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EYRBYGGJA SAGA AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY SCHOLARSHIP

It may be instructive to look at one of the best known of the Sagas of Icelanders, and see what nineteenth-century scholarship (using that word in a fairly broad sense) made of it. I did not undertake this task in the confidence that any grand overall pattern would emerge, and I do not now believe that one does emerge. But it may be thought a proper act of piety, within the Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference, to mention some of the great scholars of the past, who have made the efforts of present-day scholarship possible. We shall be praising, to use the words of Ecclesiasticus, not merely famous men but our fathers that begat us.

Chronologically, our story starts with the first printed edition of Eyrbyggja Saga, edited by Thorkelín and appearing in Copenhagen in 1787, and with Scott's Abstract of the saga, published in Edinburgh in 1814. But let us begin with an even more prestigious name than those of Grímur Thorkelín and Sir Walter Scott, that of the Emperor Napoleon. One of the key manuscripts of the saga comes from the Wolfenbüttel Library.[1] Árni Magnússon was enabled to transcribe it through his friendship with Leibnitz. In 1806, after the decisive battle of Jena, Napoleon ransacked the Wolfenbüttel Library and carried this manuscript off to Paris. He had

his stamp put on it in two places, and it was only after his fall in 1814 that it was restored to its rightful owners.[2] I suppose that stealing manuscripts is a scholarly activity, of an unorthodox sort, and certainly Napoleon, if the story is true that in his own library the Bible and the Koran were classified under "Politics", used his exalted position to give practical expression to his rather downright views on scholarly questions. My story has no logical terminal date, since it is upon the basis of nineteenth-century scholarship that more recent work on the saga, such as Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's Íslenzk Fornrit edition, the Schach and Hollander translation, and critical work by men like Theodore Andersson and G.N. Garmonsway, has been built.[3] But as a concluding figure I select Konrad von Maurer. He is a typical late nineteenth-century figure: his life-span corresponds, within a year or two at each end, with that of Queen Victoria, and, more important, his work is an epitome of much that is best in nineteenth-century German scholarship.

I divide my theme in three: first, editions of the saga; second, translations and adaptations; and finally, a few scholarly and critical comments. I put Sir Walter Scott in the third section, since I believe that his comments on the saga retain a good deal of interest for us.

I

The first edition of Eyrbyggja Saga appeared in Copenhagen in 1787,[4] though in fact the Latin translation

that accompanied it had been done ten years previously.[5] The work could be described as an early fruit of the royal charter issued to the Arnamagnæan Commission in 1760. But we ought to remember that the Commission's publishing programme, like many since, was costly and slow. We owe the edition of Eyrbyggja Saga, and three other editions of Old Icelandic texts, to the generosity of the historian P.F. Suhm, who paid for them and turned them over to the Commission. The overall editor of Eyrbyggja was Grímur Thorkelín, one of the Icelanders domiciled in Copenhagen. The edition, like others at the time, was a co-operative job, and it is not completely clear who did what. But I take the text and translation to be essentially Thorkelín's. He was in his thirties when the edition appeared and in his twenties, therefore, when the translation was made. He offered the work to the reader as the "first essay of my youth consecrated to the immortal muses".[6] The preface is brief, with a certain amount of information about manuscripts; and it offers what is perhaps to this day the only suggestion about dating this saga that commands pretty general assent, namely that the saga can be dated to before 1264, in "that golden age, sacred not less to the Muses and Apollo than to Mars, before our island came under the Norwegian sceptre".[7] By modern standards there is an absence of scholarly apparatus, but footnotes provide a great battery of variant readings.

It would be impossible to over-estimate the significance of the editions published in Denmark in this period. Other highlights were the publication of Njáls Saga (text in 1772, Latin translation in 1809) and of Laxdœla Saga in 1826. The texts of the Sagas of Icelanders became available to the whole world of scholars, and the Latin versions assisted translations into the modern languages. The importance of this is world-wide, but may be illustrated with particular reference to Great Britain. If you asked an educated Britisher of the late eighteenth century what the phrase "Old Norse Literature" brought to his mind, it is odds on that it is the figure of Ragnarr Loðbrók that would writhe its way into view. Today, the educated Britisher might think of Njáll or of Grettir. The real world of medieval Iceland, no less grand than the legendary and mythological one, has been opened to us, and it is with these early editions that this momentous development begins.

The next full edition appeared in Leipzig in 1864, and again it was the work of an emigré Icelander, Guðbrandur Vigfússon.[8] It comes at the end of his first period of editing, and of the first phase in his scholarly life. Previously he had been in Copenhagen, first as a student and then as stipendiarius Arnamagnæanus. In 1864, the year his edition of Eyrbyggja appeared, Sir George Dasent persuaded him to go to London to begin his work on the Icelandic-English Dictionary (published in Oxford ten years

later).[9] The edition shows other distinguished circles in which Vigfússon moved. His friend Theodor Möbius of Leipzig saw the book through the press, and the dedication is to another Icelander and friend of student days, Jón Sigurðsson.[10] Sigurðsson is best known generally (though not as generally as he ought to be) as the central figure in the nineteenth-century Icelandic independence movement.[11] He was also the man who fought a rear-guard action against Worsaae and the opportunist archaeologists when they grabbed the funds of Det nordiske Oldskrift-Selskab.[12] It was Jón Sigurðsson too, who taught Vigfússon his method of temporarily bringing up the faded letters of manuscripts. As Vigfússon says, the method involved no chemical reagents, but a saucer of pure water in which the vellum was placed.[13] These were gentlemanly scholars, and their method did not involve spitting on the manuscript, as I believe has been practised in some quarters.

