

A. MARGARET ARENT MADELUNG

SNORRI STURLUSON'S MIRROR OF THE
THIRTEENTH CENTURY

Anachronisms appearing in the undated texts of the Sagas of Icelanders and of the Kings' Sagas have long been recognized as one means by which these works can be placed in their proper historical setting. Through unobtrusive remarks such as "traces of it can still be seen" (e. g. Lxd. ch. 13: "ok sér þar tóptina . . .") or "there was a wood in the valley at that time" (e. g. Lxd. ch. 55: "Skógr þykkur var í dalnum í þann tíð"), the historical perspective, that is the author's consciousness of the time discrepancy between story-time and contemporaneous time comes to the fore. Snorri's Heimskringla is no exception,¹⁾ nor is Snorri above superimposing customs, modes of dress and thought on his story-time that derive from his own time. The most celebrated and obvious example is the description of the shields and the use of the cross at the battles of Nesjar and Stiklarstaðir (Hkr. II, ch. 49 and chs. 205, 213, respectively) where the cross as an emblem is inappropriate for A. D. 1030 and represents a practice that Snorri could know only from his own day.²⁾

1) E. g. Hkr. II, ch. 53, ch. 245.

2) See my article "Snorri Sturluson and Laxdoela: the hero's accoutrements," Saga og språk (Festschrift for Lee M. Hollander [Austin, Texas, 1973]), p. 79.

Snorri, it is generally assumed, wrote his Óláfs saga helga as a separate work and later incorporated it into the larger compendium.³⁾ A saint's life typically represented an emulation of Christ and was meant to convey a didactic message to its audience; it was an exemplum. Snorri no doubt found some of the earlier sagas about Saint Ólaf written in this vein. And this aspect he naturally has not totally discarded, for his Saint Ólaf does exhibit some saintly and Christ-like virtues, but to be sure most noticeably at the end of the saga. For Snorri it is Ólaf's historicalness that predominates, and it will be interesting to see what aspect of Christ's life he chose to accentuate and apply to Saint Ólaf's life and times. The political and the religious are blended, like the two sides of Ólaf's endeavors, like the two sides of his character as a secular and religious hero. It is a great pity that we can never ascertain just how much Styrmir departed from the hagiographic pattern and what debt Snorri owes him. In any case from what little we have to go by, the eight fragments from the Elzta Óláfs saga helga, the Ágrip, the younger Helgi saga and the Fagrskinna, and some 107 passages that have been identified as stemming from Styrmir, it is astounding to see how rich and already developed some of the tales and traditions were.

What prompted Snorri to compose a new version of the Óláfs saga helga when so many already existed, and especially since Styrmir's version can be assumed to have been written only a few years before Snorri's? Was the latter's only to be more accurate, more firmly based on skaldic accounts, as indicated in the preface

³⁾ See S. Nordal, Om Olaf den helliges saga (København, 1914), pp. 173-198 and Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Formáli to Heims-kringla II (Hil íslenzka fornritafélag, Reykjavík, 1945), pp. X-XIII.

to the Heimskringla, hence less filled with pious unction, or did Snorri have another idea in mind? A close look at the structure of the narrative shows that he did.

It is at once apparent that the topic of the narrative, as summed up in ch. 181, namely Óláf's political and religious aims, is illustrated by means of interspersed sub-stories whose threads are woven into the main fabric of events. The technique of using preparation and fulfillment, of setting up parallels and repeated instances among the various examples of Óláf's efforts to gain political acceptance and religious domination brings out most advantageously the reversal and shifts of allegiance. But beyond that, by virtue of the repeated instances and parallels, a certain similarity, continuity, and expectation are made manifest.

In order to become acquainted with Snorri's technique, let us take one example and follow it through, that of chapters 73-75. The Christianizing of the Upplands (chs. 73-75), of Hálogaland (chs. 104-105), and of the Trondheim District (chs. 107-109) are out on a recognizable pattern whose themes become foreseeable: Óláf travelling with 360 men; surrounding the houses in surprise attack, burning and laying waste; offering of alternatives; exacting the same whether from the mighty or the humble; killing, maiming, exiling, mulotting; demanding hostages. The Uppland kings, we are told, object to Óláf's methods and his travelling about with an army instead of the number allowed by law. The fact of Óláf's being accompanied by an unusually large host has already been prepared in ch. 38 where it is stated: "It was usual for the kings to have sixty or seventy followers on the royal progress through the Upplands, but never more than one hundred and twenty"

("Pat hafði verit siðvenja, at konungar fóru um Upplond með sex tigu manna eða sjau tigu, en aldri meirr en hundrað manna"). Óláf's practice, incidentally, also parallels Erling's of having an extra large retinue with him (chs. 22, 51). Óláf continued his same chastizing and converting as he proceeded farther into the Upplands where he found the people more heathen than elsewhere. The account (ch. 73) substantiates by way of example the generality already expressed in ch. 60:

Var þá svá komit, at víðast um sjábyggðir váru menn skírðir, . . . en um uppdali ok fjallbyggðir var víða alheiðit, því at þegar er lýðrinn varð sjálfráða, þá festisk þeim þat helzt í minni um átrúnaðinn, er þeir höfðu numit í barnæsku. (Conditions then were such that mostly in the sea-coast settlements the people were Christian . . . but in the upland valleys and mountain settlements heathendom was widespread, for as soon as the people became self-governing that belief which they had adopted in childhood remained most fixed in their minds.)

