face. Surgery to fuse a harelip, common today and routinely performed on infants, must have been seen in the society of *Sturlunga saga* as daring and invasive, and in this case humiliating, too, as it seems to have been performed as entertainment for the king and his men, an arrangement Hákon had made in consul-

tation with Þórðr *kakali*, but not Þorgils himself. The most important aspect of the surgery, however, would have been its effect on Þorgils's speech. Unlike modern readers, who are unlikely ever to have met anyone with an unfused harelip, medieval readers would not have missed the implications of this disfigurement for one's articulation. With the harelip, Þorgils's speech would have been sufficiently child-like to have undercut any success he had had with adult posturing, and would have served as a kind of cover for continued puerile behavior such as his selfishness and his restless drive to find the favor of the most powerful man. Fusing the notch in his lip would have made for better (though not perfect, considering his age) articulation and cleared the way for social expectations of adult behavior, the criteria for which he is obviously not prepared to meet. As soon as physical distance from Hákon gives him the opportunity, Þorgils will begin challenging authority again.

Þorgils winters in Trondheim — apart from King Hákon — shortly after Knútr has been made *jarl* of that district. The narrative introduces Knútr as gifted in many ways, not only with physical strength and beauty but also with a continental education of some sort, suggested by the remark that “[e]ngi var sá maðr í Nóregi, er svá kynni skynja steina náttúru sem hann” (‘There was no man in Norway who knew how to understand the powers of stones as he did’, Ch. 8). In any case, he is the “rikastr maðr í bænum” (‘most powerful man in the town’), a sure sign that, with the king away, Þorgils will egg him into a confrontation. One night while in his cups, Knútr *jarl* belittles Icelanders in general and the late Snorri Sturluson in particular as *litilmannliga* (‘puny’ or ‘gutless’, perhaps ‘unmanly’ but without pejorative sexual connotations, Ch. 8). Þorgils's retort to this relatively mild ethnic slur initiates a shouting match that escalates to their drawing weapons before their men can separate them. The next morning, Knútr invites Þorgils to his quarters as though nothing has happened, exhibiting the indifference that we have seen is a sure way to incite Þorgils to further the conflict. Since Knútr doesn't allow himself to be baited, Þorgils must await some other opportunity to challenge the older man's authority, an opportunity soon provided by a quarrel between their men. Þorgils goes so far as to rescue his man forcibly from Knútr's confinement before the conflict is smoothed over by the *jarl*'s wife, to whose persuasions Þorgils of course submits. The king arbitrates and Þorgils gains in good repute over this matter.

Þorgils's very successful sojourn in Norway ends with his return to

Iceland as the king's agent in the matter of Snorri Sturluson's estate. Since Snorri left no heirs at his death in 1241 (his two legitimate children, Jón *murti* and Hallbera, having both died in 1231), Þórðr *kakali*, his brother's son, has divided the considerable estate among the Sturlungs and their allies, while Hákon, claiming the inheritance because Snorri was his man, divides it between Gizurr *jarl* and Finnbjörn Helgason. Holding Þórðr *kakali* in Norway as a virtual prisoner (where he will stay until his death), Hákon sends Þorgils back to Iceland in 1252 to prosecute on behalf of his ownership, a position that will of course put Þorgils on a collision course with his own kinsmen. Having examined the first ten chapters of *Þorgils saga skarða* in great detail, I will merely touch on some of the episodes of the better known remainder of Þorgils's very short life to demonstrate how the motifs of his childhood and aborted (because displaced) initiation into manhood relate to his subsequent behavior and how this behavior drives the plot of the narrative during the years he flourished in Iceland.