In development of editorial technique, the eighty years that separate Thorkelín from Vigfússon seem a much longer span of time than does the full century that divides Vigfússon from us. Vigfússon presents us with a recognisably modern critical edition. It may be true that, as the later editor Gering says, Vigfússon's textual modus operandi is too simple.[14] He follows one transcript of the Vatnshyrna text, whose original was lost in the 1728 fire, and emends it from other manuscripts, to quote Gering, "here and there ... and certainly not always happily".

But at least he did have a modus operandi. And his valuable introduction contains full discussions of the transmission of the manuscripts, of the date, style and composition of the saga, and of the orthographic and phonological features peculiar to each of the various manuscripts. As an example of his thoroughness in this last matter, when he suggests an isogloss for /v/ occurring before /r/, he mentions its presence in the language of much of southern Norway, and cites Ivar Aasen's Norsk Grammatik, which appeared in the same year as his own edition.[15] Vigfússon's introduction reflects his worries about the apparently multifarious nature of the saga, and its lack of a clear narrative line.[16] He uses what Lee Hollander calls "nineteenth-century 'higher criticism' "[17] to explain the saga's lack of coherence by distinguishing several interpolated passages: it is an interesting hypothesis, but, if one does not share Vigfússon's worries about the coherence of the saga, then the necessity for some such hypothesis may be thought to disappear.

I come now to two editions published in Iceland. The significance of these is obvious. In Iceland, an edition was of value to the reading public at large, not merely to scholars, and Halldór Hermannsson has described how keenly the difficulty of obtaining the Sagas of Icelanders was felt in the late nineteenth century.[18] Þorleifur Jónsson published his edition of Eyrbyggja at Akureyri in 1882.

The text of this edition contains some errors, since Þorleifur was prevented from checking the edition as he would have wished.[19] When Valdimar Ásmundarson published his own edition of the saga at Reykjavík in 1895, he mentioned that he had just received from Þorleifur the material prepared for a second version of Þorleifur's edition.[20] I know no evidence that this second version appeared, which suggests that Þorleifur felt that Valdimar had fully catered for Icelandic demand for this saga. Valdimar's edition was volume 12 in a series of thirty-eight little books, the overall title of the series being Íslendinga sögur. These appeared between 1892 and 1902. Their appearance was very welcome to Icelanders, and credit for it is to be divided between the publisher, Sigurður Kristjánsson, and Valdimar himself, a journalist and the editor of the entire series.[21]

Both these editions published in Iceland were based on Vigfússon's edition rather than on the manuscripts, though both editors, and Þorleifur in particular, suggested some corrected readings for the verses. But of course the essentially derivative nature of these editions did not at all detract from their specifically Icelandic purpose.

In 1897 Hugo Gering published his edition of Eyrbyggja at Halle. This was volume 6 of an imposing series of annotated editions, the Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek, which had been begun in 1892, and of which Gering was one of the general editors.[22] He dedicated his Eyrbyggja to Barend

Sijmons, the Dutchman who was to edit the Poetic Edda.

Some of the scholars with whom I am dealing might not have relished an International Saga Conference, but I imagine that Gering would have done. Enough differing ideas about Eyrbyggja had been expressed by his day for him to have great scope for marshalling and drilling them like a squad of recruits. On the question of the manuscript stemma, one which interested him particularly and where he sought to bring a new precision to the discussion, he became, I suppose, one of the first to accuse Guðbrandur Vigfússon of sometimes letting his imagination run away with him. He specifically charged Vigfússon with making "frivolous assertions" (leichtfertige Behauptungen).

II

To turn to the translations. Danish was the first modern language in which Eyrbyggja appeared in full translation. N.M. Petersen translated ten of the more important Sagas of Icelanders and these appeared in four volumes, the Historiske Fortællinger, published by Det nordiske Oldskrift-Selskab in the years 1839-44. Eyrbyggja is to be found in the fourth volume. These were very popular books in Denmark. A publishing house took them over, and there was a second edition in the 1860s edited by Guðbrandur Vigfússon, and a third edition in 1901 in which Finnur Jónsson had a hand.[24] It is interesting that even at the

time of first publication Petersen's versions had their critics, and in his notes at the back of Eyrbyggja, he took the opportunity to defend himself against critics of his earlier volumes, one of whom wanted him to adopt a more polished style, and another of whom urged on him a more popular style.[25] In the 1920s once again, the shortcomings of the Petersen translations were pin-pointed by, for instance, the novelist Gunnar Gunnarsson, and the result of this was the formation in 1927 of a Society for Publishing Icelandic Sagas in Danish, in order to supersede Petersen.[26] Without seeking to make a detailed comparison between the Petersen translations and the translations into English by Morris and Magnússon, I would say that there is a similarity at least in the following respect: in each case a set of translations that had introduced the sagas to very many people over a long period was in due time superseded, a very proper scholarly development. But further, this supersession in each case took place amid a certain amount of denigration of, and ingratitude towards, the old versions, which is a typically scholarly occurrence too, but perhaps not such a proper one.