Upon hearing of Óláf's approach, the Upplanders hold an assembly where Hróerek speaks out: "Now it is just as I thought would happen . . ." which refers to his speech at the former meeting of the Upplanders (ch. 36) where Óláf was accepted as king and constitutes a fulfillment of what was anticipated there, namely that Óláf like some of the kings before him would become tyrannical and the petty kings would lose their independence. Hróerek's historical summary serves the purpose of comparison between the various kings' reigns and particularly of comparison with the present situation. Contrary to his earlier advice not to submit to Óláf, Hróerek here (ch. 74), like Hring in ch. 36, urges acquiescence but on different grounds: First, most often several leaders cannot win against one uncontested leader, and secondly they had better not pit their luck against Óláf's. Both these reasons are interesting in that the

one is again a truism that shows insight into factors that often govern the course of history--multiple leadership is usually disastrous--and the other picks up a repeated theme, that of Óláf's luck. This motif was prepared already in ch. 9: "Mátti þá enn sem optar meira hamingja konungs en fjelkynngi Finna" ("Then as often afterward the king's luck worked more than the Finns' sorcery"), where the "enn sem optar" prepares for its continuance as a running motif (chs. 29, 68, 69, 74, 187). Gudrød, another of the petty kings from the Upplands, voices his opinion in favor of fighting against Óláf, even if this reverses their allegiance, he says, "since they fought for Óláf against Svein. Gudrød's speech forms a parallel to Hrðerek's in ch. 36: Óláf's aim are heading toward their all becoming thralls to this king:

"En ef hann vill nú fyrirmuna hverjum várum þessins litla ríkis, er vér höfum áðr haft, ok veita oss pyndingar ok kúgan, þá kann ek þat frá mér at segja, at ek vil fœrask undan þrælkan konungs, . . . fyrir því at þat er yör at segja, at aldri strjúkum vér frjálst höfuð, meðan Óláfr er á lífi." (ch. 74)

("And now if he wants to begrudge each of us that little power which we have had up to now and inflicts extortions on us and oppresses us, then I for my part can say that I will avoid becoming the king's thrall . . . because I can tell you that we shall never be free men as long as Óláf lives.")

Significantly it is Hrðerek in ch. 74, not Óláf, who suggests the alternatives: either to submit to Óláf's demands or band together against him.

The two Uppland episodes are designed to form a parallel with repetition of themes--Óláf's large following, alternatives set forth--with comparative and contrastive speeches, with fulfillment of the anticipated. The fact that the first Uppland encounter is political and the second undertaken for the avowed purpose of religious submission, brings into focus the comparison intended between these two aspects of Óláf's ambitions. Both lead to the same

result: subjugation. From Hrórek's first speech (ch. 36) the same notion can be gathered. In summarizing previous reigns, he points out that Hákon the Earl had become so high-handed with the people that the Trønders killed him, and when Ólaf Tryggvason came to full power, no man could maintain his independence against him, for he exacted the same and even more tribute than had Harald Fairhair. And he goes on to say: "en at síðr váru menn sjálfráða fyrir honum, at engi réð, á hvern guð trúá skyldi" ("but even less were men independent over against him in that no one could decide for himself as to what god he should believe in").

Snorri's sources, from what we can gather from comparable passages in the Helgi saga and the Fagrskinna and from the skaldic verse of Ottar the Black cited by Snorri for the second Uppland episode attest to only one such encounter with the Upplanders.⁴⁾ Thus the first episode would seem to be deliberately created, and significantly no skaldic verse appears there. The narrative technique of splitting into two and forming doublets out of what was once a single event in the other sources is characteristic of the Óláfs s. h. and of the Heimskringla throughout.⁵⁾

⁴⁾ Helgi s., p. 18 (references and citations are from the edition of R. Keyser and C. R. Unger, Christiania, 1849), Fagrsk., p. 155 (references and citations are from the edition of Finnur Jónsson, København, 1902-03).

⁵⁾ E. g. Hkr. I, Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Hið íslenska fornritafélag, Reykjavík, 1941), chs. 48, 49 where the dreams of Earl Hákon's thrall Kark take place in two different places of hiding, whereas in Monk Odd's Ól. s. T., Snorri's source, they all take place at Rímul in the pigsty (cf. AM 310 [ed.

The sequel to the Uppland episode is that Óláf gets wind of the plans of the five petty kings, and here again we meet with a truism in the form of an adage: "hverr á vin með óvinum" (ch. 74: "everyone has a friend among his enemies"). Óláf's informer is a Ketil of Hringunes who was first introduced in ch. 45 (preparation) and afterwards appears at the battle of Nesjar, after which he receives a skiff as present from King Óláf (ch. 52). This skiff now stands Óláf in good stead, for Ketil takes him across the lake in it so that they reach the quarters of the kings before dawn and surround the houses in a surprise attack. Some Óláf maims, others he exiles. Hröðrek he blinds, but keeps him with him as something of a bedeviler. Instead of dismissing Hröðrek from the story by stating that he was blinded and exiled to Iceland, as stands in the Helgi s. (p. 18), Snorri spins a very long tale about his treachery (chs. 81-85) and introduces yet another yarn, and a very witty one, about Thórarinn Nefjólfi and his ugly feet. Thórarinn loses his bet with the king and as a penalty has to take Hröðrek,

P. Groth, Christiania, 1895], p. 41 and S [ed. P. A. Munch, Christiania, 1853], pp. 20-21); Hkr. III, Magnúss saga berfoetts (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Hið íslenska fornritafélag, Reykjavík, 1951), where Magnús has two comparable battles, one in Gautland (ch. 14) and one in Ireland (ch. 24), in which the themes of confused identities and counterparts accoutered like the king mark these passages as deliberate parallels, since the Morkinskinna (ed. Finnur Jónsson, København, 1932), p. 335 has only one such episode. Cf. also the Fagrsk., p. 327. See my article, op. cit., pp. 61-63, 81, 83. To be noted is that Snorri deals with his source in precisely the same manner, namely dividing into two, when using the same passage from the Mork. in the Hkr. and in Laxdœla.

who has made an attempt on the king's life, into exile. But Hrǫrek does not get to Iceland by a direct route. Ólaf suggests he be taken to Greenland, but Thórarin has some misgivings about arriving there and asks what he should do with Hrǫrek in case he makes Iceland instead. Ólaf tells him to take him Gudmund Eyjólfsson's farm. And it so happens, but by no coincidence, that Thórarin is thrown off course by storms and does make Iceland instead. But even now Hrǫrek circulates from one farm to the next, including the one Ólaf had intended, and finally stays at one place and dies there shortly thereafter. All this roundabout and difficulty in getting Hrǫrek firmly secure in Iceland is told apparently to make a point, namely that Hrǫrek, so says Snorri, is the only king buried in Iceland. The real point Snorri is making will become apparent later on.

