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CHARACTER PORTRAYAL IN THREE
ICELANDIC SAGAS

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This dissertation outlines the political and social organization of the Icelandic Commonwealth, and analyses the characters of Gunnlaug in Gunnlaugs saga; of Brodd-Helgi, Geitir, Blami and Thorkel in Vápnfirðinga saga and of Snorri in Eyrbyggja saga.

CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
1. INTRODUCTION TO THE ICELANDIC COMMONWEALTH	1
2. THE CHARACTER OF GUNNLAUG IN <u>GUNNLAUGS SAGA</u>	11
3. THE CHARACTERS OF BRODD-HELGI, GEITIR, BJARNI AND THORKEL IN <u>VÁPNFIRÐINGA SAGA</u>	24
4. THE CHARACTER OF SNORRI IN <u>EYRBYGGJA SAGA</u>	40
5. CONCLUSION	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY	63

CHAPTER 1 : THE ICELANDIC COMMONWEALTH : A CONCISE ACCOUNT OF THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION OF MEDIEVAL ICELAND

Since the characters in the Icelandic family sagas operate in a particular social, cultural, political and legal system, a brief sketch of the organization of their society follows. The people who are dealt with in the family sagas lived or are presumed to have lived in the Saga Age which lasted from 930 to 1030. However, the sagas were composed and written down during the Sturlung Age about two hundred years later, from the middle of the twelfth century until the fall of the Commonwealth in 1262 and also shortly after the Sturlung Age. This probably means that the Saga Age is looked at by the saga authors through thirteenth century eyes. Christianity reached Iceland in the year 1,000 and it is possible that the authors placed certain values on some of their characters, for example Bjami in Vápnfirðinga saga. Perhaps the great importance given to feuding in the family sagas is a result of the feuding which took place in thirteenth century Iceland. Likewise, the ending of all feuds in the sagas in moderation and reconciliation may be a thirteenth century wish because of the civil war in Iceland in the thirteenth century and an indication of what the authors wanted to learn from their forefathers. Reconciliation was a lesson for their own contemporaries.

The following features are the chief characteristics of medieval Icelāndic society during the Saga Age :

I. (a) Legal Organization

In the year 930 the General Assembly or Althing was established for the whole island. It consisted of thirty-nine chieftains who had the rank of *goði* and who were also in charge of the temples. A lawspeaker presided over them and was elected by the *goðar* for a period of three years. He had to know the law and recite it from memory during his period of office before the Althing, which met every year for two weeks in June at Þingvellir. The Althing had judicial and legislative power, but it could not enforce laws. The office of *goði* was inherited, but it could be sold or transferred. Farmers usually swore allegiance to the *goði* who lived nearest to them. The word *goðorð* denoted the *goði's* authority. The *goði* was the local chieftain and those who owed him allegiance were called his thingmen. The relationship between *goði* and thingmen was one of protection and supporting: the thingmen supported the *goði* and went with him to the Althing to support him there as well as on dangerous expeditions. In return, the *goði* protected his thingmen. The *goði* who had the greatest number of supporters had the most power and thus carried the most weight in legal arguments and when it came to fighting. Each farmer had to be a member of a *goðorð*.

A ninth of the *goði's* thingmen went with him every summer to the Althing. Thingmen were at liberty to transfer their allegiance from one *goði* to another, and the ability to do this could be exploited by the *goðar*, since they

could force the thingmen of another *goði* to join their own *goðorð* (Reference: Sørensen). The relationship of *goði* to thingmen was clear: in his own district the *goði* represented the law and any disputes were referred to him so that a settlement could be reached. He was expected to look after the interests of his thingmen. In due course, some ^{goðar}~~godar~~ became more powerful than others, and there was a link between *goðorð* and feud (Reference: Gwyn Jones).

The country was divided into quarters, one for each point of the compass, and Quarter courts were created in about 962. Each Quarter had three local or district Things, but the North Quarter had four. The local Things or Spring Assemblies met every spring and there lawsuits were heard and administrative matters attended to. Three *goðar* presided over each local Thing. Their task was to select the judges who would hear the cases to be tried there. All people were supposed to belong to a Thing located in the Quarter in which they lived. A court for each Quarter met at the Althing. The Quarter courts were a forum for cases in which no judgement could be reached at the local Thing, and cases between litigants who belonged to different local Things went first to the Quarter courts. The local Things and the Quarter courts were presided over by a panel of thirty-six judges chosen by the *goðar* (Reference: William Ian Miller).

The Fifth Court was established in about 1005 and was a court of appeal for cases which ended in a divided judgement in the Quarter courts. In the Fifth Court judgement could be made by a simple majority, whereas in the Quarter courts at least thirty-one judges had to concur (Reference: William Ian Miller).

Legislative power was exercised by the *lógrétta* which consisted of thirty-six and later of forty-eight *goðar*, and was presided over by the

Lawspeaker. However, medieval Iceland lacked a central executive or administrative authority which could enforce sentences arising from litigation and this explains the prominent role played by feuding in the sagas in matters pertaining to lawsuits and vengeance (Reference: Peter Hallberg).

(b) Kinship

An Icelander never operated in isolation, but always as a member of a family or kinship group. This was because he needed support as a means of protection and also when he needed to enforce and claim his rights. Kinship ties were established by arranging marriages, for example, into strong and powerful families, so that in times of conflict and feud people could draw on the kind of support they needed to defend their case. Kinship ties in medieval Iceland were particularly strong. The family was the closest unit of kinship which by law was regarded as extending to fourth cousins, and people traced their connections to one another through male and female links. However, there was usually a strong reluctance to extend kinship obligations as far as the fourth cousin.

When characters are introduced in the sagas, their kin groups are explained so that it is quite clear from the outset that characters never act in isolation. Kin members were not only linked by ties of blood. Mention has been made above all of the practice of extending kinship ties by marriage and these ties played a prominent role when it came to conducting feuds.

Spouses were sought for their kin and family links. In addition to marriage ties, there was also the practice of fostering and blood-brotherhood. A child

could be sent away from home to be fostered by another family. The child then became the foster brother of the children of that household, thus creating new kinship ties. The foster family was chosen with great care with due regard to its own connections and position in society. Another form of fostering occurred when two men swore an oath to avenge each other just as if they were brothers.

The other forms of kinship were relationships such as 'vinfengi' which occur in Vápnfirðinga saga and which were formal, contractual alliances and involved 'friendship' arrangements; relationships between people of different rank; and ordinary affective friendships.

It is quite clear from the family sagas that the network of kinship relations in medieval Iceland was one of the main features of that society, regulating its social intercourse and helping to direct and manipulate the course of feuding and blood vengeance.

(c) Feuding

All the family sagas centre on feud and the vengeance to be exacted. For the medieval Icelanders justice was viewed in terms of revenge. When a feud spilled over into open fighting, it became known as a blood feud, and it is here that the alliances formed by kinship groupings played a pivotal role, in many cases enabling the family to fight for survival against any individual or group that threatened or injured them. In the event of the death of a family member, the remaining members were fully within their rights to seek compensation for their loss. This was often done by means of a revenge

killing. However, the feud did not necessarily end there, and the first death often marked the start of a series of killings. This would end only when the weaker party was crushed or wiped out by the stronger one. The alternative to such annihilation was a realization by both sides of the senselessness of further killings, in which case the matter was put to arbitration. Underlying the feuding was a sense of right. Despite the bloodshed, the element of heroism was still the guiding principle. There was no fighting for the purpose of torture or unnecessary suffering.

Vengeance was a crucial element in the feuding process. Great dishonour was brought on a dead man whose death was not properly avenged, for example Arnkel in Eyrbyggja saga. Again and again in the sagas the dead are to be honoured with suitable revenge. A dead man was still regarded as a member of his family, and he had a claim to be avenged by members of his kinship group.

Feuds were often settled by means of arbitration, usually invoking a third party to act as mediator, and sometimes parties on good terms with each of the warring sides were called in, for example when Bjarni sends men to Thorkel Geitisson in Vápnfirðinga saga. Sometimes the party who has suffered injury or death is granted the right to make his own award, and these awards were usually made at the Thing. The injuries and losses on each side were counted and measured off against one another. If both sides were equal, no payment was made, otherwise fines were paid as compensation for losses suffered. The severest penalty was a sentence of full outlawry. The lesser outlawries involved banishment overseas for a period, sometimes only for three winters. District outlawry involved moving to another district in Iceland and never returning.

Feuding lies at the heart of the family sagas. Feud and dispute were inevitable in a society characterized by rivalries between tightly knit kinship groups, the search for power and territorial expansion by *goðar* such as Snorri and Arnkel in Eyrbyggja saga, and the propensity in the Saga Age to settle arguments and misunderstandings by violence.

The modern reader is often shocked by the disposition towards violence in the family sagas. Any infringement of, or threat to the jealously guarded concept of honour meant that that honour would be defended to the death. A threat or an insult could not be tolerated. To do so would lower the reputation of the individual concerned and of everyone in his kinship group. Personal slights and hurt feelings paved the way for the demand for retribution which was often exacted violently, and there are several instances in the sagas where open feuding between families has been sparked off by insults.

Mention has been made of the fact that all feuding in the family sagas ends in reconciliation. It is reconciliation that the sagas teach, and not the concept of fighting at all costs. Reconciliation was seen as the restoration of social equilibrium.

II. The Sturlung Age

The Sturlung Age from 1150 - 1262 is named after the Sturlung clan and is characterized by great internal feuding, savagery and moral dissolution. The balance of power among the *goðar* became disrupted, and unscrupulous and ambitious chieftains and farmers strove for more and more wealth and power. Individual chieftains began taking over more than one *goðorð*, as many chieftains who had been ordained priests gave up their secular chieftaincies (Reference: Peter Hallberg). Whereas during the Saga Age there had been many *goðar* among whom power had been fairly evenly distributed, there were now a few powerful and influential families and individuals controlling large parts of the country and constantly fighting among themselves. These 'uninterrupted conflicts ... reached their culmination in the early decades of the thirteenth century and eventually led to the submission of Iceland to the rule of the Norwegian King.' (Hallberg, p.20)

The Sturlung family began with Hvamm-Sturla, and it was his sons Thorodd, Sighvatr and Snorri who began to wield the power during this period. Snorri became famous as a poet and as a historian, and was elected Law Speaker. Towards the end of Snorri's life the king of Norway began to increase his influence over Iceland and after Snorri's death the king confiscated his property. After this the chieftains voluntarily handed over their authorities to the king, and eventually Iceland was ruled by the Norwegian crown in 1262. The Sturlung Age was characterized by ambitious and ruthless power relations among Icelandic chieftains in the thirteenth century. The sagas were written down during this period.

III. The Importance of Character in Saga Literature

The reason why character is dealt with in this dissertation is that the saga plot depends on people saying and doing things to other people. Characters are revealed by the things they do and say, by the way they conduct feuds, exact vengeance and make peace, by their treatment of others, by their manipulation of the legal system and their exercise of authority. Characters in the sagas live and operate in a specific society and culture.