C.J.L. Lönnberg may have hoped to do in Swedish what Petersen had achieved in Danish. His translation of Eyrbyggja was published in Stockholm in 1873, as the second volume in a planned series of Fornnordiska sagor. He says in his introduction that other translations, including one of Njáls Saga are in hand.[27] But these did not appear,

and the work of Swedish translation was taken up by others.

The most famous nineteenth-century translators of the sagas into English were, of course, William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon. Their Saga Library - by no means their first venture in the field - was issued in six volumes from London in the years 1891 to 1906. The first two volumes contained five Sagas of Icelanders, and the rest of the series was devoted to their translation of Heimskringla. Eyrbyggja Saga and Heiðarvíga Saga are together in volume 2, the translations being called "The Story of the Ere-Dwellers, with the Story of the Heath-Slayings". It is worth noting how the translators provided an introduction and indexes on a scale that probably few publishers of translations would encourage today. In the introduction to Eyrbyggja Morris and Magnússon subscribe to the theory of interpolations in the saga.[28] They instance the fact that the last eighteen years of Snorri goði's life are not covered by the saga, and suggest that to fill the supposed gap someone has "dashed in" the two chapters that tell about the bull Glæsir, and the last news of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi. One wonders if they were at all uneasy as they added this comment on the interpolations: "The language of these chapters, however, appears in no marked manner to differ from the rest of the book, so they must be from a contemporary hand."

The dispute over the quality of the Morris and

Magnússon translations is well known.[29] In the introduction to their 1959 translation of Eyrbyggja, Schach and Hollander put forward a view that most people would have some sympathy with. They say that the Morris and Magnússon translation of this saga, "because of the unfortunate misconconception ... that the sagas require an antiquarian language flavoured with English dialecticisms, is almost unreadable today".[30] Now we did need a mid-twentieth-century translation, and are grateful to Schach and Hollander for providing it. But perhaps they are a wee bit hard on their predecessors. Morris as a translator was interested in linguistic creation as well as in linguistic conservation. And the Morris and Magnússon version of Eyrbyggja was read by many people with great pleasure at the time. I am inclined to side with Cowan and Hamer in their view that even today "the persistent reader will discover that Morris's prose has a compelling power".[31]

One of the most interesting comments on the Morris and Magnússon translations comes from Robert Louis Stevenson, the Scottish writer who was resident in the South Pacific when the translation appeared. A letter that Stevenson sent to Morris is worth quoting in full. It was inspired by the volume of the Saga Library containing the translations of Eyrbyggja and Heiðarvíga saga. It displays some of the reservations that later scholars have had about the Morris and Magnússon translations. But above all it exhibits

Stevenson's gratitude for the way that the Saga Library had made the sagas available to readers of English: [32]

> MASTER, - A plea from a place so distant should have some weight, and from a heart so grateful should have some address. I have been long in your debt, Master, and I did not think it could be so much increased as you have now increased it. I was long in your debt and deep in your debt for many poems that I shall never forget, and for Sigurd before all, and now you have plunged me beyond payment by the Saga Library. And so now, true to human nature, being plunged beyond payment, I come and bark at your heels.
>
> For surely, Master, that tongue that we write, and that you have illustrated so nobly, is yet alive. She has her rights and laws, and is our mother, our queen, and our instrument. Now in that living tongue where has one sense, whereas another. In the Heathslayings Story, p. 241, line 13, it bears one of its ordinary senses. Elsewhere and usually through the two volumes, which is all that has yet reached me of this entrancing publication, whereas is made to figure for where.
>
> For the love of God, my dear and honoured Morris, use where, and let us know whereas we are, wherefore our gratitude shall grow, whereby you shall be the more honoured wherever men love clear language, whereas now, although we honour, we are troubled.
>
> Whereunder, please find inscribed to this very impudent but yet very anxious document, the name of one of the most distant but not the youngest or the coldest of those who honour you ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

And in another letter, Stevenson said apropos the Saga Library: "I cannot get enough of Sagas; I wish there were nine thousand; talk about realism!"[33]

Stevenson was inspired by Eyrbyggja to write a story called The Waif Woman, closely based on the Þórgunna episode and the hauntings at Fróðá.[34] He is even more relentless in his handling of characters than is the author of the saga, since not only Þórgunna's host but also her hostess, the characters equivalent to Þóroddr and Þuríðr in the saga, meet their deaths through disregarding Þórgunna's instructions, and the curse is lifted only by the next generation, their son and daughter. Stevenson intended this story for his collection Island Nights' Entertainments, but his wife dissuaded him from publishing it, and it appeared only after his death. It may well be that her argument was the straightforward one, that the story is too closely derivative from the saga. But the mainspring of the action in this part of the saga, and in Stevenson's adaptation, is the harm that comes from a wife's greed and her husband weak acquiescence in her demands. At least one critic has been unchivalrous enough to suggest that it was this that Mrs Stevenson, a bit of a character by all accounts, could not stomach.[35]