The Óláfs s. h. contains so many examples of the type of handling we have just discussed, especially the formation of doublets or repeated instances out of a single attested occurrence, that I can only mention a few more here. Chapter 111 presents a repeat performance of Ólaf's Christianizing efforts in the Upplands and divides the episode again into two: the inhabitants of Lesjar and Dorfrar are given the alternatives to become Christian or suffer death or flee abroad, and the king takes hostages to assure their "good faith." Then in Ljárdal at the settlement of Lóar the king makes the remark upon approaching the village and seeing it stretched out on either side the river: "Skafi er þat . . . at brenna skal byggð svá fagra" ("It's a shame to have to burn down so lovely a settlement"). The statement is not idly made, for it becomes the alternative that the king offers the people: either do battle with him and suffer their homes to be burned or accept the faith and give hostages. Snorri relates that King Ólaf stayed at a farm called Nes

and slept in a loft that "stendr enn í dag, ok er ekki at því gert síðan" ("stands still today and nothing has been changed on it since"). The description of the valley and the anachronism here likely reflect Snorri's firsthand experience (there is no trace of these episodes in other sources), but noteworthy is that he has handled them in literary fashion, true to the expected pattern, employing preparation-fulfillment devices. Chapters 114 and 121 give further examples of the pattern with the nice variation that at one the people gave battle but lost-- "and that was to their own good for they accepted Christianity" ("ok váru barðir til batnaðar, því at þeir tóku við kristni"). This pious unction, rare in the saga, appears again as a parallel in chapter 121 where the people offer battle but panicked-- "and that was to their advantage, for they submitted to the king and became Christian" ("er þeim gegndi betr, at þeir gengu til handa konungi ok tóku kristni").

Another interesting example is Ólaf's arrival at his step-father's and his reception there (chs. 32-34). This fact is mentioned in other sources,⁶ but again Snorri splits and divides and gives it his own touch in accordance with his narrative preferences and with his overall aim. Snorri has two banquets prepared for Ólaf, one here upon his arrival in Norway and one later (chs. 75-76) after his successes in gaining dominion. The first banquet with the elaborate details as to how the house was decorated and the meal served pads out the stereotyped words of the Helgi s.: "oc hævir su veret æin kallað skarulegast væizla i Norege" and the meager reference to it contained in the

6) The Agrip (ed. Verner Dahlerup, København, 1880), col. 44, merely says that Ólaf stayed the first winter with his step-father Sigurd in Uppland. The Helgi s., p. 18, pp. 18-19, pp. 21-22, seems to separate the account, yet the last reference beginning with "Eitt sinni" might be construed as another, later visit at Sigurd's farm. The Fagrsk., p. 147, has only one visit and banquet for Ólaf.

word "prýði" in the Fagrsk. The account pays attention to such minute detail that one had the feeling that it too derives from firsthand experience, a description of life and times in the author's own day. Indeed, the details of Sigurd's workday clothes and of his activities on the farm (ch. 33) carry the same impression.⁷⁾ This chapter also fulfills, that is gives concrete example of the hint or preparation concerning Sigurd's character found in ch. 1. The statements in the saga have necessary connection, and the threads are tightly woven, for which there are any number of other examples. But to return to the banquet. After the stereotyped and superlative statement as found in the Helgi s., the text goes on to say: "Sva er sact at hann veitti þeim annan hværn dag slatr oc ol" ("Every other day he [Sigurd] offered them meat and ale")--meant as explanation and confirmation of why this feast was an especially fine one. The Fagrsk. (p. 147) has this version: "oc veitti Sigurðr konongr þeim með mikilli prýði. gaf þeim annan hværn dag slatr oc mungat. en annan hværn smior oc braut oc miolk at drecka." As if he had forgotten one of the elements of the story, the author of the Helgi s. goes on to say a bit further (pp. 18-19) that Sigurd often let Ólaf and his men drink milk when others drank ale, giving as reason a bit of moralizing that the latter (ale) would neither rob them of their wits nor their strength. Under Snorri's handling we get another

7) Similar eye-witness descriptions might be the one about the residence at Nidarós (ch. 52), the one about hunting (ch. 89), the one about court life (ch. 94). From personal knowledge, it would seem, we get an account of how levies were made (ch. 46), about currents in various sounds and rivers (e. g. ch. 184). Interestingly enough the details of taxation under Stein (ch. 239) are already presented in the Ágrip, cols. 48-49.

interpretation. The fact that meat and ale, bread and milk were served on alternate days applies to the treatment Ólaf received at the hands of his step-father in contrast to the sumptuous banquet of Ásta, thus accentuating the differences between Ásta and her husband. For Sigurd Sýr had been cautious in embracing Ólaf's cause, whereas Ásta immediately offered all in her power to promote him (ch. 35). We have also been told (ch. 34) that Sigurd was not given to show ("Engi var hann skartsmaðr"), whereas Ásta makes a great to-do over the banquet and stresses the point that Sigurd is to change his clothes and look ^{and act} more lordly, more like Harald Fairhair than his side of the house. 8) The fare that Sigurd offers his guests is thus meant to appear stingier than Ásta's.

The second banquet prepared by Ásta to celebrate Ólaf's success and launch his career fulfills and incidentally also squelches Sigurd Sýr's surmise expressed at the first visit of Ólaf to the effect that there might be doubt as to whether Ásta could send her son off in as grand style as she received him (ch. 33: "ef hon fær svá út leiddan son sinn, at þat sé með þvílíkri stórmennsku sem nú leiðir hon hann inn"). Indeed the second banquet appears to be deliberately created to form a parallel and balance this statement. The prophecies about the brothers Guthorm, Hálfðan, and Harald, Ólaf's half-brothers, occur at the second banquet (ch. 76). The Helgi s., before the interpolations were made, most likely had this account joined to those above about Ólaf's first stay at his step-father's. In any case, Snorri not only makes two banquets out of one, he also divides the prophecies about the boys into two incidents. In the Helgi s. Ólaf sets first the one (Hálfðan), then the other (Harald) on

