

**Is Snorri goði an Icelandic Hamlet?
On Dead Fathers and Problematic Chieftainship in *Eyrbyggja saga***

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This paper is tentative and to be considered as part of a work in progress on narrative in thirteenth century Iceland and how it relates to social reality. Over the past years I have focussed on *fornaldarsögur* or legendary sagas and mainly on one representative of the genre of saga of Icelanders, *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, though I have also touched upon other *Íslendingasögur* such as *Grettis saga* and *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*. The method employed has been structural and thematic analysis of the texts inspired by structuralist anthropology and semiotics (Lévi-Strauss and Greimas). At the same time extensive use has been made of the contemporary sagas as sources of knowledge about Icelandic society in the thirteenth century. My understanding of these sources has been informed by the idea that Iceland is following the main evolutionary trends in medieval society during the period, i.e. a strengthening of the royal state and the church as institutions and the concomitant and somewhat reluctant adaptation of the dominant classes to this new situation.

Of special interest are the lay chieftains (or *goðar*), since it is most likely that the saga literature developed within this social class. In my work on the *fornaldarsögur* I believe I have been able to show that issues and problems of the thirteenth century are projected into a more or less imaginary world of the past.¹ The same is true of *Egils saga*, though this saga is much more complex in the way it offers itself to interpretation, showing among other features evidence of an awareness of biblical exegetic methods.²

Over the last months, I have been working on *Eyrbyggja* in the same spirit. In a forthcoming article I have proposed that the complex method used to put an end to the supernatural events at Fróðá (chapters 50 to 55 of the saga) is to be seen as an expression of the way lay chieftains of the first half of the thirteenth century viewed their role in society in opposition to that of the Church. They are willing to collaborate with clerics, though preferably on their own terms. However, their right to prosecute in legal matters is not to be infringed upon (Torfi H. Tulinius 2005).

In this paper I would like to focus on a different aspect of the saga, the relationship between its multi-stranded narrative structure and the portrayal of its main character, Snorri goði Þorgrímsson. One could indeed say that the saga is paradoxical in its construction, since on the one hand it tells the story of one character, of how his ancestors founded the society in which he evolves and of his subsequent rise to power in his region. On the other, the saga has an exceptionally meandering structure, going from one plot-line to another, often developing what seem to be parallel stories in which the main character has only a secondary role. The structure of *Eyrbyggja saga* has been the object of quite a number of articles over the last decades. It is therefore useful to give an overview of the main ideas developed in earlier work before proposing a different approach.

¹ See *The Matter of the North* (2002).

² This is the subject of my recent monograph on *Egils saga: Skáldið í skrifinni*.

In his influential book from 1967 on the sagas of Icelanders, Theodore M. Andersson was unable to fit it into the structure he uncovered for most of the *Íslendingasögur*, which is ultimately derived from Germanic heroic epic. It is indeed impossible to isolate a conflict-revenge cycle that governs the construction of *Eyrbyggja* (Andersson, p. 153-162). Using a different approach, Carol Clover argued for a more medieval and continental aesthetic, citing *Eyrbyggja* as an example of a multi-stranded narrative, comparable to the complex prose cycles written in French in the thirteenth century (Clover, p. 77-79), the same period in which the saga is believed to have been written.³

A third and interesting view of the composition of the saga was developed by Lee M. Hollander, who made a case for a relationship between the construction of *Eyrbyggja* and the way skaldic poetry was composed. Hollander focussed especially on the intricate interlacing of the sentences in the 'dróttkvætt' stanza, woven into the framework provided by the constraint of metrical rules and metaphorical speech. He saw it as a model for the meandering narrative of the saga, wandering from one plot to another and with no obvious central character (Hollander, p. 222-227). Even though Hollander's approach is limited, it nevertheless has the advantage of stating clearly the view that the complexity of the saga is due to authorial design rather than lack of mastery of the material at the disposal of the saga's author.