There were various nineteenth-century translations (as well as editions) of parts of the saga, by people interested in the settlement of Iceland, or Greenland and American voyaging, or ghosts.[36] I shall mention only one. In 1897

the Scots writer and folklorist, Andrew Lang, published a miscellaneous Book of Dreams and Ghosts. He needed a translator for his Gaelic and Old Norse material, and he chose W.A. Craigie. Craigie, later the great lexicographer, and an Old Norse scholar revered both in Scotland and in Iceland, was then about thirty. Among the material he translated for Lang was the account in Eyrbyggja of the marvels at Fróðá.[37]

It may be instructive to compare part of the account of the first marvel at Fróðá, as given in four nineteenth-century translations and in one recent one. The passage occurs in Chapter 51 of the saga in the Íslenzk Fornrit edition, but I quote the text of Guðbrandur Vigfússon's edition, on which three of the translations were based - Lönnberg's, Morris and Magnússon's, and almost certainly Craigie's. It will be seen that Schach and Hollander follow Einar Ólafur Sveinsson[38] in preferring the reading "Þóroddr", from several manuscripts, to the reading "Þuríðr", from the Vatnshyrna-derived manuscripts.

Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1864).

... sá menn, at blóði hafði rignt í skúrinni. Um kveldit gjörði þerri góðan, ok þornaði blóðit skjótt á heyinu öllu, nema því er Þórgunna þurkaði; þat þornaði eigi, ok aldri þornaði hrífan er hón hafði haldit á. Þuríðr spurði hvat Þórgunna ætlar, at undr þetta man benda. Hón kvaðst eigi þat vita, en þat þykkir mér

líkligast, segir hón, at þetta mundi furða nökkurs þess manns, er hér er.

N.M. Petersen (1944).

Man saae da, at det havde regnet Blod; men da det blev godt Tørrevejr om Aftenen, saa tørredes Blodet snart af alt det andet Hø, men Thorgunnes blev ikke tørt, og heller ikke den Rive, hun havde holdt paa. Thuride spurgte hende, hvad hun mente, dette Under skulde betyde; hun svarede, hun vidste det ikke, men dette maatte varsle Ondt for nogen i Huset.

C.J.L.Lönnberg (1873).

...folk såg, att det hade regnat blod under skuren. Om qvällen blef det godt torkväder, och blodet torkade hastigt på allt höet, utom på det, som Torgunna räfsade; det torkade icke, och aldrig torkade räfsan, som hon hade hållit i. Turid sporde, hvad Torgunna tänkte, att detta under månde betyda. Hon sade sig icke veta det; "men det tyckes mig likligast", yttrar hon, "att detta månde vara varsel för någons död af dem, som här äro."

William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon (1892).

Then men saw that it had rained blood in that shower. But that evening good drying weather set in again, and the blood dried off all the hay but that which Thorgunna had spread; that dried not, or the rake either

which she had handled. Thurid asked Thorgunna what she thought that wonder might forbode. She said that she wotted not. "But that seems to me most like," says she, "that it will be the weird of some one of those that are here."

W.A. Craigie (1897).

...it was seen that blood had fallen amid the rain. In the evening there was a good draught, and the blood soon dried off all the hay except that which Thorgunna had been working at; it did not dry, nor did the rake that she had been using.

Thurid asked Thorgunna what she supposed this marvel might portend. She said that she did not know, "but it seems to me most likely that it is an evil omen for some person who is present here".

P. Schach and L.M. Hollander (1959).

Then people saw that it had rained blood. During the evening the weather again became good for drying the hay, and the blood quickly dried on all the hay except where Thorgunna had been working. There the blood did not dry, nor did it ever dry on the rake she had been using.

Thórodd asked Thorgunna what she thought this strange occurrence might signify. She said she did not know - "but it seems most likely to me," she replied, "that it

forebodes the death of someone here."

No doubt nothing dramatic emerges from the comparison. But one sees that even the small piece of Morris and Magnússon given here is characteristic. Some people might be happy to do without "wotted" and "weird", but on the other hand the construction "dried not", "wotted not" shows the translators seeking the effect of the Old Norse construction with eigi, a construction that is available to Scandinavian translators. This particular piece of archaic English syntax occurs at points in the passage where economy of style is surely particularly appropriate: whether we like their work or not, we can see that Morris and Magnússon were more alive than many translators to the fact that literary effects are produced by particular linguistic means, and that a good translation reflects this.

