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Narrative Techniques in Njals Saga

By

Jane Lee Rulfs

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Chapter One

Introduction: "Saga"

In this study, I propose to demonstrate the organization of Brennu-Njáls saga (or Njála, to use the current and shorter nomenclature); to show that an organization exists, and that it encompasses every portion of this colossal work. As a preliminary, this chapter will attempt to justify such a study and to define its premises.

We will not concern ourselves here with the origins of the sagas in general, nor with the authorship of Njála in particular, for this study will deal only with the work as it exists, not with its (or its genre's) genesis. Karl Lehmann and Hans Schnorr von Carolsfeld, in their study of the law in Njála, Die Njáls-sage insbesondere in ihren juristischen Bestandtheilen, demonstrated that Njála in its present form was written after the fall of the Icelandic Republic—i.e., it is not a product of ancient oral tradition—a view by now generally accepted.¹ The arguments for and against both historical intent and oral tradition of the genre as a whole are contained in Theodore Andersson's The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins.²

The first major concern of this chapter will be saga style, as it has been described by a variety of critics. The "historical" and "oral" elements are the first areas demanding comment, since they touch upon the nature of the sagas. We will also define point of view in the sagas—narrative perspective and authorial limitations—and begin the discussion of common techniques.

The second part of this chapter will discuss the Weltanschauung the sagas express, a discussion necessary because so many opposing ethics have been seen in them. Some confusion about the moral basis of the
sagas is understandable, considering the vast and complex body of subject matter they present. It is difficult to measure the extent of Christian influence in the sagas, for they in general purport complete ignorance of it, in defiance of the fact that they were written in a Christian era. The heroic ethic has aroused equal controversy, due largely to its political use by Aryan racism. (The heroic code has also come under attack from pacifists such as Halldór Laxness, for example in his novel Gerpla, a re-telling of the Fóstbrodára saga.)

Consideration of general saga style and ethical bias should yield a set of boundaries beyond which no saga will pass, and a list of indispensable prerequisites which each saga must include, thus laying a foundation for an analysis of Fjála.

The sagas use a variety of phrases which seem to belong more to oral conversation than to written style. They are also anonymous, even such works as Fjála, which was in all probability the creation of a single, late thirteenth-century author. Oscar Bandle has stated that the sagas were anonymous because they were considered "Gemeingut"; but then, he believes that their intent was historical. It is safer to state that the sagas desire to resemble products of a folk tradition.

This desire is part of their "quasi-historicity." There is no way to verify the "truth" of the sagas' main content, but it is possible to judge their intent. They disagree in details with the more clearly historical Landnámabók (Book of Settlements); this can be laid to inadvertance, as it was by the historical school, or could, before Sigurður Nordal demonstrated the artistic function of the "historical inaccuracies" of Hrafnkels saga in his Hrafnkettla. Another such
example is furnished by *Laxdaela saga*, which is obviously a version of the Nibelungen tale; in other words, it is structured to express a particular intent.

Thus the intent of *Laxdaela* or *Hrafnkatla* is not to present unadorned and unstructured history, but to tell a story. It is easy to add other examples of obvious structuring—Gunnlaugs saga as the fulfillment of a dream-prophecy (this, too, borrowed from the Nibelungen legend); *Egils saga* as a skaldic biography; *Fóstbroeóra saga* as a story of love and vengeance.

On the other hand, one cannot, without further definition, treat the sagas as fiction. History-writing and fiction are not the only possible modes, and one cannot apply the rules of modern fiction to a medieval genre without first examining the premises of that genre. Fiction implies the suspension of disbelief, the creation of an illusion with its own internal logic. To a certain degree, the sagas follow fiction in this. Yet fiction is answerable only to its own inner causality, and if it can create a convincing inner logic, anything is possible to it. The sagas do not know this freedom; they deny themselves even the freedom of the medieval fantasy.

The individual saga may not create its own premises and its own logic by which alone it can be judged, like fiction; it is limited by genre expectations, which include some, even though spurious, references to historical fact. Neither author nor narrator is allowed an audible voice. Open emotionalism, or interior portrayal, is denied to author, narrator, and generally characters; everything must be portrayed from without. Characters act in certain situations according to stereotyped genre roles, particularly in the expression of jealousy,
revenge, magnanimity, etc. Women behave so consistently that they can be summarized into a very few types, as Rolf Heller has done in his book, Die literarische Darstellung der Frau in den Isländersagas. 8

A saga must have some reference to history and fact. Hrafnkatla begins: "Þá var á dögum Haralds konungs ins hárfagra, Hálfdanar sonar ins svarta... Óláfs sonar trútelgju svíakonungs, at sá maðr kom skipi sínu til Íslands í Breiðdal, er Hallfreðr hét." ("That was in the days of King Harald Fairhair, son of King Halfdane the Black... son of Olaf the Woodcarver king of the Swedes, that a man brought his ship to shore in Iceland at Breiðdal whose name was Hallfreðr.") This sentence conjures up history; Haraldr is a historical figure, Hallfreðr a supposedly historical one; both are presented as "real." Hrafnkatla proceeds slowly from this opening to the creation of its own fiction; other sagas move immediately into their own world. A sample paragraph from Chapter 3 of Hrafnkatla makes the distinction clear, for it is non-historical narrative. "Einn dag tók Einarr hest sinn ok reið á Aðalból. Hrafnkell sat í stofu. Hann heilsar honum vel og glaðliga. Einarr leitar til vistar við Hrafnkel." ("One day, Einarr took his horse and rode to Aðalból. Hrafnkell sat in the sitting-room. He greets him gladly. Einarr asks about a job.") Dialogue passages are more obviously "fictional."

Reminders of outside reality are common to all the sagas. Njála has easily two dozen examples such as "Starkaðr hét maðr; hann var sonr Barkar blátannarskeggs, Börkels sonar bundinfóta, er land nam umhverfis Eríhrynning." ("There was a man named Starkaðr. He was the son of Björk Bluetoothbeard, son of Börkell Boundfoot, who settled land around Eríhrynning, ch. 57.") 9
The sagas do not have the irrefutable philosophical framework which gives Christian allegory its basic "reality." Sagas have a structure, but they do not tell a story to illustrate a moral. Their only internal truth is that of human portrayal, and human portrayal apparently does not give them sufficient validity.

W. P. Ker, in his *Epic and Romance*, says that "Whatever Epic may mean, it implies some weight and solidity; Romance means nothing, if it does not convey some notion of mystery and fantasy," and, "Romance by itself is a kind of literature that does not allow the full exercise of dramatic imagination; a limited and abstract form, as compared with the fullness and variety of Epic." Romance must be kept within strict formal limits because it takes so much internal license. Saga, like Ker's epic, takes great formal freedoms, deriving its solidity from a real base in historical figures.

Saga reality lies in both historical (or pseudo-historical) ties and in the inner drama created. Basic components of the latter are the truth of accurate human portrayal and a realistic, unemotional style.

In narrative as well as in dialogue, the sagas use the spoken idiom, reinforcing their appearance of history and oral tradition: "Nú er þar til málss at taka," ("Now to be talked about is . . ."); "Svá er sagt at . . ." ("So it is said, that . . ."). "Nú" and "sagt" particularly can give no other impression than that of casual conversation between saga narrator and reader, and "nú" is used with a frequency approaching a rhythmical beat. Such stock phrases are used as a specific type of narrative punctuation. They are virtually ubiquitous at the beginning and end of episodes and at a shift of scene within an episode.

Stock phrases from "oral tradition"—particularly "nú" ("now") and
"pá" ("then")--create a rhythm of repetition giving linguistic continuity throughout the length of the saga. This repetition forms a subtle superstructure for the progression of events and episodes. Literary parallels within a saga, on the other hand, create an inner framework to tie the saga together (and to foreshadow the outcome of an event), but such parallels are not reinforced by verbal repetition.  

The sagas have a variety of further techniques for strengthening their historical look: genealogies, geographical detail, references to Landnámabók, to public opinion ("fá sógou menn..."; "Men said..."), etc. Njála adds to these the long and intricate law suits. As mentioned, these quasi-historical touches are often inaccurate. Lehmann and Carolsfeld demonstrate in their book that the law-suits in Njála also differs from Landnámabók in the account of Gunnarr's last battle. Landnáma mentions no women; it is obvious in Njála why Hallgerðr, Gunnarr's malicious wife, was included. She is one of the more picturesque pieces of motivation in the genre.

Some of the quasi-historical techniques are devices of perspective. The shift to a historical viewpoint is, like the oral phrases, most common at the beginning and end of episodes. It can have the effect of the famous perfect tense in the last sentence of Goethe's Werther, creating objective distance between the reader and the narrative. Historical perspective is used to give a firm starting point to a story, to bring it back to rest, or to mitigate moments of great suspense.

Several elements of the sagas' "realistic" style have been cited by the historical school as proof of their historical intent: chronological order, the ban on overt expression of emotions, the limitation of authorial omniscience to scenes which could have been viewed by an
eyewitnesses, the lack of authorial intrusion. These limitations were interpreted as a ban on the embellishment of historical fact.\textsuperscript{14}

These aspects of style are no proof of origin. It has been demonstrated that they are as inconsistent as the historical references are inaccurate. Chronological order is broken by the genealogies and by foreshadowing; one can only attribute to the sagas a sense of the "unity of time."\textsuperscript{15} Events develop from the starting point to the conclusion, and chronological order is conducive to an effect of inexorability.

Some emotions, such as love, are not portrayed in the sagas, perhaps because they are too intimate. Yet anger or grief at insult or injury are expressed in gestures, or outward physical manifestations, although never in speech. Vengeance is the genre's chief motivation, and thus the accompanying emotions are necessary to the narrative.\textsuperscript{16}

The sagas have a particular fondness for the sentence "A and B went up on the mountain and talked, and no one knows what they said," which is a very effective device. It furthers the illusion that the content of a saga is limited to firsthand accounts. Actually, this is another shift from the normal dramatic and scenic perspective to pseudo-historical distance.

There is also a considerable use of scenes which could have been viewed by no eyewitness reporter—the last moments of Skarphedinn and Grímr in Njála, for example (ch. 13:). These are moments when trying to explain the source of information (such as a shepherd hiding near a bush or someone looking through the window) would be more devastating to the illusion of truth than silence.

Thus, the sagas use their realistic and pseudo-historical style to further the look of truth.\textsuperscript{17} In the main, they try to resemble historical
writing, but the quasi-historicity is not allowed to hinder their cre-
ation of a drama.

On the surface, shifts to a distant perspective seem to be that
shattering of the narrative illusion that Brecht called "epic." Instead,
the particular sentence, "A and B went up on the mountain and talked..."
is placed at the most tantalizing moments, when it seems to heighten
rather than diminish suspense. Such secret conversations are virtual
stereotypes as signals and emphatic devices; the results are always made
known, and always have a great influence upon the further course of
events.

While there is a real ban upon authorial omniscience which expresses
thoughts in direct or indirect discourse, character portrayal is the
sagas' primary goal, and thus they must find methods of expressing the
characters' reactions to the course of events. The gestural systems
developed by Goedecke and Hruby are one such method; the gestures can be
very powerful, like Skarphedinn's eerie grin that foreshadows his death
in Íjálæ.

The primary technique of characterization is the usual one of allow-
ings the character to reveal himself through his actions and words. His
value as a man is established through action, through his behavior under
stress, and his emotions are irrelevant to his deeds, and thus to his
worth in the sagas' ethical system.

Dialogue is the vehicle for expressing his reactions to events.
It is not a reliable source for establishing his worth, but it is the
method for making him human, for making him tragic or loveable. Saga
characters tend to be most verbose at moments of greatest leisure and
least tension. They become silent in the face of danger, they express
themselves only through a magnificent gesture, such as a light epi-
gram.\textsuperscript{19} Moral strength is shown through deeds. This distinction be-
tween dialogue and narrative, between thought and action, is the basis
of \textit{Njála}.

Authorial omniscience in the sagas is limited to the perception of
internal processes, as they are revealed externally. This restriction
places no limitations upon what is expressed, only upon the method by
which it is expressed. The same may be said of authorial intrusion: it
is not absolutely banned; it is merely limited to certain standard areas
of expression. The first of these—and, generally speaking, the only
permissible \textit{direct} authorial opinion—occurs in the introduction of new
characters. The reader is told typically: "He was generous/a brave
man/respected by his neighbors," or alternatively, "He was hard-up for
cash/malicious and cunning/No one thought well of him." The reader is
left in no doubt as to which opinion he is to hold about the character,
or what role he is to play in the saga.

The second main (but indirect) vehicle for authorial commentary is
the shift to historical or distant perspective. When "people said that
it was a dastardly act," supposed public opinion has been used to
express authorial opinion.\textsuperscript{20} This is an especially strong device in
light of the saga ethic, according to which a man's value exists solely
in public opinion.

The saga author's restrictions and liberties arise from an inner
logic which is itself an outgrowth of the sagas' heroic ethic. In the
power complex of the saga hero's world, one of the most sought-after
skills is the ability first to conceal one's own emotions, and second
to read one's opponent's, thereby gaining the ascendancy, as both
Goedecke and Eruby have stated. It is to this point of view that the saga narrator is limited, as well as the characters. Whatever cannot be read from exteriors, whatever the audience cannot validate empirically by common sense, does not belong to the sagas' concept of reality. Within this limitation, the saga-author displays a highly-developed faculty of observation, as do his characters.

One further area of general saga style remains to be discussed: the method of structuring. Foreign models have been found or postulated for some of the sagas; they would thus furnish a framework around which the events have been ordered. As has been mentioned, *Laxdæla* is a reflection of the story of the Nibelungen. The high-point of *Egils saga*, Egill's "höfuðlausn," bears a strong resemblance to an account of Bragi before King Björn of the Swedes. Gunnarr's last battle in *Njálal* corresponds closely to a scene on a panel of the Frank's casket, and Guðbrandur Vigfússon has postulated a lost Irish legend as source of both.

It is possible to distinguish thematic sub-genres of the saga, such as the skaldic biography (e.g., *Egils saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Kormáka saga*), the romance (e.g., *Gunnlaugs saga* and *Laxdæla*), the outlaw story (e.g., *Grettis saga* and *Gísla saga*) a single comedy (as in *Bændamanna saga*), the common conflict drama (e.g., *Hoenesa-Fóris saga* and *Bjarnar saga hitdalakappa*); other common themes could also be found. The differences of theme imply differences of structure and content. Verses naturally play a greater role in the skaldic biography than in any other type of saga, for example. And no romance could exist without its picturesque prophecy or parallel.
Common to all the sagas is the conflict. Theodore Andersson developed the conflict as the basic structuring form of the genre in a provocative study, The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading. He describes a common rhythm pattern which resembles that of classic drama: beginning, after a ceremonious introduction, with the initial irritation from which strife springs, the saga builds toward a carefully motivated climax, generally in the dramatic form of a battle. The emotion aroused by the exposition and climax is released in a revenge section, and the saga end with a general reconciliation. "One of the fundamental principles of the saga is that of balance. The narrative line of a saga is a progression from balance to imbalance (conflict and the outbreak of violence) back to balance."\(^{24}\)

This is an apt formulation, and a most important observation on saga structure; however, Andersson attempts to fit a single conflict over the entirety of every Icelandic saga, and this does not always work—at least, not without reservation. Any saga longer than about ten chapters creates a cycle from balance to climax to balance. Njála, which has a long progression of episodes, creates a rhythm of rise and fall of tension as conflict after conflict arises and is resolved, a pattern typical of all the sagas.

It is indeed possible to interpret any saga as a single conflict; it is possible to make Njáll's death the climax of his saga, and on one, very abstract level, it is accurate to do so, as we shall show in the next chapter. But a single conflict spread over 159 chapters is abstract at best. By far the strongest rhythm is that of the individual episode, for only in brevity can the sagas create the dramatic effects so typical of this art form. Considering only Gunnarr's section of
Njála, there are four major conflicts, each composed of a series of smaller climaxes. Each of the four sections is an entity by content and by form, for each begins and ends at a point of balance. The return to balance makes their rhythm dominant over the subtle methods used to weight Gunnarr's story toward his death.

Andersson's description is most accurate and valuable for the individual episode. It can thus be fitted most convincingly onto the þættur-length sagas which contain only one episode, such as Forsteins þáttr stangaryggja, which is the starting point of Andersson's analysis. Attempting to make Egill's "höfuðlausn" the moment toward which all else in his saga is aimed, as Andersson does, is to reduce all but a few chapters to irrelevancy.

As has been said, the sagas are episodic, creating a rhythm of building from rest to dramatic climax and unwinding again to rest, to begin again. Part cause of the sagas' episodic nature is an apparent fear of boring. The rapid tempo and dramatic use of dialogue also contribute to the sagas' outward appearance as adventure stories. The larger sagas build a supra-structure by varying the rhythm of the individual episodes to create a grander effect and to give particular emphasis to one episode in a series. Thus in the second half of Njála, the long series of episodes in the feud build logically toward the destruction of Njáll's family.

As examples of the supra-structures used, Gunnaus saga and Leidxæla use the dream-prophecy to give structural unity to a series of small conflicts. The first half of Egils saga is built around the Icelandic truism that it is unwise to put one's faith in kings like Haraldr Fairhair, since Órólfur, who did, was killed by the king, while
his brother Skallagrímur, who instead fled to Iceland, prospered and lived
to die of old age, the goal of every saga hero. The second half re-
volves around Egill, the warrior-skald, and the unique power of poetic
génius. The two halves together make Egils saga a nationalistic affir-
mation of particularly Icelandic ideals.

The feeling of continuity given by such underlying structures is
reinforced by the saga's pseudo-historical style. Within the framework
of a supposedly historical subject matter, unity is further supported by
the march of chronological order and by the general repetition of stock
phrases which tie the work together linguistically. This framework
gives the saga a great deal of freedom, allowing it to jump from scene
to scene and to maintain a rapid tempo without becoming fragmented.
The major events are pre-determined by "historical" accounts such as
Landnámabók; Njáll must be burned, and Gunnarr must meet his end at
Hlíðarendi.

The style of the sagas is an intricate system of balances, between
pseudo-historical apparent lack of structure and romantic, obviously
artistic devices and motifs; between adventure story and psychological
drama; between the autonomy of the episodes and the continuity of the
whole; between history and fiction.