The family sagas centre on feud, and character traits such as aggressiveness, greed, pride, inflexibility, a taste for vengeance or unusual foresight come to the fore in situations of conflict, dispute and arbitration. That is why Peter Hallberg argues that 'the characteristic traits of saga style probably best come into their own in the delineation of character. Character is, after all, the alpha and omega of this literary genre ...' (Hallberg, p.73). This is a significant opinion about the sagas, and a reading of the family sagas supports this contention.

The variety of character traits such as those mentioned above which come to light in the course of saga narrative often stands in contrast to the way in which a character is introduced. A brief description of physical appearance and attributes and a concise statement about temperament are the only glimpses which the author reveals at the outset. After this brief introduction characters reveal themselves through words and deeds, the situations in which they become involved, conversations with other characters and the interaction of different personalities. The saga author hardly ever reveals his characters' thoughts. This is why it is necessary to analyze the

situations in which characters find themselves, in order not to miss important connections revealed in dialogue and events. Accounts of eye-witnesses are also important in helping the reader to understand character. The terse objectivity of saga style demands a very close and careful reading of the text in order to analyze the characters. Understatement by the author and a complete lack of extravagance in style and expression also make this necessary.

The central role played by characters in saga literature enables the reader to learn about the legal system of medieval Iceland, the structure of Icelandic society, and the reasons why people make the choices and decisions which they do. A study of character in the family sagas gives the reader a window onto the historical events of the time, their motives and consequences, and the social and political values which make up the fabric of this society.

Paul Schach's statement that '... the essence of saga art is not plot but character portrayal...' highlights the importance of the role played by the characters in the family sagas (Schach, p.153).

CHAPTER 2 : THE CHARACTER OF GUNNLAUG IN GUNNLAUGS SAGA

The story of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue is the story of a man whose physical strength and prowess are not matched by his spiritual and mental resolve and determination. In the areas of decisiveness and action, Gunnlaug reveals himself to be a vacillating, weak and irresolute character and this weakness is his single most consistent feature throughout the saga.

The saga writer introduces him as follows :

Svá er
sagt frá Gunnlaugi, at hann var snimmendis bráðgörr,
mikill ok sterkr, ljósjarpr á hár, ok fór allvel, svarteygr
ok nokkut nefljótr ok skapfelligr í andliti, miðmjór ok
herðimikill, kominn á sik manna bezt, hávaðamaðr mik-
ill í öllu skaplyndi ok framgjarn snimmendis ok við allt
óvæginn ok harðr ok skáld mikit ok heldr níðskár ok
kallaðr Gunnlaugr ormsunga.

(Fomrit III, Chapter 4, p.59).

Although Gunnlaug was a poet, his poems do not illuminate his character to any important extent, and therefore his poetry is not discussed here. The only reference to a poem is the one on which Hrafn bases his assessment of Gunnlaug's character.

Gunnlaug immediately proves his unruliness when he tries to defy his father's refusal of his request to go abroad, but Illugi the Black asserts his authority. He makes Gunnlaug put back the sacks of merchandise which he has taken out of the storehouse in preparation for his voyage abroad. However, the incident causes a breach between them because Gunnlaug goes to stay with Thorstein in Borg for a year. Already at the age of twelve

Gunnlaug has shown himself to be obstreperous and irascible. As soon as Gunnlaug is introduced and his character described, the saga writer immediately shows how his character is revealed in the sequence of events in which he is involved. Gunnlaug holds centre stage throughout the saga and determines his own fate. It is evident from the text that the events and incidents provide windows onto his character.

It is in Thorstein's home that Gunnlaug is instructed in law and where he is introduced to Helga, Thorstein's daughter. Since he is well thought of during his stay, it seems that very few of his negative characteristics come to light, until he asks Thorstein to teach him how to become legally engaged to a woman. This request seems to be made with an ulterior motive in mind, since he and Helga have already taken a great liking to each other. Gunnlaug manipulates the situation to serve his own interests and get his own way:

Þá mælti Gunnlaugr: „Nú skalt þú vita, hvárt mér hān skilizk, ok mun ek nú taka í hönd þér ok láta sem ek festa mér Helgu, dóttur þína.“ Þorsteinn segir: „Þarfleysi ætla ek þat vera,“ segir hann. Gunnlaugr þreifaði þá þegar í hönd honum ok mælti: „Veit mér nú þetta,“ segir hann. „Ger sem þú vill,“ segir Þorsteinn, „en þat skulu þeir vita, er hjá eru staddir, at þetta skal vera sem ómælt ok þessu skulu engi undirmál fylgja.“ Síðan nefndi Gunnlaugr sér vátta ok fastnaði sér Helgu ok spurði síðan, hvárt þá mætti svá nýta. Hann kvað svá vera mega, ok varð monnum mikit gaman at þessu, þeim er við váru staddir.

There is a parallel between this mock betrothal and the earlier incident when his father prevented him from going abroad in the sense that Gunnlaug's wishes are met on both occasions with a refusal at first.

The blow to the shepherd at Grimstungur reveals Gunnlaug's irascibility and obstreperousness (Fomrit III, Chapter 5). The shepherd had borrowed Gunnlaug's horse and returned it covered in sweat, which was hardly a sufficient reason for Gunnlaug to knock him unconscious. Gunnlaug is unable to keep his irritability and hot temper under control. To make the matter worse, he insults the farmer by offering inadequate compensation - one mark instead of the required fine of three marks. Gunnlaug compounds his bad behaviour by chanting an insulting verse and having peace made on his terms. The incident confirms what we already know about Gunnlaug, namely his assertiveness, his volatile nature and his insistence on having his own way.

With Illugi's granting of Gunnlaug's second request to go abroad, the saga writer reveals for the first time the vacillating, indecisive aspect of his character. Although he thanks his father profusely for buying him a half share in a ship, he allows himself to be drawn back to Borg in order to spend time with Helga:

en Gunnlaugr var at Borg,
meðan þeir bjuggu skipit,¹ ok þótti glaðara at tala við
Helgu en vera í starfi með kaupmönnum.

(Fomrit III, Chapter 5, p.64-65), which indicates that his attention is already divided and prepares the reader for his indecisiveness which continues throughout the saga.

One of the incidents in the saga which best illustrates Gunnlaug's character takes place just before his departure. Helga's father, Thorstein, offers Gunnlaug first one horse and then another, but Gunnlaug turns down the offer on the grounds that he is about to leave the country. But Gunnlaug then asks Thorstein why he does not offer him what he is only too willing to accept, namely his daughter Helga. Thorstein refuses because he quite rightly finds it contradictory that Gunnlaug should make the request without altering his original reason for refusing the horses:

Hann svarar:
„Eigi vil ek þessi heldr en hin, eða hvi býðr þú mér eigi þat, er ek vil þiggja?“ „Hvat er þat?“ segir Þorsteinn. Gunnlaugr mælti: „Helga in fagra, dóttir þín.“ Þorsteinn svarar: „Eigi mun^s svá skjótt ráðask,“ segir hann ok tók annat mál, ok riðu heimleiðis ofan með Langá.

(Fornrit III, Chapter 5, p.65). This calls forth a sharp reply from Thorstein:

Þorsteinn svarar: „Ekki sinni ek hégóma þínum,“ segir hann.

(Fornrit III, Chapter 5, p.66). Thorstein expands on his retort and in his comments he manages to express a great deal about Gunnlaug's character.

Þorsteinn svarar: „Vita skyldir þú fyrst, hvat þú vildir. Ertu eigi ráðinn til útanferðar ok lætr þó, sem þú skylir kvángask? Er þat ekki jafnræði með ykkur Helgu, meðan þú ert svá óráðinn, ok mun því ekki verða á litit.“

(Fornrit III, Chapter 5, p.66). In response to this Gunnlaug shows himself to be unyielding, just as the saga writer described him, and proceeds to argue with Thorstein that as a son of Illugi the Black, he is the most suitable husband for Helga. He is not above making a threat:

enda mun þat^s fám bónd-
um vel endask, at synja mér mægðar.“

(Fornrit III, Chapter 5, p.66). The word *óráðinn* used above appears again in the saga, for example when it is used by Gunnlaug's father, Illugi the Black, about his son, and when it is used again by Thorstein when Illugi goes to him at Gunnlaug's request to ask for Helga's hand for his son:

„Pat eitt finn ek Gunnlaugi, at
mér þykkir hann vera óráðinn,“ segir hann,

(Fornrit III, Chapter 5, p.67). However, at Illugi's insistence Thorstein agrees to a conditional betrothal whereby Helga is not formally engaged to Gunnlaug but promised to him for three years, and unless Gunnlaug returns improved in character and at the agreed time, Thorstein is to be freed of any obligation. Having got his own way as far as he has been able, Gunnlaug is now ready to sail. The reader is very well acquainted with his character by this stage. He is impetuous and becomes very persistent when he cannot get his own way. The incident with Helga highlights his indecisiveness, since he appears to want her and to want to travel. He lacks clear ambition and purposefulness.

The central feature of Gunnlaug's travels abroad and his visits to various courts where he recites his poems to earls and kings, is his relationship with Hrafn who emerges as his rival for the hand of Helga. However, Gunnlaug reveals his true character in Norway when he gives an impudent and discourteous reply to earl Eirik when asked about his foot which had a boil on it:

Gunnlaugr svarar: „Eigi skal haltr ganga, með-
an báðir fœtr eru jafnlangir.“

(Fornrit III, Chapter 6, p.69). The exchange between them continues in the same vein until Eirik orders him out of the country. His behaviour has been arrogant, and in response to a rebuke he recites an offensive stanza. Earl Eirik disapproves, and Gunnlaug replies with a deadly insult :

Gunnlaugr svarar:
„Svá, sem mér þótti vera eiga, at þú bæðir mér engra
forböena, en bæðir sjálfum þér hallkvæmri böena.“
„Hverra þá?“ segir jarl. „At þú fengir eigi þvilíkan
dauðdaga sem Hákon jarl, faðir þinn.“

(Fornrit III, Chapter 6, p.69).