III

I shall now turn to a few of the scholars who have contributed to the general discussion on Eyrbyggja. In 1814 Sir Walter Scott published his Abstract of the saga, incorporating comments on it, in the volume called Illustrations of Northern Antiquities.[39] This book was an early exercise in the study of comparative literature. Scott's backing for the book, which was compiled by two of his friends, Henry Weber and Robert Jamieson, shows that he was as whole-hearted a promoter of interest in medieval litera-

ture as he was himself a student of it. The Edinburgh publishers were, reasonably enough, sceptical about the potential appeal of such a book, but Scott nevertheless prevailed on Longman of London and John Ballantyne of Edinburgh to bring it out. Henry Weber was a refugee from the same troubles in Germany that had led to the Wolfenbüttel manuscript's going to Paris. Scott employed him as a secretary, and after Weber's complete mental collapse in 1814, Scott supported him for the rest of his life.[40] Weber contributed material on the Nibelungenlied and the Deutsches Heldenbuch to the Illustrations of Northern Antiquities. Robert Jamieson contributed material on Danish and other ballads, which, as he and Scott appreciated, bore a family relationship to the Scottish ballads. Scott's contribution to the book was his Abstract of Eyrbyggja. In this single piece of work, Scott showed that, despite sharing his contemporaries' over-romanticised picture of the bloodthirsty Viking, and despite having only a limited knowledge of the vocabulary of Old Norse, and a minimal knowledge of its morphology and syntax, he was nevertheless as a critic capable of seizing upon the essential qualities of one of the Sagas of Icelanders.

My explanation of Scott's insight is that he and the author of Eyrbyggja had a close literary kinship: both were social realists. This is not the place to debate whether the author of this saga or the writers of others were realists in the sense in which Georg Lukács saw

Scott as a realist - that he bore truthful and unflinching witness to the most crucial social changes.[41] I think it safer simply to assert that Scott and the author of Eyrbyggja were both social realists in the more limited sense used by W.H. Auden (when writing specifically about the sagas): [42] "The social realist begins by asking: 'What do I know for certain about my fellow human beings?' and his answer is: 'What they do and say in the presence of others who can bear witness to it.'" Perhaps not everyone will be convinced by this demonstration of literary kinship. But in any case the reader may reach a lower estimate than mine of Scott's ability as a saga critic, and the need to account for Scott's perspicacity will thus be removed.

Scott starts his account of Eyrbyggja with a bad error, because, following Thorkelín in saying that the saga was written before 1264, he describes this as the period "when Iceland was still subject to the dominion of Norway".[43] In fact, of course, the 1260s saw the formal beginning of this subjection. Scott could be a careless writer, and probably knew the truth perfectly well.

He next tells the story of the saga with gusto, and has great fun with the ghosts at Fróðá. But it is, paradoxically, as historian, lawyer, and literary realist that he is best pleased with the ghosts, and with the duradómr, the court set up to expel the ghosts: here, Scott feels, light is cast on the way that Icelandic society worked. If the

Icelanders took even ghosts to court, then despite all their feuding, their respect for the law must have been considerable. In the course of a long description of the duradómr, Scott says:[44]

> All the solemn rites of judicial procedure were observed on this singular occasion; evidence was adduced, charges given, and the cause formally decided...it is the only instance in which the ordinary administration of justice has been supposed to extend over the inhabitants of another world, and in which the business of exorcising spirits is transferred from the priest to the judge. Joined to the various instances in the Eyrbiggia-Saga, of a certain regard to the forms of jurisprudence, even amid the wildest of their feuds, it seems to argue the extraordinary influence ascribed to municipal law by this singular people, even in the very earliest state of society.

I do not wish, on the basis of Scott's random comments, to overstress his modernity as a saga critic, still less to suggest that any of the subsequent debate on the big questions he touches on has been a waste of time. Some of the big questions occur to a fairly casual reader, but it is only amid intensive and prolonged scholarly debate that we can each work out our own considered conclusions.

On the historicity of Eyrbyggja, for instance, Scott says merely that "the name of the author is unknown, but the simplicity of his annals seems a sufficient warrant for their fidelity".[45] We know that this assessment is insufficient in itself: Scott is thinking of the historicity of a history-book, and not the historicity of a work of literature. Scott's point is not the same as, say, Liestøl's remark that "the family sagas claim to be history", which as Theodore Andersson argues is "an aesthetic statement aimed at clarifying the relation of the saga writer to his material".[46] Still, one does have the feeling that, for realists like the author of Eyrbyggja and Sir Walter Scott, historical and literary truth would be found at the deepest level to take their source from a common spring. But then that is an aesthetic statement too.

Scott is very interesting on the problem of coherence in Eyrbyggja. Theodore Andersson says that "Eyrbyggja saga is the most amorphous and troublesome of the family sagas".[47] And at least three different critical emphases, over the years, have encouraged us to believe that this saga is basically incoherent and disparate in its materials. Firstly, there is the stress that, as we have seen, Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Eiríkur Magnússon placed upon supposed interpolations. Then there is the emphasis on the saga's function as history: G.N. Garmonsway described it as "a series of 'provincial annals', giving the whole work the

impersonal character of a chronicle",[48] and Felix Niedner has written that "none of the greater Sagas of Icelanders is to such an extent history and in such small degree a novel as that of Snorri goði".[49] Finally, there is G. Turville-Petre's kindly emphasis on the artlessness of the saga: "it is a series of scenes and stories, which follow the disordered course of life itself."[50]

Nevertheless, and purely as a reader responding to the saga, I feel that it does have a basic unity. Two recent critics, Lee M. Hollander and Véstein Ólason, favour this point of view.[51] Lee M. Hollander stresses the saga author's technique of interbraiding many strands of narrative, and suggests that this produces an effect like "the leisurely amplitude of the English Victorian novel". And he cites Konrad von Maurer and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson in support of his views. He could have gone farther back and cited the father of the Victorian social novel himself, Sir Walter Scott.