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- 8) Sigurd Sýr is put into second place on several occasions, notably in ch. 2 where Ólaf saddles a goat for him to ride and again in ch. 35 where he is the object of Ásta's ridicule when she says that she would rather have Ólaf

his knee (Guthorm does not appear here) and asks what each would most like to be or have when he grows up. Hálfðan's answer that he would like to have lots of cattle prompts Ólaf to interpret that he will be a great and successful farmer. Harald's answer that he wants enough housecarls to eat up all Hálfðan's cows leads Ólaf to prophecy that he will not lack for wealth, honor, or fame, but he does not know for what reason he will be proven as such. Snorri begins his tale by selecting Harald first and putting him on his knee amid familiar tussling and play and makes a prophecy about his vindictiveness. Then all three boys are seen playing at a pond and each is asked what he is playing and from their games Ólaf prophesies what is to become of each. Harald is playing with chips as ships and Ólaf predicts that he will someday command ships. And when asked what he wanted most to have, after learning that his brothers were interested in farms and cattle, Harald's answer that he wanted enough housecarls to eat up his brothers cows at one sitting (note the embellishment) leads to Ólaf's prediction that he will some day be king. Thus Snorri has three prophecies for Harald where there probably was only one originally, and he makes the last one specific, whereas the hint is left vague in the Helgi s., perhaps deliberately so. The prophecies, further-

be king for a short time like Ólaf Tryggvason than to be no more of a king than Sigurd Sýr and die of old age. The motif of set-tos and differences between man and wife is carried out as a parallel in the altercations between Earl Rogvald and his wife Ingibjorg (ch. 69). To be noted are the similarities in these instances with Guðrún and Thorkel in Laxdœla.

more, afford Snorri opportunity to direct yet another oblique criticism at Sigurd Sýr: Harald will be a king like his mother's kin, whereas the other two boys will be farmers like their father.⁹⁾ The prophecies about Harald also serve as links to the sagas after the Ól. s. h. in the Heimskringla.¹⁰⁾

Of course one of the most obvious examples of setting up parallels for comparison are the preparations of each side for the battle of Stiklarstaðir. Ólaf's battle formation is given in ch. 205: the most valiant and trusted under the middle standard; the assignment of the standards to right and left. Likewise, the farmers set up their standards (ch. 221), middle, right and left. The two battle slogans "fram, fram Kristmenn, krossmenn, konungsmenn" (for Ólaf, ch. 205) and "fram, fram bóndmenn" (for the farmers, ch. 224) provide nice balance.¹¹⁾ Their similarity (note the "fram, fram") and the proximity of the troops to one another even cause a

9) Compare Hoskuld's similar remark in respect to Jörunn in Laxdæla.

10) This touches on a far-reaching problem, namely the question as to whether the Óláfs s. h. of Snorri was conceived as a separate saga before he composed the Heimskringla or whether the compendium was written as a totality. The sagas are joined together not only by prophecies and dreams, but also more subtly through less obtrusive hints and by means of repeated themes and parallels. Strands begun in one saga are knit together with those of the next saga. There are many threads in the Ól. s. h. that weave both back to the preceding sagas and forward to those that follow. But more of this will become evident later in the discussion.

11) The Helgi s. probably transmits the original tradition: "Knyum knyum konungs liðar harðla harðla bóndamenn" (p. 69). Snorri has taken his slogan for Ólaf's men from the Sverris saga, where the battle call "nu fram allir Kristmenn Krossmenn ok ens heilaga Óláfs konungs

confusion among the troops, in that the enemy closest to one of Óláf's flanks calls out the wrong slogan, intriguing, too, in light of the shifts of allegiance that have taken place and because it is an exemplum of another adage used in a different context: people always take up what is newest (ch. 205: "þá er nýjast, þat er þá ellið karst"). Each side is exhorted to stay close to the assigned standards (Óláf's troops, ch. 205 ; the farmers, ch. 223). Each side suffers a delay in getting started, Óláf (ch. 224) because Dag Hringuson, his right flank is on reconnaissance and the farmers (ch. 224) because the rear guard lagged behind, as was foreseen.¹²⁾ The exhortations of the troops by Óláf and by the farmers' bishop Sigurð and by Kálf (chs. 211 and 218, respectively) contain similar elements. On each side the men encourage one another and their spirits "are fired from one man to the next" (Óláf's men, ch. 211; the farmers, ch. 223). A champion arrives at the last hour to aid each of the leaders: Arnljót joins Óláf (ch. 215),¹³⁾ and Thorstein

menn" is recorded for the battle of Oslo A. D. 1200--evidence again for Snorri's use of anachronisms. See my article, op. cit. pp. 91-92, n. 49.

12) Interesting is that the Helgi s., p. 19, includes a request for a delay at the battle of Nesjar because it is Palm Sunday. Snorri does not use this motif in his version of that battle (chs. 48-49).

13) In ch. 63 it is told that Thránd the White and eleven others went to Jämtaland to collect taxes and were killed. In ch. 141 we are told that because of this no one had wanted to go there on the king's errand. Then Thórodd Snorrason, an Icelfander, bored with being held hostage, volunteers to undertake the same mission, going with eleven others. This doubling of the venture into Jämtaland is what one would expect from the structure

the Shipbuilder joins Kálf and Thórir (ch. 222). And each army is described as to its constituents: Ólaf's is a bunch of rabble, highwaymen and robbers according to Bishop Sigurd (ch. 218), and among the farmers, "as is often the case with such large armies," there were the powerful as well as cotters and laborers (ch. 216). The latter statement is one of the many in the Ól. s. h. that expresses a generality which makes it possible to apply the truism to individual instances. Here the truism couldn't be more appropriate since the audience knows that all the powerful chieftains have joined the side of the farmers and King Knút. The fact that Bishop Sigurd knows that highwaymen and robbers have joined Ólaf also couldn't fit better as Arnljót has already been depicted as a highway man and evil doer (ch. 141) and the brothers Gauka-Thórir and Afra-Fasti, who also joined Ólaf, as highwaymen and evil robbers (ch. 201).¹⁴ This illustrates Snorri's practice of positing a double audience. He puts into Bishop Sigurd's mouth words that are known to the audience but not so exactly by the bishop. The latter's speech makes good rhetoric with its slanderous surmises. To assume that the bishop has heard the precise facts through spies or the grapevine posits a reading between the lines that destroys the poetic illusion. This is

of the narrative. It also provides the chance to introduce Arnljót and his silver bowl ahead of his appearance at Stiklarstaðir. The Helgi s. knows of some such tradition as it has Arnljót say to the king: "Herra ságir hann, silfrdiso minn sända ek yör víð Þorodde Snorrasene" (p. 66), without having told before anything of the story.