We have examined the more pertinent elements in the exterior form
of the sagas, and indicated a few of the techniques used to achieve
the desired effect. A few remarks are also necessary on the content,
on the Weltanschauung behind the sagas, the unexplained background for
the characters' actions. The sagas' ethical system can be read from
the works themselves, although it is not recreated in the individual
work. It is instead an invariable premise for each saga.

The sagas' concept of man is complex. He has been seen by W. P. Ker, G. Turville-Petre, and Sigurður Nordal as the heroic ideal;28 by Peter Hallberg and A. U. Bæðth as the doomed plaything of fate;29 by Andre Jolles as the subservient family member.30 Man in the sagas does not exist in a void; what defines any man includes his forebears, his sphere of influence from family to fé (property), and his reputation with both his contemporaries and posterity. Thus no character of note may be introduced without a genealogy; in the saga context, this would leave him without a background and unsubstantial. There are no poor heroes in the sagas; a man without property is negligible. Hoensa–Hörir is a good example; he is indigent and rootless and remains throughout his saga a contemptible figure. Offense at insults to both property and esteem is one of the most frequent motivation for conflict, for such insults jeopardize a man's position.

M. C. van den Toorn discusses the various ethical systems behind the saga man in his dissertation, Ethics and Moral in Icelandic Saga Literature.31 The saga ethic is a system of balances between the magnificent gesture of the heroic honor code, as expressed in the Eddaic tales, and the common-sense practicality of the Hávamál aphorisms.32

Heroic honor can lead to extreme behavior, such as the feud between Hallgerðr and Bergþóra in Njála, which begins from a question of seating and kills seven men; examples from other sagas include Hoens–Hörir's slaying of Blundketill, Styrr's ravages in Heidavíga saga, Eiríkr raudí's incessant feuds which lead to his outlawry, and the entire personality of Þorgeirr in Fóstbroðra saga. In the case of Njála, Peter Hallberg and Magnus Magnusson find the reactions of its characters to
insult excessive. Republican law is cast in the sagas in the role of balance to such extremism; the law assumes the position of mediator.

In general, the concept of honor in the sagas has been modified to allow the hero the possibility of a long and prosperous life. (I define "hero" here, as throughout this work, as one who lives according to the heroic ideal). Honor is practically identical with power. Ideally, the saga hero wishes to live forever, collecting wealth, family, and friends dependent upon his munificence, wisely regulating the lives of the large number within his sphere of power, unchallenged by similar aspirants to power. Egill Skalla-Grímsson must rank as one of the most successful saga heroes. Yet even he must live to lose his son and his nearest friend and to become blind and impotent, thus demonstrating that perfection is not possible in this world.

Life being what it is, it is generally impossible for the saga hero to attain all his goals. Thus he must choose at each crisis. Some saga characters choose consistently throughout their careers: the unscrupulous money-grubber Hoensa-Hórir, the heroic devotee to vengeance Fornmór Bersason of Fóstbroðra saga, the vain and belligerent warrior, such as Gunnlaugr ormstunga (among many others). Most saga characters are less singleminded, and their problems are thus more interesting, their stories more dramatic.

The most poignant dilemma for the saga character is facing the choice between death and dishonor. This is always an individual decision; although the situation is a common one, there is no stereotyped preference. Each man has his own point at which the prospect of disgrace (or personal loss) becomes unbearable. For Gunnarr, it is outlawry and exile from Iceland; for Njáll, the loss of his sons.
When faced with a crisis, the man of the saga may act from purest self-preservation, or according to the heroic standard, and the most picturesque example of this contrast is the juxtaposition of Kári and Björn in Njal's (ch. 148-152). Kári is so ideally heroic as to be boring, and Björn's cowardice and bravado make him a comic-relief figure of almost Shakespearian character.

"Fate" is another name for all the illogical and unforeseeable catastrophes which strike a man in spite of all attempts to live by the saga ethic. The events themselves are less interesting to the saga audience than human behavior; it is a man's reaction to events that proves his worth and gives the events meaning.

Self-assertion of the individual will in the face of a chaotic reality is the meaning of life. The lowest form is the every-day materialism of the Hávamál—"Look behind the door when you go into a stranger's hall, for an enemy may be lurking there," and the other pole includes heroic self-control—displaying no reactions to the worst buffets—and the heroic gesture.

The inanimate world is unstructured and vaguely hostile; landscape description is rare and strictly functional to the plot. Mountains, fogs, and rivers impede flight or pursuit; this is nature's only influence upon the saga character. The relationship of man to his fellows is a continuation of his struggle with the inanimate world, a continuous power-struggle.

This entire concept of man is, in the saga definition, fundamentally heathen, and cannot exist in a Christian environment. Self-assertion, the accumulation of power, and the pursuit of honor are not Christian virtues. The saga hero, a man alone against the world, is not a
Christian figure. A Gunnarr who could cast his fate into the hands of God would lose most of the dramatic interest he arouses in the saga context. Höskuldr Hvítanessgodó is an apt illustration of the lack of drama surrounding the saga Christian.

The saga’s heroic individualism may be only the literary ideal of the thirteenth century rather than a document of the tenth; but it is the ethic expressed in the sagas, and it determines the narrator's reaction to the behavior of his characters. A man introduced as "wealthy, generous and well-respected" will conform to a certain code of behavior, a mixture of heroism and Hávamál, and will merit the narrator's approval.

The art form itself charts a man's ability to face his fate without succumbing to it. In the general saga situation, the various goals of the characters are made clear, their methods of achieving their goals are developed, and the obstacles that arise are followed to the final result of the situation.

To the sagas, the most interesting aspect of the general human situation is a character's reaction to the unavoidable obstacle, particularly a fatal crisis. Death may not be met cravenly, it must be met wilfully when it becomes unavoidable, and most superb of all is to meet it with a light-handed gesture.

The content of the saga thus divides into two realms: the realm of action, which plots the path the character carves toward his ambitions; and the realm of psychology, interested in plumbing his motives and reactions to the events which affect him. The literary medium of the realm of action is prose narration; of psychology, dialogue.

This explication of saga ethic is but a summary of standard
comments on fate, family, and the hero's code. Its only originality lies in its viewing the saga ethic from a literary rather than philosophical standpoint. For the purposes of this study, we are uninterested in its origin, viability or implications in the real world. The only sure applicability of the saga ethic is as a literary phenomenon, and it is unwise to view it as anything else.

In conclusion, the sagas have the following general characteristics. First, a particular set of ties to the factual world is essential to them, as a literary framework, but not as a literal reference, for the sagas are invariably structured, and interested in telling a story.

Second, the sagas are interested primarily in human behavior, revealed in the stream of action, since the overt verbal expression of thoughts or emotions is not allowed. Even dialogue has as normal subject matter the course of events.

Third, the sagas are dramatic in their creation of suspense. The opening situation is built toward a climax which is made inevitable by structure--by rhythm, by foreshadowing, by literary parallel. The basic structural form is the conflict. The most important attribute is balance. A sense of drama is particularly evident in the dialogue; not in the mere fact of its existence, but in the careful art of paring it to the most telling few phrases. 35

Last, the human behavior portrayed in the sagas is judged by a set ethic which purports ignorance of Christianity and the courtly code; every saga narrator approves the same type of behavior. Njála contains all these elements of the genre, as well as innovations of its own. It plays deliberately with its role between history and literature; it contains an unusual number of obviously literary
motifs, and it also contains unusual sections of apparent raw history. Æjálta takes as its basic structural principle the saga dichotomy of the realm of action and the realm of psychology and divides them between its two protagonists, Gunnarr the consummate hero, and Njáll the man of ultimate knowledge. This is formed into a dual structure, the story of Gunnarr and the story of Njáll.
Chapter Two

The Structure of Njála

As we survey the various past interpretations of Njála, two major problems emerge: the divergency of Njála's parts and its relationship to Christianity. These two problems are the key to the author's choice and arrangement of his material, and thus offer a good approach to the work.

Njála has an intentional structure. Its wealth of events may seem at first chaotic and bewildering; the sagas in general take some care to create this effect by concealing the mechanics of their structures. In addition, both the standard saga structure—a single strand of narrative tending toward a climax—and the elliptical saga style are better suited to brevity than to the length of a Njála. The overall structure is easily lost in the mass of material.

Yet Njála can be broken down into several discrete episodes, as Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Denton Fox, and A. U. Bæth have done.¹ Two short episodes introduce it: the story of Hrútr and the story of Hallgerðr. These are then followed by Gunnarr's saga, which sub-divides into five sections: introductory anecdotes, the feud between Bergþóra and Hallgerðr, and Gunnarr's three conflicts with Otkell, with the Starkadarsons, and with the two Ængeirrs. The structure of Njála's second half reverses that of the first half: the feud between Njáll's family and the Sigrússons corresponds to Gunnarr's story in the first half, while Kári's revenge and Brjánn's saga, minor structures like Hrútr's and Hallgerðr's stories, close the saga.

The relationship of the various sections to one another is the first of our two problems. By far the most frequent and most emphatic
criticism leveled against *Njála* is that it is an uneasy marriage of two major and some minor stories tied together in the most superficial and unconvincing manner. The two major stories traditionally are called Gunnarr's saga and Njáll's saga; each has its own inner logic in structure, content, and general style. In addition, the story of Hrútr, the story of Hallgerðr, the historical excursion on the introduction of Christianity, and Brjánn's saga are equally independent of the two major stories.

The older school of criticism, represented by Guðbrandr Vigfússon, Finnur Jónsson, W. A. Craigie, and Sophus Bugge, first leveled this criticism at *Njála*. These critics saw *Njála* as a late amalgam of various oral sagas and þaettir (short sagas) which correspond to the separate stories listed above. Andreas Heusler also finds the conception of *Njála* too broad, its sections unamalgamated.

Many critics of the modern school still accept this theory of *Njála*'s origins, but A. U. Bæðth and Einar Ól. Sveinsson, and others after them, have seen *Njála* as a unified, cohesive work, based upon the opposing central characters Gunnarr and Njáll. The portrayal of Gunnarr and Njáll, as a structural principle, does not explain certain digressive sections of *Njála*. Anne M. Saxon and Richard F. Allen (as well as Einar Ól. Sveinsson) have demonstrated *Njála*'s use of repeated minor motifs to establish relationships between events.

Sigurður Nordal furthered the concept of *Njála*'s unity by explaining the historical digressions as part of the look of truth. The digressions are tied, superficially at least, to the main course of events. Hrútr is a pre-parallel of Gunnarr; Christianity plays a role in the motivation of Njáll's death; Brjánn's saga is the setting for
Kári's last acts of revenge for Njáll's death. However, these ties do not justify the full development in each case of action which is independent of the main stream of events. In order to be valid, any general structure of Njála will have to explain the function of these digressions.

The second problem, the Christian or otherwise ethical bias of Njála, is equally debated. A variety of ethical interpretations can be found for Njála, all with some validity. Denton Fox and Magnus Magnusson see Njála as a condemnation of the stifling honor code which kills Gunnarr. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Fox read a Christian interpretation into Njáll's death (as a result of his sins). Wilhelm Goetz makes gold the evil, from Hrútr's initial folly in retaining Gunnhildr's gift, to Gunnarr's and Njáll's deaths as a result of Móðr's greed. Carsten Hauch derives the entire tragedy from the wages of Gunnarr's first deceitful action, when he disguises himself as Kaupa-Hedinn.

There is one critic who sees Njála's moral bias as entirely heathen. Einar Pálsson, a theologian, has recently interpreted Njála as a medieval allegory of the pagan Icelandic heritage. In his book Baksvið Njálu, he develops his theory of a religion tied to the land itself, and based on a wheel of seasons and on the death and rebirth of Freyr (as represented in Njála by Höskuld Hvítanessgoði). Until Pálsson develops and clarifies his allegory, his theory can be attacked or defended only from the standpoint of anthropology, and does not belong in the realm of literary criticism. It is mentioned here only to illustrate the full range of palusible opinions on the meaning of Njála, and to emphasize the martyr-like character of Höskuld Hvítanessgoði.

In dealing with the two problematic areas, the relationship of the
sections and the moral bias of the whole, we will begin with the structure of the two main sections of *Njála*, Gunnarr's story and Njáll's story (the feud between Njáll's sons and the Sigfrússons), their relationship to each other and the reasons for their differences. We will then include the other, shorter sections to arrive at a coherent structure of the saga as a whole, and its intent. In this context, the structural role of Christianity and the pagan heritage will be discussed. Their full thematic implications will be left until we deal with the content.

The shift of central figure from Gunnarr to Njáll would suffice to divide the saga into two independent sections. Yet the separation is reinforced by differences of style and general structure; these differences, more than the difference in content, are responsible for the theory that the two halves were originally separate sagas.

Gunnarr's story is a series of episodes, each leading to an independent climax: the Bergbóra-Hallgerðr feud, the conflict with Otkell Skarðsson, the conflict with Starkaðr Barkarson, and the two Órgeirrrs. The first three have no causal connection to one another; only the last episode, which leads to Gunnarr's downfall, derives from preceding events.

The unifying factor is the strong and strongly emphasized figure of Gunnarr. His story is thus a saga-biography (like *Haensa-Ióris saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Bjarnar saga hitdaelakappa*, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímsson*, *Grettis saga*, and *Gísla saga*). All these sagas use the same unifying technique: they group a series of otherwise unrelated episodes around a central figure.

The second half of *Njála* belongs to the feud-saga type (like
Heiðarvíga saga, Laxdæla, Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings, Bandamanna saga, Ljósvetninga saga, and other sagas named for a clan instead of a single character). In Njáll's story, one event leads to the next in a logical progression, but the characters in the foreground shift constantly. This is the classic pattern of the saga feud. The original cause, Bráinn Sigfússon, soon dies, and even Njáll and his family pass from the saga. Yet the feud continues between Kári Solmundarson and Flosi Þóróarson, far removed from the original insult which appeared so briefly in the early stages of Gunnarr's saga (ch. 42).

In his story, Gunnarr never relinquishes the dominant position. He is a striking character, and he is further emphasized by structure. From his introduction to his death, Gunnarr is constantly a central combatant. The second half of Njála deliberately has no one to equal him, for the feud contains a shifting set of combatants. Instead of a strong central figure, the feud presents a series of semi-heroes: Skarphéðinn, almost an anti-hero, Kári and Hóskuldr Hvítanessgooi, both shallow characters. In both halves of the saga, Njáll remains on the periphery of the action.

No one has made the accusation that Njáll does not belong in his own half of the saga. He at least dies there, and thus is closely concerned with the course of events. However, the historical school in particular has accused Njáll of not belonging in Gunnarr's story, of being inserted into it to give the saga a surface unity.¹³ Njáll's peripheral nature appears more sharply when contrasted with the strong central figure of Gunnarr; Njáll and Gunnarr appear together as complements only in Gunnarr's story, and no further reason for Njáll's presence there is necessary.
The difference between the structures of the two halves carries further implications. The obvious end to the saga-biography is the death of the central character. It is also the perfect climax, if one is interested as many saga authors are in dramatic suspense and a closed structure. By contrast, there is no obvious end to a feud and no obvious climax. The general reconciliation usually chosen is often anti-climactic. A feud terminates arbitrarily, it does not close gracefully.

The feud is a diverse and expansive form. In mid-action, it can diverge into a second line of events. It is open-ended; a feud could potentially go on forever. It progresses logically; one event leads to the next, given the code of insult and revenge which the sagas establish.

The biography is closed and uniform in comparison. It engages our sympathies for a central hero who then goes down to destruction. It has little of the impartiality of the feud. We become wrapt up in Gunnarr's fate, as in no other in this saga. We can take a historic perspective of the deaths of Njáll and his family, and yet they are potentially the more tragic figures, for with them die their family unit and their pre-Christian way of life. Yet Njáll has the historian's perspective that what the future brings is right, and this attitude precludes tragedy.

The dispassionate tone of the second half of Njála is a necessary balance to the inevitable tragedy inchoate to a logical progression of events. On the other hand, in Gunnarr's saga, there is neither logic nor moral to his death. Someone finally kills him after a series of incidents have gradually rendered him vulnerable.

In terms of causality, the first half of Njála is arbitrary and the second half logically rigorous. In terms of construction, on the other
hand, the arbitrary first half is tightly structured, and the logical
second half is diversely structured. The natural differences between
biography and feud are further developed in Njála. Gunnarr’s saga is
overtly “literary”; in other words, it uses certain recognizable devices.
There is the pattern of Hallgerðr’s story: marriage—slap—death of the
husband. Second is foreshadowing, exemplified in Njáll’s famous pro-
phhecy, repeated until it becomes an independent motif. Last is the use
of three-fold repetition, with the emphasis on the third repetition.17
Gunnarr is Hallgerðr’s third husband; he and Njáll exchange compensation
three times in the feud between their wives; Gunnarr meets three major
threats to his life successfully, although the third precipitates the
fatal episode; he even wards off three assaults in his final battle.
And his story is prefaced by two independent þaettir, the story of Hrútr
and the story of Hallgerðr, and is itself a third element.

There are no digressions, nothing superfluous in Gunnarr’s story
from his introduction to his death. Everything serves to portray the
classic hero and to build the classic structure. Njáll’s story has no
obviously literary motifs. Its feud logic gives it an inner unity
which Gunnarr’s story lacks, so that the tight structural unity of
Gunnarr’s story is no longer necessary. Thus Njáll’s story has the
freedom to make excursions into the history of the law (the founding
of the Fifth Court), of religion (the advent of Christianity), and of
great events (the battle of Clontarf).

Within Njáll’s feud, there is a complex overlapping of other stories.
The story of Hóskuldur Hvítanessgoði, the doom of Njáll’s family, the
story of Christianity, and the story of Kári and Flosi are separate
strands that weave in and out of the progression of short episodes. The
movement of history can be considered both another story and a separate theme of Njála.