Back in Iceland, Þorgils immediately allies himself with Gizurr *jarl*, still the family arch-enemy, against his own father's brother, Sturla Þórðarson (the author of much of *Sturlunga saga* but not of this particular piece). Lest we readers naively suppose that Þorgils still had some residual affection for Gizurr, the man who served as his surrogate father when his own gave him away as a hostage, we are reminded that his actions are governed only by his loyalty to the King: "engi því bregða, er hann hafði konungi heitit, þótt hann gerði þat eigi fyrir Gizurar sakir" (Ch. 15). It comes out that the Sturlungs believe King Hákon has given Þorgils orders to kill Sturla. Though Þorgils denies this vehemently, stating that Hákon is incapable of asking for parricide and he himself incapable of carrying it out, what's interesting is that Þorgils's kinsmen and affines readily believe either that he is actually capable of it or, if they are inventing the charge as a pretext for killing him, that others will find it plausible. From here on, the saga concerns itself with the killings, mutilations, and shifting alliances among the principal contenders for Snorri's properties and for dominance in the district. One by one the Sturlungs become reconciled with Þorgils, in no case because they prefer to follow him but rather in all cases because they have learned, to their cost, that it is not worthwhile to resist him. Þorgils himself seems to have set his sights on a piece of property and a *godorð* at Skagafjörð and does little else through the saga except kill, maim, and plunder his way toward it.

During these years, his relationship with women seems to be limited to allowing middle-aged housewives to beg him to cease and desist. His interest in taking a woman for himself seems close to nil. Once, at age twenty-seven, when he is shown visiting a household with an unmarried daughter, the narrator tells us that “sýnist honum þat eigi upp at bera, því at honum leizt konan ófrið” (‘it seemed to him that there was nothing to say because the woman appeared ugly to him’, Ch. 27). Finding women ugly is one way to avoid marrying, and, instead, he hires a married couple to run his household. On another occasion he seems to be flirting with a married woman, but when her husband, a certain Vestarr, comes running at him with a drawn sword he restrains his men and makes this remarkable speech:

... hann er maðr at vaskari, þótt hann vildi hefna svívirðu sinnar, er hann hugði honum væri ger, þótt hér væri eigi þau efni í. En legg ekki hug á þat, Vestarr, at ek vilja nökkura þá hluti eiga við konu þína, at hon sé þá verri kona en áðr. En fyrir raun þína vaska vil ek gefa þér öxi þessa. (Ch. 28)

... he is a manly man and would avenge the dishonor that he thought was done him, although none was done him here. But Vestarr, don't think for a minute that I would do anything with your woman to make her worse than she was before. And for the test of your valor, I will give you this axe.

Since backing down before a rustic clown with a drawn sword is most uncharacteristic of Þorgils, and since the scene is played straight, we cannot but believe him here: he truly has no designs on this woman, or on any woman. It is not until after the news of the death of his only friend, Þórðr *kakali*, in Norway has reached Iceland that Þorgils takes a *frilla* ‘concubine’ — at age thirty — and fathers a bastard daughter. We recall here that Þórðr is the sole kinsman with whom he has had early, continuous, and relatively normal relations, the man who played midwife to his new face. Sixteen years Þorgils’s senior, Þórðr was of his father’s generation but yet young enough to function as an older brother. In addition, the two cousins shared speech impediments that edged their careers to the violent end of the spectrum of political survival strategies. Finally, like Þorgils, Þórðr was first the man and then the victim of the Norwegian king. We shall return to this friendship briefly, below, when we meet with something of an analogue.

Þorgils is executed two years later, at the age of thirty-two, during

an episode in the on-going property struggle, in a scene that is made by our author to resemble, astonishingly, the assassination of Thomas à Becket, the saint whose shrine was the most popular in Europe in the thirteenth century and whom Þorgils is said to have admired. Clearly, the two men shared a prickly sense of self, deep-seated resentment of authority, and a distaste for women, in addition to their death wounds.