- 14) These two brothers also make a double appearance (chs. 201 and 204) for the express purpose of joining Ólaf's troops but are refused the first time because they are not Christian. The second time they let themselves be baptized. Another instance of Snorri's practice of creating parallel instances.

Snorri's omniscience, not the bishop's.¹⁵⁾

From the discussion of the above examples of Snorri's narrative techniques, we have noted his handling of sources and his predilection for forming parallel incidents. It has also been noted how he uses preparation and fulfillment, whereby the strands of the narrative are tied together, how he develops comparisons and contrastive pairs, sets up patterns with repeated instances to illustrate the same point, carries through repeated motifs, and confirms generalities and adages. We have also noted from time to time anachronisms in the saga. That prophecy is used to advantage, both direct types such as dreams and the like and indirect hints, is obvious from the structure of the narrative. Repetitions and parallels create in themselves a type of anticipation. Whatever is stated has, so to speak, a consequence later. The narrative becomes thus highly predictive and predetermined whereby the casual is made necessary and the past a precondition for the future. One might say that the structured narrative consists in analogous incidents used to call forth implicit comparisons and of prophetic statements, in the broader and narrower sense, that render the conclusion preknown, or hint of developments to come.

In many places it is remarked upon that the consequences of an event will become or became evident later--a type of predicting based on the assumption that signs are given beforehand but often are read as such only after the consequences have become all too apparent. For instance, Hárek of Thjótta (ch. 158) sails past the Danish fleet with his ship camouflaged, but Knút later recognizes the sail after it was hoisted. We are told: "people thought it likely that Hárek wouldn't have attempted the venture, had it not been agreed upon before. And this was considered self-evident later when the friendship between Knút and Hárek became known to everybody." In ch. 162 Sighvat's

15) See my book, The Laxdœla saga: its structural patterns (Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 32, 38, 52-53, 56-58, 207 n.5.

sword is said to have prompted envy, "as became apparent later" (which is confirmed, chs. 206, 208). And in ch. 180 in speaking of the defectors to Knút's side, Snorri remarks: some were loyal, others became outspoken enemies, "as was apparent later."

In order to get at the heart of the Óláfs s. h., which is also the heart of the Heimskringla, we must turn our attention to yet another episode in the saga, namely the altercations between King Óláf of Norway and King Óláf of Sweden. Even at first reading these involvements strike one as having received particular attention on the part of Snorri.¹⁶⁾ Here again we find all the narrative techniques as in the examples discussed above--preparation, seemingly trifling details that prove necessary and are tied together in the narrative, development of doublets, parallels, and running motifs. Björn the Marshall and Hjalti go to Earl Rognvald's in West Gautland (chs. 69-69) to gain support for Óláf's mission of peace with the Swedish king over the boundary issue and taxes. In brief the salient features for our analysis are: Sighvat the Skald, we are told, also accompanied Björn and Hjalti to Earl Rognvald (ch. 71). This comes as somewhat of an after-thought and forms[✓] complementary parallel since Óttar the Black and Gizur the Black, two Icelandic skalds, are present at the Swedish court. And out of Sighvat's journey again doublets are created in that Sighvat much later makes a

16) The only aspect of the dealings with the Swedish king which the Ágrip records is as follows: "síðan báð oláfr dottr olafs sáinsca astripar svstor ingiripar er fvr var heitin honum. oc bra fapar hennar heiton þeim fvr reiði sacar. oc gifti íarittlave austr uęs konungi." The Helgi s., pp. 28-33, gives a most interesting variation of the episode. Only some of the differences between it and Snorri's text can be mentioned here. Hjalti asks Björn to go along instead of the other way around. But Björn plays no role. About

second trip east (ch. 91) to find out how matters stand.¹⁷⁾ The conversation between Rognvald and his wife Ingibjörg parallels the contrastive differences already witnessed between Sigurd and Ásta. Rognvald, like Sigurd, has misgivings and is cautious; Ingibjörg, like Ásta, pushes Ólaf's cause. The journey to Sweden is split into two separate undertakings from Rognvald's. Hjalti, being an Icelfander, feels he can attempt the mission with less risk and goes first alone to the Swedish court where he is most diplomatic, offering tribute and taxes but assuring the king that he has not met with "that fat man." The derogatory use of Ólaf of Norway's epithet "Digri" has been carefully prepared, first in ch. 59 where emissaries from the king of Sweden call Ólaf of Norway "big-mouthed"--another meaning for "Digri" and then in ch. 67 where it is told that the king of Sweden in his rage over Ólaf of Norway will not permit his name to be mentioned. Hjalti enlists the aid of Ingigerd in furthering the cause with her father, and he praises Ólaf to her and

him we are humorously told: "Biörn hafðe augnaveik mikinn og ser lítt hans ivirsyn." Rognvald does not come into the picture at all. Instead Egil is named the foster-father of Astrid, Ólaf's other daughter, and is at the court in Sweden. The king prepares the way for meetings between Hjalti and Ingigerd. Hjalti suggests to her that a longer lasting peace could be achieved if she married Ólaf of Norway. She agrees to support his case because "hann segir hvert orð satt." The king and Hjalti drink together, and what with Hjalti's flattery the king agrees, the meeting between the two kings takes place and the betrothal is accomplished. Hjalti explains to the king of Norway just why he had not come to see him (this appears to contradict the fact that Hjalti had been sent by the king) and why he paid out the tribute to Ólaf of Sweden because he did not want to tell a lie and had to assure Ólaf of Sweden that he had not seen "that fat man."

suggests a marriage to weave the peace. Neither Ingigerd nor Hjalti get anywhere with the king.

At this point the narrative is interrupted by a flashback to what is going on in Norway at the same time. It deals with Óláf's second encounter with the Uppland kings (ch. 74). Returning then to Sweden to pick up the thread there, the narrative tells of the second journey to Sweden undertaken by Björn and Rognvald after Hjalti has prepared the ground, so to speak. Ingigerd is informed of Óláf's success in surrounding five kings and taking them by surprise. Björn and Rognvald enlist the aid of the lawspeaker for the Uppsala assembly Thorgný. The assembly is held and Björn speaks up on behalf of Óláf of Norway at which the king of Sweden, we are told, first thought he himself was being spoken of since no one ever dared mention the name of that other king. But realizing it was indeed Óláf of Norway's name, he became furious (another leitmotif). This little joke on Snorri's part is also not irrelevant, as we shall see presently. After Thorgný's persuasion, the king agrees reluctantly to accept peace and a betrothal of his daughter. Here again the story is interrupted with a flashback to Norway. The topic is Hróerek and his treachery.