Gunnlaug's next stop is England where he distinguishes himself by fighting with a troublesome robber and killing him, although he fights with a sword given to him by the king. Although the victory is therefore not solely due to Gunnlaug's prowess, he wins great renown for it nevertheless. But he

was impetuous in lending money in the first place, and hot-headed in being so eager to fight. From England Gunnlaug travels to Ireland and Orkney, and on his way to Sweden he spends Christmas in west Gautland. From there he goes to Sweden and in the Swedish court he meets Hrafn Onundarson and they become friends. However, they are soon at odds when it comes to reciting their poems. Gunnlaug demands to recite his first, saying that his father had never stood back for Hrafn's father. The king, showing considerable insight into Gunnlaug's character, allows Gunnlaug to recite his poem first:

(Konungr mælti: „Gunnlaugr skal fyrri flytja, því at honum eirir illa, ef hann hefir eigi sitt mál.“

(Fornrit III, Chapter 8, p.80). It is after the recital of their poems that the two become enemies. When the king asks Hrafn for his opinion of Gunnlaug's verse, Hrafn replies:

„Þat er stórt kvæði ok ófagrt ok nokkut stírkveðit, sem Gunnlaugr er sjálfur í skaplyndi.“

(Fornrit III, Chapter 9, p.80), and Gunnlaug describes Hrafn's verse as follows:

fagrt kvæði, sem Hrafn er sjálfur at sjá, ok þetta er yfirbragðslitit;

(Fornrit III, Chapter 9, p.80). Hrafn's assessment of Gunnlaug is that he is high-sounding and full of big words or pompous, inelegant and rather stiff. Hrafn has only just met Gunnlaug in the Swedish court, but from Gunnlaug's behaviour in pushing himself forward and insisting on reciting his poem first, he is able to make some judgement of his character. Hrafn is correct in saying that Gunnlaug is high-sounding, since he claims as his excuse for reciting his poem first that his father had never stood back for Hrafn's father. He is correct in saying that Gunnlaug is inelegant because he has not shown good manners in pushing himself in front of Hrafn, and he is correct in saying that he is stiff in the sense of being rigid or inflexible. Gunnlaug asks Hrafn why he composed only a short poem about the king, and did not consider the king to be worth a longer one. Hrafn remembers this remark and threatens Gunnlaug:

skál ek einhverju sinni eigi þik minnr vanvirða en ^{Nú} þú
vildir mik hér.

(Fornrit III, Chapter 9, p.81). Soon after this incident Hrafn returns to Iceland where he attempts to arrange a betrothal to Helga, probably acting out of spite in accordance with his threat to Gunnlaug. He persists until another conditional betrothal is made, whose conditions were as follows: if Gunnlaug did not return home that summer, the wedding would take place at the beginning of winter, but in the event of Gunnlaug's return, Thorstein would be free of all his commitments to Hrafn.

Back in England, Gunnlaug delays his departure to Iceland on the grounds that King Ethelred was under threat from the Danish king who had a large army guarding the realm in England which his father had won. When Gunnlaug asks permission in spring to leave, the king dissuades him and Gunnlaug complies, but requests to go in the summer if the Danish threat has not materialized. Up to this point Gunnlaug's behaviour appears reasonable, but when he remains in England all summer and the next winter as well and the Danes do not come, it becomes clear that he is behaving true to character and is vacillating. He eventually leaves after midsummer and to his credit he does not waste time in Norway but sails to Iceland with Hallfred. Gunnlaug's delay in returning to Iceland is wholly in keeping with his indecisiveness and irresolution. He could have requested leave to go home earlier, particularly as the Danish threat had receded. It is Hallfred who warns Gunnlaug that he, Gunnlaug, has met his match in Hrafn, by relating his own experience with Hrafn, when he was forced to yield to Hrafn on Hrafn's own terms after he had withheld money from one of Hrafn's housecarles.

Gunnlaug arrives in Gilsbakki on the same evening that Helga's marriage feast takes place at Borg. Although he had hurt his foot in a wrestling match with Thord, he wants to go to Borg at once, in his characteristic impetuosity, and only Illugi seems to dissuade him from going. But not too much weight should be attached to this, as the saga writer informs us that he could hardly put his foot to the ground, so that the journey would have been physically impossible for him. With Gunnlaug back in Iceland and with Hrafn married to Helga, the conflict between the two men escalates. Helga's attitude to Hrafn hardens:

Ok litlu síðar fluttisk útkváma Gunnlaugs. Helga gerðisk þá svá stíð við Hrafn, at hann fekk eigi haldit henni heima þar, ok fóru þau þá heim aptr til Borgar, ok nýtti Hrafn lítit af samvistum við hana.

(Fomrit III, Chapter 11, p.89).

At the wedding at Skaney, Gunnlaug sees Helga for the first time since his return, speaks to her and gives her the cloak which King Ethelred had given him. At this point Gunnlaug's impetuous nature gets the better of him, and he gallops furiously up to Hrafn, but Illugi and Thorstein run up and prevent a fight.

At the Summer Assembly Gunnlaug calls for Hrafn and tells him frankly that he has set himself up as his enemy by marrying Helga. He challenges Hrafn to a fight on the island at Oxara, thus showing that he can take the initiative at times, and Hrafn admits that it is a fair offer. However, the fight ends inconclusively because Illugi stops it when Gunnlaug is slightly wounded. Gunnlaug is furious and declares that their next meeting will take place when Illugi is not there. Gunnlaug is now finding that his father's presence can be overbearing, although he is obstreperous enough to force his own way in any situation. It is true that he uses his father's reputation to his own advantage, such as when he presses Thorstein to agree to his betrothal to Helga. There he tries to persuade Thorstein that a match with a son of Illugi the Black is probably the best match he could make. But now Gunnlaug is beginning to realize that over-dependence on his father can also be a drawback, since his father insists on intervening between him and Hrafn. True to character, Gunnlaug leaves the initiative to Hrafn to take up the challenge. Hrafn

challenges him to fight in Norway, where no kinsmen can interfere, and Gunnlaug accepts.

The difference in the nature of their respective journeys to Norway highlights the contrast between the two characters: Hrafn is decisive and journeys straight to Thrandheim without any detours or delays. Gunnlaug goes to Orkney after making a late start, spends the winter with the earl and in the summer he goes harrying with the earl right up to Scotland, although he knows that Hrafn is waiting for him. This shows his indecisiveness and inability to act. On arrival in Norway he is forbidden by earl Eirik to fight in his kingdom, and he spends the winter there. He appears to be drifting and merely whiling away the time, showing no enthusiasm for the fight, until he comes upon a mock fight in which two men named Hrafn and Gunnlaug are fencing. The bystanders pass remarks about how the Icelanders are slow to remember their boasts, and the underlying contempt in their words affects Gunnlaug. The incident jolts him into finding Hrafn who has left for Sweden, and Gunnlaug sets out but arrives every evening in the place where Hrafn had been the night before. Paul Schach points out that the actual distance travelled was only twenty-five miles, '... but retardation before the climax for the purpose of suspense is an important element of saga structure' (Schach, p.153). Eventually they meet on a headland called Dinganes, where they fight after all their comrades have been killed. Gunnlaug fights with the sword given to him by King Ethelred, and he cuts off Hrafn's leg. Hrafn asks for a drink and Gunnlaug makes him promise not to engage in any foul play, which shows that Gunnlaug is suspicious of Hrafn and raises the question why he gives him the water. The answer must be his impetuous nature. Hrafn is deceitful, although Gunnlaug has asked him not to deceive him before he

fetches water for him in his helmet. But the fact that he makes the request shows that he knows Hrafn's true nature. Hrafn strikes Gunnlaug's head when Gunnlaug brings him water, prompting Gunnlaug to make the remark:

Þá mælti Gunnlaugr: „Illá svæktu
mik nú, ok ódregiliga tór þér, þar sem ek trúða þér.“

(Fornrit III, Chapter 12, p.102). Hrafn admits his treachery, but feels it is justified:

Hrafn svarar: „Satt er þat,“ segir hann, „en þat gekk
mér til þess, at ek ann þér eigi faðmlagsins Helgu inn-
'ogru.“

(Fornrit III, Chapter 12, p.102). They fight again and Gunnlaug kills him. Three days later he dies from his head wound.

Gunnlaug is the only person in the saga whose character is fully sketched. He does not distinguish himself as a typical Icelandic hero. Nor is he passionate or even a very committed lover. His greatest distinguishing feature is negative: he is an expert at delaying, at being irresolute and at vacillating. The saga writer concentrates on this aspect of his character which is the one that makes the greatest impression on the reader. He is not really a complex character. His life is distinguished by his impulsiveness, a lack of resolve and delay. He is unable to carry anything through to a conclusion.

The saga begins with a dream of Thorstein's concerning his daughter Helga's future and the direction it would take. However, the dream is merely a literary device and a typical feature of many Icelandic sagas. But it has nothing to do with the way in which Gunnlaug's character evolves and is not

an essential element in the story. Events happen anyway, and the interpretation of Gunnlaug's character does not ^{depend} on the dream. It is independent of it, even though the dream comes true.

Gunnlaug's weakness and lack of resolve prevent him from realizing any real and significant potential in life. His physical strength on its own is not sufficient to allow him to do so. The saga writer has sketched his character very effectively, and throughout the saga Gunnlaug remains true to the essential features of his nature.

CHAPTER 3 : THE CHARACTERS OF BRODD-HELGI, GEITIR, BJARNI AND THORKEL IN VÁPNFIRÐINGA SAGA

Brodd-Helgi lived at Hof in Vapnfjord. He was the son of Thorgils, the son of Thorstein the White who came out to Iceland. Thorgils was killed, so Thorstein took over the farm and reared his grandson Helgi. The saga-writer has the following to say about Helgi:

Helgi var mikill maðr ok sterkr ok bráð-
gorr, vænn ok stórmannligr, ekki málugr í barnæsku,
óðæll ok óvægr þegar á unga aldri. Hann var hugkvæmr
ok margbreytinn.

(Fomrit XI, Chapter 1, p.23). He acquired his nickname from a 'broddr' or iron spike which he fastened to the forehead of his bull in order to give it the advantage in a fight with another bull.

The saga writer shows, through the course of a family feud which continues through two generations, how such a feud can end in reconciliation as the result of the foresight and magnanimity of one of the characters involved.

The feud follows after a curse, which is probably a literary device, is uttered by the outlaw Svart who killed a man named Skidi and whose bloodsuit was taken up by Brodd-Helgi. When Svart starts helping himself to Brodd-Helgi's sheep, a fight ensues in which Brodd-Helgi takes off Svart's leg. Svart utters a curse that there will be kin-hurt in Brodd-Helgi's family from then on for ever, as long as the land is lived in:

. Þá mælti Svartr: „Nú gerði gæfumun okkar,“ segir hann, „ok muntu verða banamaðr minn, en sá ættangr^s mun verða í kyni yðru heðan af, at alla ævi mun uppi vera, meðan landit er byggð.“

(Fornit XI, Chapter 2, pp.25-26). Then Brodd-Helgi kills him.

Brodd-Helgi develops a close friendship with Geitir, son of Lyting Asbjarnason of Krossavik, and marries Halla, Geitir's sister. Later on in the saga, it is Bjami, the youngest son of Brodd-Helgi and Halla, who takes up the feud with Geitir's family after Brodd-Helgi's death.