I have posited an equation between Einarr Þorgilsson and Þorgils *skarði* Þoðvarson and then gone on to analyze select passages from their sagas that exemplify a great number of detailed differences along with similarities. In the larger narrative scheme, for example, Einarr was surprised by the twists of fate that gave him sole possession of a *godorð* for which he had not been groomed, while Þorgils, lacking the same sort of family attention as Einarr lacked, grooms himself by seeking the favors of the *rikastr* man everywhere he goes. Among the details of their styles of feuding, Einarr exhibits a pattern of attacking defenseless, middle-aged women when their husbands are from home, while Þorgils on the contrary picks fights with their husbands and lets the women beg him to desist. Behind such differences between the two characters, however, lies a single motif and method of character development: A powerful *goði* with more than one son and many daughters seems to devalue the one son with a speech impediment, doubtless with reason since that boy would not be expected to make a successful *goði* without eloquence. The mother is insignificant in the narrative (cf. the much better developed characters of Sturla's wives) and the boy is sent from home under conditions that win no particular advantage for the family. As youths, Einarr and Þorgils take different paths. While Einarr lodges with some kinsman in obscurity until his father relinquishes control of the homestead and *godorð* and then seems content to serve as his older brother's sidekick, Þorgils leaves home, family, and country to seek out the most powerful men in the Norse world. The practical effects of the two strategies, however, are the same: whether thrust into a *godorð* or dedicated to taking one by force, both men proceed by initiating violent encounters with the Sturlungs that occupy the latter to the exclusion of almost every other pursuit — in the narrative world of *Sturlunga saga*. This is not to say that the historical Sturlungs would have been peaceful farmers if it weren't for people like Einarr and Þorgils, for even in the created world of the compilation the Sturlungs enjoy a wide variety of adversaries, from the knife-wielding wife of a pacific priest and teacher

whom we saw at the end of *Sturlu saga* to the kings of Norway. However, it does seem that the compilation selects chiefly characters like Einarr and Þorgils as “straw men”, in resistance to whom the family’s actions can be seen as justified. These are the characters who keep the plot moving along, and they are depicted as driven to their violence largely by the internal Generational Tensions delineated here.

*

The third and final character to be discussed is the enigmatic Guðmundr *góði* ‘the Good’ Arason, Bishop of Hólar. It is often, and rightly, observed that a very great deal of the violence in *Sturlunga saga* derives from the clash of the newly introduced practice of ecclesiastical control of Church properties, revenues, and men (e.g., clergy subject to canon, not common, law) with the native social organization that had been in place in Iceland before the introduction of Christianity in which rich families built temples and provided for their upkeep and *godar* were simultaneously priests and executives of secular law. At the same time, it is true to say, as W. P. Ker (1925: 159–60) has, that the thirteenth century didn’t need that particular sort of struggle to provide Icelanders with something to feud about. The character of Guðmundr is a key to understanding the truth of both statements. While as Bishop of Hólar he certainly does introduce into *Sturlunga saga* this new element, the contest between clerical and secular forces for control of property and men, at the same time he is a now familiar character type. Like Einarr before him and Þorgils (whom he baptizes) after him, as a social agent he is subject to the same Generational Tensions that energize the plots throughout. While Guðmundr as bishop plays a large role in *Íslendinga saga*, excommunicating what seems like everyone in sight while eating his friends out of house and home with his large band of hungry followers, it is to another component saga in *Sturlunga saga*, *Prests saga Guðmundar góða* (*The Saga of the priest Guðmundr the Good*), that we turn for the story of his formative years. This saga survives in other, longer versions, all of which stem from an original thought to have been written by Lambkarr Þorgilsson, who had been close to Guðmundr and admired him, and who wrote the saga as part of an ultimately futile effort to have Guðmundr canonized as a saint. The *Sturlunga* version differs from the others chiefly in having been shortened by the deletion of some of the miracle episodes, and in any case the father-son paradigm

we have been examining is largely unaffected by the overlay of hagiographical elements. The saga's purpose, canonization, however, makes the development of the protagonist's character the saga's *raison d'être*, the author making explicit the connections between Guðmundr's boyhood experiences and youthful adventures and his later (alleged) saintliness.