The king of Sweden does not keep his agreement and no betrothal takes place. Aggravated at her father for post-

It is told how one time the king went hunting and came home boasting of his catch at which Ingigerd takes his ego down by saying: "Eigi þærftu rosa sva málke þesse vísí. firir þu at lítile minndi þeim þókla vært sia vísí er hann fece valld .xi. kononga a sinum morne." In anger the king of Sweden betrothes his daughter to Jarizleif instead. Óláf of Norway is depressed. Astrid and her foster-father Egil come to Norway and she tries on three occasions to cheer the king and ends by suggesting he marry her, which he does, without her father's permission or counsel. The Fagrsk., pp. 155-157, tells in

poning the agreements of the assembly, Ingigerd incurs his wrath by squelching his boastfulness over his catch of five birds. She taunts him with: "Góð morginveilar er þetta, herra, er þér hafið veitt fimm orra, en meira er þat, er Óláfr Noregskonungur tók á einum morgni fimm konunga ok eignaðisk allt ríki þeira"(ch. 89). Snorri neatly equated the five birds and five kings (note that Helgi s. has 11 kings and Fagrsk. has 9). Her father marries her off to Jarisleif in Garðaríki instead. Ólaf of Norway is down-hearted but agrees on the advice of Rognvald and Hjalti to take Astríð instead. She had been introduced earlier (ch.88) as a daughter by a bondwoman and as that one of those children by her whom Ólaf of Sweden liked most and who was the most well liked by others. This proves true when she is at Rognvald's estate. Hjalti presents her qualities to Ólaf of Norway in good light much as he had Ólaf's qualities to Ingigerd. Ólaf is persuaded and feels he has stolen a march on the King of Sweden by marrying his daughter without his consent.

brief about the "usætt mikil" between the two Óláfs, that a conciliation was attempted by proposing Ingigerd in marriage to Ólaf of Norway but that ^{Ólaf became} incensed over his daughter's remark, when he came home proud of his catch of five birds:

"veiztu noccon konong hafa þeitt meira a einni morgonstundu. en hon svaraðe a þessa lunnd. meiri vælar var su, er Olafur Harallz son toc a sinum morne .ix. kononga oc eignaðez allt riki þeirra." He declares that she will never get Ólaf Digri for a husband. With that the settlement between the kings was broken and Ólaf of Norway renegotiates and gets Astrid instead. Her lower birth is not directly indicated but might be implied: "oc cvað engi von þess vera Olafe digra at fa Ingigierðar er bæge var konongs datter oc drotthinga. So a sagðe hann aðra dottor er hæitir Aztrið." The

That this episode is central to the saga can be gathered from its position, standing as it does precisely between the political happenings that have led up to Óláf's success and the beginning of those events that bring about a reversal in his luck and ultimately spell his downfall. Significant also are the two flashbacks. The first one, although it shows Óláf's success in capturing five kings at once, nonetheless represents the beginning of dissatisfaction among the nobles and farmers over his harsh treatment and over the inroads Óláf was making on their freedom. The second flashback, dealing with Hróðrek's treachery, sounds the warning of what the second cause for Óláf's defeat will be.

That which strikes one at first glance as something utterly playful and out of place or as something under which more is hidden than meets the eye are the parables. They are presented to Óláf of Sweden somewhat as in a comedy of errors where the difficulties are resolved by a *deus ex machina* to bring the whole to a happy solution. Emund the Guileful is the originator of the parables and the interpreters are Arnvith the Blind, Thorvith the Stammerer, Freyvith the Deaf. The names themselves suggest their fictitious nature and the by-names surely indicate their

skald Sighvat is mentioned here as having been on the journey east: "oc orte hann flocc um oc callaðe Austr farar visur. oc sagir i þessa evæðe mart um þessa fæð." 17)

The Austrfararvísur seem to be divided between the two chapters 71 and 91. The Fagrsk. appears to know a tradition about Sighvat's participation in the reconciliation with Sweden, but that compendium may have been written after the Heimskringla and could be influenced by it. Most all the doublets which Snorri has devised have the peculiarity that as far as the creative process is concerned, the first of the pair appears to be deliberately created whereas the second rests on some tradition or evidence from sources, or on skaldic verse.

humorous function. Can anyone take seriously the interpretations and advice of those who are blind, deaf, and stammering? But we are given a hint in Emund's by-name that some guile is intended here. In the remark of king Ólaf to Sighvat the Skald we are given another clue. He says to Sighvat concerning the latter's luck in not having incurred his wrath for having baptized his son Magnús: "It is not strange that good fortune attends wisdom, but it is always strange when good luck attends foolish men and foolish counsel turns out to be fortunate" (ch. 122). Indeed, the counsel of these foolish men turns out to be fortunate and nothing could be stranger than for the foolishness of Ólaf of Sweden to be resolved in this manner.

This whole interlude is obviously intended as a farce--on the face of it and within the context of the story. Certainly any audience would have to laugh at this ridiculous resolution of the difficulties. But what do the parables say and why has Snorri used parable in the first place to illustrate "historical" events?

The first parable about the hunter Atti dóelskr who chases after one more squirrel and thereby loses all the sled of skins he had already taken presents a moral on avarice. Greed for more causes the loss of all. The second parable carries practically the same message: a group of merchantmen capture four ships and all their booty, but not being satisfied they go after the fifth ship that had escaped them and in so doing are shipwrecked and lose all their own ships and the ones confiscated. The third parable tells about two noblemen who quarrel over land and in the settlement the stronger of the two substitutes lesser value for that agreed upon: a gosling for a goose, a pig for a hog, clay for gold. The moral: be wary of deceit in settlements and promises; all that glitters is not gold.