The conflict between Brodd-Helgi and Geitir begins when Thorleif the Christian and Hrafn arrive by ship in Vapnfjord and Brodd-Helgi invites Hrafn to stay with him. But Hrafn insults Brodd-Helgi twice:

Austmaðr kvazk eigi þangat mundu fara til vistar. „Mer ertu sagðr stórlátr ok fégjarn,“ segir hann, „en ek em smálátr ok lítilhæfr, ok er þat ósamfoert.“ Brodd-Helgi falaði af honum góða gripi, því at hann var skrautmaðr mikill, en Hrafn kvazk enga gripi vildu á frest selja.¹ Brodd-Helgi svarar: „Smæliga² hefir þú gort ferð mína, neitat vistinni, en synjat kaupins.“

(Fornit XI, Chapter 4, p.29). When Geitir comes to the ship and meets the captain, he tells him that it is unwise of him to alienate the most notable man in the district. The Norwegian asks Geitir whether he might stay with him instead, which he does, although Geitir is not very enthusiastic about it, probably because he feels that in taking in Hrafn he is indirectly alienating Brodd-Helgi because of the exchange which has taken place between Hrafn

and Brodd-Helgi. Hrafn was a wealthy man and carried many of his valuables in a box with him. He is killed in suspicious circumstances at a farm near Hof, and a friend of Brodd-Helgi and Geitir, Tjorvi the Big, was found to be missing all day on the day of the killing, which means that he could possibly be under suspicion. Geitir and Brodd-Helgi agree to take half each of Hrafn's riches after the Spring Assembly. But Thorleif carries Hrafn's riches away from Geitir's store-house in order to convey them to Hrafn's heirs. Brodd-Helgi is quite prepared to attack Thorleif, but Geitir advises against it. This willingness of Brodd-Helgi's to attack a person in order to acquire wealth is an early pointer in the saga to Brodd-Helgi's avarice and greed, and the Christian virtues which triumph at the end of the saga are foreshadowed here by Thorleif's morally correct behaviour in passing on Hrafn's riches to his heirs. Thorleif proves his unselfishness by this deed. Geitir's unwillingness to attack Thorleif shows that he is less impetuous than Brodd-Helgi is and not nearly as aggressive:

Þá tók Geitir til orða ok mælti:
„Ekki at ráði þykki mér þetta at veita þeim atsókn á smáskipum, en vér vitum eigi, nema komi á andviðri ok reki þá upp, ok má þá enn þat af gera, sem sýnisk.“

(Fornít XI, Chapter 4, p.31).

Brodd-Helgi's truculence shows itself in his bad temper during the following summer and the reason for it is clear:

BRODD-HELGI var heldr ókáttr um sumarit ok lang-
aði mjök til kvámu Þorleifs.

(Fornrit XI, Chapter 5, p.32). The wealth which they have let slip through their fingers becomes an obsession with both Brodd-Helgi and Geitir, and this obsession soon leads to suspicion between them, because Brodd-Helgi suspects Geitir of keeping the little box which Hrafn owned, and Geitir asks Brodd-Helgi about Hrafn's gold ring. Each suspects the other of keeping part of Hrafn's riches, and both reveal themselves to be greedy and money-grabbing. It is hardly surprising that their friendship cools as a result.

Brodd-Helgi seizes Thorleif's return to Iceland as his long-awaited opportunity to pursue the matter of Hrafn's riches. However, Thorleif's transfer of the wealth to Hrafn's heirs makes a lawsuit pointless, and Brodd-Helgi finds another way to pursue Thorleif, namely through his outstanding temple tax, and he lives up to his description as an overbearing and headstrong man. The saga writer says:

ok ætlaði þó at fá á honum fangstað.

(Fornrit XI, Chapter 5, p.33). So he sends Ketil to claim the tax and summon Thorleif. But because of bad weather Ketil is forced to accept Thorleif's hospitality which is very good, and the result is that Ketil lets the lawsuit fall through and swears his friendship. When Brodd-Helgi hears of this, he feels deceived. Once again the saga writer sharply contrasts the characters of Brodd-Helgi and Thorleif, making Brodd-Helgi's aggressiveness and truculence stand out against Thorleif's generosity and good nature. Because Geitir could have supported Brodd-Helgi in the matter but didn't, their

friendship takes a turn for the worse. All the incidents in the saga concerning Thorleif show Brodd-Helgi's taste for revenge and serve to embitter the friendship between Brodd-Helgi and Geitir.

The hostility between the two increases when Halla falls ill and Brodd-Helgi loses no time in becoming engaged to Thorgerd Silver. It seems from the text that Brodd-Helgi is less than honest about the whole matter because his reply to Halla when she tells him of her illness is:

„Ek þykkjumk vel kvángaðr, ok ætla ek at una þessu,
meðan okkart líf vinnsk.“

(Fornit XI, Chapter 6, p.36). Soon after he has spoken these words, he allows himself to be seduced by Thorgerd Silver, a point which is not lost on Halla, who reacts to the news by saying:

„Pat þykki þér eigi of
brátt,“ segir hon.

(Fornit XI, Chapter 6, p.36). The argument over the return of Halla's dowry soon starts and when Geitir tries to have the matter out with Brodd-Helgi in an attempt to get the dowry back, Brodd-Helgi answers:

Helgi svarar: „Gott þykki mér,“ segir hann, „ef Halla unir eigi í Krossavík, þá er hon er heim komin.⁵ Mun hon enn hingat koma til Hofs.“

(Fornit XI, Chapter 6, p.37). With this evasive kind of reply, Geitir gets nowhere with Brodd-Helgi on the matter of the dowry. He also gets no encouragement from Halla who seems quite happy to leave her property with Brodd-Helgi, believing that it is safe with him. Geitir, however, feels insulted to be cheated like this and his second attempt at claiming Halla's money is met with a blunt refusal by Brodd-Helgi.

Geitir's next step is the Assembly where he is thwarted once more because Brodd-Helgi has a greater number of supporters and is able to overcome Geitir with force. At the Althing Brodd-Helgi sees to it that he has the backing of Guðmundr the Mighty, and so once again he gets the better of Geitir by his aggressive stance. Guðmundr's support is valuable because from his appearance in several sagas it is clear that he is a man of substance and people constantly seek his support. He is not a man to be trifled with. He is prominent in legal and political matters where his support was highly valued. He sometimes played a mediatory role in such matters.

Brodd-Helgi reveals his avarice because he holds on to property that does not belong to him. Geitir appears to lack forcefulness and drive and is unable to press his case at the assemblies. He comes across as being unassertive and it seems that he could have tried harder against Brodd-Helgi who tramples on Geitir's rights quite unashamedly. Brodd-Helgi shows his capacity for quarrelling over little things, and his behaviour towards Halla when she falls ill and over the dowry alienates him from the reader. When she is gravely ill she sends for him, but he is not prepared to accede to her request to stay overnight. She sums up his callous behaviour toward her when she says:

„Eigi þarf nú at biðja þik hérvistar.
Þú munt nú mjök lökit hafa verkum, ok get ek, at fæstir
munu lúka við sínar konur svá sem þú munt við mík.“

(Fornrit XI, Chapter 9, p.44). Soon after this Halla dies. As the result of this episode concerning Halla there is now open enmity between Brodd-Helgi and Geitir. According to Jesse Byock, '... Brodd-Helgi has chosen to make the retention of Halla's dowry a test of his ability to humiliate his opponent and to ignore due process. In the eyes of the community, Brodd-Helgi's refusal to accept the customary way of settling disputes is a signal that reveals his intention to strip Geitir of his authority and gain control over the local region for himself' (Byock, p.214).

This open enmity turns into conflict with the quarrel between two of their thingmen, Thord and Thormod, who had joint ownership of some forest land. When Thord approaches Brodd-Helgi over his unjust treatment from Thormod, Brodd-Helgi responds true to character by making it clear that the only way in which he will get involved in the dispute is on condition that Thord will transfer the property to him and move over to Hof. This action reveals Brodd-Helgi's greed for material possessions, his arrogance and his manipulative powers. Thord is now indebted to Brodd-Helgi who can use the situation for his own ends against Geitir. Brodd-Helgi is overbearing and shows little regard for justice. This can be seen in his destruction of the disputed property, much of which he claims for himself by cutting down the trees. When Geitir sends men to Hof to summon Thord for tree-felling, Brodd-Helgi has some of the men killed. His disregard for justice and his determination to have his own way are so great that he is prepared to kill in order to achieve his ends. His arrogance

is such that he appears to think that he will get away with it. But it is not only Brodd-Helgi who shows up badly in this episode. Geitir reveals his unassertiveness on more than one occasion because he refuses to act against Brodd-Helgi and instead of getting involved himself, he sends Thormod to fetch the men who will go with him to summon Thord for tree-felling. In a sense Geitir pays for his lack of involvement when some of his supporters are killed by Brodd-Helgi and his men. When Geitir's men approach him to have their friends buried, Geitir still vacillates and tells them to wait.

The tide starts turning against Brodd-Helgi when Geitir's men succeed in collecting the corpses while Brodd-Helgi's attention is otherwise occupied. The incident leads Brodd-Helgi to concede that Geitir is wiser than he is:

Þá tók Helgi til orða: „Eptir koma ósvinum ráð í hug,“² segir hann. „Vér höfum verið allan dag í þröng þessari. Ek sé nú eptir, at kappar Geitis váru hjá engir, ok munu þeir hafa borit í brott líkin í kollaupunum, ok er ávallt, at Geitir er vitrastr vár, þótt hann verði jafnan ofríki borinn.“

(Fornrit XI, Chapter 8, p.43). But as there was no bloodsuit for the slaying of Thormod, Geitir did not get any justice from Brodd-Helgi. Brodd-Helgi's words constitute a significant statement of character in that he perceives Geitir to be a wiser and more cunning person than he is, although Geitir has often been overcome by force. He does not have the aggression that Brodd-Helgi has, but he is shrewder.

Brodd-Helgi's fortunes appear to be on the wane when he finds himself short of backing at the Assembly and has to buy the support of Guðmundr the

Mighty, thus entering into what Jesse Byock describes as 'vinfengi', or contractual agreements, recalling the pact which Brodd-Helgi made with Ketil over the issue of Thorleif's temple tax, although there is no mention of any exchange of money in that instance. In the case of Guðmundr, Brodd-Helgi refuses to pay him the money owed to him when his case is successful because of Guðmundr's backing. His excuse is that he need not pay money between friends. Of course he goes down in Guðmundr's estimation, and his shabby treatment of people shows his disregard for them and his view of them as expendable once he has achieved what he wants. He is punished in the sense that Guðmundr swears never to help him again.

However, Brodd-Helgi has clearly not learnt his lesson and continues manipulating when Thorarin Egilsson arrives. As soon as his ship puts in, Brodd-Helgi tries to win him over from Geitir whose thingman he is by inviting him to stay with him. Byock points out that if Brodd-Helgi should succeed '... in entering into a 'vinfengi' relationship with Thorarin, he might be able to detach Thorarin and perhaps other members of his family from Geitir. Such a shift in allegiance would endanger Geitir...' (Byock, p.215). Thorarin accepts, but Geitir intervenes and persuades him to stay at Krossavik. When Brodd-Helgi hears this, he presents Thorarin with five horses for his friendship, trying to buy his support, which Thorarin first accepts and then on Geitir's advice sends back. Geitir now proves belatedly that he is capable of thwarting Brodd-Helgi.

The quarrel now spreads with far-reaching implications for the community as farmers and *goðar* are compelled to take sides. Brodd-Helgi's role in all this is clear: he is governed by his greed, as Byock points out, and chooses to satisfy it in unacceptable ways such as breaking 'vinfengi'

agreements and making enemies of people. His treatment of Guðmundr is a good example of this.