Guðmundr's father, Ari Þorgeirsson, was the fifth son in a family of ten children, of which most of the sons proved incapable or uninterested in founding their own families. The first dies "á Grænlandi í óbyggðum" ('in the wilds of Greenland,' *óbyggðir* meaning 'unsettled areas' and suggesting the motif of men engaged in activities that do not include the establishment of family homesteads, Ch. 1) and leaves no descendants, a fate that will eventually befall the fourth brother as well. The second, Þorvarðr, becomes a member of the Norwegian court of King Ingi and fathers five legitimate daughters and four bastards, of whom only one is a son. The third becomes a monk and dies childless. The fourth, Ingimundr, is a priest, has a barren marriage, is said not to get along with his wife, and eventually leaves her. The fifth, Ari, takes another man's wife and fathers on her four children, of whom one is a daughter, two are sons who die young, and the fourth is Guðmundr, born in 1161. In other words, Guðmundr is not only a bastard, but is part of rather large generation in which there is not one single legitimate son. (Only the children of the five sons are enumerated, however; the five daughters all married, and one of them was Sturla's wife Ingibjörg, who provided an important stepson for Sturla.) Like Einarr and Þorgils, but for rather more obvious reasons, Guðmundr does not bear a family name.

Although the five brothers are not facing up to their adult responsibilities, the family is still intact in this generation and the brothers interact a great deal. Þorvarðr asks Ari, who has a couple of infants at home at the time, to travel to Norway to carry out some unfinished business that he hasn't the heart to carry out himself: avenge King Ingi. Ari complies with his brother's request and is killed in carrying it out, orphaning his bastard children. It is interesting to note, and worth an aside, that the narrative pointedly describes Ari's preparations to return home to Iceland, the false rumor that he is deserting, his consequent decision to stay in order to save his honor, and his death as a result of that decision. Like Þorgils's father, Þoðvarr, Ari chooses his honor over his son. Unlike Þoðvarr, whose honor is self-contained, Ari makes the choice for loyalty to a male authority figure over responsi-

bility to the offspring he has fathered, even though loyalty is vicariously given to the king for his brother. That the narrative is so specific on this point suggests its thematic importance.

Guðmundr's grandfather meanwhile has offered to foster the two-year-old that Ari has abandoned. (It is not said, because it is not important to this male-centered narrative, how the woman was supporting herself and her children in his absence, or what happens to her and Guðmundr's young sister after this.) When news of Ari's death reaches Iceland during Guðmundr's seventh year, Ari's father and his brother Ingimundr, he of the barren and unhappy marriage, decide that because the boy will have no inheritance, he is to be set to books under the tutelage of Ingimundr. In a humorous aside, the narrator remarks that thus "fekk honum þat fyrst í föðurbætr ok erfð, at hann var barðr til bækr" ('his first benefit from the weregild and inheritance of his father was to be beaten to his books', Ch. 4). As a bastard, of course, Guðmundr is entitled to neither inheritance nor any share of compensation paid for his father's death. A portrait of the boy immediately follows: "Hann var ólatr mjök, ok þótti þá þat þegar auðsýnt á athöfn hans, at honum myndi í kyn kippa um ódæld, því at hann vildi ráða, við hvern sem hann átti" ('He was very eager and immediately showed in his behavior that he took after his kinsmen in being overbearing, so that with anyone he had anything to do with he wanted to have his own way', Ch. 4). Here, we are reminded of how dangerous, in *Sturlunga saga*, is the combination of inherited character traits and the denial of material inheritance.