These parables preoccupy the Swedish king and he calls for the man who had told them, but he, like Odin,¹⁸⁾ had already disappeared. The king recognizes that Emund

18) Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, ch. 64.

meant more than what was said and equates himself and Ólaf the Stout with the two noblemen^{and} compares how their differences were inequably settled. Ólaf had gotten Astríð instead of Ingigerð. Thorvith tells the king that the latter too is the Atti dóelskr of the first parable: atti meaning quarrelsome, avaricious, malicious and dóelskr foolish. The king by being obsessed with one thing was passing up matters of far more importance, namely the restiveness of the people who were turning against him and had already sent out the war-arrows. Ólaf acquiesces to the demands of the people who want the old laws and their full rights, and satisfies the two factions in the land, those who want a ruler who is best fitted, be he of kingly race or no, and those who want to preserve the royal lineage that goes back to the gods. He has to accept as co-ruler his son Jákob who, like Astríð, was highborn only on his father's side. His name is changed to Onund. Earlier Snorri has told us that at the time of Jákob's birth no one liked the name (ch. 88).

The moral to be drawn not only applies to Ólaf of Sweden but also to Ólaf of Norway. The confusion of names at the Uppsala assembly is no mere witticism; an equation is intended. Ólaf of Norway through his obsession with rooting out all heathen practices in Norway was blind to the reactions of the people and their discontent. He, like Atti dóelskr, was foolish, overly zealous, and contentious. It is interesting also that there are two parables on avarice, and the second receives no direct application or interpretation for Ólaf of Sweden. Could it be that the second is meant for those followers of Ólaf Haraldsson who are shown to covet wealth and power and are thus willing to accept the bribes of king Knút? And the third parable also warns of the future. Despite the promises of Knút, in the final settlement the chieftains will find themselves cheated and deceived. The parables not only point out Ólaf's weaknesses and failing, but also enunciate and anticipate the dangers and causes of his defeat.

Any parable presents some generality couched in particular form to veil its universal applicability. This universal can hence just as well carry a message to the thirteenth century audience. Has Snorri here camouflaged the seriousness of his purpose in this highly humorous fashion? He was assuredly a man of his time, actively involved in politics and caught up in the swirling events around him. He was not writing out an antiquarian interest in the past nor out of a sense of preserving most accurate accounts possible of the events that had taken place. He interprets history and interprets it for the thirteenth century audience that it may not fall on deaf ears. We have noted how often Snorri speaks in generalities and uses adages.¹⁹⁾ Upon closer look at the many stories and tales in the Ól. s. h., it will be seen that they serve as illustrations for the truisms expressed in the general statements, in the adages, and in the parables. They are the exempla, just as the many parallels are exempla of a pattern or patterns. Snorri's intention is to draw parallels, not only within the Ól. s. h. but throughout the Heimskringla, and with the Ól. s. h., the heart of the Heimskringla, is particularly implied a specific parallel with the thirteenth century.

19) Some of the other generalities that have not come under discussion are: ch. 30: sometimes the one, sometimes the other side is victorious; ch. 61: now this, now that power has made inroads on the other's land; ch. 66: as so often happens, the crew didn't hold its tongue and let it out that . . . ; ch. 137: it was then, as is often the case, that even though friendship existed between the kings, yet both wanted all the lands they considered belonged to them; ch. 145: as is often the case when people of a country are exposed to harrying and find no support, most of them assent to all the conditions laid upon them in order to buy peace for themselves; ch. 176: then it happened, as is often the case, when men suffer a strong blow and lose their leaders, they

In the generalities, in the adages, in the parables is concentrated a philosophy of history and understanding of human psychology that only could have been gleaned from acquaintance with the wide scope of historic events and from close observation of human nature. Snorri, though involved with things of the moment, was able to detach himself from them and write books that saw everything whole, from a perspective of the totality.²⁰⁾ If the generalities, adages, and parables speak from this sublime position, so other statements throughout the Ól. s. h. startlingly sound forth a message pertinent and crucial for the thirteenth-century Icelanders' listening.

also lose their initiative. The adages used in the saga are: chs. 74, 123: everyone has a friend among his enemies; ch. 138: there's a black sheep in every family; ch. 143: the older a man gets the worse he grows; ch. 160: many are the king's ears; ch. 205: people do what is the latest.

20) From the total perspective of the Heimskringla it becomes even more apparent that Snorri's purpose is to draw parallels from one king's reign to the next, from one century to the next. We find there the same technique of building parallels, speaking out from the vantage point of generalities and adages, carrying themes through from one saga to the next, linking together by means of similarities and by prophecies. The Ynglinga saga sets the stage for all that is to follow. History for Snorri evidenced similarities, repetitions that made events analogous, hence much could be surmised and predicted. It is almost impossible to think of the Ól. s. h. without the rest of the Heimskringla, where more and more parallels are drawn strengthening the notion ^{that} comparisons are intended between one time period and another. This re-opens the question of whether indeed the Ól. s. h. was created first by Snorri as a separate

Hróerek's speech, ch. 36, gives one alternative for the Icelanders--an argument no doubt current in Snorri's day. It runs something like this: it is better to be under foreign rule, since the ruler is far away we would be left alone and freer. The other alternative is voiced even more emphatically. Thórir the Hound counsels Asbjörn, ch. 120: don't go into the service of the king and become a thrall and give up independence. Thorgrý the lawspeaker says to Earl Rognvald, ch. 79: better to be a farmer and speak freely as one pleases than to be of princely rank and not be able to say what you want to. Ironically, Erling, being freeborn but duty bound to his king, cannot sell any grain, but his thralls are free to do so (ch. 117). Gudrød, ch. 74, also warns of becoming a thrall to the king. And Emund, we have seen, advocates having as ruler he who is best fit, king or no--a modern idea for the eleventh or thirteenth century, but not foreign to Iceland. And now we also see why Snorri made it so difficult for any king, a Hróerek, to find a resting place in Iceland. These then are the alternatives before Iceland in the thirteenth

entity, for so many of the themes in Ól. s. h. presuppose knowledge of what comes before and after, and knowledge of these themes as they have already appeared deepens the understanding of their use in the Ól. s. h. and explains them to a great extent. At this point I am in no position to decide one way or the other. It is a matter to figure out which way the creative process went. Could Snorri possibly have developed his idea-complex from the center outwards, creating the themes and ideas for his Óláf's saga, then sprinkled them in, so to speak, fore and aft when he absorbed the saga into the larger whole? Or was the whole conceived from beginning to end such that examples could be plucked from here or there, repeated and made plausible because precedents had been established? The historical summaries that dot the Ól. s. h. arise too out of this total conception.

century. No saga, except Laxdœla, is so preoccupied with alternatives.