Geitir's thingmen now threaten to desert him unless he acts against Brodd-Helgi. In this way, Geitir is spurred into action and he sets off on a journey during which he consults Ofeig and Guðmundr. On his way back he makes a very revealing comment about his rival to Olvir the Wise:

„Er hann eigi ójafnaðarmaðr mikill?“ segir Olvir.
Geitir svarar: „Pat er helzt á mér orðit um ójafnaðinn
Helga, at hann unni mér eigi at hafa himininn jafnan
yfir höfði mér sem hann hefir sjálfr.“³

(Fornit XI, Chapter 12, p.47). In this respect Brodd-Helgi is similar to Hrafnel and Thorolf Twist-Foot. Each is an *ójafnaðarmaðr*.

Geitir's unassertiveness and his mild-mannered approach cause him to lose many thingmen to Brodd-Helgi. His remaining thingmen challenge him to act and threaten to leave him in the lurch and desert him unless he goes back to Krossavik and acts against Brodd-Helgi. He moves back, and although there is a lacuna in the manuscript of the saga here (Chapter 14), it is evident from a reconstruction of the lacuna that Brodd-Helgi's party was either led into an ambush on the way to the Assembly or directly attacked, and that Brodd-Helgi, his son Lyting and some others were killed. It seems that Geitir had planned the whole thing with Guðmundr, as Guðmundr helps and supports him at the Althing where the preliminary agreement concerning Bjami's compensation and the banishment of some of Geitir's followers is formally confirmed. Geitir reveals himself to be a skilful calculator since he pays a

relative small price for the great prize of Brodd-Helgi's head, even though Bjarni is awarded an honourable compensation.

The feud now passes to the next generation. Bjarni, Brodd-Helgi's son, begins taking revenge for the killing of his father by slaying Tjorvi the Big, a follower of Geitir who had been declared a district outlaw after the attack on Brodd-Helgi's party. Geitir takes no action for this killing since he is probably shrewd enough not to make matters worse for the time being. For a while it seems that Bjarni and Geitir get on better with each other than Geitir and Brodd-Helgi did, with Bjarni even paying visits to Krossavik. Geitir is probably displaying the virtue of 'hof' by behaving in this way. If it had not been for the intervention and incitement of Thorgerd Silver, Bjarni's stepmother, who shows him Brodd-Helgi's blood-stained cloak in a thinly disguised desire for revenge, events might have taken a different course. Bjarni takes a small axe with him to the meeting at Thorbrandsstadir and is clearly in a homicidal frame of mind when he arrives, as the saga writer notes that:

Bjarni segir: „Pá mun ávallt þeyja, ef þetta verður at þey.“ Bjarni stóð þá upp ok mælti: „Dofinn er mér fótr minn.“ „Ligg þú þá kyrr á,“ segir Geitir. Bjarni hjó þá í höfuð Geiti, ok fekk hann þegar bana.

(Fornrit XI, Chapter 14, p.52). Bjarni seems unwilling to kill Geitir, and immediately he is overcome with remorse because:

Ok jafnskjótt sem hann hafði höggit Geiti, þá iðradisk hann ok settisk undir höfuð Geiti, ok andaðisk hann í knjám Bjarna.

(Fornit XI, Chapter 14, pp.52-53). What strikes the reader as odd is that nobody sought redress or reparation for the slaying. It is only when Thorkel Geitisson returns to Iceland that revenge is sought, despite Bjami's quick offer of atonement and compensation.

It is clear from the outset that Thorkel is bent on revenge. The saga writer reveals Thorkel's intentions through various episodes, for example his attempt to attack Bjami up on the mountain which was foiled by Thorvard Leech, and his despatch of a messenger named Kol to Egilsstadir to find out how many men were at Hof. Kol was seen by Thorvard Leech who informed Bjami. However, Thorkel's apparent aggressiveness becomes somewhat blunted after he has sent for the sons of Droplaug, Helgi and Grim, with the intention of attacking Bjami in his home, with fire if necessary. Thorkel is mortified because Bjami had outwitted him by placing a block under a cloak on his horse and then escaping, so that when Thorkel pursued the horse, Bjami was safe in the forest. But when Helgi and Grim are ready to leave for Bjami's house, Thorkel is ill and calls off the expedition, much to the chagrin of the two brothers who leave in a temper. Despite the obvious animosity in the air, a clash is averted for the time being.

The saga writer has left the reader in no doubt that the scene has been set for a final confrontation between Bjami and Thorkel. It seems as if such a clash is going to occur when both groups leave the Spring Assembly and begin their journeys home. Eventually the fighting starts outside Eyvindarstadir but owing to Eyvind's timely intervention as well as women from his farm who throw clothes over the weapons, further fighting is forestalled, with four dead on each side. The feud between the two kinsmen is not over, and the matter is left inconclusive, with each group leaving for home.

The saga writer depicts an unusual resolution to the feud. The process is set in motion with Bjami's generous gesture in sending Thorvard Leech, a physician, to see to Thorkel's wounds. He was badly wounded in the arm in the fight near Eyvindarstadir. Thorvard is not welcomed at Krossavik, but he spends seven nights there and cures Thorkel who becomes more kindly disposed towards him and rewards him generously. Bjami is pleased with this development:

Ok þétti honum vel hafa um ráð-
izk, er Þorkell varð heill.

(Fornrit XI, Chapter 18, p.63).

Bjami's generosity does not end here. When he is told that the cattle at Krossavik are in a poor condition and might have to be killed, he sends a message to Thorkel offering to house him and his household at Hof, or else to provide him with meat and hay so that the cattle will not have to be killed. Thorkel does not react at once, except to say that he will not respond in haste to such a generous offer. But his wife prompts him into going to Hof to meet Bjami because she recognizes that such an offer is honourable. Thorkel agrees to this because he knows his wife to be wise. The meeting between the two kinsmen takes place in a good spirit and Bjami greets Thorkel and his people warmly. Once they have discussed all their problems, Bjami offers Thorkel atonement and the right to make his own award, and the two are fully reconciled and live in peace from then on, and Svart's curse is broken. The good relations extend even into old age when Bjami invites Thorkel to live at Hof after his means have given out.

It is Thorkel's wife, Jorun, who has taken the initiative and prodded him into a reconciliation with Bjami. Thorkel does not emerge here as a decisive character or as a man with any forcefulness. The role of Jorun in reconciling the two is also mentioned in *Ljósvetninga saga*, but the interesting thing is that Thorkel is a different character from the one sketched above. In his dealings with Vodu-Brand, a troublesome and difficult man, he is shown to stand up to him, for example when he instructs Brand to improve his behaviour while he is lodging with Thorkel (Chapter 9). He proves to be shrewd when he stands up to Guðmundr very firmly at the district thing in defence of Brand, probably spurred on by Guðmundr's remark to Brodd-Helgi that he, Thorkel, could be disposed of with Guðmundr's left hand. Thorkel succeeds in scattering the court by pretending that he has only five men. The rest of his men are hidden. When the legal argument produces no results, Thorkel gives the signal for the bulk of his supporters to come forward, and they break up the court. The case goes to the Althing where there is no outright winner, and a marriage is arranged for Thorkel with Jorun, thus effecting a reconciliation between the two groups (Chapter 12). The saga writer speaks of Jorun as an outstanding woman who succeeded in doing what no one else had managed to do, namely reconciling Thorkel Geitisson and Bjami, Brodd-Helgi's son. Of Thorkel the saga writer has this to say:

Þorkell bjó í Krossavík til elli ok þótti ávallt inn mesti garpr, þar sem hann kemr við sögur.

(*Íslendinga Sögur*, vol IX, p.146), from which it can be seen that he emerges as a different man from the one he is in *Vápnfirðinga saga*.

The saga writer has cleverly contrasted the characters of Brodd-Helgi and his son Bjami by showing how the overbearing, aggressive nature of Brodd-Helgi, his greed for wealth and his unjust dealings with others all help to perpetuate the feud between him and Geitir. He lives up to the saga writer's description of him at the beginning. Geitir's passivity and lack of assertiveness and decisive action mean that Brodd-Helgi gets away with being an *ójafnaðarmaðr*, because Geitir could stand up to him but he does not. A parallel can be drawn between Geitir and Snorri, since both avoid fighting until they have to, but prefer to show moderation. The aggressive Brodd-Helgi prefers to fight. Brodd-Helgi shows an unpleasant side to his character in the way he treats his ill wife, and his avarice is evident in the way he withholds her dowry and forestalls Geitir's attempts to retrieve it. Brodd-Helgi is harsh rather than gentle, and displays a capacity for extreme behaviour rather than 'hof' in his destruction of the property shared by Thord and Thormod. His meanness causes him to lose the friendship and backing of Guðmundr the Mighty, and is shown in the way in which he exploits 'vinfengi' as a means to an end. Perhaps the saga writer intends to show, when events start working against him, that his type of character is not meant to prosper.

What redeems Geitir in the reader's eyes is his lack of aggression, and the saga writer leaves it up to Geitir to guide the course of events after Brodd-Helgi's death. Unfortunately Bjami kills him against his better judgement, a deed he instantly regrets. Geitir's son Thorkel takes up the feud and persistently tries to engage Bjami in open combat, but Bjami cleverly manages to outwit him. The saga writer shows that reconciliation after a long-standing feud does not happen easily, and a settlement is reached only after a battle and deaths on both sides, but this takes place because of Bjami's

generosity and foresight. Paul Schach points to the triumph of the Christian virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation over the pagan concept of blood vengeance. There is the possibility that as one of Thorkel's descendants was a bishop, the character of Bjami was ennobled by the saga writer and that in real life he was a killer.

The feud and its perpetuation depend on four people: Geitir and Thorkel and Brodd-Helgi and Bjami. It is quite clear from the way in which the feud is portrayed, that the characters determine the way in which it is conducted and revenge is carried out, and eventually how lasting reconciliation is achieved.

CHAPTER 4 : THE CHARACTER OF SNORRI IN EYRBYGGJA SAGA

Eyrbyggja Saga is a district saga dealing with the history of Snæfellsness from the time of the settlement to the beginning of the eleventh century. It deals with the men of Thorsness, Eyrr and Alptafjord. Snorri is the central character in the saga and is a skiful and ambivalent chieftain.

Snorri was born in 963 posthumously to Thorgrim the Priest who was the son of Thorstein Cod-Biter who founded Helgafell where Snorri farmed for many years and the grandson of Thorulf Mostur-Beard from Norway. Snorri's father Thorgrim was killed by his brother-in-law Gisli. The saga writer describes Snorri's birth as taking place a few days after this. He was born to Thorgrim's widow, Thordis, and called Thorgrim after his father. When Thordis remarried, she went to live at Helgafell with Bork the Stout, and her son Thorgrim was sent to Alptafjord to be fostered by Thorbrand. The saga writer describes the boy as follows:

hann var heldr ósvífr í æskunni, ok var hann af því Snerrir kallaðr ok eptir þat Snorri.