Other scholars have examined the composition of the saga with the intention of understanding its meaning for a thirteenth-century readership. In a stimulating article, Bernadine McCreesh argued for the importance of the account of the Conversion of Iceland in the year 1000 as an organizing principle within the saga. According to her analysis, many narrative elements appear twice, once before and once after the Conversion. Despite their similarity, a qualitative change has happened and it is in the light of a general conversion of society with the coming of Christianity that the meaning of the saga is to be construed.⁴

In an article from 1971, Vésteinn Ólason had already recognized the importance of the Conversion in the saga. However, he also argued that its main organizing principle is the figure of Snorri, whom he believed to be the central character. He quotes Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's introduction to his edition of the saga, where he says that *Eyrbyggja* is 'a story which describes increasing organization, increasing order, at the same time as it tells of the growing power of Snorri'.⁵ Indeed, the saga begins by telling of several generations of Snorri's forefathers, what brings them to settle in Iceland, and their establishment as *hofgoðar*, a blend of pagan priests and chieftains, on the northern coast of Snæfellsnes. There is a decisive break in the saga when we are told extensively about how Snorri prevails in a conflict with his uncle over control of the family estate. After this, a series of more or less interwoven and interconnected plots are developed in which Snorri is sometimes the main character and sometimes a

³ The most recent discussion of the age of the saga is to be found in Forrest Scott's edition, 19*-27*.

⁴ For a discussion of McCreesh's reading of the saga see McTurk, 'Approaches to the structure of *Eyrbyggja saga*'.

⁵ 'Saga um vaxandi 'skipulag', vaxandi reglu, um leið og hún er saga um vaxandi veldi Snorra', Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, 'Formáli', *Eyrbyggja saga*, lvi.

more minor player. However, his ascendancy over the area increases as time passes, and the final chapters revolve around him.

Vésteinn Ólason compares the construction of the saga to a glacial river. It runs down from the mountains in one stream, then spreads out over the plain in countless separate rivulets, and eventually gathers before flowing out into the ocean (p. 8). Despite the multitude of separate but interwoven plots in the saga, there is a guiding force within the narrative and it is that of society ordering itself around and under the influence of the chieftain or *goði* Snorri Þorgrímsson. Vésteinn relates this view of Icelandic society in the tenth and eleventh centuries to the social reality of the thirteenth, when overlords were acquiring control over larger and larger areas of the country (p. 21).⁶

I agree with Vésteinn's reading of the saga as a whole, though I also share his reluctance to ascribe a simple message to such a complex literary work and recognize its tendency to elude any attempt to attribute a clear and unequivocal meaning to it (p. 25). I also believe with Vésteinn that the saga deals with chieftainship and the struggle for power within a community and that this theme is one of the unifying principles binding the different elements together. Though Vésteinn does not mention it, a remark of the narrator about Snorri in chapter 15 underlines this:

Hann varðveitti þá hof; var hann þá kallaðr Snorri goði; hann gerðisk þá höfðingi mikill, en ríki hans var mjök öfundsamt, því at þeir vǫru margir, er eigi þóttusk til minna um komnir fyrir ættar sakir, en áttu meira undir sér fyrir afli sakar ok prófaðrar harðfengi.⁷

Indeed, in terms of Greimassian narratology, this can be seen as the establishment of what he calls the narrative contract between the author and reader (listener) of the saga. It will tell us how Snorri fares in his task of maintaining himself or growing as a great chieftain despite the opposition he is sure to meet given the circumstances described in this passage: he has rivals who are just as nobly born as he is but are stronger, and whose strength and readiness to achieve their ends through battle have been proven.

In Greimassian terms we have a distribution of actantial roles where Snorri is the subject.⁸ The object of his quest is to safeguard or increase his status as a great

⁶ In a more recent article, Helgi Þorláksson has gone even further in attempting to understand *Eyrbyggja's* portrayal of chieftains from the perspective of the thirteenth century, since he reads its depiction of Snorri goði as a commentary on his thirteenth century descendant Snorri Sturluson.

⁷ *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 27: 'He maintained a temple and was afterwards called Snorri goði. He became a great chieftain, but many envied his rank, because they felt they were equal in birth to him, and they had more strength and confirmed willingness to use force to achieve their ends.' (My translation.)

⁸ Greimas's actantial model postulates that in every narrative there are six functions distributed in three pairs: subject and object, helper and opponent, sender and receiver. The subject is the hero of the narrative and his mission is to acquire the object. He has helpers and opponents and is sent on his quest by a sender while a receiver benefits from it. The same characters can occupy different functions and several characters can occupy the same one. Some functions can be occupied by material objects such as tools or weapons, or abstract entities, for example virtues such as fortitude or ingenuity. See A.J. Greimas, *On Meaning*. For a defence of Greimas's approach see Frederic Jameson's foreword to the volume.

chieftain. His opponents are the other chieftains of the area, for example Vermundur and Víga-Styrr, Arnkell goði, Björn Breiðvíkingakappi and several others. His helpers are his own innate qualities, i.e. his determination and his capacity for planning strategies and deceiving his opponents that already have come to light in the preceding chapter, when he tricks his step-father into selling him his father's land for a small price. The sender is not mentioned explicitly in the saga, nor is the receiver. However, as the only male member of his lineage of his generation, one could say that Snorri is 'programmed' to become a chieftain by his ancestors who founded the family's power in the area, as the saga tells us in detail in its first chapters.