The tight structure of the first half of Njála engages the audience and prepares the epic expansiveness of the second half. But the fundamental intent behind the division of the saga into two so disparate parts is the portrayal of the two sides of man represented in the dichotomy of Gunnarr and Njáll, the man of action and the man of thought. 18

Each major character in Njála falls into one of two types. There is an unusual number of noncombatant intellectuals: Mörðr Valgarðsson, Gizurr inn hvíti Teitsson, Geirr goði Ásgeirsson, Ásgrímr Ellidaðrímsson, Eyjólfur Bölverksson and Höskuldr Dala-Kolsson. The men of action are easily identified: Hrútr Herjólfsesson, Skarphédinn Njálsson, Kári Solmundarson, Flosi Mórdarson, to name only the major characters.

Njáll is as logical as the motivation in his section of the saga. On the other hand, his story is amorphous in structure, and thus a fitting framework for Njáll, whose role is not clearly defined as that of the normal saga hero. He is the only titular saga hero never to strike a blow in battle. Since saga action is typically physical action, Njáll can never be said to act in a saga sense. He is instead a machinator and intellectual mover. Njáll is never the center of the action, but moves on its periphery, and is thus unique as a pivotal figure. Even his death is but a side effect of Flosi's revenge upon Njáll's sons. The subsequent trial at the Alping does not deal with Njáll's slaying, but with Helgi's, even though it is held in Njáll's milieu, and at the court he founded. 19

Njáll is the personification of the "psychological" ideal, a man able to read the complete course of events. His ability to read men
and his second sight combine to make him wise. But Njáll sees too much, since he also sees the final futility of action and expectation. It is very early in the saga that he says, "I know how I shall die" (ch. 55), and the saga is punctuated by Njáll's forecasts of inevitable events.

Because of his ironic personality and his peripheral role, Njáll is a basically undramatic figure who must have other characters around him: Gunnarr, Skarphéòinn, Kári. Gunnarr is his opposite, the consummate hero and an intensely dramatic figure. Gunnarr's story is generally better liked than Njáll's because it is closer to the classic saga structure, and Gunnarr himself is a classic saga hero. The consummate warrior is a genre type including Egill, Gunnlaugr, Grettir and Eiríkr rauði.

Gunnarr is so admirable a character that he must be tempered. By all the saga ethic, so successful and virtuous a hero should prosper. Yet whatever, virtues, morals or literary statements are made must also be ironically conditioned; this is a basic rule of the art form, a part of its definition of realism. In Gunnarr's case, balance is restored by the reminder that the course of events is arbitrary and impervious to even the consummate hero. The end of Egill Skalla-Grimsson's life is a similar illustration of the futility of success. Njáll's story does not need to be as externally arbitrary as Gunnarr's story, for Njáll's gift is so awesome that no such authorial tempering is necessary.

To summarize, Gunnarr's story is a saga-biography, organized around a central figure. It is tightly structured, without extraneous elements, and it uses a variety of literary motifs to give it further unity and motivation. The episodes are suspenseful and the scenes
dramatic; the reader is drawn into the story. On the other hand, most of the episodes have no logical connection to one another, and the events have the flavor of the arbitrary.

The second half of Njálse is constructed as a feud between Njáll's clan and the Sigfússon clan. It is a logical sequence of events with its own internal inevitability (reinforced by Njáll's prophecies). The content is broad and diverse with large excursions into marginal topics, allowable in such a loose structure. Further, several independent stories overlap and parallel within the long series of episodes. We shall of course go into these more in the next chapter. Compared to the careful and obvious structure and motif development of Gunnarr's story, Njáll's feud is deliberately non-literary or pseudo-historical in tone. The entire saga is defined as a unit by the sizable introduction (Hrótr's and Hallgerðr's stories) and epilogue (Kári's revenge and Brjánn's saga); the two halves share an outer framework.\textsuperscript{20}

The digressions from the story of Gunnarr and Njáll are unexplained by the goal of creating the man of action and the man of thought. The role of Christianity does offer an explanation. Christianity ends the saga age. In \textit{Einfache Formen}, Andre Jolles interprets the destruction of clan loyalty by Christianity as the cause for the end of the saga age.\textsuperscript{21} But much more devastating to the saga than the destruction of the family is the destruction of the heroic individual.

Gunnarr is the ideal saga type, and Gunnarr is a man alone. He possesses a family which is no more than necessary social background. By contrast, Njáll would be unthinkable without his sons. The members of Njáll's family are constantly bowing to the will of each other, while
Gunnarr acts from no other consideration than his own interests. His attitude is typical of the saga heroes, a string of magnificent egotists, from Eiríkr rauði to Egill Skalla-Grimsson.

Christianity ended the possibility of such aggressive individualism, and Christianity ends the feud and Njála. The sequence of events begun when Hrútr goes abroad is ended not by climactic battle, and not by the triumph of reasonable conciliation, but by the final Christianizing of the remaining combatants Kári and Flosi. There can be no sequel to Njála. It is closed both artistically and philosophically.

Gunnarr's saga is completely heathen, by the saga definition of Christians and heathens. His life and death are governed by the rules of the saga ethic, as opposed to the Christian ethic, a very marked distinction in Njála. Njáll's is a Christian death, the result of a grave sin, the slaying of Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði. Sin is a concept normally foreign to the sagas.

Thus another, philosophical distinction exists between the two halves of Njála: Gunnarr's story moves according to the (heathen) saga ethic and knows no other. Gunnarr acts with consistent self-confidence because he never contacts Christianity. Njáll's story judges actions according to the Christian ethic. The concept of family, associated with Njáll and with feuds in general, implies a self-abnegation, a bowing to the will of others; Njáll and his sons constantly defer to the scruples of each other. The author of Njála uses the distinction between individual and family to emphasize the distinction between the heathen and Christian halves of his saga.

Gunnarr's death is the death of the saga hero; Njáll's is the death of the saga world at the hands of Christianity. This is one reason for
the full historical introduction to Christianity. It is one of the major combatants in the story, and like any human combatant must be properly and pseudo-historically introduced.

From Hrútr's story to Brjánn's saga, Njála plots the figurative history of the saga from its inception to its downfall, while presenting all the various structures the genre knows. Hrútr's þáttur with its Eddaic tone is properly first; whether the Eddaic lays are in fact ancient or only deliberately antiquarian, their air of cryptic obscurity effectively gives the impression of exploring a previous age, beginning Njála's figurative progression.

In Njála, the world outside Iceland is the realm of heroic deeds. Abroad is the milieu of dragons (Dorkell hákkr's tale, ch. 119), witches (Gunnhildr's curse, ch. 6), magic (Gunnarr's hallberd, ch. 30), supernatural portents (Brjánn's saga, ch. 156-157), and battles against men without background (viking, ch. 5, 30, 82-83). At home, Hrútr is a normal saga character, but abroad he meets adventures reminiscent of Beowulf or Sigurðr, and he brings a curse home with him.

Hallgerðr's þáttur is a romance like Hrútr's, due to the picturesque slap motif. ("Romance" in the sagas is generally defined by an inevitable literary pattern which determines the progress of events, such as the dream in Gunnlaugs saga or the cycle of Hallgerðr's marriages.) Hallgerðr's þáttur is placed between Edda (the chronological predecessor), and saga, Gunnarr's story. The þáttur-length episode is the structural basis of the saga, and longer works are constructed as a series of separate episodes. The author of Njála assigned to the shorter form, the þáttur, the position of precursor to the full-length
saga.

Gunnarr's story is a classic saga about a classic saga hero. The feud that follows it is more than another saga. It attempts to transcend its form, to be a new amalgam of saga and history. History, or pseudo-history, normally appears in Njála at specific moments: introductions, epilogues, and references to "public opinion." Such references are brief; their purpose is the creation of an objective perspective. They are not autonomous constructions, as are the founding of the Fifth Court, the coming of Christianity, and the battle of Clontarf.

The progression from literature to history is a major element in the overall structure of Njála. It omits the standard saga opening, events in Norway before the settlement of Iceland. Njála substitutes an equivalent literary motif, the episodes abroad, which are used as punctuation to begin every major section. Hrútr's story replaces the pseudo-historical introduction, for autonomous historical passages do not belong in the first half of Njála. They appear first in Njáll's story: fragments of legal history, presented in monologues, and the coming of Christianity.

The episode on the coming of Christianity (ch. 100-105) has the appearance of history for several reasons: its content is acceptable as fact; the preterite tense is used almost exclusively; and the prevalent mode of narration is prose. The scenes are brief and infrequent, but their existence demonstrates that the episode is saga narration and not history. The episode is constructed as a saga þáttur, with an introduction, climax (Jorgeirr's decision), and epilogue. Njála's historical digressions are historical in the style of narration, but they are presented in a saga format, and represent an amalgam of
saga and history.

The epilogue to Njála expands the saga's historical trend to include the new literary genre, the courtly tale. Kári is a courtly figure. He is not introduced with a formal genealogy, like the normal saga character, but through a series of questions and answers reminiscent of the courtly epic:

"En á því skipi, er fyrst fór, stóð maðr við siglu; sá var í silkitreyju ok hafði gyldan hjálm, en hárit baedi mikit ok fagrt. Sjá maðr hafði spjót gullrekit í hendi. Hann spurði: 'Hverir eigu hér leik svá ójafnan?' .... 'Erud þít íslenskróir menn?' segir hann. .... 'Hverr eftú?' segir Helgi. 'Kári heiti ek, ok em ek Sólmundarson.' 'Hvadan komtur at?' segir Helgi."

("And in the ship which came first stood a man at the mast. He was in a silk tunic and had a golden helmet, and hair both thick and lovely. This man had a gold-chased spear in his hand. He asked: 'Who is playing such an uneven game here?' .... 'Are you,' he says, 'Icelandic men?' .... 'Who are you?' says Helgi. 'Kári is my name, and I am Sólmundr's son.' 'Where are you from?' says Helgi," ch. 84.)

Kári's companion Björn is a buffoon in the style of Sancho Panza.

The most courtly section of Njála is the Brjánn's saga. Kormlöð is "allra kvenna fegrist" ("most beautiful of women"); Brjánn is "allra konunga bezt" ("the best of kings"); his foster son Kdrpjálfaðr is "allra manna fracnastr" ("bravest of men"). The battle itself is foreign in scale and in style. Icelandic battles do not involve armies, and the extremes of gruesome description, the marvels and miracles contrast with the objective tone normal in Njála's battle scenes (Baetke speaks of "Kampfszenen ohne Lärm"). The courtly tale
of Kári and Flosi (the framework of Brjánn’s saga) closes Njála. Christianity destroyed the philosophical bases of the saga, and the infiltration of the courtly epic put an end to the art form.

Njála began with an anecdote, a literary structure. It ends with a historical note, shifting to a distant perspective: "Íat segja menn, at þau yrði aevilok Flosa, at hann faerit utan, þá er hann var orðinn gamall. . ." ("Men say, that Flosi's death was thus: he went abroad when he had become old. . ." ch. 159). The phrase "Íat segja menn" ("men say") evokes a narrator reporting unvalidated past events. The final paragraph moves far enough away from the events of the saga to look back on two generations after Kári: "Son Flosa (Kári's son) var Kolbeinn, er ágaetastr maðr hefir verit einn hverr í þeirri aett." ("Flosi's son was Kolbeinn, one of the most famous men of that age.") The perfect tense "hefir verit" and the demonstrative in the phrase "í þeirri aett" place us with the author in the thirteenth century.

The intent of Njála is to be the ultimate saga. It was written after the fall of the Icelandic Republic, at a time when it must have been obvious that the art form was approaching its end. It is a medieval compendium of the saga form, a compendium become literature. The ambitiousness of its scale and the finality of its ending are indications that it did not expect to be followed.

Further proof lies in the role of Njáll. It is not by accident that the saga bears his name. He takes many of the narrator's functions of foreshadowing and commentary; he is also the figure who ties the entire saga together, the hub around which all the action revolves, and the symbol of the saga-world whose doom is here commemorated.

His dreamy aloofness, that very quality that makes him such a bad
saga hero, gives Njáll the historical perspective that makes him so symbolic. Aware what the future will bring, aware that it will destroy him and all he represents, friend, family and way of life, he accepts it. Njáll is the most tragic figure in the saga, because he knows what is happening, and yet he denies tragedy because he, like the saga, affirms the progression of history as right because it is the future, Njáll personifies the official authorial standpoint of historical neutrality, and thus is the title character. It is obvious, of course, in spite of official neutrality, where the real sympathies of Njáll, author and audience lie; there is a subtle wistfulness about this saga.

The primary element of Njáls's unity is paradoxically the diversity of structural methods employed. Hrútr's foreshadowing, the Hallgerðr motif, Gunnarr's biography, Njáll's feud (with all its sub-stories), Kári's story (which develops from the feud and frames Brjánn's saga, constructed around an event)—these structures organize the material clearly into discrete sections. The diversity of the structural methods enables the sections to relate easily to one another. Gunnarr's centralized biography unites the entire first half of the saga around a focal point (while the Hallgerðr motif is a linear progression that frames Gunnarr's story). Njáll's feud spreads over most of the saga's length, portions of it organized around figures such as Hrappr and Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði. Kári provides a focal point for the events after Njáll's death.

The individual episodes maintain their autonomy by their strongly marked rhythm. In the next chapter, we will analyze the methods used to balance the disintegrative effect of the individual rhythm patterns.
Chapter Three

The Pace of the Action

_Njála_ begins with the incident of Hallgerðr's "thief's eyes," an opening designed to insure our attention for the next few chapters, by which time we are thoroughly immersed in Hrútr's story. Both Hrútr's and Hallgerðr's stories, telling of romantic events in a streamlined narrative, engage a deep enough interest in _Njála_ for Gunnarr's saga to build its momentum more slowly. After the interest Gunnarr arouses, the last half of _Njála_ can afford some notable slowing beyond the genre norm, for example in the lengthening legal episodes. Thus, by the first principle of tempo in _Njála_, the initial episodes move rapidly and directly toward their climaxes; they engage the audience's attention and prepare for broader and slower treatment in the later sections of the saga.

By the second principle of tempo in _Njála_, rapid tempo is necessary in those episodes that have no direct and obvious connection with either of the two principal characters or with the main flow of the action. Our interest in Gunnarr and Njáll not only allows but encourages any opportunity to review them in greater depth (synonymous with greater length in this art form which bans reflective prose). When their fate is in question, the saga can linger over events. Since they do not arouse suspense for the central characters, the two parts of the prologue, Ófegbrandr's missionary efforts, and the caleidoscope of events in Kári's revenge must be brief, and they are the most elliptic episodes of the saga.

A slowing of the action generally accompanies the intellectual figures, the men of thought, particularly Njáil, by the third principle
of tempo in Njála. Himself verbose, Njáll imparts an atmosphere of deliberation and reflectiveness to the events that concern him closely, such as the legal procedures, and especially those that decide his fate, the trial after the death of Hóskuldr Hvitanessgöði, and the trial conducted in his revenge.

The three principles of tempo offer one explanation for the order in which the author arranges the sections of Njála. The prologue engages our attention and is thus romantic and brief. It deals with subsidiary figures; the central characters, when they appear, may develop slowly and fully. Gunnarr's story precedes Njáll's in accordance with the general slowing of tempo over the length of the work; the story of the man of action moves more rapidly than the story of the man of thought. Kári's revenge and Brjánn's saga close Njála as it began, in a brief and lively style.

Njála divides into a series of short episodes, and each episode subdivides into a series of incidents. Typically, each episode and incident follows the rhythm scheme described by Andersson: introduction, build-up of tension, dramatic climax, resolution or tapering-off of tension, and end of episode, or statement of new status quo.

For example, the conflict between Gunnarr and Otkell (ch. 46–56) begins with a formal introduction to Gizurr inn hvíti Teitsson, Geirrgöði Ásgeirsson and Otkell Skarfsson. The exposition builds over several incidents: Otkell's refusal to sell Gunnarr hay, Hallgerðr's theft, door-to-door selling, Skamkell's machinations, and the legal conflict at the Alping. The climax is the battle between Gunnarr and Otkell, the longest and most complicated incident. Tension is released
by a legal settlement, and the episode ends with everyone riding off home again.

Each incident presents a smaller version of this same rhythm pattern. To illustrate, the first incident in the Otkell episode, Otkell's refusal to sell Gunnarr hay, has the following structure: (1) introduction: of Melkólfr; (2) exposition: famine in Iceland and Gunnarr's generosity; (3) climax: scene of Otkell's refusal; (4) resolution of tension: Njáll's gift of hay; (5) return to rest: "Þór Njáll heim síðan. Líðr nú várit." ("Njáll returned home. The spring goes on;" ch. 47.)

Even the legal episodes follow the same general pattern, with an introduction of the two sides, maneuvers and counter-maneuvers, the climactic movement of settlement (or, in some cases, non-settlement and threat of arms), the terms of agreement, and a general exodus for home.

Introductions commonly begin the rhythm patterns. Generally, the characters are introduced as they appear on the stage. Actually, Njála has a number of exceptions. Hallgrímur's introduction is some eight chapters early, and Hallr of Síða's is five.

Major characters have long and weighty introductions which must fall after major pauses; in other words, at the beginning of an episode. Thus Gizurr and Geír are introduced formally in ch. 46, although they do not enter the action for three chapters. Minor characters have short introductions, and these fall after minor pauses, generally within an episode, but at the beginning of an incident. No introductions may occur in the middle of an incident, since an introduction defines the beginning of a new rhythm pattern.

Episodes commonly close with a shift of perspective to a more
objective or distant viewpoint than the scenic norm of the narrative. Dismissing a character from the saga, announcing the end of a section, reporting "future" events, or relating the passage of time are standard techniques for moving us away from the events and thus bringing them to rest.

Hrútr's story ends with the authorial comment: "Ok er nú lokit þaettí þeira Marðar." ("Here ends the story of Mórró and others," ch. 8), and Hallgerðr's story closes with, "Ok er Þórarinn ór sögunni" ("And Þórarinn is out of the saga," ch. 17). The last chapters of Gunnarr's saga report the future of two of its principal characters, Högni Gunnarsson and Kolskeggr, Gunnarr's brother.

Major stories such as Gunnarr's saga have longer introductions and epilogues than do shorter episodes and þaettir. The longest introductions of Óláfr fall at the beginning of Gunnarr's saga, since they mark the beginning of the central portion of the saga, the story of Gunnarr and Óláfr. Gunnarr's saga also closes with a chapter and a half in pseudo-historical perspective.