(Fornrit IV, Chapter 12, p.20). Both names 'Snerir' and 'Snorri' have similar meanings and denote a turbulent, war-like man. His physical appearance is described as follows:

Snorri var meðalmaðr á hæð ok heldr grannligr, friðr sýnum, réttleitr ok ljóslitaðr, bleikhárr ok rauðskeggjaðr; hann var hógværr hversdagliga; fann lítt á honum, hvárt honum þótti vel eða illa; hann var vitr maðr ok forspár um marga hluti,² langrækr ok heiptúðigr, heilráðr vinum sínum, en óvinir hans þóttusk heldr kulða af kenna ráðum hans.

(Fornit IV, Chapter 15, p26). He was a man of medium height and slender build, handsome, with regular features, a fair complexion, fair hair and a reddish beard. He was usually even-tempered, and it was difficult to tell whether he was pleased or not. He was shrewd and had great foresight and a long memory. He was also characterized by a taste for vengeance. He gave his friends good advice, but his enemies came to fear the advice which he gave them (Pálsson's translation).

At the age of fourteen Snorri goes abroad with his blood-brothers Thorleif Kimbi and Thorodd. On their return there is a great contrast between the outward appearances of Snorri and of Thorleif Kimbi:

En er þeir bjuggusk frá skipi, Breiðfirðingarnir, þá skauzk þar mjök í tvau horn um búnað þeira Snorra ok Þorleifs kimba. Þorleifr keypti þann hest, er hann fekk beztan; hann hafði ok steindan¹ sǫðul allglæsiligan, hann hafði búit sverð ok gullrekit² spjót, myrkblán skjöld ok mjök gyldan, vönduð ǫll klæði; hann hafði þar ok til vart mjök ǫllum sínum farar-efnum; en Snorri var í svartri kápu ok reið svörtu merhrossi góðu; hann hafði fornan trogsǫðul³ ok yápnú lítt til fegrðar búin; búnaðr Þorodds var þar á milli.

(Fornrit IV, Chapter 13, pp.22-23). It is clear that Snorri was not one for outward show as can be seen from his plain and unprepossessing appearance. However, he demonstrates his shrewdness in making it appear that he has no money. Later he produces money when he wants to buy his rightful inheritance from Bork.

Snorri runs into controversy very soon after his return to Iceland when the killing of Gisli causes division in his family because Gisli is the killer of Bork's brother and Snorri's father, but also Thordis's dearly loved brother and Snorri's maternal uncle. Bork is therefore pleased that Gisli is dead, but Snorri takes the side of his mother Thordis. Thordis feels so strongly about the matter that she pierces the thigh of Eyjolf, the man who brought the news about Gisli's death. This deed precipitates anger from Bork who tries to attack Thordis, and increases the bad feeling between Bork and Snorri (Chapter 13).

Snorri shows his strength of will in his dealings with Bork when he demands his inheritance from Bork and decides that he will take the decision about who will buy out whom. Bork was under the impression that Snorri would never have sufficient money to pay for the farm, since he had been deceived by Snorri's appearance on his return to Iceland. Bork sets difficult conditions: the money is to be paid on the spot and the buyer is not allowed to incur debt in order to pay. He obviously thinks that Snorri will never be able to meet the conditions, or have the money. But he underestimates Snorri's shrewdness:

Snorri svarar: „Þess kennir nú at, Borkr frændi, at þér þykkir ek févani, er þú leggur svá ódýrt Helgafellsland, en undir mik kýs ek fõðurleifð mína at þessu verði, ok rétt fram höndina ok handsala mér landit.“ „Eigi skal þat fyrr,“ segir Borkr, „en hverr penningr er fyrir goldinn.“ Snorri mælti til Þorbrands, fõstra síns: „Hvart selda ek þér sjóð nokkurn á hausti?“ „Já,“ segir Þorbrandr ok brá sjóðnum undan kápu sinni.

(Fornrit IV, Chapter 14, p.25). The silver in the purse is enough to pay for the farm and there is still a large sum left over. Bork has no choice but to hand over the farm to Snorm after Snorm has taken him by surprise. Snorm makes it quite clear that Bork is not going to get his own way about the running of the farm, since he tells Bork in no uncertain terms to clear out of Helgafell. Snorm shows that he is strong-willed and determined to get his own way. After this, Thordis divorces Bork on the grounds that he was in the habit of striking her. Perhaps she was encouraged to do so by Snorm's decisive action.

Once Snorm begins farming at Helgafell he establishes himself as a good farmer and has plenty of men to follow him. He acquires power once he becomes a *goði*, and from the outset there are people who envy him bitterly, thinking that they have an even better claim to status and privilege.

Snorm's first case as *goði* at the Thor's Ness Assembly is important because it brings him up against his rival Amkel for the first time. Amkel *goði* is Snorm's chief opponent and rival in the saga. Both men are engaged in a struggle for power beyond the confines of their chieftaincies, and this power struggle later becomes a fight for more and more land which eventually leads to Amkel's death. The saga writer gives a description of Amkel after his

death, and refers to him as the most gifted man under the old faith, i.e. before Iceland's conversion to Christianity. Furthermore he was:

vel skapi farinn,
hjartaprúður ok hverjum manni djarfari, einarður ok all-
vel stilltr; hafði hann ok jafnan inn hæra hlut í mála-
ferlum, við hverja sem skipta var; fekk hann af því
öfundsamt, sem nú kom fram.

(Fomrit IV, Chapter 37, p.103).

In their first encounter Snorri supports his brother-in-law Thorbjorn the Stout who has summoned Geirid the witch of Mavahlid for injuries inflicted on his son Gunnlaug. Arnkel supports his sister Geirid. Snorri and Thorbjorn have their case dismissed which is a great setback for them. At the same assembly Snorri emerges as a peacemaker when he arranges a truce between Illugi the Black and Thorgrim Kjallaksson, and shows that he is generous and honourable by not accepting payment for his help. There also appears to be no advantage to be gained for him in the matter. Here Snorri reveals a very positive side of his character.

The next dispute brings Snorri up against Arnkel again when Snorri takes action over the killing of his brother-in-law Thorbjorn who had charged Geirid's son, Thorarin the Black, with stealing his horses. A battle took place in which Thorarin killed Thorbjorn and a number of his men. Thorarin goes to his uncle, Arnkel, for help, and to Vermund, son of Thorgrim the Priest, because Vermund's brother, Killer-Styr of Hraun, is married to Thorarin's sister. He does this to strengthen his position with kinship support because he knows that Snorri will take revenge for his brother-in-law's death. During the

battle between Thorbjorn and Thorarin, Katla's son Odd had cut off the hand of Thorarin's wife, Aud. Thorarin and Arnkel kill Katla and her son. Arnkel tells Thorarin that there are two ways of dealing with the matter: he must either pay compensation for all the dead and wounded or else go abroad. As Thorarin cannot afford compensation, he decides to go abroad, rather than risk going to the Thing. Snorri summonses Thorarin and all the others involved in the killings to the Thor's Ness Assembly. Then Snorri and his men burn the ship in which Thorarin was due to sail, thereby showing his taste for revenge and living up to the saga writer's description of him. At the Assembly he presses his charges and Thorarin and the others are sentenced to outlawry and all their property is confiscated.

Snorri shows that he is skilful at tactical manoeuvring when he has to deal with a quarrel between Vigfus of Drapuhlid and a shepherd of Snorri's called Helgi. Helgi is knocked senseless by Bjorn, Vigfus's nephew, who is then stabbed by Snorri's uncle. Snorri does not get involved at first. When Vigfus goes to Helgafell and demands compensation for the insult, Snorri says that he is not able to judge between the two incidents, and they part on cool terms. Snorri then skilfully manoeuvres the case in his favour at the Thor's Ness Assembly so that Bjorn is found guilty of assaulting Helgi even though Bjorn was the one who was wounded and he received no compensation for the wound in his arm (Fomrit IV, Chapter 23). Snorri therefore demonstrates his skill as a tactical manipulator who knows exactly how to turn a situation to his own advantage. His shrewdness lies in not rushing in at once and taking action immediately, but in assessing the situation carefully and then becoming involved precisely when he can turn the matters in the direction in which he wants them to go. This is exactly what happened in this incident.

The matter does not end here, because later on Vigfus sends an assassin to kill Snorri, but the killer misses his target and is apprehended. Snorri then kills Vigfus. His widow Thorgerd seeks help from her husband's kinsmen. Arnkel refuses at first and is then shamed into helping her when she follows Vermund's advice to take Vigfus' head to Arnkel:

„Nú skaltu heim fara,“ sagði Vermundr, „ok láta upp grafa Vigfús, bónda þinn; tak síðan höfuð hans ok fær Arnkatli ok seg honum svá, at þetta höfuð myndi eigi við áðra meta at mæla eptir hann, ef þess þyrfti við.“

(Fornrit IV, Chapter 27, p.69). This spurs Arnkel into action but Snorri is shrewd enough to bring a counter-action, saying that Vigfus had been lawfully killed because he had made an attempt on Snorri's life. Snorri is made to pay a large fine which shows that he was not able to win every case. Soon afterwards Snorri does manage to have his sister's seducer, Bjorn Asbrandsson, exiled, and he joins the Jomsvikings. The incident with Vigfus shows that Arnkel is a formidable opponent.

Two Swedish berserks come to Iceland from Norway with Vermund when he returns because he feels that his position will be strengthened if he has the berserks on his side. The earl of Norway warned him that he would find the berserks troublesome, but Vermund takes them with him. It is not long before he regrets his move because they become threatening to him. In an attempt to get rid of them Vermund offers them to Arnkel, saying that they might come in very useful. Arnkel is wise enough to turn down the offer. Vermund presses his brother Styr to take them, on Arnkel's advice. Styr refuses, but Vermund persuades him eventually. At first Styr and the berserks

get on well. When one of the berserks wants to marry Styr's daughter, Asdis, Styr is placed in a predicament and goes to Snorri for advice. When he goes back home, Styr sets the berserk Halli a few difficult tasks to accomplish before he can marry Asdis. But while the berserks are hard at work, Styr has a bath-house built and one evening he persuades them to have a bath. As soon as they are inside the bath-house, Styr seals it off and pours in a lot of water, making it unbearably hot for them. When they rush out, Styr kills them. Afterwards Asdis marries Snorri. The killing of the two berserks on Snorri's advice shows that he is capable of acting cruelly to the point of murder when there is a reward for him. However, Snorri does not suffer a loss of reputation as a result of this shrewd move. The saga writer is fairly explicit about the advantages of this marriage:

gørðarmaðr meiri ok vitrari, en Styrr atgongumeiri;
báðir váru þeir frændmargir ok fjölmennir innan heraðs.
var Snorri goði ráða-

(Fomrit IV, Chapter 28, p.75), which clearly cemented the alliance between them.