Scott's comments show that he saw the thematic unity of the saga as lying in its depiction of a society in process of development. He writes:[52]

> (These annals) contain the history of a particular territory of the Island of Iceland, lying around the promontory called Snæfells, from its first settlement by emigrants from Norway: and the chronicle details, at great length, the feuds which took place among

> the families by which the land was occupied, the advances which they made towards a more regular state of society, their habits, their superstitions, and their domestic laws and customs.

The community of Snæfellsnes is for Scott in one sense the main character in the saga.

And if Scott and the author of Eyrbyggja are realists as I have suggested, we will not be surprised if Scott's remarks on the personality and rôle of Snorri goði are pertinent. For Snorri goði is, in his unobtrusive way, the symbol of the saga's unity. He does not hold the centre of the stage as a tragic hero does: when he disappears for a chapter or two, we imagine him in the wings, patiently building up his political power base. His place in society and his place in the saga are the same, unobtrusive but central. Scott puts it thus: [53]

> That such a character, partaking more of the jurisconsult or statesman than of the warrior, should have risen so high in such an early period, argues the preference which the Icelanders already assigned to mental superiority over the rude attributes of strength and courage, and furnishes another proof of the early civilisation of this extraordinary commonwealth. In other respects the character of Snorro (sic) was altogether unamiable, and blended with strong traits of the savage. Cunning and

> subtlety supplied the place of wisdom, and an earnest and uniform attention to his own interests often, as in the dispute between Arnkill and his father, superseded the ties of blood and friendship. Still, however, his selfish conduct seems to have been of more service to the settlement in which he swayed, than would have been that of a generous and high-spirited warrior who acted from the impulse of momentary passion.

Edith Batho has pointed out that Scott twice laid aside unfinished the draft of his first novel Waverley, and then finished it in a rush a few months after completing the Abstract of Eyrbyggja.[54] She suggests that the saga may have served as a powerful unconscious stimulus to Scott at the time when he became a novelist. This hypothesis cannot be proved, but in view of the type of novelist that Scott became, it is a particularly fascinating hypothesis.

Peter Erasmus Müller fitted Eyrbyggja into place in his Sagabibliothek, published in Copenhagen in the years 1817 to 1820.[55] This work is perhaps the first overall attempt made since the seventeenth century to classify the sagas, and within the general category of Sagas of Icelanders Müller carefully explains links between them. He shows, for example, which of the characters of Eyrbyggja are to be found in other sagas, and in turn which other texts and authorities are referred to in Eyrbyggja itself. While many of Müller's suggestions for dating the sagas have

been discounted by later writers - and this reflects no discredit whatsoever on a pioneering book - his preference for a fairly early thirteenth-century date for Eyrbyggja is something to which Einar Ólafur Sveinsson has returned.[56]

A very useful piece of work on the saga was contributed in 1861 to the second volume of Safn til sögu Íslands. This was an article by Árni Thorlacius on the locations mentioned in the saga.[57] Eyrbyggja is particularly fitted for this treatment. Árni Thorlacius showed that the local knowledge of nineteenth-century Icelanders often stretched back with remarkable strength over most of a millennium. But even in Iceland some doubts as to the exact locations mentioned in a saga will arise after that lapse of time, and it was therefore valuable to prevent further loss of knowledge by committing it to print. One example from his article may be given: he gives the exact location of Arnkelshaugr, the burial mound of Arnkell goði, gives its measurements, says that it has borne its correct name as long as can be remembered, and adds that it is now overgrown with grass and shows signs of caving in or having been broken into. In this type of study, there is clearly no substitute, as Árni showed, for local knowledge plus local investigation.

Towards the end of the century we have a contrast in scholarship: on the one hand, the light and brilliant touch of W.P. Ker; on the other, the achievement of Konrad von Maurer, a monumental achievement in the best

sense of that phrase.

If W.P. Ker's leisurely approach to medieval literature, as exemplified in his Epic and Romance, first published in 1897, has not made him unfashionable in the very different world of today, then it must be because he has the cardinal virtue of the literary critic. We respond with him to the works he deals with, and we come to understand his reasons for his responses, particularly for his enthusiasms. He seeks to restore to us the responses of the original audience of Eyrbyggja, or, better, of the audience of the Sagas of Icelanders as a group. He makes a relevant comparison with the works of Balzac as a whole:[58]

> This solidarity and interconnexion of the Sagas needs no explanation. It could not be otherwise in a country like Iceland; a community of neighbours ... The effect in the written Sagas is to give them something like the system of the Comédie Humaine. There are new characters in each, but the old characters reappear ... [He instances the appearances of Gudmund the Great, and then adds:] So also Snorri the Priest, whose rise and progress are related in Eyrbyggja, appears in many other Sagas, and is recognised whenever he appears with the same certainty and the same sort of interest as attaches to the name of Rastignac, when that politician is introduced in stories not properly his own. Each separate mention of Snorri the Priest finds

its place along with all the rest; he is never unequal to himself.