The larger rhythm patterns normally cause shifts of emphasis in the smaller units that comprise them. The first incident of an episode is primarily introduction; the last is largely epilogue. The first chapters of Gunnarr's saga have little climax or return to rest, while the last episode has little exposition.

This basic rhythmical emphasis is varied to meet the needs of the work as a whole. Thus there are no formal introductions at either the beginning of Hallgerðr's story or the beginning of the second half of the saga, the story of Óláfr. There are no major strands of content or structure to bridge the transition to a new story in either case. The
rhythm patterns in Njála seek a balance between the autonomy of individual parts and the unity of the entire saga.

The symmetry of the basic rhythm pattern, which begins and ends at rest, its central climax balanced by the method of reaching it and the method of leaving it, is reflected in the symmetrical overall construction of Njála. The initial two episodes of Hrútr and Hallgerór are balanced by the final conflict between Kári and Flosi and the Bjánn saga. All these are separate in content from the body of the saga, which is itself constructed around the central incident of Gunnarr's death, the turning point in the fortunes of the saga's characters.

Hrútr's story displays the same symmetry of structure. Hallgerór's "pjófsaugu" (ch. 1) and the two boys' mock divorce (ch. 8) are dramatic anecdotes irrelevant to the otherwise tightly knit and carefully motivated chain of events; they reflect on a smaller scale the engaging sections that bracket the main body of Njála. A series of incidents build to the inevitable climax, the disintegration of the marriage (ch. 7), and the unresolved legal altercation forms the transition to the close of the episode.

Hrútr's story is closed and complete in itself. A chain of events is brought into motion and set to rest again. Only the interest aroused in Hallgerór and the unfinished business of Unnr's dowry are left as possible connections to coming events.

Hallgerór's story, which follows Hrútr's, is unfinished. The two episodes, the marriage to Þorvaldr and the marriage to Gíumr, are constructed as parallels with the pattern: marriage arrangement, the wedding, an account of married life, the slap, the death of the husband,
and the subsequent settlement of the enmities thus created. The only variation between the two parallels lies in Hallgerðr's attitude toward each event.

Motivation is given by the careful development of Hallgerðr's character, rather than by the romantic technique of prophecy used in stories of like theme from Gunnlaugs saga and Laxdaela. Hallgerðr's story, like Hróðr's, is a dramatic, tightly constructed þáttur, containing no digressions from the main theme.

A third parallel episode is the expected climax of the Hallgerðr apparatus, but it is missing. Her third marriage, to Gunnarr, is rhythmically a part of his story. Hallgerðr's story is broken off before it is completed, and the motif (her fatal influence) does not reappear for fifteen chapters, when she meets Gunnarr. The expectation created by the premature end of Hallgerðr's story is sufficient to carry us over the intervening pause for introductions to Gunnarr's saga. This contrasts with the end of Hróðr's story, which is closed in both content and form.

Gunnarr's saga begins with formal introductions to Gunnarr and Njáll (ch. 19-20). A minor episode, the business of Unnr's dowry, is followed by another rest in the action, during which various marriages are reported (ch. 25-27). Unnr's dowry provides some action in the middle of the five chapters of formal introduction that announce the beginning of the story of the two central characters.

Gunnarr's adventures abroad and his marriage to Hallgerðr (ch. 28-32) further set the scene for his story. Neither has a forceful climax. The Hallgerðr motif is re-opened with the beginning of the third and climactic marriage. The first two elements of the Hallgerðr pattern,
the marriage arrangement and the wedding, occupy about the same amount of space in Gunnarr's saga as in the first two marriages, although romantic and courtly motifs are added to the courtship to give it emphasis, and the wedding is certainly bizarre, with its sudden exchange of wives by Þráinn Sigfússon.

The third element in the Hallgerðr pattern, the picture of married life (which also contains the motivation for the slap), is considerably expanded in Gunnarr's saga. It is the feud between Bergþóra and Hallgerðr (ch. 35-45), a delight in the art of build-up, using the pattern of alternating move and countermove, intensifying toward a climax. That the climax is missing detracts nothing from the virtuosity of the performance. This is a feud structure within Gunnarr's saga-biography; Njáll's feud similarly contains structured biographies.

Each incident in the feud has the same structural pattern: introduction by a stock phrase, "Nú er at taka til heima," "um várit" ("in the spring"). Þórór/Sigmundr hét maðr;" exposition—Hallgerðr/Bergþóra gives orders; the climax when someone is slain; settlement by paid compensation between Gunnarr and Njáll; closing the incident with a phrase in distant perspective, such as: "Svá gaettu þeir til ál þeim misserum, et ekki varð at." ("They took care that year that nothing further happened"; ch. 37.)

After the settlement of Þórór's killing, the feud is simply cut off with the announcement: "Þeir maeltu þat báðir, Gunnarr ok Njáll, at engir hlutir skyldi þeir til verða, at eigi semði þeir sjálfir. Efndu þeir þat ok vel síðan, ok váru jafnan vinir." ("Gunnarr and Njáll agreed that nothing would happen between them that they would not settle themselves. It did turn out that way afterwards, and they
remained friends," ch. 45.) Since this type of statement is not uncommon, we do not know for certain that the feud is ended until we turn the page.

These sentences show the power of the saga narrator. For ten chapters, he builds an expectation that a member of one of the two families will become involved in the feud; he does this by creating a progression in the slayings from slaves to the edge of the family unit, the foster father Þóról. He then denies this expectation by ending the feud prematurely, and the reader feels no more than a slight sense of surprise. The narrator simply states that the episode is ended, and we accept his statement (as we plunge into the next conflict). The feud episode, like the introductory chapters before it, is unbalanced in rhythm, to provide pure exposition for Gunnarr's three conflicts that follow it.

This feud also demonstrates the autonomy of the episode or incident. Whatever expectation is created by a series of climaxes is far less important than the satisfaction given by the individual closed climax. This is demonstrated by our acceptance of the author's shift of structures.

However, our sense of expectation, of building toward a climax, carries over into the next episode, the conflict with Ótkei, the first of the three major conflicts which from the central section of Gunnarr's saga.

The end of the feud finds Gunnarr at the high point of his fortunes. Beginning with his victory over Hrútr and his unparalleled fame abroad, Gunnarr's stature develops against the background of Hallgerðr's machinations; by contrast to her and by association with
Njáll, Gunnarr becomes a paragon and a man capable of handling any crisis. From this point in Gunnarr's saga, the progression is downward. He will still emerge victorious through three major conflicts, demonstrating in action his ability in a crisis, but at the same time, these conflicts, with Otkell Skarfsönn (ch. 45-46), the Starkaðarssons (ch. 57-66), and the two Þorgeirrs (ch. 67-74), gradually force Gunnarr into a position in which he can be killed (ch. 75-77). This position is defined by Njáll's prophecies, beginning at the end of the Otkell incident (ch. 55).

Gunnarr's three conflicts are built with a uniformity of pace unusual in Njála. Each is roughly ten chapters long. By contrast, the episodes of Njáll's feud vary in length from one to thirteen chapters. Gunnarr's conflicts also follow the same structural pattern, with a double climax: formal introduction of Gunnarr's opponent; initial hostility; pre-climatic confrontation (with retarding moment); worsening of hostilities to the point of irreconciliability; climactic battle and death of Gunnar's enemy; legal conflict and settlement; statement of Gunnarr's position.

The pre-climaxes are, respectively, Hallgerðr's theft, the stallion fight, and the abortive attack by the two Þorgeirrs. The retarding moment after the theft and the abortive attack is a legal settlement. The stallion-fight is followed by a digression to Ólafr pá and Ásgrímr Eilíðagrímsson which also creates a pause before the intensification begins again. It is indeed interesting that Njála's maximum length to build a simple climax is about five chapters.

The last incident in the Hallgerðr pattern before the death of her husband, the slap, occurs haphazardly in the middle of the
exposition to the Otkell episode, in a position rhythmically meaningless if the Hallgerðr pattern were still the dominant structure. After the slap, the motif is dropped entirely until the moment of Gunnarr's death. The third in Hallgerðr's chain of parallel marriages stretches over some fifty chapters.

Hallgerðr's third marriage, to Gunnarr, does not function as a rhythmic unit; the parallel has become much more a leitmotif, interspersed through a story with its own separate rhythm pattern, the story of Gunnarr. The theft is more important to the episode than the slap, for the theft leads to Otkell's summons of Gunnarr, the first and lesser climax of the episode.

The two structures—the Otkell conflict and the Hallgerðr pattern—overlap, a technique frequently used in the second half of Njála. The rhythm always clearly belongs to only one of the interwoven strands, and that the more important one. Hallgerðr's only function in Gunnarr's saga is to foreshadow his doom, and she is secondary to his portrayal and his conflicts.

The second point of interest about Gunnarr's conflicts is the deterioration of his position, as stated at the close of each. The Otkell epi...ie ends with the statement: "Gunnarr ... fekk af ina maestu saemó. Sitr Gunnarr nú heima í saemó sinni." ("Gunnarr ... received great honor from this. Now Gunnarr sits at home in his honor," ch. 56.) The conflict with Starkaðr closes with: "Reið Gunnarr heim af þingi ok sitr nú um kyrkt, en þó ofnuðuðu mótstoðumenn hans mjök hans saemð." ("Gunnarr rode home from the Thing and sits in peace, but his adversaries envied him his honor greatly," ch. 66.) The note of warning sounded subtly here is dominant at the end of the
third conflict, as Njáll repeats his prophecy: "En ef þé fær eigi útan ok ryfr saett þína, þá muntú dreppinn vera hér á landi..." ("but if you do not go abroad and you break your settlement, then you must be killed here in Iceland..." ch. 74,)

This deterioration helps prepare for the last episode of Gunnarr's saga, his death and the resulting events (ch. 75-81): (1) introduction, preparations by a variety of people to go abroad; (2) exposition, preparing the reader for Gunnarr's death by a series of unusual incidents, from the unlikely speech "Fógr er hlíðin..." to Gunnarr's being declared an outlaw and Hallgerðr's long-postponed revenge for the slap (ch. 75-77); (3) the climax in Gunnarr's death; (4) the tapering-off of excitement through a eulogizing stanza (ch. 77), some generally desired revenge by Högni Gunnarsson and the inimitable Skarpheðinn, and a settlement between Njáll's family and Gunnarr's slayers (ch. 78-80). The last words of the episode are (5) the lengthy dismissal of Geirr godi, Högni Gunnarsson, and Kolskeggr from the saga.

Gunnarr's saga does not build over its length to a grand climax in his death. Gunnarr is slain briefly and objectively: "Gunnarr varði sík vel ok fraeknîga ok saerir nú aðra átta menn svá stórum sárum, at morgum lá við bana. Gunnarr verr sík, þar til er hann fell af maedi. Þeir saerðu hann morgum stórum sárum, en þó komsk hann þá enn þró hondum þeim ok varði sík þá enn lengi, en þó kom þar, at þeir drápu hann."
("Gunnarr defended himself well and valiantly, and wounded eight more men so badly, that many lay dying. Gunnarr defended himself until he fell from exhaustion. They gave him many deep wounds, but he got out of their hands and defended himself quite a while longer. But they finally killed him," ch. 77.)
The rhythm creates a number of climaxes in Gunnarr's saga, none emphasized as heavily as, for example, Njáll's death. However, from the point of view of content, Gunnarr's death is certainly climactic for his story. The final episode, brief as it is, includes the epitaph due any hero of so long a saga. It includes all the normal devices, a tribute by Gunnarr's enemies, a stanza in his honor, and a ghost-walk. If the rest of Njála did not exist, and Gunnarr's saga stood alone, the revenge section would be too brief; Gunnarr deserves a full episode, as Andersson comments. Because Njála has another half, it cannot come to rest after Gunnarr's death. The sense of anti-climax inevitably created by his death places a great demand upon the rhythm to regain the momentum, and our attention with it.

Gunnarr's saga exhibits several variations of a basic suprastructure. The first conforms to the structure of the standard saga-biography: (1) introduction: from Gunnarr's introduction and the Unnr episode to the wedding; (2) exposition: the wife feud; (3) climax: the three central conflicts and Gunnarr's death; (4) setting to rest: the revenge, ch. 77 to 81. This is the most straightforward interpretation, as well as the most immediate, since it is favored by the rhythm.

Next, there is an adaptation of this which takes into account the Hallgerðr motif and reflects the three central conflicts by creating a double climax: (1) introduction: Hallgerðr's þáttur and the introduction to Gunnarr, through his adventures abroad; (2) initial exposition: from Gunnarr's and Hallgerðr's marriage through the wife feud: (3) pre-climax: the theft and the slap; (4) second exposition through the three conflicts with Otkell, the Starkadarsons, Þorgeirr; the growing list of Gunnarr's enemies; (5) climax at Gunnarr's death; (6)
same epilogue.

This version is based on the content rather than the rhythm, to the point of ignoring the rhythm in the case of the slap. A more satisfying interpretation from both viewpoints makes Gunnarr's death the climax of both expositions: (1) introduction; (2) exposition one, broken off at a symbolic point; (3) exposition two, independently developed to: (4) the climax of both strands in Hallgerðr's revenge and Gunnarr's death; (5) release of tension.

Both structures, the saga-biography and the double exposition, are intended. The rhythm creates the former; the Hallgerðr apparatus, the latter. There is a third permutation of the suprastructure in Gunnar's saga. In depicting the rise of Gunnarr's fortunes to the Otkell episode and their subsequent deterioration to his death, this story has balance and symmetry. It thus reflects one of the structures of Njáls as a whole, which has Gunnarr's death as its turning point.

In general, the first half of Gunnarr's story (ch. 18-45) is devoted to his glorification, while the second half (ch. 46-77) traces his doom. The turning point is the Otkell episode. It contains both the slap and the first formulation of Njáll's prophecy of warning: "'Ráð þú mér heilraedi nökkur,' segir Gunnarr. 'Ek skal þat gera,' segir Njáll; 'veg þú aldri meir í inn sama knérunn en um sinn, ok rjúf aldri saett þá, er góðir menn gera meðal þín ok annarra, ok þó sízt á því máli.'" ("Give me some good advice," says Gunnarr. "I shall do that," says Njáll. "Never kill more than once in the same family, and never break the agreement that good men make between you and others, especially then," ch. 55.)

Actually, both strands, Gunnarr's glorification and the motivation
for his death, run through the entire first half of *Njála*. Thus Hrútr, as a parallel to Gunnarr, is both a great warrior and a man doomed by a woman. Hallgerðr's þáttur, of course, is entirely forboding. Yet the dominant theme from Gunnarr's introduction to the Otkell episode is his portrait as a paragon of the hero, and an increasingly powerful figure. Similarly, from the Otkell episode to Gunnarr's death, the presentiments of doom increase and become more pointed, in spite of the fact that each victory won is another demonstration of Gunnarr's superiority.

In Gunnarr's half of *Njála*, rhythm and content are synchronized. Except, of course, for that of Hallgerðr, each "story" is contained in a rhythmically complete episode. To be sure, Gunnarr's introduction and the wife feud are weighted toward exposition, and the final episode of Gunnarr's death toward epilogue. This is the expectable definition of the overall rhythm of Gunnarr's saga. In *Njáll's* half of the saga, rhythm and content generally do not coincide. In the first place, there are the several overlapping themes or structures, such as the various "biographies"--Höskuldr Hvitanesgödi, Njáll, Kári. These are not rhythmical entities. In the second place, the feud is interspersed with the historical digressions, which are indeed rhythmical entities. There is thus an alternation of feud episodes and history. To add to this complexity, it is not even easy to define the rhythm of the individual episodes in the feud.

The first "episode" of the feud, the slaying of Dráinn Sigfússon, (ch. 82-94) is a good example. At its center is the short story of Hrappr Örgumleidason (ch. 87-88), which is defined as a separate unit by introduction: "Kolbeinn hét mór ok var Arnjótarson," and epilogue, in pseudo-historical perspective: "Þat mæltu sumir, at vingott vaeri með
Þeim Hálgerði ok hann rifldi hana, en sumir maeltu því í móti."
("Some said, that he and Hálgerðr were good friends, and he slept with
her, and some said not.")

This story is followed immediately by the climax of the Njálossons'
adventures abroad, their imprisonment by Hákon jarl (ch. 89) for help-
ing Hrappr escape from Norway, or more exactly, for allowing Þráinn
Sigfússon to help Hrappr escape. In fact, Hrappr's story itself is the
exposition to this climax, which is set to rest by the reconciliation
between Hákon and the Njálossons, their return to Iceland, and Kári's
marriage into Njáll's family (ch. 90). This second climax is in turn
the motivation and thus exposition for the next set of events, the
revenge upon Þráinn Sigfússon (ch. 91-94), which is the point of this
entire episode, as it begins the feud. The third climax is set to
rest by payment of compensation and by Njáll's fostering of Þráinn's
son Hóskuldr.

The "episode" of Þráinn's death, act I of the feud, from Þráinn's
going abroad to the fostering of Hóskuldr Þráinsson (ch. 82-94), is a
far from simple structure. Preceding Hrappr's story, the rhythmical
entity which lies at the center of this series of events, are the
Njálossons' first adventures abroad (ch. 83-86), including meeting Kári,
and preceding that again, Þráinn's first adventures abroad which begin
the second half of Njála (ch. 82). Thus the episode consists of three
concentric structures: (1) Þráinn goes abroad; (2) the Njálossons
abroad; (3) Hrappr Örgumleiðason; (2) climax of the Njálossons adventures
abroad, their imprisonment by Hákon jarl, an insult directly caused by
Þráinn; (1) climax of the episode: Þráinn and Hrappr are slain by the
Njálossons. We will see another such massing of climaxes, each serving
as exposition for the next, repeated on a grander scale in the events leading to Njáll's death.

The last event in this first episode, Njáll's fostering of Höskuldýr Fráinnsson, is also the first event in Höskuldr's story, one of the major structures of the second half. It belongs by rhythm to the aftermath of Fráinn's death, and by content to the episode which follows it, the founding of the Fifth Court, since Höskuldýr is the device that ties this historical digression to the stream of events. Hildigunnr Starkardóttir, whom Höskuldýr wishes to marry, insists that he first have a godord. Since Njáll cannot otherwise get him one, he founds some new ones belonging to the Fifth Court.