During the next four or five years, there is much moving house as Ingimundr breaks up his household, moves in with his wife's father, and finally leaves his wife, while Guðmundr sojourns with another of his father's brothers until Ingimundr makes the marital break and calls the young man back to him. While it would not have been remarkable for a childless man like Ingimundr to foster his dead brother's bastard son or even to take serious interest in his education, the narrative weaves this growing relationship between man and boy, scholar and pupil, into the concurrently declining relationship between the man and his wife. The narrative makes it clear that for Ingimundr the boy Guðmundr takes the place of the abandoned wife.

In September of 1180, when Guðmundr is nineteen and has already been tonsured and ordained a deacon, he and Ingimundr undertake a sea voyage during which they are wrecked by a storm. The narrative slows down considerably to cover this story, which will follow the

traditional pattern of an initiation ritual: separation, a liminal period, and re-integration as a new man. The other men on the ship appeal to Ingimundr to hear their confessions, which he refuses to do on the grounds that they hadn't wanted to confess earlier, and to tell them the highest name of God, which he purports not to know, demonstrating the kind of stubbornness and, worse, self-righteousness that Guðmundr himself will exhibit many years later as bishop. While Ingimundr is thus denying his fellow travellers the consolation of religion, young Guðmundr is in the ship's boat attempting to help them lower the sail. When another wave hits the ship, Guðmundr is knocked over but his right foot is stuck between the boat and the ship's gunwhales, and his leg is so badly fractured that he cannot feel it. The Old Norse word *fótr*, the cognate of English *foot*, refers not to the body part below the ankle, as the English word does, but rather to the entire part below the knee, and it becomes plain later in the narrative that it was his shin that was splintered, causing his foot to be rotated 180 degrees, with the toes where the heel should be, and shards of bone to protrude from his leg months later. There is no reason to doubt the historicity of an event like this, including any of the details of the compound fracture of the leg, other than the suggestion that Guðmundr was restored to health ("varð Guðmundr heill", Ch. 6) by the following May, a remark best understood to mean that he was up out of bed, as well as he would ever be. That he was crippled for the rest of his life is indicated in a scene in which an arthritic old woman is found to massage his *fótr* (Ch. 19), and is, in any case, simply the only possible outcome of a fracture like this, as the saga's medieval public would have known. One would not wish to suggest, therefore, that the author of *Prests saga Guðmundar góða* was creating a fictional episode out of the archetypal motif of the foot or leg as a euphemistic stand-in for the phallus. Nevertheless, the narrative does explicitly represent the leg injury that cripples him as changing his character forever, as we shall see, with the result that Guðmundr is celibate for life. For the author, of course, this celibacy is an indication of his holiness and candidacy for sainthood, the hagiographic interpretation of plot elements and character motifs overlaying neatly the basic theme.

Returning to the scene of the ship wreck now, when the others realize what has happened to Guðmundr, there is of course a great deal of discussion about how to extricate him. Everyone is in danger at this point of losing his cargo and being drowned when a certain Bersi, by-named *valbrað* because he has a coal-black mark on his cheek

“kinn hans önnur var kolbla”, Ch. 6), suggests that “the cripple” be thrown overboard so that the others may save themselves: “Hví munum vér fara með fótbrottinn mann, er vér megum eigi bjarga sjálfum oss, — ok skjóti fyrir borð”. The satanic imagery of the black mark is not further developed, however, and the men get on with saving Guðmundr in this remarkable scene:

... [Þ]eir ... láta síga Guðmund ofan í vaðmáli fyrir borð, en Þórarinn ok Einarr taka við honum, ok helt um sitt lær hvárr þeira ok hann sinni hendi um háls hvárum þeira. Þá gengu sumir eftir ok hlífðu þeim við áföllum ok drógust svá til lands, at út vildi draga at út soginu, en þá skreið á, er brimit hratt þeim at upp, ok kómust at landi með hann. (Ch. 6)

They gently lowered Guðmundr overboard in wadmal, and Þórarinn and Einarr took ahold of him and each of them held a thigh and he held his arms around their necks. Then some others went and sheltered them from the waves and thus they drew to land, for the undertow was pulling them, and then slipping in when the sea tumbled them toward shore, they made land with him.