What motives outweighed those for independence? When Ólaf Haraldsson, ch. 126, sends a request for chieftains from Iceland to come to Norway, some Icelanders think yielding to the king's call might redound to their honor. In ch. 185 we are told that what with the large amounts of money, the fair promises, the large presents, Björn was overcome by avarice and swore fealty to Knút and Hákon. In the eleventh century the Norwegians defected to Knút, wooed by his promises of more power and revenue, overtaken by their own greed. It was no different in the thirteenth century. What brought about Ólaf's downfall, greed and treachery, will also bring about the downfall of Iceland--through those chieftains whose desire for personal prestige, wealth, and power will cause them to succumb to the offers of gifts and titles bestowed by the king of Norway. But in the eleventh century, Snorri warns, those that betrayed their countrymen received clay instead of gold. Einar Thambarskelfir was promised highest authority in the land after Hákon (ch. 171). After Hákon's death Einar thinks he will receive the kingship only to learn that Knút's son Svein was named king (ch. 194). Kálf Árnason is promised an earldom (ch. 183); but after the battle is won, promises are not kept and Kálf settles down on his estate no higher in rank than before (ch. 242, 247). Snorri writes, ch. 239: "those who hadn't fought against king Ólaf said: 'Now you get the friendship and reward of the Knytlings for having fought against Ólaf and driven him from the country. For the peace and justice promised you you now have oppression and servitude.'" A gesling for a goose.

Obviously directed toward the thirteenth-century Icelandic audience are the sections dealing with Ólaf Haraldsson's designs on Iceland. He sends tokens of friendship, large gifts to many chieftains, wood for the church

at Thingvellir and the bell, "which is still there" (note the anachronism). "However in this show of friendship by the king toward Iceland there dwelled some considerations which became evident later on" (ch. 124). We have met with similar statements before in the saga. The "later on" here is not only the fulfillment in the next chapter--it turns out that the king desires to be ruler over Iceland, as over the Orkneys and the Faroes, and wants Grímsey as a token of the Icelanders' good faith in paying out taxes and indemnities--^{it applies to King Hákon's attempts in the thirteenth cent} The words of Einar Eyjólfsson, Snorri's words, in response to the king's request ring through the centuries:

"Því em ek fároesinn um þetta mál, at engi hefir mik at kvatt. En ef ek skal segja mína ætlan, þá hygg ek, at sá myni til vera hérlandsmönnum at ganga eigi undir skattgjafar við Óláf konung ok allar álogur hér, þvílíkar sem hann hefir við menn í Nóregi. Ok munu vér eigi þat ófrelsi gera einum oss til handa, heldr bæði oss ok sonum várum ok allri ætt várri, þeirri er þetta land byggvir, ok mun ánaus sú aldrigi ganga eða hverfa af þessu landi. En þótt konungr sjá sé góðr maðr, sem ek trúi vel, at sé, þá mun þat fara heðan frá sem hingat til, þá er konungaskipti verðr, at þeir eru ójafnir, sumir góðir, en sumir illir. En ef landsmenn vilja halda frelsi sínu, því er þeir hafa haft, síðan er land þetta byggðisk, þá mun sá til vera at ljá konungi enskis fangstaðar á, hvárki um landa eign hér né um þat at gjalda heðan ákveðnar skuldir, þær er til lýðskyldu megi metask." En hitt kalla ek vel fallit, at menn sendi konungi vingjafar, þeir er þat vilja, hauka eða hesta, tjöld eða segl eða aðra þá hluti, er sendiligir eru. Er því þá vel varit, ef vinátta kómur í mót. En um Grímsey er þat at roeða, ef þaðan er engi hlutr fluttr, sá er til matfanga er, þá má þar foeða her manna. Ok ef þar er útlendr herr ok fari þeir með langskip um þaðan, þá ætla ek mörgum kotbóndunum munu þykkja verða þrængt fyrir durum."

It is now not difficult to surmise why Snorri excused himself in the preface for having written so much about Icelanders. One would scarcely have noticed it, had he not said so. And it could not be clearer what Snorri's intent was in writing a new Óláfs saga helga. It was meant indeed as

a parable in itself, an exemplum from history, and it carries a didactic message. Interestingly Snorri does not fail to draw a parallel too with Christ's life, as was typical for writing a saint's life. His Saint Ólaf not only takes on the martyrdom of a Christ, his marshall Björn becomes a Judas, for Saint Ólaf, like Christ, was betrayed through the avarice of those he depended on most. The analogy is ^{thus} drawn between former times, saga time, and future time. Snorri's phrases "as is so often the case," "as was to be expected," or "it became evident later on" show his train of thought. The parable of his saga speaks out the warning and lays before his compatriots the alternatives. Just as Saint Ólaf's life is a blend of the secular and the religious, so too Snorri's saga combines a religious form with a political purpose, and so too the king's desire to annex Iceland in Saint Ólaf's day as in Snorri's day was couched under a religious pretext. Out of all the similar instances, ^{out of} all the examples found in history could be abstracted a general rule; history became proverbial and hence predictable. Similarities and repetitions made it possible to see the future in the past. Likelihoods became so great that situations and events could be newly invented and appear just as plausible as if they had happened because precedents for similar ones in other contexts abounded. History could be created. And if we look to Laxdœla saga we will find Snorri at work, creating a plausible history, writing yet another parable in camouflaged form. The eleventh century served him as a mirror into which he looked to see the thirteenth century and onto which he superimposed the image of the latter, anachronistically, analogously.

It is almost with dismay that we read in the mirror the picture Snorri gives of himself:

"Kings should be served in such fashion that the men who do their errands derive great honor therefrom and are valued more highly than others. But often they are in danger of their very lives and must be reconciled to either outcome." (ch. 68)

With these words let us recall what took place here at Reykholt, Sept. 23, 1241.