What we are calling the "episode" of the founding of the Fifth Court comprises three chapters (95-97). Two are formal introductions, to Flosi Þórdarson and Hallr af Síðu Þorsteinsson. They are two major figures of the second half; with Flosi, the roster of principal actors in the feud is complete. Hallr does not even appear in the founding of the Fifth Court, but these introductions fit into this point of the saga because both Flosi and Hallr are connections of Hildigunnr, Höskuldr's intended wife. She will be one of the causes of Njáll's death.

The "action" of the episode is Njáll's founding of the Fifth Court; it is primarily a monologue expounding the types of legal problem to be handled there. As Lehmann mentions, all appear in the long legal confrontation after Njáll's death, so that the battle for Njáll's honor is fought in the court that he founded.

Since the Fifth Court has no obvious immediate connection with the feud, and since it is not dramatized as a saga þáttur, but recited like
historical prose, it marks a pause, an effect reinforced by the two
formal introductions, to Flosi and Hallr. This pause marks the formal
introduction to the second half of Njála; it corresponds to the intro-
ductions of Gunnarr and Njáll in the first half (ch. 19-20). In both
halves, the formal overture is preceded by a þáttur designed to engage
audience attention. The þáttur of Þráinn must both overcome the dif-
ficulty of bridging the gap between the two halves, and it must carry
the saga through the pause created by the founding of the Fifth Court.
Its three consecutive climaxes create enough momentum to do so. Höskuldr
is another bridge, since his fostering leads to the Fifth Court.

The stage is now set for the second half of Njála. The source of
enmity between the Sigfússons and the Njálssons is portrayed, and a
long fanfare of introduction announces a new major structure. It begins
with act II of the feud, a brief and thus rapid episode (ch. 98-99),
contrasting in pace with the pause before it to give the upbeat to new
action. In this episode, Lýtingr, Þráinn's brother-in-law, kills
Höskuldr Njálsson. Höskuldr is a bastard, he is thus the outside fringe
of the family. Considering the sagas' normal policy of intensification,
Höskuldr's death is expectable after Fó르r's (ch. 42) and before Grímr's
or Helgi's. Skarphéðinn, Bergbóra and Njáll must be last, as they are
the most important family members for the audience.

Thus the progression of killing from slaves to Fó르r of the
Bergbóra-Hallgerðr feud is picked up here. The connection, which must
be slight with forty chapters of Gunnarr's saga intervening, is
strengthened by the connecting link of Þráinn Sigfússon, who was an
onlooker while Fó르r was killed.

Höskuldr Njálsson's death at the hands of Lýtingr (ch. 98-99), and
Lytingr's slaying by Ámundi Hóskuldsson (ch. 106) form a frame for the episode of the coming of Christianity to Iceland (ch. 100-105). This is the second historical digression of the saga, and it is tied to the mainstream of the feud by its frame. Ámundi the Blind is given vision by an understanding (Christian) God just long enough to avenge his father's slaying.

The coming of Christianity is structured like a normal episode as a conflict—between two beliefs rather than two men. It has a climax, Órgeirr's famous decision in favor of Christianity. Although the tempo is rapid—Bangbrandr fights four battles and converts eight households in a mere four chapters—the general effect of the episode is a pause, for it is a pause in the action of the feud. The actors who bring or oppose Christianity are not the combatants in the feud; Njáll's family appear only in one sentence, as objects of a conversion.

Ámundi's episode, which follows and frames the coming of Christianity, is a return to the action of the feud. It is very brief, and thus rapid in tempo, like Lytingr's episode, which forms the other half of the frame. In fact, they are by length incidents rather than fully-developed episodes. Yet each is a full-fledged act in the give and take of the feud, and for this reason, we have defined them as episodes, by their content. By Njála's normal rhythm scheme, they are too brief to deserve such a distinction, and they should be grouped with the coming of Christianity as one unit. They would then correspond to the unrelated incidents which frame Hrótr's þáttur, or the central story of Gunnarr and Njáll.

The coming of Christianity begins, in one sense, the central
portion of Njáll's half of the saga, for it initiates the metaphoric conflict between the heathen and Christian beliefs. This conflict is composed of three interlocking structures: the death of Höskuldur Hvítanes-sgoði, the resulting case at the Alþing; and the Burning.

Höskuldur's story, although a thematic rather than a rhythmical entity, is well balanced; i.e. it has a full exposition and epilogue. It has its introduction in the death of Höskuldur's father, Bráinn Sigrússon (ch. 82–94). Such an introduction, which presents the story of the hero's father, is of course a standard saga usage; Egils saga, Gísla saga, and Laxdæla are examples.

Höskuldur Bráinsson is further portrayed at odd moments in the feud: he ties the founding of the Fifth Court to the action (ch. 97), and he is peacemaker in the Lýtingr episode. The introduction of Christianity makes his character possible, as it appears in the climactic episode of his death, for Höskuldur would rather die at the hands of Njáll's sons than do them harm (ch. 109).

The climax of Höskuldur's story is, of course, the episode of his death (ch. 107–112), which is also the motivation for the destruction of Njáll and his family, thematically in Höskuldur's casting as symbol of peace, and rhythmically in the feud structure of slaying—revenge.

The epilogue to Höskuldur's slaying is the resulting conflict at the Alþing (ch. 113–123). It is not a return to rest; it is the exposition for the Burning, and a heightening rather than lessening of tension. The normal exposition of a legal conflict in Njála consists of alternating legal maneuvers by the two sides.

This episode uses a secondary device: violence threatens as the two opposing parties enlist allies. Since legalities are virtually
ignored, the expectation is created that matters will be decided by force of arms. It is an expectation which is not immediately fulfilled. The climax of the episode is the sudden breaking off of negotiations, and the aftermath of the episode is Flosi's gathering of supporters for his planned vengeance (ch. 124).

Thus violence is temporarily averted, but suspense is heightened for the next (and climactic) episode. As mentioned, the expectation is aroused that this legal conflict will be settled only by armed battle between the two sides. This expectation is not fulfilled in this episode, but in the next, when Flosi and Njáll's family meet in battle at the Burning. Looking even farther ahead, the next legal conflict, the one which follows the Burning, also fulfills this expectation, for it does end in an armed battle.

The Burning is the climax of the feud. It is introduced by a witch-ride (ch. 125); its exposition is Flosi's attack on Bergþórhváll (ch. 126-128), and its climax is the Burning and Kári's escape (ch. 129-130). Tension is released by Kári's flight (ch. 131), and the episode is set to rest with the recovery of the bodies and the final comment, in pseudo-historical perspective: "Aldri ámaelti hann óvinum sínum, ok aldri heitaðisk hann við þá." ("He [Kári] never blamed his enemies, and he never made threats against them." ch. 132.)

As mentioned, Njála repeats at this point on a larger scale the interweaving of structures which led to the death of Þráinn Sigrússon. Three climaxes are massed, each the exposition for the one following. This places extra emphasis on the third climax, the death of Njáll and his family.

The feud has two more episodes after its climax, which bring it back
to rest: the fight at the Alþing, and Kári's revenge in Iceland. In scale, they serve as eulogy for both Njáll and Gunnarr; Gunnarr was denied his own proper revenge section in the interests of the saga's unity.

The last and largest of the legal episodes (ch. 133-145) will be discussed in full in another chapter, for the law in Njála is a motif deserving special consideration. The episode begins slowly, in keeping with the dignity generally given to the legal sections; an introductory pause for Flosi's dream (ch. 133) is added to the final rites for Njáll that closed the episode of the Burning, to create a major pause in the rhythm before the trial begins.

The trial builds slowly, with triple repetition of long legal formulae. The legal maneuvers on both sides build toward, but do not achieve a climactic settlement. The simultaneous power maneuvers do lead to the climax—the pitched battle in Almannagjá (ch. 145). The episode closes with all the dignity with which it began: Kári's stanzas, the settlement of terms, and general visits all around set events firmly to rest (ch. 145).

Kári's revenge in Iceland contains two episodes. The first, in which Þorgeirr skorgeirr is Kári's ally, is short (ch. 146-147), with no introduction to a new character, a brief exposition, the climactic battle with the Sigfússons, a full aftermath of negotiations between Flosi and Þorgeirr, and the final settlement. The lack of introduction helps tie the episode to the one preceding it, legal vengeance for Njáll's slaying. The saga also continues to use the technique of allowing one episode to serve as exposition for the next. However, Kári's and Þorgeirr's revenge, like the trial before it, is rhythmically
weighted as epilogue to help bring the feud to rest.

The second portion of Kári's revenge in Iceland presents Björn hvíti Kabalsson as his accomplice (ch. 148-152). The pause to introduce Björn is minimal and is sandwiched into the middle of a chapter, so that it will not seem a stop. This tends to connect the episode to the preceding revenge sections. The unchanging theme of revenge is enlivened by slapstick humor; variation of mood atones for the lack of variation in subject matter.

This episode brings us to the end of the feud, since Brjánn's saga stands as a separate structure. A variety of structural strands tie the second half of Njála together. The first and simplest is the feud action, an alternation of action and reaction: (1) Fráinn's death; (2) the slaying of Höskuldr Njálsson; (3) the slaying of Lýtingr; (4) the slaying of Höskuldr Hvítanessgöd; (5) the aborted settlement of same; (6) the Burning; (7) the resulting battle at the Æping; (8) Kári's revenge. This interpretation of the structure does not include any historical digressions. In addition, the feud connects to the conflict between Bergþóra and Hallgerðr.

The rhythm pattern includes the historical digressions and unites the second half of Njála. Fráinn's death and the coming of Christianity are weighted to be primarily exposition; three massed climaxes lead from the death of Höskuldr Hvítanessgöd to the Burning; and the long revenge sections, including Brjánn's story, are epilogue by nature.

Njáll's story also presents an alternation of saga and history: Fráinn's death; the Fifth Court (history); the slaying of Höskuldr Njálsson; the coming of Christianity (history); Lýtingr's slaying; Höskuldr Hvítanessgöd; the doom of Njáll's family (from the first Æping
episode to Fosi's departure from Iceland); Brjánn's saga (history).

The slaying of Höskuldr Hvítanessgodi breaks the strict alternation between saga and history; it also disrupts the action-reaction pattern of the feud. Lýtingr's slaying, the episode which precedes it, is saga and not (quasi-)history; it is also a reaction by Njáll's clan to the slaying of Höskuldr Njálsson. Feud logic creates an expectation that the next event in the feud will be vengeance by the Sigfrússons for Lýtingr's death. Instead of this, Njáll's sons slay Höskuldr Hvítanessgodi, another member of the Sigfrússon clan, an action which disrupts the feud pattern of alternating initiative.

The deviation from an established pattern focuses attention on Höskuldr's slaying, and particularly on its position in the alternation of literary and quasi-historical episodes. If the slaying of Höskuldr Hvítanessgodi were a quasi-historical anecdote the alternation would be strict. The expectation aroused in Njála by major patterns thus defines Höskuldr's slaying as quasi-history, i.e., the attempt to stop the progress of Christianity.

The second half of Njála is a synthesis of saga and history. It uses the regular alternation of the feud as its basic rhythm, and traces the progression from the heathen Íslendinga saga of the first half to the Christian triumph of the final chapter and the victory of the foreign riddara saga (romance) of Brjánn's saga. Its climax is the destruction of Njáll's clan, the symbol of the Icelandic family unit (but new family bonds are formed by the reconciliation).

Njála as a whole does not give the impression of building the rhythm to a single climax, for the rhythm of the separate stories tends to predominate. However, the metaphoric history can be divided into the
following parts: (1) introduction: the origins of the saga, the heroic
tradition (Hrútr) and the Icelandic þáttur (Hallgerðr); (2) exposition:
the saga world (Gunnarr); (3) climax: the confrontation of saga world
and Christianity (the feud, the destruction of Njáll and his family);
(4) release of tension: the new way of life, Christianity and the
Continental romance (Brjánn); (5) the new status quo: Christian harmony.

Many variations are possible. One example is based on the rhythm
patterns: (1) introduction: Hrútr's story, a unit which begins and
ends at rest; (2) exposition: Hallgerðr, from her introduction to the
slap, since both her structures, the marriages and the feud, are unfin-
ished; (3) climax: Gunnarr, the apotheosis of the saga ideal, so that
his death is its death. The conflicts which destroy him point to their
climaxes more neatly than any others in Njála; (4) release of tension:
the expansive, diverse pattern of the feud, which traces the gradual
destruction of the rest of the saga world; (6) the new status quo:
Brjánn, another closed structure like Hrútr; and the manifestation of
the new Christian and courtly world.

No single structural pattern does justice to a long saga. Njála
has rising and falling rhythm patterns and a multiplicity of structural
strands, but as a whole, it is trying to be as broad as history. The
structural elements are minimal techniques to keep the wealth of material
together.

There is one last element of tempo to be considered, the alternation
of dialogue and prose narration. The action—battles, journeys, insult-
ing actions, marriages—occurs in prose. Dialogue is the realm of
character portrayal, and dialogue generally means a pause in the action.
Yet of the two modes, dialogue is the more certain to engage interest, for the characters engage us more than the events.

The alternation of dialogue and narrative in the sagas is a highly developed art; this is the point of Jeffrey's, Ludwig's, and Netter's analyses. It is an art of omission. The ability to reduce a conversation to one meaningful speech, to relegate all but the most dramatic moments to indirect discourse or report, gives the dialogue a greater rhetorical emphasis than it has inherently.

The genre gives a particular emphasis to direct discourse. Njála takes advantage of this tradition, and transforms all the most important parts into dialogue as a matter of course, no matter how lengthy the resulting speeches become. Extensive use of dialogue thus accompanies major climaxes: Mórar plans Gunnarr's downfall in a long speech (ch. 67); Flosi voices his elaborate plans for the attack on Bergporsvíð (ch. 124), and his decision to burn Njáll and his family (ch. 127).

Pomp, in the form of rhetorical emphasis, also attends the legal sections, particularly those eulogizing the dead heroes. Long legal speeches begin as early as chapter seven, with Mórar gigja's plans for Unnr's divorce, and this is indeed very early in the saga for so long a monologue, especially by a subsidiary character. Further instances are the formulaic speeches after each of Gunnarr's three major battles (ch. 56, 67, 73), and Njáll's speech on the Fifth Court.

The trial in Njáll's revenge has the longest speeches in the saga. It is the greatest legal case, following the major climax, in so far as Njála has one, and it is the most gripping moment of Njáll's biography, since Njáll himself never acts. The verbal emphasis in these proceedings begins with Ásgrímr's speech in which vengeance plans are
laid (ch. 132), echoed by Gizurr (ch. 135), and culminates in Mör ör's 
repetition of formulae in chs. 136, 141, and 142 to the point of refrain, 
giving all the weight of litany to the proceedings.

Dialogue gives pomp and dignity to major climaxes and legal eulogy
gies in Njála, and dignity also belongs to the figure of Njáll.
Gunnarr's stature is of course created in action; this is the traditional 
method for characterizing the hero, as well as his particular idiom in 
this saga. Njáll's idiom is dialogue, characterizing the man of thought. 
Since he does not act, verbal emphasis is the medium to create his 
stature.

The pace of Njála slows gradually over its length. Several elements 
contribute to this effect: the broadening of the rhythm patterns, the 
increase of length in speeches, and content, in the inclusion of digres-
sions from the main course of events. The slowing of tempo parallels 
and reinforces Njála's progression from literature to history.
Chapter Four

The Characters, Christianity and the Law

Gunnarr is the classic saga hero, and his character is developed in the classic saga manner. First, a set of character attributes indispensable to the hero is listed in Gunnarr's introduction. These attributes fall into the three categories of physical prowess, character traits, and fame. Each of Gunnarr's physical abilities is next illustrated in the series of anecdotes which begins Gunnarr's story, including such minor motifs as his ability to leap his height. (Later in the saga, Kári makes such a leap, thus drawing a parallel between himself and Gunnarr.)

The body of Gunnarr's story portrays him acting in accordance with his initial description and with the heroic standard of behavior. Over the course of his story, new facets of Gunnarr's personality are constantly revealed. Gunnarr's magnanimity and moderation are illustrated in the Bergþóra-Hallgerðr feud. His fame, first described in his episode abroad, is the subject that closes each of the three conflicts—with Otkell, with Starkaðr, and with the two Þorgeirrs. Honor is the dominant theme at the end of Gunnarr's story, from his outlawry through the revenge for his death.

In contrast to Njáll, Gunnarr is never a loquacious character; he is the man of action. In keeping with the heroic pose, Gunnarr maintains a laconic stoicism at all moments of crisis, both on the battlefield and at the court. Gunnarr is most reticent in the legal episodes, and he is entirely silent during the final trial which decides his fate, and until the "Fógr er hifóin" speech.

Njáll speaks for him. Conversations between the two generally
consist of long speeches by Njáll and brief comments by Gunnarr. The
ideas and feelings expressed in these dialogues are shared by and
characterize both figures. The man of thought and the man of action are
distinguished by the amount of the dialogue allocated to each.

Njáll has a dual role. He is first the embodiment of the saga's
ideal of wisdom, and he is the vehicle for authorial comment. "Vitr
var hann ok forsjar, heilrjar: ok góðgjrarn, ok varð allt at ráði, þat er
hann réð mænum, hógværr ok drenglyndr . . . hann leysti hvers manns
vandraedi, er á hans fund kom." ("He was wise and foreseeing, kind and
giving good advice, gentle and generous, and when he advised people, it
turned out well . . . he solved the problems of all who came to him," ch. 20.) Njáll's dominant characteristic is deep wisdom. The saga
illustrates his wisdom as it illustrates Gunnarr's prowess: the regaining of Unnr's dowry (ch. 22), a series of successes in extricating
Gunnarr from trouble (ch. 64-65, 701-74), and solving the problems of
Njáll's sons (ch. 91, 93). Final and symbolic display of Njáll's
wisdom is the accuracy of his prophecies.