The birthing imagery in this scene is unmistakable as the Pauline “Old Man” gives birth to the new: Guðmundr, supported by two fellows, is in the posture of a woman giving birth supported by midwives while simultaneously being alternately forced out and sucked back by the rhythm of the surf. The cloth motif reappears with the wadmal, the common woolen cloth produced by Icelandic women for home use and export that became something of a monetary unit in the trade economy. Upon reaching land, Guðmundr is put to bed like the newborn and its mother to regain his strength, with the broken leg suggesting that his manhood is now dysfunctional. Guðmundr has been effectively feminized and will henceforth take the place of Ingimundr’s wife and employ the woman’s medium of words rather than action to advance his interests. This observation, of course, does not devalue the author’s interpretation of the entire complex of motifs, that Guðmundr becomes saintly through his attachment to Ingimundr and his rebirth in the ship wreck. Later, the narrator will remark that

... þóttust menn mestan mun á hafa fundit, at skap hans hafði skipazt vetr þann, er hann lá eftir skipbrott á Ströndum, því at þá undi hann sér hvárki nótt né dag, þar til er hann hitti fóstura sinn. Ok

kom þaðan frá við nökkut á hverjum missirum til siðabótar honum. Ok þar kom, at nær þótti hann orðinn allr annarr maðr í atferð sinni en fyrst þótti til horfast, er hann var ungr. (Ch. 11)

it was thought that his temperament had changed the winter he was laid up after the shipwreck in the Strands, because he was ill content both day and night until he saw his foster father. From then on, every year brought further reformation of his life. And it came to the point that he nearly seemed to be another man in his demeanor than what he first seemed when he was young.

According to this passage, the change that takes place in Guðmundr's character is caused by his desire to be reunited with Ingimundr.

As for Ingimundr, we are told that the loss of his chest of books in the shipwreck and his young companion's injury were a double blow to him, and the only thing that can tear him away from Guðmundr's bedside now is the news that the chest of books has washed up on shore, the sole surviving piece of cargo from the ship. Some seven years later, as Ingimundr is leaving for Norway, he makes Guðmundr a gift of the best and most scholarly of these books ("gaf honum bækr þær allar, er hann átti beztar ok froðastar", Ch. 11). The narrative thus insists on the identity, for Ingimundr, between his foster son and protégé on the one hand and his books on the other, as though to suggest that Guðmundr's potential as a scholar was what interested him in the boy. In any case, this insistence on identity makes for an interesting backreading of the narrator's comment that Guðmundr's inheritance was to be beaten to his books.

It is during those years immediately after the shipwreck that Guðmundr makes a second friend, this one his own age: Þorgeirr *biskupsson*, the son of Bishop Brandr. Guðmundr (with Ingimundr) stays with Þorgeirr for a couple of years while Þorgeirr settles one of his law suits for him with "svá mikla ást ok einurð" ('so much love and loyalty') that Guðmundr later maintains "at honum hefði engi maðr óskyldr jafngóðr þótt sem Þorgeirr" ('that no one outside his own family had ever been as good to him as Þorgeirr', Ch. 9). Presently, however, Ingimundr and Þorgeirr set off together for Norway: "Ok fóru þá í brott þeir menn tveir, er hann unni mest, Ingimundr ok Þorgeirr" ('And thus the two men whom he loved the most, Ingimundr and Þorgeirr, went away', Ch. 11). When Þorgeirr dies soon after his return to Iceland from a sickness contracted on the return voyage, "svá segir Guðmundr Arason, at hann hefði einskis manns þess misst, er

honum þætti jafnmikit at missa. Ok þat fell honum svá nær, at náliga mátti kalla, at hann skiptist í allan mann annan". ('Guðmundr Arason said that he had never felt a loss so great as he felt this loss. And that it touched him so near that it almost claimed his health and he consequently changed in all respects into another man', Ch.11). In fact, Guðmundr nearly kills himself in his grief:

Guðmundr prestur gerðist þá svá mikill trúmaðr í bænahaldi ok tíðagerð ok örlæti ok harðlifi, at sumum mönnum þótti halda við vanstilli, ok ætluðu, at hann myndi eigi bera mega allt sumam, harðlifi sitt ok óyndi af andláti Þorgeirs. (Ch. 11)

Guðmundr the priest made himself into such a great "true believer" in the saying of prayers and the celebrating of mass and in acts of charity and of subjugating the flesh that it seemed to some men immoderate and they thought that he would not be able to bear it all together, his subjection of the flesh and his restlessness over the death of Þorgeirr.

This extreme response, which, by the way, is what earns Guðmundr the by-name *góði*, is not well motivated in or by the narrative, except perhaps by the verb *unna*, used for Guðmundr's feeling for his friend. While it was not at all uncommon for the Church to take over into the religious life words like *unna* whose primary meanings had been in the semantic field of secular love, the saga provides plenty of support for the reading that Guðmundr was indeed in love with his friend Þorgeirr, a kind of love that he had learned from his uncle Ingimundr. It is the narrative's often reiterated insistence on the uniqueness of these relationships that recalls Þorgils's sole friendship with his cousin Þórðr whose death freed Þorgils to take a *frilla*.

Guðmundr's grief not only looks like love sickness, but appears to be interpreted as such by Þorgeirr's father. Bishop Brandr's response to Guðmundr's extravagant and showy grief appears in the following passage:

Nú var bæði þess í leit, at honum væri þat óhægt ok mætti hann minna at hafast til þurfta öðrum, af þeim, er hann öfunduðu, at skipt var þingum við hann, ok skyldi hann hafa þau, er féminni vátu. Ok þá kallaði Brandr biskup til bóka ok messufata í hendr honum, ok ollu því öfundarmenn hans, en biskup kallaði staðinn at Hólum eiga arf eftir Ingimund prest. (Ch. 11)

Then his enemies sought these two ends, that it should be inconvenient for him to mind the needs of others and that the parishes should be divided so that he would have those that had less revenue. And then Bishop Brandr claimed, with the support of his enemies, the books and vestments that he had in his possession, and the bishop claimed that the see at Hólar had right to the inheritance of Ingimundr the Priest.

On the one hand, the bishop's claim could be attributed to his duty to see to it that the Church, not a priest's relatives, inherited everything, this being one aspect of the ongoing struggle between the continental-style Church claims and the Icelandic customs that the Church was hoping to displace. But on the other hand, even so great a duty to the Church would hardly motivate what has every appearance of malice on the part of the Bishop toward his dead son's best friend. After all, why would his son's death prompt him to claim the gifts that Ingimundr gave Guðmundr before his departure? Clearly, there is some connection between Ingimundr's books and Guðmundr's relationship with the late Þorgeirr behind Brandr's response. He apparently resents Guðmundr's grand displays of grief over Þorgeirr, displays that must have outdone his own. The narrator states that Þorgeirr's death was a blow to his father "most of all", so by grieving more than the dead young man's own father, and so much more publicly, and in such a way as to win widespread admiration ("Öllum mönnum þótti mikils vert um trú hans, ok þeim öllum mest, er vitrastir váru", Ch. 11), Guðmundr has apparently irritated the Bishop — or it may be that we are to understand that it was Guðmundr's friendship with his son in the first place that the Bishop found irritating. One reading that cannot be dismissed out of hand is that Guðmundr's extravagant mourning cast a homosexual shadow on Þorgeirr, in social terms a slur that could not be answered because he was dead. In any case, Guðmundr now must wait for the Bishop's death (in 1201 when Guðmundr is forty) before he can hope for any advancement. Before leaving the strange episode of Þorgeirr *biskups-son*, we should note that external sources state he was a married man at his death. The pointed omission of that piece of historical information from the narrative encourages the line of speculation here advanced.