I believe that this is an implicit and very important theme in the saga, as will become clear in the course of this paper. Moreover, Snorri is himself the ancestor of many of the most powerful chieftain families in the thirteenth century, most prominently the Sturlungs, who wielded Snorri's chieftainship in the Dalir region, but also the Ásbirningar in the Skagafljörður area and the Vatnsfirðingar in the Westfjords. One could therefore say that the senders are Snorri's ancestors and the receivers, i.e. the beneficiaries of his quest for the object, many Icelandic chieftains of the Sturlung age, who are his descendants and are mentioned in the final chapter of the saga.

The fact that both past and future generations occupy the positions of sender and receiver, i.e. what Greimas calls the axis of communication in his actantial model, need not come as a surprise. So much of the saga literature is genealogical in its nature, and therefore establishes some kind of relationship between the generations that are the object of the narrative and those of the present. What is interesting about *Eyrbyggja* – and this is probably true for quite a few of the sagas of Icelanders – is that this relationship involves three periods or generations: the settlers, the people living around the Conversion and those of the age of saga-writing. The settlers were the founders of the society in which both of the other generations live, although the second of these generations is the main object of the saga narratives.

One can therefore propose as a hypothesis that the third of these generations, to which the author and first auditors/readers of *Eyrbyggja* belong, is projecting one of its own concerns on the world of their ancestors living just before and after the Conversion. This concern is the necessity for a chieftain to hold his own in a society where there is enormous competition between people of equally prestigious ancestry. With reference to the title of Vésteinn Ólason's book on the sagas of Icelanders, *Eyrbyggja* is not only a 'dialogue with the Viking Age', but also with somebody, i.e. the generation of Snorri goði, who is already involved in a dialogic relationship with that particular period.

This has interesting ramifications for our understanding of *Eyrbyggja* and the purpose it served as a narrative. One is that the saga not only establishes a heritage but also tells of how individuals or groups deal with this inheritance. This is a theme which resonates with the situation of the chieftain class in the first half of the thirteenth century in Iceland, a period of increasing strife within the chieftain class. The sources tell of quite a few *godar* of that period who were equally well born (to paraphrase *Eyrbyggja*), whose capacity to use force was more or less proven and who were in intense competition for power. What was it that motivated them to engage in this struggle? There must have been some kind of pressure that was inherent in the fact that their position in society was bestowed upon them at birth. Therefore, they had to

defend it against other chieftains. In the following, I will argue that this pressure can be perceived not only in the theme of *Eyrbyggja* but also in the way it is structured.

An interesting side issue here, but of importance for a general understanding of Icelandic medieval literature, is that the genealogical urge, so obvious in the way literature in general and the saga genre in particular structured itself in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is related to the way society organised itself by basing the transmission of power and wealth through inheritance.⁹ It is therefore interesting to note the importance of dead fathers in *Eyrbyggja*; indeed, it is a very salient theme in the saga. This becomes clear when one searches for what Greimas calls isotopies, i.e. multiple occurrences of the same semantic element in the same narrative.

A brief overview of the semantic element in the saga yields the following results: Snorri is the fourth in a line of males founded by the Norwegian settler Þórólfr Mostrarskegg. Snorri's grandfather and father died prematurely. Snorri's father died when Snorri was yet unborn. He carries the mark of these fathers, however, since his social position derives from them. He also bears the same name as his father, Þorgrímr, even though he has been called Snorri from an early age. Another occurrence of the same semantic element is Snorri's own paternity, as has already been mentioned.

Of other characters whose fathers die or are dead, it is interesting to note that these fathers are in some sense problematic. The most obvious one is Þórólfr bægifótr, father to Arnkell goði. He can be characterised as a hostile father, engaging in a plot with Snorri against his own son. He is even worse when he dies, coming back as a revenant and killing among others his own wife (p. 93). His son manages to control him while he is alive, but after the death of Arnkell, Þórólfr bægifótr comes back and his body has to be burned to put an end to his haunting. Nevertheless a cow licks ashes from his body and is subsequently seen with a mysterious grey bull nobody has ever seen before or sees after this. The cow becomes pregnant with the bull calf Glæsir, so here again the theme of Þórólfr's paternity is hinted at (p. 171).