The following prophecies are among those that mark him as bearer of
the narrator's functions: "Erfitt mun þér verða at baeta ðil alys
Hallgerðar, ok mun annars staðar meira slóða draga en hér, er vit eigum
hlut at" to Gunnarr ("You will find it difficult to compensate for all
of Hallgerðr's mischief, and elsewhere the consequences will be more
serious than here, where we are friends," ch. 36.) Njáll's statement on
the law has become a cliche: "Með lögum skal land várt byggja, en með
ölögum eyda," ("With law shall our land be settled, and with lawlessness
emptied," ch. 70.) Finally, "Mikil eru tíðingi þessi, ok er þat líkara,
at hér leidi af daúda eins sonar mins, ef eigi verðr meira at." ("Great
are these tidings, and it is likely that this will lead to the death of one of my sons, if worse doesn't happen," ch. 92.) Njáll voices authorial opinion in his commentary on the justification for blood vengeance (ch. 91), his explication of the need for the Fifth Court (ch. 97), and his speech on Christianity: "Svá lígt mér sem inn nýi átrúnaðr muni vera miklu betri, ok sá mun saell, er þann faer heldru." ("It seems to me that the new faith is much better, and he who accepts it must be happy," ch. 100.)

Gunnarr and Njáll are made sympathetic by the revelation of their feelings. The saga creates its villains by an objective portrayal of their actions: Otkell and Íorgeirr, Starkaðr and his sons, Íráníinn Sigfússon, Skamkell, Hrappr, Lýtingr and, above all, Mörör and Hallgerðr. 2 Björn of Mörk is as cowardly as Mörör; Skarphédinn as implacable as Hallgerðr. Both the archvillains have admirable characteristics in the saga ethic, for Hallgerðr is at least Gunnarr's equal in the use of the heroic verbal gesture, and Mörör's brainstorm show true insight into human relations (particularly the episode of the stolen cheese).

Mörör Valgarðsson is the man of expediency, the true opportunist. He does not hate gratuitously; his plots against Gunnarr and Höskuldr Hvítanessgodí are based on purely mercenary motives. His is not an unknown type in the sagas, although examples like Haensa-Mörir are more generally malicious, and not so purely opportunistic as Mörör.

Hallgerðr, on the other hand, hates with great singleness of purpose. Vengeance, pride and vanity are her ruling passions. There is nothing mercenary or petty about her, so that she forms a contrast to Mörör. The two arch-villains are opposites: Mörör is never condemned (or praised) by the opinion of other characters, while comment on
Hallgerðr is frequent and unanimous, from Hrútr's "þjóðsæugu" (ch. 1) to Skarphédinn's "Ekki munu mega ord þínu, því eft annathvárt hornkerling eda púta." ("Your words aren't worth much, because you are either an old crone or a whore," ch. 91.) She is condemned by the saga narrator, Ósvífr and Höskuldr in the first chapter of her story (ch. 9). This method of characterization parallels the portrayal of Gunnarr, the most-praised man in the saga.

Like Gunnarr, Hallgerðr is not loquacious. In the Þorvaldr episode, she makes only four speeches before her husband's death, two characteristic and two to motivate the killing. Her non-epigrammatical speeches throughout the saga are strictly functional, motivating mischief by insults or planning her plots.

Móðr, on the other hand, is loquacious, from his explication of the disposal of stolen goods (ch. 49) to his prosecution for the Burning, by far the longest and most redundant set of speeches in a verbose saga (ch. 135, 141, 142, 144). As Hallgerðr is Gunnarr's counterpart, Móðr is Njáll's. The latter pair are the commentators and contrivers, prime movers of the action but both inactive in a literal sense. Neither takes part in a battle, although Móðr is a spectator at the death of Gunnarr.

Neither figure ever lifts an active hand in the events of the saga, and yet every major movement in the central action is either caused or prophesied by one of the other, from Gunnarr's introduction to the fight at the Alþing. Further, they are the legal giants of Njála. Njáll is, of course, the greatest living lawyer. We are told this directly and indirectly: "Hann var lögmaðr sú mikill, at engi fannsk hans jafningi," ("He was so great a lawyer, that his equal could not be found," ch. 20)
states his introduction, an opinion repeated by Unnr (ch. 21) and Hóskuldr (ch. 23). It is demonstrated by Njáll's solutions to Gunnarr's various problems. Mörrér displays similar ability at plotting (ch. 46, 67, 71, 107), and he is given great legal stature by his position as chief prosecutor for the Burning (ch. 135-145).

Njála has been called a saga of the law. The legal episodes are used, as in other sagas, to bring the action to rest. The law in Njála is also an independent motif, a figurative history from the pre-Republican hólmganga of Hródr's story to the disintegration of Republican law with the battle in Almannagjá.

The law in Njála is not defined as the codex of legal prescriptions nor as the lawyers' usage, but as a spirit of compromise and conciliation to prevent open enmity. "Svá lízt oss," says Róoddór godi, "sem þat muni frídlígast, at sættak sé á málit." ("It seems to us most peaceable to come to an agreement." ch. 56.) The Fifth Court is founded on the threat "'ok vilju vér heldr heimta méð oddi ok eggju.' 'Svá má eigi,' segir Njáll, 'ok hiýðir þat hvergi at hafa eigi log í landi,'" ("'We would rather settle by the sword.' 'That may not be,' says Njáll, 'and it will not do to have no law in the land,'" ch. 97.) Christianity becomes the law of the land with Iorgeirr's warning "Svá lízt mér sem málum varum sé komit í ónytt efni, ef eigi hafa ein log allir, en ef sundr skipt er lógnumum, þá mun sundr skipt friðinum, ok mun eigi við þat mega búa." ("It seems to me that our affairs will become impossible if there is not one law for all. For if the law is divided, our peace must be divided, and we may not live with that," ch. 105.)

The law is a basic part of the saga tradition, in its role as narrative punctuation, and thus is entitled to a place in Njála's compendium of the
saga tradition. A wide display of subject matter—marriage, property and manslaughter by self-defense, single combat, ambush and Burning—and a survey of legal procedure—summons, direct and obscure trial knowledge, and settlement by hólmganga, arbitration and force of arms—culminate in the proceedings for the Burning, which present a detailed account of a trial.

Lehmann and Carolsfeld have already catalogued all the legal references in Njála. Excluding all non-dramatic settlements and instances of mutual agreement, the following episodes remain, each a structured conflict between two opposing parties: (1) Unnr's divorce (ch. 8); (2) Unnr's dowry (ch. 22-24); (3) Hallgerðr's theft (ch. 49-51); (4) Otkell's death (ch. 55-56); (5) the slaying of the Starkadarsons (ch. 65-66); (6) the abortive attack on Gunnarr (ch 70); (7) the slaying of Þorgeirr Otkelsson (ch. 73-74); (8) the Fifth Court (ch. 97); (9) establishment of Christianity as the state religion (ch. 105); (10) the slaying of Höskuldr Hvítanessgöði (ch. 119-123); (11) the Burning (ch. 135, 138-145). The legal episodes build in length from one chapter to several.

The first two episodes, connected with Unnr, are settled by a challenge to hólmganga. Hólmganga in the sagas is a remnant of pre-Republican, pre-law times, justice by the stronger arm. Law in the prologue to Njála is pre-saga law. The tendency to cut through legal transactions by force lingers into Gunnarr's story; Gunnarr hints at hólmganga in the episode of Hallgerðr's theft, and Geirr göði taunts him about previous challenges after Otkell's death: "Muntu þá skóra mér á hölm sem þá ert vanr ok þóla eigi logi?" ("Are you going to challenge me to the holm, as you are wont, and not endure the law?" ch. 56.)

Yet the legal episodes in Gunnarr's story are settled by mutual arbitration rather than by force. They define the spirit of Republican law as
this saga sees it: the rules of behavior, defined by the law, exist to prevent total chaos; the law is man's institution to assure the continuity of society.

Gunnarr's story traces the development of saga law from the brute force of hólmganga (also part of the parallel between Gunnarr and Hróðr) to amicable arbitration. Njáll's story, a synthesis of saga and history, presents legal history in a saga context: the founding of the Fifth Court, the adoption of Christianity, and a record of legal formulae.

Litigation in Njálal is, as Lehmann showed, senseless from a legal or logical standpoint. No case is decided by the law, and all turn on baroque machinations and petty points of defense. If, in the end, the logical right triumphs, it is as a result of consensus, of transcending the rules in favor of the greater good of upholding peace.

The system functions, but only temporarily; temporarily, bloodshed is avoided. Many characters who would otherwise be involved in a bloody feud are allowed to leave the saga in peace, such as Kolskeggr and Hógni Gunnarsson. But all settlements of conflict are eventually broken, except that between Gunnarr and Hróðr. Here, as in the quiet mutual arrangements between Gunnarr and Njáll of their wives' devastations, the legal opponents are men of good will. This is the exception.

Hallgerðr's theft is compensated, only to develop to Otkell's slaying. Neither Órgeirr Starkadarson nor Órgeirr Otkelsson allows blood vengeance to be denied. Þráinn Sigfússon cannot rest in peace; "Patt vitu allir," Lýtingr says, "at ek hefi ekki við bótum tekit eftir Þráinn, mág minn." ("Everyone knows that I got no compensation for Þráinn, my brother-in-law," ch. 98.) Similarly, Lýtingr's settlement with Njáll for the slaying of Hóskuldr Njálsson only lasts until Æmundi blindi appears.
Whatever the eventual results, all legal conflicts so at least reach a settlement averting immediate and imminent chaos, until Christianity becomes the state religion and lawful conciliation fails entirely. The last two legal episodes, concerning the slaying of Höskuldr Hvítanessgodi and the Burning, are broken off in a state of total hostility.

If we are to read a Christian message as the point of the saga: "Tá vil ek hálfu heldr þola dauda af þeim en ek gera þeim nokkut mein," ("then I would rather endure death from them than give them any harm;" ch. 109) it is precisely the death of the peaceful Höskuldr Hvítanessgodi which should, above all others, be followed by harmony. There is certainly a great effort made by the characters involved to give this set of proceedings an appropriate lofty spiritual tone. There is unusual pathos for a saga in the arbitrators' discussion: "En gera vil ek fealsekt svá mikla, at engi madr hafi dýrri verit á landinum en Höskuldr" ("and I will set such a high payment, that no man will have been dearer in this land than Höksuldr, ch. 123), and Hallr's plea, "Er þat baenarstadr minn til allrar algýðu, at nökkurn hlut gefi til fyrir guds sakir" ("This is my entreaty to all the people, that each give something for God's sake," emphasis mine, ch. 123.)

Christianity in Hjálta does not often stand for peace. It comes with violence and killing and is accepted amicably thanks solely to the old system of legal compromise. Fosil, the Christian has fewer qualms about the Burning than did Gizurr the heathen (at Gunnarr's last battle, ch. 77). The battle of Clontarf is Christian, and it is Christians who execute Broðir so gruesomely. Most important, the law breaks down entirely after Christianity arrives. It no longer functions to avert violence, and the law disappears entirely after Kári leaves Iceland.

Christianity in the form of Höskuldr Hvítanessgodi, Hallr af Síðu
and the final reconciliation represents peace and harmony, but it also represents the disruption of Icelandic law, the fundamental influence for peace in Republican Iceland. At Hóskuldr's death, the rising star of Christianity and the dying one of the saga world (including the law) intersect. This makes Hóskuldr's death a turning point of the saga, and explains its structural and rhythmic emphasis.

The series of legal episodes are set apart from the rest of the saga by their cast of actors, the lawyers. Gunnarr and Otkei may be the apparent opponents in the episode of Hallgeró's theft, the legal master minds who determine the course of events are Hrútr and Njáll vs. Móðr Valgardsson. The lawyers for the various episodes are: (1) Módr Gígja vs. Hrútr; (2) Hrútr vs. Njáll; (3) Móðr Valgardsson vs. Hrútr and Njáll; (4) Gizurr and Geirr vs. Njáll; (5) Móðr vs. Njáll; (6) Móðr vs. Njáll; (7) Gizurr Geirr vs. Njáll; (8) Njáll; (9) Borgarri godi; (1?) Móðr and Ásgímar Ellidagrímsson vs. Flosi; (11) Móðr and Torhallr Ásgímsson vs. Flosi and Eyjólfr Bólverksson.

In general, these are men of intellect rather than men of action. The legal episodes have little action; like the character of Njáll, they are verbose and slow of tempo, and they are fittingly Njáll's milieu. Their position in the rhythm pattern gives them the function of releasing tension, yet the legal battles have the only real suspense, for the outcome of the real battles is known in advance by heavy foreshadowing.

As Gunnarr is the embodiment of the physical ideal, Njáll is the embodiment of the intellectual ideal, and his realm is the law. Gunnarr's death is the defeat of the ideal for which he stands, since death negates his ability to maintain himself against the world. Njáll's death is no rebuttal of what he represents, since no one would ever expect Njáll to defend himself physically with any success. But the destruction of the
law is indeed the destruction of Njáll's realm. Pingvellir is the most important place in the saga. Men's fates are decided here by Njáll and his brother lawyers, collectively in the two historical episodes. Without the law, Njáll is nothing.

Thus the series of legal episodes trace Njáll's real fate, beginning with his series of successes paralleling Gunnarr's physical victories. The story of Njáll's feud portrays not only his death, but the disintegration of the law. Njáll's last active appearance establishes the Fifth Court. Referring again to Lehmann, the jurisdiction given the Fifth Court covers the principal developments in the Burning proceedings. The Fifth Court is Njáll's special creation and Porhallr Ægrímsson, master lawyer of those final proceedings, is Njáll's pupil. Although the trial does not deal with Njáll from a lawyer's standpoint, and this is typical of his role in the saga. He moves behind the scenes, but he is nonetheless a prime mover of the course of events.

The progress of Christianity in Njála is portrayed in the characters. The degrees of Christianizing spread from Æmundi blindi to the reconciliation of Kári and Flosi. Beginning as a disruptive foreign intrusion, Christianity becomes finally the new status quo and the way of the future.

The first reference to Christianity is not a happy one. It appears in the aftermath to Gunnarr's death: "En hann réð svá, at hann myndi fara suðr í lýnd ok verða guðs riddari. Kolskeggr tók skírn í Danmórkku, en nam þar þó eigi ynjói ok fór austr í Gardaríkí ok var þar einn veitr." ("He advised that Kolskeggr should go south and become God's knight. Kolskeggr was baptized in Denmark, but he was not happy there and went east to Russia and stayed there one winter," ch. 81.)
To introduce Christianity in an incident abroad is to temper our reception of it. At this point in the saga, going abroad has led to Háfr's curse and Gunnarr's marriage.

The episode which introduces Christianity formally begins with a pseudo-historical note on the changing times in Norway. Christianity's genealogy is a series of events rather than a series of men, for Njála does not define Christianity's progress as mutable by human endeavor.

A foreigner Þangbrandr brings Christianity to Iceland. It becomes an Icelandic concern when Æjalti Skeggjason and Gizurr inn hvíti become its advocates. The list of conversions is significant. It begins with Hallr af Síðu, one of the two truly Christian figures and the great arbiter of the second half of Njála. The list continues with several of the Burners: Glúmr Hildisson, Kolr Þorsteinnson, Ózurr Þráalðsson, all of whom die, and Flosi. Next come Njáll and his clan. Thus the remainder of the feud is represented here, the two opposing sides and the spirit of conciliation which eventually triumphs. Njáll takes no part in the momentous altercation at the Alþing, the first legal battle in the saga without him.

The characters in Njáll's story must be viewed through their relationship to the Christian ethic. After Þorgunnar godi's famous decision, all the characters are nominally Christian. Yet they range from those who oppose the new belief openly (Mörör Valgarðsson and his father, ch. 102) to the rare true Christians (Höskuldr Hvítanessgodi and Hallr af Síðu).

The first group are those completely unaffected by Christianity. They act in allegiance with the Áld code of behavior: Mörör, Skarphéðinn, Grímur and Belgi, Bergþóra and Kári. Although Skarphéðinn brands himself with a cross in his dying moments, he deviates at no other time from the older ethic. Skarphéðinn's is the most superb dying gesture in the saga,
from a character notable for superb gestures. Skarphéðinn acknowledges his defeat, not by Flosi, but by time and Christianity.

Skarphéðinn definitely belongs to the men of action. His speeches are ironic gestures rather than factual statements that further the action. Yet Skarphéðinn is no initiator of action like the figures Hrútr, Gunnarr and Kári. Nowhere in the saga does Skarphéðinn cause a conflict, although he is the character most motivated by a sense of duty and honor. In the Bergróra-Hallgerðr feud, in Gunnarr's conflicts, in the feud with the Sigfússons, Skarphéðinn acts only in support of family and friend. Gunnarr is disturbed by issues: whether to kill, how best to act in accord with honor and dignity. Skarphéðinn is a Christian because philosophical issues do not interest him. He may be ironic and objective; loyalty is his prevailing characteristic and the key to his actions. Loyalty is the single force that can involve Skarphéðinn in the events.

The second level in the Christianizing process is represented by those characters who accept the external trappings of Christianity while remaining heathen in fundamentals. Ámundi blindi Hóskuldsson is the first example, and he appears immediately after the legalization of Christianity (ch. 106). God's giving Ámundi vision long enough for him to sink his axe into Lýtingr's skull is an illustration of naive faith.

Hildigunnr, wife of Hóskuldr Hvítanessgodi, is another example of naivest Christianity. Her actions after her husband's death are consistent with the old idiom of vengeance: saving the bloody cloak and infuriating Flosi into retribution against Mjáll's family. Hildigunnr assumes the standard saga role of shrewish inciter, but she expresses herself in Christian terms: "Skýt ek því til guðs ok godra manna, at ek saeri þík fyrir
alla krapa Krists þíns ok fyrir manndóm ok karlmennsku þína, at þú
hefnir allra sára þeira, er hann hafði á sér dauðum, eða heit hvers manns
nÞöingr ella." ("I call to witness God and all good men, that I charge you
by all the powers of your Christ and by your manhood and valour, that you
avenge all the wounds on him, or else be called villain by all men," ch.
116.)