Two years after the return and precipitate death of Þorgeirr, Ingimundr dies in Greenland, where he is shipwrecked, the narrator noting that his corpse was discovered uncorrupted fourteen years

afterwards — proof that Guðmundr's mentor was indeed saintly. While Ingimundr's first ship wreck initiates his young kinsman's saintly life, his second confirms his own. Thus is Guðmundr finally and irrevokably "separated from the two men he loved best" — in fact, the only two men who ever loved him — at the age of twenty-eight.

Guðmundr has grown up as an outsider, the son of another man's wife, an orphan, a charge on his father's family, an equivalent to his foster father's books, and a replacement for the latter's wife. His one experience of "friendship" with a peer has been cut short by untimely death and followed by the ill will of his friend's father, who, as Bishop, is also Guðmundr's superior. From this point on, Guðmundr will attract only the poor and the weak as companions and hangers-on. Like Einarr and Porgils, he will lead the familyless. And like them will he also brook no challenges to his authority from anyone, least of all from Kolbeinn Tumason, who will make him bishop and then try to rule him. His maturation process having been deflected by a father surrogate who treated him more like a beloved than like a son, he cannot function as a pastor or leader to any but the dispossessed — the pious hagiographer's equivalent to Einarr's following of loose men. Nor will he be able to negotiate with secular authority in the person of Kolbeinn. As Guðmundr struggles with every man who crosses his path to total autonomy, his episcopate will resemble the torn table cloth on which Kolbeinn sets his first meal as bishop and which prompts Guðmundr to remark, "En þar eftir mun fara biskups dómr minn, — svá mun hann slitinn vera sem dúkrinn" ('My bishopric will go like this — it will be torn like this tablecloth', Ch. 26). In a kind of reversal of the cloth imagery in this and *Porgils saga skarða*, Guðmundr here shows that this symbol of the feminine will not hold for him. We recall that the occasion of his maiming, where the injury to the leg suggests an injury to his manhood, occurred because he was attempting to free a sail, a huge piece of cloth masculinized by the context of the ship and by its use under male control — ideally. During the storm, an apt symbol of adolescence, this piece of cloth went out of the control of his male companions and threatened to capsize the ship they were in. Guðmundr struggled with it in vain — not only was he hurt, but the ship was capsized. In his rebirth from this unsuccessful struggle to gain control over what appears to be his sexuality, we recall that he is placed in a sling of wadmal. We might also note here that cloth figures prominently in Ingimundr's trading trip to Norway that ended in his death by shipwreck, but in that episode

Ingimundr successfully counters the attempt of the king's men to steal his cloth. Unlike his fosterfather, Guðmundr never regains control of "cloth", and spends the rest of his life watching it rip.

*

Einarr Porgilsson, the lisping, stumbling annoyance to the patriarch Sturla, Porgils *skarði* Bøðvarsson, the harelipped maverick Sturlung, and Guðmundr *góði* Arason, the lame, orphaned bastard who becomes the disastrous Bishop of Hólar, are various realizations of a type of great importance in *Sturlunga saga*: the man who never resolves tensions with his father or father surrogates and whose persistent adolescence leads him to rage at the patriarchal social fabric, in general, and at men like Hvamm-Sturla, Gizurr *jarl*, and Kolbeinn Tumason in particular, who realize, in exemplary fashion, the social expectations that these permanently immature men fail to meet. These childless men break the temporal thread of Icelandic history by failing to perpetuate their bloodlines beyond the demise of the Freestate, while the absence of progeny precludes the continuance of their behavior patterns over further generations. While the damage they did was thus contained, it could not be undone and their heritage is loss. These are the men who, in the narrative scheme of *Sturlunga saga*, were the agents of the violence that led to the end of the independent commonwealth of Iceland and its regression to dependence on the fatherland.

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