It is interesting to note that Þórarinn Máhliðingur, an important character in quite a long segment of the saga, also has a dead father. Though he does not appear in the saga, he is mentioned when Þórarinn is introduced. It is noteworthy that his name is Þórólfr, just like Arnkell's father and like Þórólfr Mostrarskegg, Snorri goði's great-grandfather. Þórarinn is remarkable for two things. First, he is such a peaceful man that his enemies say that he has just as much the character of a woman as that of a man.¹⁰ He is goaded by his mother but his wife tries to keep the peace. He becomes furious when he is accused of having cut his wife's hand. That is when he shows definitely that he does not have the character of a woman, by killing his aggressors.

The fourth occurrence of the theme of the dead father problematises paternity in a different way. Kjartan is the son of Þuríðr Barkardóttir, half-sister to Snorri goði. Though officially the son of Þóroddr, Kjartan is widely believed to be the son of Björn Ásbrandsson of Breiðavík (p. 77, 107-9, 155). Indeed, the saga makes it quite clear

⁹ For a discussion of genealogical structuring in Icelandic literature and its relationship with Icelandic society in the late twelfth and thirteenth century, see my *Matter of the North*, 35-63.

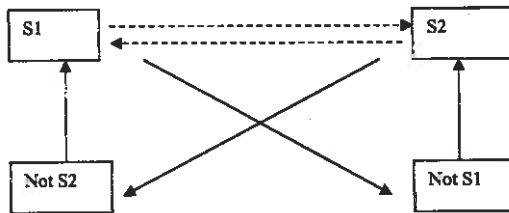
¹⁰ *Svá var hann maðr óhlutdeilinn, at óvinir hans mæltu, at hann hefði eigi síðr kvenna skap en karla.* (p. 27)

that in *Kjartan* we have a case of falsely attributed paternity. Nevertheless, the semantic element of paternity is present.

We therefore have four occurrences of the semantic element of paternity in the saga, and in all cases the fathers are dead. In two of these cases, the fathers will not stay in the world of the dead: Þórólfr bægifótr and Þóroddr. This is not true of the two others: Þórólfr Mostrarskegg, Snorri's great-grandfather lives on in Helgafell where he welcomes his son Þorsteinn in a memorable scene (p. 19), and we learn nothing of what became of Þórólfr, the father of Þórarinn. He must be dead and does not participate in the story. It is remarkable that of the four, three have the same name, Þórólfr.

It is tempting to try to fit all these dead fathers into what Greimas calls the elementary structure of meaning and which he represents as the 'semiotic square', with the following diagram.

Figure 1: Greimas's semiotic square



Meaning is structured through opposition (S1 vs. S2). Narrative achieves meaning by going through a number of logical transformations. Before going from S1 to S2, there must be a phase when meaning separates itself from S1 and becomes Not S1 before it can become S2. The same is true of the transformation from S2 to S1. It must transit by Not S2. To take the example of the opposing pair of Good and Evil, a good man must go through a stage when he is not good before becoming evil. This intermediary stage could be some kind of temptation he falls into which leads to his becoming evil. In order to be transformed back into good, he must renounce his evil ways. This is the elementary structure of a traditional story of Fall and Redemption, but also that of every story, if we follow Greimassian narrative theory.

Let us now turn to *Eyrbyggja*. If we allow ourselves to combine all of Snorri's paternal line into one, one could say that Snorri's dead father(s) is (are) characterised positively, and that he (they) stay(s) in his (their) place, i.e. the world of the dead. However, he (they) is (are) ever present in a sense, because Snorri's social situation derives ultimately from Þórólfr's status as first settler and *hofgoði*. This is for example symbolised by the way Snorri climbs up on Helgafell to devise successful plans (p. 72).

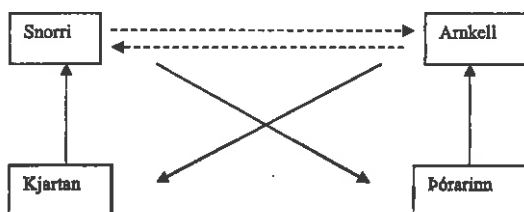
Þórarinn's father also stays dead, however there is nothing left of him, neither family ties nor power, to support his son in the struggle he must engage in. Þórarinn must rely on his maternal line, through his uncle Arnkell, and his brother-in-law, Vermundr mjóvi, who is married to his sister. One could say that this 'absence' of the father is symbolised by what is said of his *kvenna skap* or womanly temperament.