The third group of characters represent the transition period,
balanced between two ethics. Flosi having mass said to bless the Burning
(ch. 124, 126), or lamenting "Ok er þeg þo stór þþyrgó fyrir guði, er vör
crum kristnir sjálfir" ("And that is a great responsibility before God,
for we are Christians ourselves," ch. 128) is aware of the spirit of
Christianity. Yet he completes his personal vengeance before accepting
the concepts of forgiveness and charity. Ásgrímr Ellíadrámsson, Hjalti
Skeggjason, Gízurr inn hvíti, Snorri guði and Flosi are all Christians
when convenient, but all take part willingly in the battle at the Alþing.

The only consistent Christians in Ægis are Hóskuldr Hvítanessgodi
and Hallr af Síou, who loses his son trying to separate the fighting parties
at the Alþing, and then renounces all compensation (ch. 145). There is
little to add about Hóskuldr, since his only characterization is the model
Christian. This precludes Hóskuldr's entering into enmity with anyone or
being aware of a conflict. His character is uniform; no subtleties are
given him. Hóskuldr and Skarphedinn are opposites; Skarphedinn is loyal to
people and uninterested in ideas, while Hóskuldr acts in allegiance to an
idea and is indifferent to the demands of people. In killing Hóskuldr,
Skarphedinn is attempting to kill an idea and to stop time.

Njáll the historian is aware of the absolute futility of such
rebelliousness against time, but Njáll's foresight condemns him to
permanent inaction. His sons, like Gunnarr, maintain the heroic belief that one must act futilely rather than be destroyed passively.

Njáll the historian may see the inevitability of the Christian triumph; still Njáll belongs to the heathen world. From the time of Óláfr's arrival in Iceland, Njáll takes no active part in any legal conflict, formerly so much his milieu; Njáll is instrumental in neither the settlement of the religious question nor the settlement of Höskuldur's slaying. The various maneuvers are devised and carried out by Ágrímr Ellíagrímsson, Gizurr inn hvíti and Mörðr Valgardsson.

In fact, after the advent of Christianity Njáll is no longer capable of manipulating men. For the first time, he cannot control his sons, and Höskuldur Hvítanessgodi dies. The subsequent negotiations are broken off by Skarpheðinn. Njáll withdraws from the action and refrains from commentary until the Burning, when he makes one last and futile attempt to alter the course of events. His speeches may be strongly Christian, but Christianity does not send him into his house to die rather than face disgrace.

The feud which began with Práinn Sigfússon develops into an alignment of Christians against non-Christians, as further indicated by the contrast between the final opponents, Kári and Flosi. Flosi (like his followers) is an avowed Christian, while Kári (like the rest of Njáll's clan) never makes even naive references to God. Even Mörðr Valgardsson uses ritualistic phrases such as: "svá gud hjálpa mér í þvísi ljósí ok í góðru" ("So God help me, in this world and the next. ch. 144).

Flosi is honestly torn between the demands of implacable honor and the Christian forgiveness. His emotions are among the most clearly delineated: Hildigunnr's influence, Skarpheðinn's insult, revulsion against the cowardly mass slaughter of the Burning, generous respect of
Kári's motives and actions, and a sincere, if belated, desire for a conciliation compatible with honor. Kári displays no such scruples. He single-mindedly seeks vengeance and does not waver until it is accomplished. There are no additional nuances to his behavior; Kári is as simplistic a character as Höskuldr Hvitanessgodi. The saga's sympathies shift after the Burning to the Christians, as if the battle between beliefs were ultimately decided then, with only the last reverberations remaining to be chronicled.
Chapter Five

The Look of Truth

Njála is strictly motivated. Its internal causality conflicts with the quasi-historical aspect of saga style, which would demand that the events seem unmotivated. Thus the saga’s causality, like the other structural aspects, remains in the background and is almost obscured by the wealth of events. The principal methods of motivation are the unexpressed but understood code of behavior (an action demands a certain reaction); structural techniques of rhythm, literary models, and parallel situations; and the bald statement—prophecies, portents, and dreams.

Motivation is the instrument of literary believability. Fiction, in the modern sense, is allowed to create an inner logic of precepts, causalities, and results which are autonomous to the particular work of art. The free suspension of disbelief we accord the individual work of fiction is limited in the sagas by a set of genre rules of expectation and interior logic.

Much of the motivation in a saga relies upon a stock idiom of the genre, the Weltanschauung and ethical system. These can be deduced from the body of works in the genre, and are neither explained nor re-created in the individual saga. For the progress of the action, the concept of honor is the prime mover. The desire for revenge is tacit in all the sagas. There is no need to explain it, nor even to explain why honor has been impugned, and yet revenge is the most frequent motivation for further action. It motivates the entire second half of Njála, as it motivates all feuds and virtually all conflicts in the sagas. Gunnarr’s story displays a variety of incitement to vengeance ranging from a quarrel about seating (the Bergþóra-Hallgerðr feud) to the death of a near relative
(Forgeirr Otkelsson and Forgeirr Starkadarson). Revenge is sought for any serious attack upon one's honor; much less serious inducement than a slaying can lead to violence. Public insult, such as the libelous poems and the spur wound, is justifiable cause for blood vengeance.

_Njála_ defines the limits of justifiable vengeance, limits the sagas normally assume tacitly. _Njáll_ is the spokesman: "Skammt munt þú til þess eiga," he says to Skarphedinn, "at þik mun slíkt henda, ok mun þik þó nauðr til reka." ("You will soon be involved in this, and you will be driven to it," ch. 40.) To Gunnarr, _Njáll_ comments, "Mikit hefir þú at gört, ok hefir þú verit mjók at þreyttir," and "Þat munu margir maela," segir _Njáll_, "at þú hafir mjók verit til neydr." ("You have done a lot, but you were sorely tried," ch. 55; "Many will say that you were forced to do it," ch. 64.) The most detailed explanation of the code of vengeance is _Njáll_’s long explication on public opinion in the Þráinn episode, beginning with the statement "Þat mun þykja um sakleysi, ef þeir eru drepnir," ("It would seem unjustified if they are killed (now)," ch. 91), and outlining the measures necessary to make vengeance acceptable to public opinion.

Acts of vengeance are usually preceded by the expression of anger, for planned slaying is less admirable than unpremeditated violence in the sagas' ethical system. Anger is expressed in gestures, but stereotyped gestures are not a common technique in _Njála_, and the central figures avoid them. Gunnarr loses his self-control only once, when he attacks Ótkell Skarfsson, and _Njáll_ indicates his reactions by words, since he is too detached for violent emotion. The most striking gesture is Skarphedinn's grin, an invariable signal of impending violence (ch. 36, 37, 44, 120, 123, 128). The only other characters who use gestures are Flosi (ch. 116), Ásgrím (ch. 136), Órhallr (ch. 132, 142, 145), and
Hallgerðr (her laugh, ch. 11, 17).

The pace of Njála is too deliberate in general for paroxysms of emotion, and extreme gestures are thus infrequent. The violent character familiar from so many sagas is absent (the topos includes Gunnlaugr, Egill, Gísli, Eiríkr rauði, and the two central characters of Fóstbroedra saga). The closest approximations to this type are Njáll's sons, and even their impetuosity is tempered by a good deal of caution. The gestures are not needed for motivation, which is amply provided by other methods.

The structural techniques used to prepare the audience for coming events are the rhythm of the episode, which points to a climax, parallel situations (Hallgerðr's marriages), and literary models (the expected pattern of the saga-biography and feud). Gunnarr's death is motivated by the Hallgerðr parallel, by the rhythm of three major conflicts (the third being cataclysmic), by Njáll's prophecy, a literary pattern analogous to the dream-prophecy of Gunnlauga saga, and by the analogy to the genre of the saga-biography, which normally structures the hero's death as his most dramatic moment. Since there is no internal reason for Gunnarr's death, and no moral to be illustrated, external literary motivation is complex and insistent.

Njáll's doom is prepared by the feud, with its pattern of intensification to a climax (a pattern established by the intensification of the Bergbóra-Hallgerðr feud); by the pseudo-Christian demand for atonement for Hóskuldr's death; and by the highest concentration of prophecy in the saga. Prophecy is the main vehicle of foreshadowing; the device of making certain figures prescient effectively circumvents any genre ban of overt authorial predictions. Typically, old women are the seers and foreshadowers in the sagas;² Rannveig, Saeunn, and Bergbóra conform to the standard
role (ch. 42, 72, 124, 127). In addition, first Hrótr and then Njáll assume the authorial role of predictor with a commentary on every major event. With predictions by a variety of minor characters as well, the outcome of every dramatic episode is known in advance.

The motivation throughout Njála illustrates a desire for complete causality, a range of techniques, and restrictions placed upon methods of motivation by the genre's pseudo-historicity. In Hrótr's story, the most important motivation is Gunnhildr's curse which ruins the marriage (ch. 6). Prophecies, portents, and dreams are a favorite embellishment in the saga; they are motivational techniques to the extent that they prepare the audience for forthcoming events. But the supernatural is very rare as the logical cause of events; the realism which is so much a part of the sagas prefers natural causes (such as greed, aggressiveness, or revenge). Gunnhildr's curse, replacing logical motivation for Hrótr's impotence and the resulting divorce, is unique in Njála and unusual for the genre. The device imparts to the episode an elliptic and mysterious atmosphere, reminiscent of the Eddaic lays and magical tales.

Love is never explained in the sagas. Hrótr's choice of wife (like Gunnarr's) receives neither preparation nor justification from the author. Yet the necessity of Hrótr's trip abroad is painstakingly prepared (ch. 2), as is his uncharacteristic challenge to hólmganga—by Mórirgíggja's "sigrnd ok kippi" ("avarice and ardor," ch. 8). The only prophecy of the climax is Hrótr's oblique statement "Vel, en eigi veit ek, hvárt vit eigum heill saman." ("Well, but I don't know whether we'll have happiness together," ch. 2.)

A series of logical events always seems to "belong" to the saga, while unrelated incidents appear irrelevant. Thus the chain of events
from Hrótr's decision to marry until the challenge to hólmganga form a consequential episode, to which the beginning incident of Hallgerðr's "thief's eyes" and the final incident of the boys' mock divorce are not strictly tied. These two embellishments are not non-functional, however. The first both hints at faults in Hallgerðr's character and foreshadows dimly her theft (ch. 48). The last incident contributes to characterization: displaying Hrótr's magnanimity is important for the later parallel to Gunnarr.

The primary motivation for Hallgerðr's actions and their drastic results lies in her character, which is drawn vividly and economically. Her introduction as "grlynd ok skaphgró" ("impetuous and severe," ch. 9) is followed by the characteristic exchange with her father about the impending marriage. The argument reaches its climax with an important statement by Hallgerðr: "Míkill er metnadrydvarr fraenda, ok er þat eigi undarligt, at ek háfa ngkkurn." ("Great is the pride of my relatives, and it is not surprising that I have some," ch. 10.)

Motivation by character portrayal is the reverse of the method used in Hrótr's story, where the characteristics of the people involved are irrelevant to the course of events, since the events are determined by an external impetus. By contrast, Hallgerðr's extravagance with the household provisions is the provocation for the first slap, a quarrel about Þjóðtólfr motivates the second, and her thievery the third. These insults to her pride—and her pride is emphasized in her portrayal—must be avenged.

The chain of Hallgerðr's marriages is prophesied by Þjóðtólfr (ch. 10.) The story of her second marriage follows exactly the sequence of events established in the first marriage. A slight variation is
introduced by making Hallgerðr innocent of willing Glúmr's death. This variation removes the logic from the chain of events. The progression of the first marriage (slap—desire for revenge—commissioning Eyjóstólfr's death) is modified in the second marriage to slap (with no desire for revenge)—Eyjóstólfr's interference—Glúmr's death. The logic of vengeance, the most common motivation in Njála, appears for the first time to prepare Þorvaldr's death.

In contrast, Glúmr's death is not logical. The pattern established by the first marriage provides all the motivation for the second. Glúmr's death is not foreshadowed, as is Þorvaldr's—twice by Hrútr (ch. 10) in his role as seer, and once by Ósvífur (ch. 11). Glúmr's death is an exception to the general rule in Njála, since it is not foreshadowed by a prophecy.

The death of Hallgerðr's third husband, Gunnarr, is a logical sequence of events, like Þorvaldr's death and unlike Glúmr's. Logic is necessary because the events are scattered over several episodes. Hallgerðr's role in Gunnarr's story follows the pattern: slap—desire for revenge—denial of the hair—Gunnarr's death, a perfectly logical sequence of events. The pattern of Hallgerðr's previous marriages is thus not logical motivation in Gunnarr's story; it provides foreshadowing by inference.

Gunnarr's involvement with Unnr is justified at some length (ch. 18, 19, 20). The challenge to hólmganga, necessary to initiate the comparison to Hrútr, has as explanation only the brief statement, "Njáll var eigi við dómina," ("Njáll was not at court," ch. 24) to explain the failure of legal proceedings and Gunnarr's impetuosity, which erupts when he is out of the influence of Njáll's deliberate counsel. Hrútr's reference to disagreeable events to come closes the episode (ch. 24).
Gunnarr's adventures abroad and his marriage to Hallgerdr are prepared by the parallel of the prologue. The feud between the wive and its outcome are foreshadowed by Njall's prediction that Hallgerdr will bring trouble (ch. 33), as Njall assumes for the first time his role as the seer. The divorce at Gunnarr's wedding prepares an atmosphere of strife for the direct cause of the wive's feud, the (supposed) insult about Hallgerdr's seating (ch. 35). When men battle in Njala, the worsening of hostilities is motivated by insults and threats until violence results. Women are apparently always ready to quarrel; Bergthora and Hallgerdr move immediately from the initial disagreement to armed conflict.

The normal feud logic (action—revenge—counter-revenge, etc.) is adequate to carry the audience believing through the feud between the wive. Embellishment to the feud logic is added by a prophecy of death for each character killed, although some of the warnings are upon probability rather than second-sight. Death is foreshadowed for Svartr (ch. 36), Kolr (ch. 36), Atli (ch. 38), Brynjolfr (ch. 38), Krodr (ch. 41, 42), Sigmundr and Skjoldr (ch. 42, 43). The portents become more vivid and dramatic, and intensification which parallels the increase in the stature of the victims over the course of the feud. Thus the prophecies also build toward a climax—which, however, is averted. From Hallgerdr's initial aside "pvi skal ekk rada, at hann hoggvi eigi optar" ("I'll see that he never chops another tree," ch. 36), the warnings intensify to Krodr's vision of his fylgja. The final incident in the feud is further emphasized by Skarphedinn's only loss of gestural self-control in the saga (ch. 44).

The slap, basically foreign to Gunnarr's noble character, must be well motivated. Indirect preparation is the feud, in which Gunnarr bears a great deal from his wife, but the direct cause of the slap is Hallgerdr's
theft (ch. 48), motivated in turn by the incident of the hay (ch. 47). The
theft is the cause of the enmity between Otkell and Gunnarr, as predicted
by Njáll earlier (ch. 36). The situation is exacerbated by Skamkell's
machinations, explained through his introduction as "lyginn, ódaell ok illr
vióreignar" ("lying, rough, and hard to get along with," ch. 47).

Otkell's insults are emphasized and the necessity of Gunnarr's action
in attacking him is justified at length, from his generous offers of repay-
ment and self-judgment (ch. 49) and the humiliation inherent in public
trial for theft, to Njáll's statement "mikit hefir þú at górt, ok hefir
þú verit mjók at þreytttr." ("You have done a great deal, but you were
sorely tried," ch. 55.) Final indication of the severity of the insults
is Gunnarr's anger, his only loss of self-control, revealed by Rannveig's
"Reiðuligr ert þú nú, sonr minn, ok ekki sá ek þík slíkan fyrr." ("you
are now angry, my son, and I never saw you like this before," ch. 54.)

From Otkell's death to Gunnarr's, events receive direction from
Njáll's prophecy (ch. 55). Beginning with the prediction: "Mun þetta
upphaf vigaferla þinna" ("This will be the beginning of your killings, ch.
55), it announces the exact sequence of events leading to Gunnarr's
death: two slayings in the same family and a broken settlement. The
fulfillment is delayed for another episode after Otkell's death, but the
appearance of the prophecy at this point creates expectation of coming events
immediately before the first unmotivated shift in the action of Gunnarr's
story, the introduction of Starkaður and family. The Hallgerðr pattern
dominates the chain of events from Gunnarr's marriage to the slap in the
Otkell episode, at which point it disappears until Gunnarr's last battle.
The prophecy is a structural framework for the remainder of Gunnarr's
saga.
The Starkaðr episode is tied to the prophecy by another of Njáll's commentaries, that many deaths will result from the stallion fight, "en þó munu þeir muna fórnan fjáðndkap ok nújan at þér faera; ok muntú ekki annat mega en hrøkkva við." ("But they will remember earlier enmity, and will bring new against you, and you will have no choice but to strike back," ch. 58.)

The Starkaðarsons' introduction, like Otkell's and Skamkell's, prepares a conflict: "þeir váru ofsamenn miklir í skapi, hardlyndir ok ódælir; þeir sátu yfir hlut manna." ("They were overbearing men in nature, bad-tempered and hard to get along with. They oppressed people," ch. 57.)

The Otkell episode carefully develops the inner motivation for Gunnarr's actions, but the inner logic of the Starkaðr episode is not as rigorous. Starkaðr's episode follows the pattern of Otkell's and relies upon the established pattern for causality. Logical motivation is replaced by dramatic use of foreshadowing in Þórir's prediction of his own death (ch. 61) and Gunnarr's dream (ch. 62). The loss of his brother Hjört in the battle with the Starkaðarsons is the first serious penetration of Gunnarr's defenses, and prepares the atmosphere for Gunnarr's third and disastrous conflict.

Njáll's prophecy of Gunnarr's death becomes active motivation as Móðr Valgarðarson for the injuries to their families. They are guided by Móðr's hired directions. Þorgeirr Otkelsson is the unwitting sacrifice; his slaying is deliberately contrived by Móðr. to fulfill the first half of Njáll's warning, never to kill twice in the same family. Two aborted attempts on Gunnarr's life create suspense for the major battle between Gunnarr and the Þorgeirrs, preceded by a "death rain" (ch. 72), and
closed by Rannveig's comment, "Vera má, at gott sé verkit, en verra vare mér við en ek aetla, at gott muni af leiða." ("Perhaps the deed is a good one, but I have a bad feeling about good resulting from it," ch. 72.)