The great Munich scholar Konrad von Maurer was basically a jurist and legal historian, who wrote massively on the Old Norse legal system.[59] But that does not mean that saga scholars can assign him, however honourably, to a box labelled "auxiliary studies". Not only did he edit some texts himself, but in 1871 he published an exemplary study of one of the Sagas of Icelanders. This was his article, "Über die Hœnsa-Þóris Saga", in the publications of the Royal Bavarian Academy.[60] Of this article Theodore Andersson has written:[61] "Maurer's essay represented an extraordinary advance in saga research. It anticipated most of the techniques of present investigation... With Maurer we enter the stage of research which does not have mere historic interest but brings us face to face with the issues still under debate."

But it is with a couple of Maurer's other insights that I wish to deal now. Firstly, in reviewing Guðbrandur Vigfússon's edition of Eyrbyggja,[62] his comments strikingly complement the point I quoted from W.P.Ker. His suggestion is that the author of Eyrbyggja had a priority, namely to tell the story of a local society as fully as possible, insofar as that story was not already known to his audience from related sagas. There is an implication that for Maurer this did disrupt the aesthetic unity of the story

seriously, but the point he makes is crucial even for those people who do not share his aesthetic response. The saga is the story of Snorri goði only insofar as he is the embodiment of the society which he dominates. That society is the saga author's main character.

In 1896 Maurer dealt with Eyrbyggja again, in one of his studies of law in the sagas, also contributed to the publications of the Royal Bavarian Academy.[63] Here he argues that, for instance, the jury that heard the accusations of witchcraft against Geirríðr, and the duradómr that sat in judgment on the ghosts at Fróðá, are almost certainly described in the saga as they had existed in early Icelandic history, even though this cannot be proved from the surviving written law. It is very pleasant to obtain, from such a scholar, an affirmation of the detailed factual veracity of a work of art so deeply rooted in concrete social reality.

If my study has illustrated anything, then it is the way that, while editions may build up a successively clearer picture of a saga for us, many other types of saga scholarship contain a certain subjective element. No matter: readers will not, and should not, adjust their level of enjoyment of a saga to accord with the wishes of the scholars. I have inevitably left out of my story the great body of those who read Eyrbyggja with enjoyment, in the original or in translation, throughout the nineteenth century. I shall end, therefore, by recalling to mind what

we mean by the cliché that "sagas are literature": we mean that they are worthy of the most intensive scholarly study because they continue to be read by people other than intense scholars.

NOTES

I wish to thank Margaret Orme and Ingi Sigurðsson for their help with this paper. I use the following abbreviations below:

Andersson, Problem		Theodore M. Andersson, The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins (New Haven and London, 1964).
Andersson, Reading		Theodore M. Andersson, The Icelandic Family Saga: An analytic Reading (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967).
ES	=	Eyrbyggja Saga.
ES/ÍF		Eyrbyggja Saga, Eiríks Saga Rauða etc., ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (Íslenzk Fornrit IV. Reykjavík, 1935).
ES/T		Eyrbyggia Saga sive Eyranorum Historia, quam Mandate et Impenses Faciente perill. P.F. Suhm. Versione, Lectionum Varietate ac Indice Rerum auxit G.J. Thorkelin (Havniæ, 1787).
Illustrations		Henry Weber and Robert Jamieson, Illustrations of Northern Antiquities (London and Edinburgh, 1814).

1. ES/ÍF, lviii - lix.
2. ES, ed. Þorleifur Jónsson (Akureyri, 1882), 3.
3. ES/ÍF: ES, trans. by Paul Schach and Lee M. Hollander (University of Nebraska Press, 1969); Andersson, Problem, passim; Andersson, Reading, 153-62; G.N. Garmonsway, "ES", Saga-Book XII (1945), 81-92.

4. ES/T.

5. Halldór Hermannsson in Islandica I (1908), 18-21, lists editions, translations and commentaries up to 1908. I have also drawn extensively on Halldór's Old Icelandic Literature: A Bibliographical Essay (Islandica XXIII, 1933).

6. ES/T, xii.

7. ES/T, vii.

8. ES, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon (Leipzig, 1864).

9. O. Elton, Frederick York Powell: A Life (Oxford, 1906) I, 31 ff. et passim.

10. ES, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon, ix - x, liii.

11. Páll Eggert Ólason, Jón Sigurðsson (5 vols., Reykjavík, 1929-33); Jón Sigurðsson, The Icelandic Patriot. A biographical sketch. Published by one of his relatives (Reykjavík, 1887).

12. Islandica XXIII, 12.

13. O. Elton, Frederick York Powell: A Life (Oxford, 1906) I, 35: Guðbrandur Vigfússon and F. York Powell, Corpus Poeticum Boreale (Oxford, 1883) I, 543n.

14. ES, ed. Hugo Gering (Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek VI. Halle, 1897), xxviii - xxix.

15. ES, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon, xlix; Ivar Aasen, Norsk Grammatik (Christiania, 1864), p. 110.