ArnkeU's father, Þórolfr bægifótr is the most infamous and virulent ghost of the saga, as has already been described. The characteristics I will note particularly here are his hostility towards his son, and the fact that he will not stay within the boundaries of the world of the dead. Indeed, he manifests himself at several times as an evil and disruptive power within the world of the living.

Finally, there is the problem of Kjartan's falsely attributed paternity. Here, the saga represents this ambiguity very clearly. On the one hand, there is no doubt that Björn is the young man's father; on the other, Kjartan himself will not let it be known that he is not the son of his 'official' father, as can be seen in the episode when Snorri is praising his nephew for valour in battle and alludes to his real father (p. 155). Kjartan will not talk about it, but the sword Björn sends to Kjartan at the end of the saga confirms symbolically that he is indeed the son of the hero from Breiðavík (p. 179-80).

The four sons of dead fathers can be arranged in a semiotic square in the following way:

Figure 2. Conflict between two types of goðar



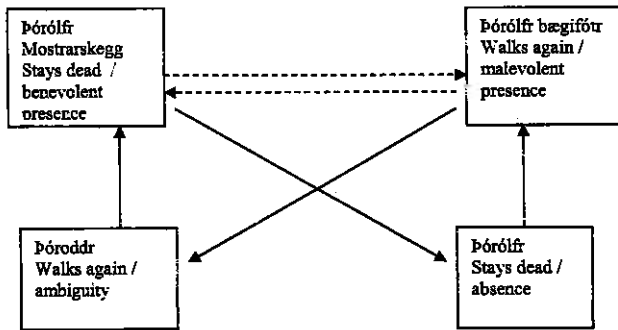
Snorri is Kjartan's maternal uncle, as Arnkell is maternal uncle to Þórarinn. Whether this is relevant or not remains to be seen. However, the saga narrative seems to follow the movement of the semiotic square along the unbroken lines in the diagram. After Snorri is introduced, we are told of how he acquires his father's farm and his ancestors' power in the area. This phase is what Greimas would call the acquisition of a competence. Then there is the episode involving Þórarinn svarti which will eventually pit Snorri against Arnkell goði, since the latter is obliged to organise his nephew's defence. After Arnkell has been killed, there is the long and complicated issue between Snorri and Björn Breiðvíkingakappi. It involves Björn's continuing affair with Snorri's sister, which is the reason for Kjartan's dubious paternity, but their feud also gets entwined into skirmishes between Snorri's close neighbours. Then we are told about Kjartan's supposed father's death and haunting, which brings the narrative back to Snorri. At the end of the saga, Snorri is the Christian goði, who has prevailed. He is also a certain type of chieftain. He has had a difficult time affirming his authority, while Arnkell has no problems. One could say that the saga tells of a developmental process, since in the end Snorri is successful. His descendants are in power while Arnkell has none.

It is interesting in this respect how meaning travels within the text in the form of the dead fathers (see figure 2). The dead fathers of Snorri remain dead and they are a source of strength for him. In this sense they are present and their presence is

benevolent. Þórarinn's father is absent, and he is in a position of weakness. His father's absence makes him neither malevolent nor benevolent, whereas Þórólf bægifótr's presence is pure malevolence. Though his son manages to check this malevolence while he is alive, it becomes ever more virulent as time passes and quite uncanny in the Glæsir episode.

The haunting at Fróðá leads to Þóroddr's death. He is a dead father who remains present in the world of the dead until he is made to leave when prosecuted in the *dyradóm* by Kjartan and his cousin, Snorri's son Þórðr kausi. His presence is transformed into absence and later the fact that he is not Kjartan's father is confirmed by both Snorri and Björn himself. At the end of the process, Snorri's authority over the region has increased.

Figure 3. Behaviour of dead fathers



The main opposition is therefore between two types of dead fathers, those who stay dead and those who will not rest in their graves. An additional opposition is between their benevolence and malevolence. The benevolent ones give the main character strength whereas the malevolent ones turn against him and disrupt society by their behaviour. One could rephrase this and say that the opposition is between two types of attitudes to what has been left by the father, or to inheritance. On the one hand, paternal heritage gives one status and wealth. On the other, it brings one trouble and in the end makes one's position weaker.

It is in this context of an opposition between two figures of the father that it is interesting to look at the first episode in which Snorri is involved in the saga, i.e. when he tricks Þórkr into giving him back his inheritance. This is a crucial episode from a Greimassian perspective, since in it Snorri acquires competence, as has already been said. The reader is now informed that Snorri is somebody with a plan, a plan that he will not necessarily divulge but that has to do with his striving for power to be the equal of his forebears. It also tells the reader that Snorri will prefer manoeuvrings and ruses to the use of brute force.