The events leading up to Snorri's final encounter and confrontation with Amkel begin when Amkel's father, Thorolf Twist-Foot, takes hay from his neighbour Ulfar and Ulfar appeals to Amkel for help. Amkel reimburses him and takes an equivalent value from his father, namely seven oxen. Thorolf demands payment for the oxen, but Amkel explains his actions, namely that he was covering the cost of the hay. Thorolf threatens to make Ulfar pay dearly because he sees Ulfar as the cause of all the trouble, which of course is not the case because it is Thorolf with his disagreeable temper who started

the argument in the first place. Thorolf's slaves then set fire to Ulfar's house and try to burn Ulfar to death inside. Arnkel steps in, puts out the fire and has the slaves hanged. Jesse Byock refers to the quarrel thus far as 'a neighbourly squabble' which will escalate into something more serious (Tucker, ed., p.191). Ulfar is frightened by the attempt to kill him, and he makes over his property to Arnkel:

Eptir þat
handsalaði Úlfarr Arnkatli fé sitt allt, ok gerðisk hann
þá varnaðarmaðr Úlfars.¹ Þetta handsal líkaði illa Þor-
brandssonum,² því at þeir þóttusk eiga allt fé eptir
Úlfar, leysingja sinn, ok tóksk af þessu fæð mikil með
þeim Arnkatli ok Þorbrandssonum,

(Fomrit IV, Chapter 31, p.84). However, this only causes fresh problems and the whole matter escalates into a dispute which affects the entire community. This is because the Thorbrandssons are the foster-brothers of Snorri and consider that they have a claim to Ulfar's property because Thorbrand freed Ulfar from slavery. The dispute becomes wider and turns into a feud between Arnkel and Thorolf, between Thorolf and Ulfar, and between Arnkel and the Thorbrandssons.

Thorolf Twist-Foot is angry because Arnkel refuses to pay him any compensation for his slaves, and he goes to Helgafell to see Snorri and ask him to prosecute Arnkel for the killing of the slaves. Snorri is initially reticent and hesitant about getting involved:

svarar: „Eigi vil ek ganga í deilu með ykkur feögum.“
Snorri

(Fornrit IV, Chapter 31, p.85). But Thorolf is too wily and too determined to give up. He offers to hand over to Snori Kraka Ness with the wood on it which he claims is the best in the district if he will prosecute for the killing of the slaves:

Snorri þóttisk mjök þurfa skóginn; ok er svá sagt, at hann tók handsölum á landinu ok tók við eptirmáli þrælanna; reið Þórólfr síðan heim ok unði ve við, en þetta mæltisk litt fyrir af öðrum mönnum. |

(Fornrit IV, Chapter 31, p.85). Snori thus lays himself open to bribery. At the Thor's Ness Assembly a settlement is reached whereby Arnkel pays a small amount for each slave. Thorolf accuses Snori of slackness in following up the matter, and the two do not part on good terms.

With the death of Ulfar at the hands of a friend of Thorolf's, the feud deepens. Arnkel reacts quickly and has the murderer killed. Thorolf sends a message to the Thorbrandssons to go to Ulfarsfell and claim their rightful inheritance, but Arnkel is cunning enough to have anticipated this move and he presents the testimony of witnesses who were present when Ulfar signed over his possessions. Arnkel stands firm and warns the brothers to make no further claims, since he regards the property as part of his inheritance. The Thorbrandssons ask Snori for help, but in vain:

| Snorri kvað enn farit hafa sem fyrr, at þeir höfði orðit tafli seinni¹ en Arnkell, — „ok munu þér,“ sagði hann, „eigi þrifa í hendr honum eptir² þessum penningum, með því at hann hefir áðr tekit undir sik lausafé, en löndin liggja yðr öllum jafnnær, ok munu þeir þau hafa, sem handsterkari eru; en þess er þó meiri ván, at Arnkell hafi hér af meira hlut, sem af öðrum yðrum skiptum. |

(Fornit IV, Chapter 32, p.90). Thorleif Kimbi accuses Snorri of not wanting to defend them against Amkel because he, Snorri, is always the loser against Amkel. However, Snorri's prediction that the stronger party will win does come true later. Snorri's assertion that Amkel tramples on everyone's rights in the neighbourhood and will do so as long as he lives can be interpreted as an incitement to violence against Amkel.

Thorolf tries to enlist Amkel's help in claiming Krakaness Wood from Snorri, but Amkel refuses, and Thorolf goes home in a rage and dies. Snorri goes on using the wood but Amkel soon says that Snorri has no legal right to it and that by handing it to him Thorolf was cheating his legal heirs. Amkel sets off to attack Snorri's slaves who are fetching timber and kills Snorri's friend Hauk who attacked Amkel first. Snorri brings a court action but Amkel says that Hauk was guilty of unlawful assault. Snorri loses the case and gets no compensation for Hauk. Amkel proves that he is capable of getting the better of Snorri.

Snorri's prediction that the stronger party will win comes true because after Thorolf's death Amkel acquires his father's farm at Hvammr, and this means that Amkel has gained control of almost all of Alptafjord. In the end Amkel's ambitions are thwarted. There is an attempt on his life by a man sent by Snorri who is later shamed at his own feast into supporting the Thorbrandssons when Thorleif Kimbi draws a comparison between Amkel and Snorri:

„Miklu mestr þykki

mér Arnkell,“ segir hann. „Hvat finnr þú til þess?“ segja þeir. „Þat, er satt er,“ segir hann; „ek kalla, at þar sé sem einn maðr, er þeir eru Snorri goði ok Styrr, fyrir tengða sakar, en engir liggja heimamenn Arnkels ógildir hjá garði hans, þeir er Snorri hefir drepit, sem Haukr, fylgðarmaðr Snorra, liggir hér hjá garði hans, er Arnkell hefir drepit.“]

(Fomrit IV, Chapter 37, pp.98-99). Snorri gives Thorleif Kimbi an axe and the two pledge to kill Amkel. Their opportunity comes when Amkel is away from home at Orlygsstad at night and is surprised by Snorri and the Thorbrandssons who attack and kill him. The outcome of the court case is a success for Snorri and only one man is outlawed. The case is not pursued with great vigour because all the legal heirs to Amkel's estate were women, and it is possibly a sign of Amkel's importance that the law in Iceland was changed so that no women, or men under sixteen years of age, were allowed to bring a manslaughter action ever again. With Amkel's death, Snorri's great rival is gone. Both were ambitious men and both wanted control in the district, and they could not co-exist. With Amkel out of the way, Snorri is now able to extend his power and influence.

Snorri's chief role in the saga after Amkel's death lies in the conflict between the Thorbrandssons and the Thorlakssons. The Thorbrandssons are Snorri's blood-brothers who took his side against Amkel. Another cause of conflict is Bjorn Asbrandsson of Breidavik who has seduced Snorri's sister Thurid whose husband Thorodd has asked Snorri for help. To complicate matters there are fairly trivial disputes as well. Thorleif Kimbi is hit and burnt on the neck on board ship by Ambjorn Asbrandsson, brother of Bjorn. Thorleif

Kimbi is a son of Thorbrand and thus blood-brother to Snorri. Soon afterwards Thord Blig, one of the Thorlakssons, is hit on the neck by a large piece of turf by the Thorbrandssons. The incident happens after Thord Blig has been threatened by Thorleif Kimbi who in turn had been told by Thord that he could not marry his sister Helga until he had avenged the insult caused by the burnt porridge. Snorri and Steinthor step in and act as arbitrators, and both sides manage to settle the dispute fairly satisfactorily.

Snorri continues to play the role of peacemaker between the Thorbrandssons and the Thorlakssons. He even goes so far as to take precautionary measures in order to try to keep the two sides apart. When he sees the six Thorbrandssons fully armed, he does not remain silent:

kvazk mundu lúka ørendum þeira, en bað ^{Snorri} þá fara heim ok glettask eigi við menn; kallar opt lítit þurfa til með þeim monnum, er áðr var fátt í meðal, ef fundi bæri saman.

(Fornrit IV, Chapter 41, p.113). Here Snorri displays positive leadership qualities, perceptiveness and foresight. The Thorbrandssons prove to be more hot-headed than Snorri is because they go to Bakki and try to attack Ambjom in his house. When Snorri and his men arrive in Bakki, he tells the six brothers to leave and not to cause any more trouble while they are with him. They do as he tells them, because they have not managed to get into the house. The Thorbrandssons are unhappy that a fight has been averted. Snorri has made his mark as a leader, an arbitrator and a peacemaker, and he has made it quite clear that he is not precipitating any conflict here or acting as an aggressor up to this point.

However, Snorri reveals his ambivalence in the next episode where the Thorbrandssons tell their slave Egil to kill one of the Breidavik men, Bjorn or Ambjom or Thord, and in return gain his freedom. The saga writer is hesitant and non-committal as to who exactly was behind the idea, but the implication is that it was Snorri:

Þat er sumra manna sagn, at þat væri gort með ráði Snorra goða, ok hafi hann svá fyrir sagt, at hann skyldi vita, ef hann mætti leynask inn í skálaná ok leita þaðan til áverka við menn, ok það hann ganga ofan skarð þat, er upp er frá Leikskálum, ok ganga þá ofan, er máleldar væri górvir, því at hann sagði þat mjök far veðranna, at vindar logðusk af hafi um kveldum, ok helt þá reykinum upp í skarðit, ok það hann þess biða um ofangonguna, er skarðit fylldi af reyk.

(Fornrit IV, Chapter 43, p.116). Unfortunately for Egil he trips over a loose tassel in his shoe and falls, and is killed by Thord and Bjorn. It is this incident with Egil which finally triggers off fighting between the two opposing groups, because when the Breidavik brothers go to pay compensation for the slave as the law demanded, they gather a large force of men and send a man to Snorri to find out his reaction to their large group. Snorri, however, reveals nothing at all about his intentions, thus demonstrating his shrewdness once again.

Steinthor's perception that Snorri's behaviour means that he is quite happy for them to go about their legal business is an underestimation of Snorri's shrewdness. He allows himself to be taken in by Snorri's seemingly passive behaviour. Acting on this misconception, Steinthor leaves behind twenty of his men, although Bjorn warns him not to underestimate Snorri:

Björn svarar: „Eigi mun ek keppask til fylgðar við þik, meir en þér þykkir hæfilegt, en eigi hefi ek þar fyrr verit, at ek hafa liðrækr verit gorr; en þat hygg ek,“ segir hann, „at yðr verði Snorri goði djúpsær í ráðunum, en eigi em ek framsýnn,“ sagði Björn, „en þat er hugboð mitt, at þar komi í þessi ferð, at þér þykki þínir menn eigi ofmargir, áðr en vit finnumsk næst.“

(Fornrit IV, Chapter 43, p.119).