16. ES, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon, xvii - xviii.

17. Lee M. Hollander, "The Structure of ES", Journal of English and Germanic Philology LVIII (1959), 222 - 227.

18. Islandica XXIII, 5.

19. ES, ed. Þorleifur Jónsson, 6.

20. ES, ed. Valdimar Ásmundarson (Íslendinga sögur XII. Reykjavík, 1895), iii - iv.

21. Islandica XXIII, 5.

22. Islandica XXIII, 24.

23. ES, ed. Hugo Gering, xxviii.

24. Islandica I, 19: Islandica XXIII, 11, 16.

25. Historiske Fortællinger, trans. N.M. Petersen, IV (Copenhagen, 1844), 314ff.

26. Islandica XXIII, 16.

27. Eyrbyggarnes Saga, trans. C.J.L.Lönnberg (Fornnordiska sagor II. Stockholm, 1873), intro.

28. The Story of the Ere-Dwellers with the Story of the Heath-Slayings, trans. William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon. (Saga Library II. London, 1892), xxix.

29. Einar Haugen, "On translating from the Scandinavian", in Old Norse Literature and Mythology, ed. Edgar C. Polomé (Austin and London, 1969), 3-18, esp. 11-12 and works cited there.

30. ES, trans. Paul Schach and Lee M. Hollander (University of Nebraska Press, 1959), xx.

31. E.J. Cowan and A.J.Hamer, The Sagas in English: A Bibliographical Introduction (cyclostyled, Edinburgh, 1971), 29.

32. ed. S. Colvin, The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson (new edn., London, 1911) IV, 20 - 21: Stevenson to Morris, Feb. 1892. The editor describes Stevenson's draft letter, found among his papers after his death, as having "touches of affectation and constraint not usual with him" and suggests that "it is no doubt on that account that he did not send it". But Ruth Ellison tells me that there is a copy of the letter among the Morris Papers. The reference in the letter to Sigurd is to Morris's poem Sigurd the Volsung, published in 1876.

33. ibid, IV, 72-3: Stevenson to E.L.Burlingame, Summer 1892.

34. Scribner's Magazine LVI (1914), 687-701: The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson (Tusitala ed., London, 1914) V.

35. George S. Hellman, The True Stevenson: A Study in Clarification (Boston, 1925), 216-20. Hellman implies wrongly that the story was not published till 1916.

36. For a list of such translations and editions, see Islandica I, 18-20.

37. W.A. Craigie, "The Marvels at Fróðá", in Andrew Lang, The Book of Dreams and Ghosts (London, 1897), 273-87.

38. ES/ÍF, 140.

39. Sir Walter Scott, "Abstract of the ES", in Illustrations, 475-513; for Scott's interest in Old Norse literature see my paper in the forthcoming proceedings of the Sir Walter Scott Bicentenary Conference, held in Edinburgh in 1971.

40. For Weber, see J.G. Lockhart, Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart (Edinburgh, 1837-8), II, 16, 138, 168, 215, 331; III, 58, 109, 112, 114; VI, 259; and Edgar Johnson, Sir Walter Scott, The Great Unknown (London, 1970), esp. 434-5.

41. Georg Lukács, The Historical Novel, trans. H.and S. Mitchell (London, 1962), 30-63. See further, my paper referred to in note 39 above.

42. W.H. Auden in the Observer, 12 March 1972.

43. Illustrations, 477.

44. Illustrations, 508-9.

45. Illustrations, 477.

46. Andersson, Problem, 50.

47. Andersson, Reading, 160.

48. G.N. Garmonsway, "ES", Saga-Book XII (1945), 81.

49. Die Geschichte vom Goden Snorri, trans. Felix Niedner (Thule: Altnordische Dichtung und Prosa VII, new ed. with postscript by Professor H.M. Heinrichs. Düsseldorf and Köln, 1964), 1.

50. G. Turville-Petre, Origins of Icelandic Literature (Oxford, 1953), 242.

51. Lee M. Hollander, "The Structure of ES", JEGP LVIII (1959), 222-7: Vésteinn Ólason, "Nokkrar athugasemdir um Eyrbyggja sögu", Skírnir CXLV (1971), 5-25.

52. Illustrations, 477.

53. Illustrations, 512.

54. Edith Batho, "Sir Walter Scott and the Sagas: Some Notes", Modern Language Review XXIV (1929), 409-15: Edith Batho, "Scott as a Mediaevalist" in Sir Walter Scott Today, ed. H.J.C. Grierson (London, 1932), 133-57, includes the same arguments in slightly amended form.

55. Peter Erasmus Müller, Sagabibliothek (Copenhagen, 1817-20) I, 189-98. For Müller see Andersson, Problem, 22-30.

56. ES/ÍF, xlv-lii.

57. Árni Thorlacius, "Skýringar yfir örnefni í Landnámu og Eyrbyggju", Safn til sögu Íslands II (1861), 277-98.

58. W.P.Ker, Epic and Romance (London, 2nd ed., 1908), 187 ff.

59. Karl von Amira, Konrad von Maurer. Gedächtnisrede gehalten in der öffentl. Sitzung der Kön. Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München am 25. November 1903.

60. Konrad von Maurer, "Über die Hœnsa-Þóris Saga", Kön. Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, München, philos.-philol.Classe, Abhandl. XII (1871), Part 2, pp. 157-216.

61. Andersson, Problem, 39-40.

62. Konrad von Maurer, "Zwei Rechtsfälle aus der Eyrbyggja", Kön. Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, München, philos.-philol. u. histor. Classe, Sitzungsberichte (1896), 3-48.