It is all the more interesting that this crucial episode should be linked to a situation analogous in many ways to that of Hamlet.¹¹ Indeed, Snorri goði and Shakespeare's prince of Denmark share a similar predicament. Both are sons and heirs to dead fathers who were rulers. In both cases their paternal uncle has taken over their father's political position and married his widow. Both *Eyrbyggja saga* and *The Tragedy of Hamlet* portray the ghosts of dead fathers. In the play it is the hero's father, in the saga his main opponent's.

This opens up a way for explaining why the complex task of acquiring power in a stateless society also involves ghostly episodes. It has to do with the duality of the father in Freudian theory: both the figure of the law, a model imposed on the son, and the fearsome tyrant, he who threatens to castrate the son if he does not submit to the law by repressing his desire for the mother. Unlike the ghost of Hamlet's father, who urges him to take revenge, the ghosts in *Eyrbyggja*, especially the ghost of Þórólfr bægifótr, represent the sadistic and castrating father, whereas the memory of the other Þórólfr, Þórólfr Mostrarskegg, Snorri's great-grandfather, is the model he has to imitate.

An element of significance here is the way the author of *Eyrbyggja* narrates the scene where Börkr gives his wife a blow for attempting to murder the slayer of her brother Gísli Súrsón. Indeed, the same episode is told in *Gísla saga*, but there Snorri is absent from the scene, whereas in *Eyrbyggja* he pushes his step-father to the ground and takes his mother under his protection (*Gísla saga*, p. 116-17). Another difference between the two sagas lies in the fact that whereas Þórdís divorces her husband immediately in *Gísla saga*, she doesn't do this until her son has managed to trick Börkr into selling him the ancestral farm at Helgafell. These differences between the two sagas carry meaning. *Gísla saga's* account of the episode highlights the major theme of that saga, i.e. the senseless logic which brings people to turn on their own kinsmen or friends in order to take revenge, a theme also developed in eddic poetry and in *fornaldarsögur*. The way the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* tells the story introduces quite a different theme: intergenerational strife for wealth, power and women.

Moreover, this theme is developed in a way that offers itself to an approach informed by psychoanalysis. Börkr is Snorri's uncle but also his mother's husband. Like Claudius in *Hamlet*, he is in the ambiguous position of being in the father's place and therefore concentrating upon himself the (suppressed) hatred of the son, but also being a usurper which the son must remove in order to take his own rightful place, (and can therefore legitimately hate). Hamlet does not manage to do this and Freud explains this by attributing Hamlet's famous indecision to his identification with Claudius. The uncle has done what the nephew secretly dreamed of doing himself (Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 367).

Snorri is more successful than Hamlet, since he not only obtains his rightful inheritance, but also gains control over his mother, who spends the rest of her life with him. However, the persistence of the ambiguity in his relationship with the paternal inheritance is projected into other parts of the saga, especially in its more fantastic parts, i.e. the Bægifótr episodes and the account of the haunting at Fróðá. It is signified one last time in the final chapter when the three members of the oedipal triangle,

¹¹ Paul Edwards and Hermann Pálsson mention this parallel with Hamlet in the introduction to their translation of the saga, p. 11.

Snorri, his mother Þórdís and his uncle Börkr are dug out of their graves before the eyes of Guðný Bøðvarsdóttir, the maternal ancestor of the Sturlung line (p. 183-4).

A tentative and temporary conclusion to this exploration of *Eyrbyggja's* structure would be that a combined structuralist and psychoanalytical approach is worth trying. The preliminary results suggest that the apparently loose structure of the saga has a hidden logic which allows one to read it as a social myth of the authority of the chieftain class, an authority which is undermined by an ambiguous relationship with its paternal inheritance. It does not present the ancestors as a model for the present but tells of a character that has to deal with the pressure of living up to the social status of his ancestors. By projecting problematic aspects of paternity onto figures of dead fathers, it deals in a covert way with the pressure to become a great chieftain.

The positive result of the approach attempted here is twofold. On the one hand it explains the seemingly loose structure of the saga, since the complexity of the saga's meaning calls for several narrative lines in order for it to be fully expressed. On the other hand it shows why the fantastic is so important in *Eyrbyggja*. It is because that particular mode allows saying what cannot be in a more realistic tale.

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