Snorri acts as soon as Steinthor's spy has left, and sails up Alptafjord with nearly fifty men. Once again the Thorbrandssons want to march against their enemies at once, and once again it is Snorri who displays restraint and allows them to conduct their legal business. He is quite adamant about this:

Þá svarar Snorri goði: „Eigi skal þeim verja, bæinn, ok skal Steinþórr ná lögum, því at hann mun vitrliga ok spakliga fara með sínu máli; vil ek, at allir menn sé inni ok kastisk engum orðum á, svá at af því aukisk vandræði manna.“

(Fornrit IV, Chapter 44, p.120). Steinthor brings his twelve ounces of silver and appoints witnesses. The Thorbrandssons are on edge, and pace up and down the room. It takes a chance remark from a woman about Steinthor's impressive appearance and looks to spark off the fighting, with Thorleif Kimbi in the lead. The first blow is exchanged between Thorleif and Thord Blig. It is Snorri who comes out once the fighting is really underway and tells them to stop, rather surprisingly since he has gathered a large force together. Once again he displays his ambivalence. The two sides listen to him and the fighting stops. But when Snorri sees that his son has been wounded by

Steinthor, the Thorbrandssons and Snorri with their supporters go after Steinthor and the fighting begins in earnest. Men passing by try to stop them, but Steinthor strikes Snorri's hand when Snorri extends it to agree to a truce. A resumption of fighting seems likely, but Snorri pleads for peace and Steinthor is urged to agree to terms which he pledges to keep. The two sides are kept apart as the truce was not binding when the men were at home again.

The two sides fight again at Vigrafjord but Snorri is not involved in this battle directly as he is at home when they come to blows. The six Thorbrandssons attack Steinthor of Eyr in a group of nine, with Thorleif Kimbi attacking first. The Thorbrandssons are cut down by Steinthor and his men, and by the time Snorri is alerted, Steinthor has left. Thorleif Kimbi urges Snorri to go after Steinthor and kill the whole party, but Snorri again exercises restraint and he judges from the blood that flowed from Bergthor's wound that it was an internal wound and that Bergthor would therefore be dying, so he decides not to pursue them:

„Pat hygg ek,“ sagði Snorri, „at þetta sé feigs manns blóð, ok munu vér eigi eptir fara.“

(Fornrit IV, Chapter 45, p.129). A settlement is reached in which the deaths and assaults on both sides are paired off, and the settlement was honoured during Snorri's and Steinthor's lifetimes.

Snorri's encounter with his sister's seducer, Bjorn Asbrandsson of Kamb, sees Snorri in the role of aggressor. Thorodd the Tribute-Trader, Thurid's husband, complains to Snorri about Bjorn and tells him it is his duty to stop him. Snorri and eight men ride to Kamb, with Snorri wearing a blue cloak,

making it quite clear that he has come to kill Bjorn. Bjorn's courage and shrewdness save his life, because he is on his own when Snorri appears and he points his knife at Snorri's chest and holds the sleeve of Snorri's cloak. Mar Hallvardsson, whom Snorri has instructed to kill Bjorn, loses his nerve at this display of daring. Instead of fighting, Snorri and Bjorn discuss the situation and reach an agreement that he will leave the district and not visit Thuid any more.

When Christianity comes to Iceland, Snorri plays a prominent role in its adoption. The saga writer records that:

ÞAT er nú næst sagt,² at Gizurr hvíti ok Hjalti, mágr hans,³ kómu út með kristniboð ok allir menn váru skirðir á Íslandi ok kristni var í lög tekin á alþingi, ok flutti Snorri goði mest.við Vestfirðinga, at við kristni væri tekit.⁴ Ok þegar er þingi var lokit, lét Snorri goði gera kirkju at Helgafelli,⁵ en aðra Styrr, mágr hans, undir Hrauni, ok hvatti menn þat mjök til kirkjugörðar, at þat var fyrirheit kennimanna, at maðr skyldi jafnmörgum monnum eiga heimilt rúm í himnaríki, sem standa mætti í kirkju þeirri, er hann léti gera.⁶

(Fornit IV, Chapter 49, p.136). It was Snorri more than anyone else who persuaded the people of the Westfjords to convert to Christianity. He built a church at Helgafell and his father-in-law, Styrr, built one at Hraun. Snorri's role in the new faith does not end here, because when the district is troubled by the hauntings of the ghosts of Thorgunna, Thorir Wood-Leg, Thorodd and their companions and Thorgrima Witch-Face, it is Snorri who takes the lead in banishing them. He sends a priest who was staying at Helgafell to Frodriver, with detailed instructions about how to banish the ghosts. His orders are

carried out exactly and the ghosts get up obediently and leave for good. Snormi assumes the role of a spiritual leader here, acting as a force for peace and the wellbeing of the community.

Snormi has to take action over the killing of his father-in-law, Styr (Chapter 56). He does so in a group of four hundred men, summoning Gest for the killing, but his case is later dismissed at the Althing by Thorstein Gislason whom Snormi kills together with his son Gunnar. At the Thor's Ness Assembly Snormi and Thorstein of Hafsfjord Island confront each other, with Thorstein wanting to kill Snormi whose life is saved by his nephew Kjartan. The quarrel is settled at once and Snormi's terms are very generous because he does not want the case to come before the Althing, seeing that the killing of Thorstein Gislason has not yet been dealt with. Snormi is shrewd enough to reach a compromise and not press the matter further just for the sake of getting his own way.

When a man called Ospak begins raiding the district, plundering, looting and killing as he pleases, Snormi gets involved first when he has Ospak and his men sentenced to outlawry at the Thor's Ness Assembly (Chapters 57-59). After travelling north to Bitra to hold the court of confiscation, Snormi finds that Ospak has gone. Ospak has moved up further north, doing a great deal of damage. After Snormi has divided the property of the outlaws among all the farmers who have suffered from their robberies, he goes back home to Tongue (Chapter 60). When Alf the Short, one of Snormi's supporters, is robbed a second time by Ospak, he runs to Snormi and asks him to take action (Chapter 61). Snormi delays at first, wanting to find out whether Ospak had only scared Alf away or whether he had done anything more. Snormi invites Alf's family to stay with him for the rest of the winter, but:

Snorra goða lofðu honum til ámælis, at hann þótti
seint rétta hlut Álfis; lét Snorri goði þar tala um hvern
þat er vildi, en þó varð eigi at gort. ^{Óvinir}

(Fornit IV, Chapter 61, p.165). Snorri vacillates while Ospak and his men plunder and loot, and eventually he sends a message to Thrand Stigandi, a very fast runner and a strong man, to come to Tongue. Snorri gathers a force of eighty men and they go north to Ospak's stronghold at Eyr. Fierce fighting takes place, and in one sentence the saga writer hints at a reason for Snorri's delay in taking action: to prepare a good supply of weapons to take the fortress. Eventually Ospak and two men are killed and the vikings surrender to Snorri who honours their condition that they will not be maimed or killed. Snorri and his men drive all the vikings away.

The saga writer's last comment on Snorri is:

En er Snorri tók at eldask, þá tóku at vaxa vinsældir hans, ok bar þat til þess, at þá fækkuðusk ofundarmenn hans. Pat bætti um vinsældir, at hann batt tengðir við in mestu stórmenni í Breiðafirði ok viðar annars staðar.

(Fornit IV, Chapter 65, p.180).

The rivalry between Snorri and Arnkel has been the main strand in the saga, and Jesse Byock rightly contends that 'Snorri goði is unsurpassed in saga literature as a manipulator of the tools of survival in Icelandic society, especially the court structure with its system of law and personal alliance. ... He repeatedly plays the role of an advocate, manipulating the problems of others to his own best interest, as well as to the advantage of his friends'

(Jesse Byock in Tucker, ed., p.195 and p.186). Snorri plays a variety of roles throughout his life, many of them contradictory, and he remains an ambivalent figure to the end. He is a shrewd calculator, a brave fighter and a peacemaker, yet he is also open to bribery and he sends a criminal to kill his enemy. He is a pagan priest, yet more than anyone else he persuades the Icelanders to adopt the new faith. He acts with caution and restraint and exercises the virtue of 'hof'. Possibly his most notable feature is what Andersson calls 'his political stamina' (Andersson, p.161).

Snorri is not a straightforward character. He has in him a mixture of good and bad, and he is neither wholly one nor wholly the other. He helps others, at times when he can turn the situation to his own advantage as with the berserks, and at other times when there is no advantage for him in the situation.

When the saga writer comments in Chapter 65 that 'the older Snorri grew, the better people came to like him' (Pálsson, translation, p.164), he hints at some development which his character appears to have undergone. One of the reasons given for this is that Snorri's enemies were dwindling in number. The reader is left to make the inference that Snorri was also not making new enemies, which reinforces one's perception of him as a peacemaker, a role which he played very effectively as has been illustrated above. In the sense that this represents a movement away from his turbulent, difficult nature as a child, his character has developed. However, he retains his shrewdness into old age since he is clever enough to enter into marriage alliances with leading people in Breidafjord and other places, thereby increasing his standing. From the analysis given above of Snorri's role in dealing with Ospak, it is clear that he retains his ambivalence. He sits back and takes no action while people

criticize him for being so slow and indecisive. In this sense Snorri has not undergone transformation, and he exhibits 'contradictory impulses' all his life (Pálsson, p.11): he is a fighter and a man of peace, he acts honourably but also selfishly and dishonourably when it suits him to do so, he acts decisively at times and at others he sits back and does nothing. He is one of the most interesting and outstanding figures in saga literature.

CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSION

In the characters which have been discussed there is little in the way of character development, except in the case of Snorri. To the modern reader who is accustomed to reading novels, the personalities in the sagas seem flat. What does emerge from the family sagas is that once a person has been introduced as good or bad, he will be shown to exemplify some or all of these characteristics in the course of the saga narrative. This process is revealed in the way in which he interacts.

From the first introduction to the end Gunnlaug is haughty, overtly concerned with his honour and a bragger. He is the same person at the ages of twelve and eighteen as he is when he dies, which means that there has been no real transformation. The same can be said about Brodd-Helgi and Geitir. Brodd-Helgi remains truculent, greedy, aggressive and unjust to the end. Geitir remains unassertive and indecisive and consequently rather ineffectual. Bjarni is a killer in real life although he changes at the end into a generous man who makes a concerted effort to achieve reconciliation with Thorkel Geitisson. However, it is doubtful whether this represents real character development. It is probably the author's slant from a later period emphasizing the Christian importance of reconciliation. Thorkel too undergoes no development and remains a vengeful, though indecisive man. It is in *Ljósvetninga saga* that he appears as a man of substance and forcefulness, although this is probably the author's view of him.

Some characters have other qualities in addition to the dominant qualities, and Snorri is the character who is more fleshed out than the others discussed here. He is not a flat character like Gunnlaug, but reveals aspects

which give him some complexity. He embodies the virtue of 'hof' and displays restraint and moderation in his dealings. He knew the importance of compromise and the role it played as an instrument of survival in Icelandic society. He is ambivalent and displays a variety of features which add to his complexity and show that his character is made up of many strands.

It is no wonder that Robert Cook concludes that 'sane, judicious weighing of human character ... is the hallmark of the family sagas' (Cook, p.21). A study of characterization is the key to understanding the family sagas. The characters discussed above present an example of the variety of personalities dealt with in the sagas and it can be seen that they are realistic figures who reveal themselves in the sagas as actual people.

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