The death rain is emphasis for Gunnarr's approaching death, not for Þorgeirr's, although it is Þorgeirr who is slain in the incident. The final episode in Gunnarr's saga presents his death. Its logical motivation is the judgment against Gunnarr, his breaking the settlement, the insult this implies to Þorgeirr's supporters, and the resulting need to avenge this insult by an attack on Gunnarr. Hallgerðr fulfills our expectation of her by refusing Gunnarr her hair for a bowstring, but this is only one motif in the vast apparatus necessary to make Gunnarr's death inevitable. It is picturesque but not primary motivation. The large role played by Njáll's prophecy from its first appearance to its fulfillment is the major element of inevitability.

The elements of foreshadowing point toward Gunnarr's death, but the actual event receives further preparation by the creation of a fey atmosphere and by the development of Gunnarr's acceptance of his doom. The preparation for the final battle has three stages: Gunnarr's reaction to the judgment against him, his speech "Fógr er hliðin" ("The hill is so beautiful," ch. 75), and his doomed refusal of all attempts to save him.

When faced with the judgment against him, Gunnarr makes no direct comment. (He makes no speech in direct discourse.) Njáll's emphatic reiteration of his warning is framed by two brief statements from the narrator: "Gunnarr lét ekki á sik finna, at honum þaetti eigi gða saettin," and "Gunnarr kvæk ekki aetla at rjúfa saettir." ("Gunnarr gave no sign that the judgment did not suit him," and "Gunnarr said that he did not intend to break the settlements," ch. 74.) Njáll's eloquence
emphasizes Gunnarr's silence, directing our attention and suspicion toward Gunnarr's reactions. Characters in Ñjála who are less verbal than expected in a moment of crisis signal drastic action to come.

Against Gunnarr's apparent acceptance of the insult of exile one must set his pride and sense of honor which began his career of slaying. That he finds the insult unbearable is indicated by his indirect comment, "at hann myndi ríða í braut alfari." ("that he was leaving for good," ch. 75.) Gunnarr's ambiguous attitude toward the judgment prepares his speech, his first since the trial, in which he decides not to leave Iceland because his home is so lovely. One of Ñjála's common techniques of emphasis directs our attention to this speech, the detailed scenic description in the preceding paragraph. As Paul Schach notes, landscape description in Ñjála signals a particularly dramatic climax.

Kolskeggr replies to Gunnarr's dramatic speech with the final prediction of Gunnarr's death: "En seg þú þat fraenum mínun ok móður minni, at ek aetla mér ekki at sjá Island, því at ek mun spyrja þik látrinn, fraendi, ok heildr mik þá ekki til útferðar." ("So tell my friends and my mother that I do not expect to see Iceland again, for I will hear you dead, brother, and I will not care to return," ch. 75.) The moment is further emphasized by the poignancy of Gunnarr's and Kolskeggr's speeches.

After the "Fygr er hliðin" speech, Gunnarr's acceptance of his impending death is portrayed. Gunnarr remains stoically laconic, as befits the saga hero, and the narrator indicates Gunnarr's refusal to avoid his doom and travel to Óláfr's protection with the sentence: "en þá er at kom, vildi hann eigi." ("But when the time came, he did not want to go," ch. 75.) In a last conversation with Ñjáll, Gunnarr quietly speaks of his death, thus making its imminence absolute (ch.75).
The outcome of the final battle is thus prepared at length, but a further device is needed to overcome Gunnarr's established superiority at arms. The device used to turn the tide of battle is Hallgerðr. The importance of her action in denying Gunnarr the hair for his bowstring was established at the beginning of Gunnarr's story, when his ability with the bow was developed.

The feud between the Njálssons and the Sigfússons motivates itself according to standard feud logic (firmly established for this saga in the Bergþóra-Hallgerðr feud). Predictions are numerous, but the causality is less rigorous than in Gunnarr's story, where every event was carefully motivated. Motivation becomes less strict over the course of the saga, as the tempo slows and the structure becomes more expansive. Initial rigor in these areas has already established the "look of truth" of the saga. The only event in the second half of Njála motivated with care is the Burning.

The Burning has all the logic of the feud to prepare it, as well as the Christian sinfulness of Höskuldr's slaying, and the emphasis created by two major climaxes—Höskuldr's death and the resulting trial—which lead logically to the third and most important climax, the destruction of Njall's family. Prophecies prepare an atmosphere of impending doom similar to the atmosphere preceding Gunnarr's last battle. Skarphéðinn and Njáll become fey, further paralleling Gunnarr. Njáll speaks of approaching death, after Höskuldr's slaying (ch. 111), while Skarphéðinn, a stoic hero like Gunnarr, does not, he is labelled fey by other men at the Alþing: "Hverr er så inn mikli ok inn feiknli, ok ganga fjórðir menn fyrri, fjölleitr ok skarpleitr, ógæfuseamligr ok illmannigr?"
("Who is that man, tall and fey, the fifth in line, pale and sharp-featured, ill-starred and cruel?" ch. 120.)

The Burning itself is related to Gunnarr's last battle by Skarphédinn's statement: "Gunnarr sóttu heim þeir hofdingjar, er svá váru vel at sér, at vildu frá hverfa en brema: hann inni." ("Gunnarr was attacked by chieftains of such stature that they would rather have left than burn him in his house," ch. 128.) In Gunnarr's final battle, the Burning was foreshadowed by Móðr's suggestions that Gunnarr be burned: "Móðr maelti: 'Brennu vér hann inni!'," and "Þá maelti Móðr annat sinn, at þeir myndi brema Gunnar inni." ("Móðr said, 'Let's burn him inside,' and "Then Móðr said again that they should burn Gunnarr in his house," ch. 77.)

In contrast to the Burning, Brjánn's death in the Battle of Clontarf has no preparation, in keeping with Njála's general unconcern about the causality of events abroad. The lack of motivation in the episodes abroad emphasizes the logic of the events in Iceland, and is one illustration of the nationalism expressed in Njála (as in many of the other sagas).

In summary, Njála uses several levels of motivation: logic, foreshadowing, and cumulative motifs (and the expectation created by the rhythm). The logic is derived from the sagas' ethical system; the major elements used in Njála are the logic of revenge and the logic of consistent character portrayal. Foreshadowing techniques are prophecy (including dreams and other portents) and certain parallels which create an expectation (such as the parallel of Hallgerðr's marriages, which creates an expectation of Gunnarr's death at her hands).

The cumulative parallels revive motifs from an earlier episode, motifs which at their first appearance did not create anticipation for the future. The motifs' reappearance, however, establishes a parallel between
the events in progress and the earlier episode. Njáll's beardlessness, for example, seems irrelevant in his introduction, but becomes a motive for Skarphedinn's actions when used as an insult by Hallgerðr (ch. 41, 44, 91). The results of Njáll's beardlessness intensify from the deaths of Sigmundr and Skjöldr (ch. 45) to the slaying of Þráinn Sigfússon (ch. 92). When Flosi finally uses this insult during the negotiations after the slaying of Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði, the pattern is firmly established, and Skarphedinn's action, ending the negotiations and thus precipitating the Burning, is completely expectable (ch. 123).

*Njála* has a myriad of such motifs, some of which have been discussed (by Sveinsson, Allen, Kersbergen and others). The variety of minor parallels is one of the clearest indications of *Njála*'s concern with both causality and unity. Causality is strictest in the first half of *Njála*; the second half relies increasingly upon the minor motifs to motivate the outcome of events by parallels with preceding episodes.
In Conclusion

We began our analysis with a definition of premises, a description of the concept "saga," of the art form and of the Weltanschauung embodied in the works. The sagas exhibit artistic structuring which adapts the material to the authorial intent of telling a certain story. Contrasting with their obvious artistry, the sagas' quasi-historicity reflects a desire to appear traditional and non-literary, a desire expressed in phrases from oral conversation and recitation, and in references to an outside reality—to "sources," to other quasi-historical writing, and to historical events and people. Validation of the look of truth is sought in such excursions from the main narrative stream into the recital of "facts" in an apparently historical context. There is no question, however, that the sagas' artistic intent is far more important than the quasi-historical posturing; Sigurður Nordal's analysis of "historical inaccuracies" demonstrated that "factual" reality is distorted to conform to the story the saga wishes to narrate.

Events in the sagas are judged according to a fixed set of ethical rules. The saga ethic has two sides: the nobility of the heroic virtues, and the everyday common-sense of the Hávamál. The saga man thus has two primary, often conflicting goals: fame and comfort. Common to both ideals are the accumulation of wealth and power, and the possession of physical prowess and mental adroitness. The virtues the sagas extoll can thus be divided between the realm of action and the realm of thought.

This brings us to Gunnarr and Njáll, the man of action and the man of thought. Njála is organized into two major sections, the first constructed around the central figure of Gunnarr (saga-biography), the
second developed as a logical sequence of events leading to the destruc-
tion of Njáll's family (feud). In fact, the difference in structure
between the two sections contributes more to their definition as separate
entities than does the difference in protagonist.

To combat the division of the saga and establish the unity of the
whole, the two structural methods--centralized and progressive--are
interwoven throughout the work. Hrútr is a pre-parallel of Gunnarr, and
his story, like Gunnarr's, is centrally organized. Hallgerðr exists to
prepare Gunnarr's death; her story, as it appears in the prologue,
consists of two identical structures which create an expectation of a
third and climactic parallel element (Gunnarr's story). The figure of
Hallgerðr unites the parallel elements in her story; in this respect,
it resembles Hrútr's and Gunnarr's centralized biographies. However,
Hallgerðr's story as developed in the prologue is not a closed unit
like Hrútr's story, but an unfinished progression which thus points
ahead to the end of Gunnarr's story. It resembles the feud in the sense
of linear progression which it creates. Hallgerðr's story leads into
the wife feud which begins Gunnarr's story.

Gunnarr is the focus of events from his introduction to his death.
Yet the first (major) episode of his story is a feud which is interrupted
until the second half of Njála. The two halves of the feud thus frame
Gunnarr's three central conflicts and death, an arrangement that emphasizes
his death and gives it a central position in the saga. Gunnarr's death is,
indeed, a natural turning point in the action; since he and Njáll are
closely linked in Gunnarr's story, the death of Gunnarr creates audience
acceptance, at least, of Njáll's death, the climax of the feud.
Thus, Gunnarr's three conflicts and death are emphasized by the contrast between their centralized organization and the progressive organization of the feud which they interrupt. However, the final episode of the death itself is rhythmically unstressed; the episodes preceding it do not build toward it, for each episode in Gunnarr's story is rhythmically autonomous and begins at rest, builds to its climax, and returns to rest. The final episode is separated from preceding events by its introduction, which threatens another journey abroad for Gunnarr. The device of outlawry precludes all but the briefest vengeance for his death and thus precludes a logical development from Gunnarr's death to subsequent events. His death stands rhythmically alone. The independent rhythm of each episode in Gunnarr's story contrasts with the progressive intensification of the rhythm patterns in Njáll's story, a progression which parallels the logical progression of the feud.

Njáll's death is placed in the middle of a feud and is an integral part of that feud; in other words, its method of structuring events does not contrast with that of the surrounding episodes. Emphasis is given to Njáll's death by making it the third in a series of intensifying climaxes, each of which derives from the one preceding. Thus opposite methods are used to stress Gunnarr's death and Njáll's death.

A further result of the division of Njála into the story of Gunnarr and the story of Njáll is the contrast created between the solitary hero and the family man. The concept of family is associated in the sagas with the feud. The Bergþóra-Hallgerðr feud is Gunnarr's major appearance as a family man—i.e., a man responding to the demands of family unity. Yet his family (Hallgerðr and Rannveig) is characterized by dissension,
while Njáll's family (Bergbóra, Skarphedinn, Grímr and Helgi) act with unanimity of purpose. This feud establishes the distinction between Gunnarr the individual and Njáll the family member.

Gunnarr's definition as the solitary hero is reinforced by the centralized organization of his story, which places him alone in the foreground, the focal point of the action. The correlation in Njála between the hero and a centralized structure extends to the portrayal of Gunnarr's two parallels, Hrókr and Kári. Both figures are focal points for organizing events which lie outside the central story of Gunnarr and Njáll—in Hrókr's story and in Kári's revenge.

Njáll is the man of logic and the family man. His death is the end of a long logical progression beginning with Hallgerðr's introduction. Family ties lead to the Burning. Family pride demands the slaying of Þráinn Sigfússon, the beginning of the real feud, and filial loyalty prompts Skarphedinn's disastrous exchange of insults with Flosi and the resulting end of negotiations between the two parties, the immediate cause of the Burning.

Rhythm, characterization and motivation parallel the division of Njála between its two protagonists. The contrast in rhythm between the independent episodes of Gunnarr's story and the progressive intensification of the feud has been mentioned. Characterization distinguishes between the (solitary) man of action and the (communal) man of thought. Gunnarr is portrayed directly, by his actions and by the commentaries of other characters on these actions. Njáll does not act, he directs and comments upon the course of events. Njáll is reflected in the actions of his friend Gunnarr and of his family. He is also associated with
historical progression and the story of an epoch far more than is Gunnarr. The two themes, Njáll and the law, and Njáll and Christianity, reflect the fate of all Iceland.

Gunnarr's portrayal deals with a man's actions, Njáll's with the effect of history upon him. The motivation in Gunnarr's story prepares his actions and the actions of his opponents. In Njáll's story, motivation is increasingly historical anecdote. The role of Christianity in the preparation of events is the most important example. The founding of the Fifth Court and Republican law in general (as it appears in Njála) are also vital elements in the preparation for the Burning and subsequent events. Even Brjánn's saga plays a role; its excesses give the final reconciliation greater attraction by contrast.

As Allen demonstrates in *Fire and Iron*, Njála begins on a small scale, with the story of Hrútr, and then expands its themes by stages, until it encompasses the history of an epoch in an almost apocalyptic presentation. Njála presents a figurative history of the saga genre. The Eddaic reminiscences in Hrútr's story (Gunnhildr's curse and the introduction of the heroic type) reflect the sagas' (quasi)-historical origins, and Hallgerðr's story, as a classic saga þáttur (short saga), represents the structural origin, for all longer sagas are constructed as a series of þáttur-length episodes. Hallgerðr's extreme concept of honor, the primary motivating force in her story, belongs by saga definition to an older, pre-Christian era.

Gunnarr's story is a classic saga. It is tightly structured, without extraneous elements, and moves at an even pace. Each of the major episodes is constructed according to the classic pattern: formal introduction
(a pause in the rhythm), exposition, climax, return to rest, statement of status quo. Gunnarr is a classic saga hero: the greatest warrior, and a generous, wealthy, moderate figure. His conflicts culminate in physical crises which must be met by ability at arms: the climaxes in Gunnarr's story are battles (not one-sided assaults, as in Njáll's feud). Gunnarr is naturally victorious in every battle except his last one, although it is left to Njáll to negotiate the consequences of these victories. Gunnarr, the man of action, is the normal saga hero.

The story of Njáll's feud (rather, the feud of Njáll's family) is another type of saga than Gunnarr's, but it also expands the genre's historical tendency to include within the narrative entire episodes of apparent "raw history": the founding of the Fifth Court, the coming of Christianity, and Brjánn's saga. Njáll's story extends the boundaries of the saga form in an alternation of saga episode and quasi-historical anecdote, and Njála ends with the presentation of Kári, the courtly knight, and Brjánn's saga, the courtly epic, thus depicting the end of the saga world and the foreign philosophy that succeeded the saga ethic.

Paralleling Njála's figurative history of the saga genre are similar histories of Republican law and the Christianizing process. The law develops from hólmganga, or law of the stronger arm, to a spirit of compromise and conciliatio which prevents mass violence and wanton retribution from the Bergþóra-Hallgerðr feud to the slaying of Lýtingr. The end of Republican law comes with Christianity; from the slaying of Húskuldr Hvítanessgoði through Kári's revenge, the law is incapable of handling problems and is gradually replaced by the Christian code, finally triumphant in the reconciliation of Kári and Flosi which closes the saga.
The progress of Christianity is portrayed in the characters' ethical standards. The "heathens" in Njála (e.g., Skarpheðinn and Gunnarr) are contrasted with the representatives of the first level in the Christianizing process, the naive Christians such as Ámundi blindi and Hildigunnr. The next level are the figures caught between two ethics (Flosi, agonizing between Christianity and the Burning, is the major example). The final level are the true Christians, Hallr af Síðu and Ósksúldr Hvítanessgoði. The chronological story of Christianity is simultaneously depicted, from its first effects upon Icelanders abroad, through the turmoil created by its arrival in Iceland (portrayed in a series of Alþing episodes: its official adoption and subsequent effect upon the native legal tradition), to its eventual displacement of the heroic tradition, symbolized in the Christian conciliation that ends the feud between the Njálssons and the Sigfússons.

We closed our analysis of Njála with a discussion of the motivational system. Expectation is created by the implied code of behavior inherent in the saga ethic, and by literary devices of foreshadowing and parallel situations. The code of vengeance is the primary motivating device in Njála, as in the entire genre; revenge is a virtual genre cliché of motivation. Njál's secondary device is foreshadowing by prophecy. Njáll is the major prophet, as he is in general the author's voice. His prophecy of Gunnarr's death is both literary preparation and active motivation for Gunnarr's final battle, since Móðr explicitly engineers its fulfillment. The third device is the creation of parallel situations. The pattern of Hallgerðr's marriages is the most obvious example, although there are numerous repeated minor motifs and major structural patterns
in *Njála*, from Njáll's beardlessness to Gunnarr's three conflicts.

In conclusion, *Njála* deliberately exploits every standard device of unity and expectation known to the genre. It is a compendium of the saga tradition. *Njála* is also designed as the ultimate and final saga, even passing the boundaries of the genre tradition to create a new amalgam of literature and history. Its *Schlussakkord* marks the end of the saga world philosophically and artistically, and the dawn of a new tradition.
Footnotes, Chapter One

1 Karl Lehmann and Hans Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Die Njals-sage, insbesondere in ihren juristischen Bestandtheilen (Berlin, 1883).


4 On the "history"-"pseudo-history" controversy, see Andersson, Origins, pp. 41-50.

5 Particularly Finnur Jónsson, Den islandske litteraturs historie (Copenhagen, 1907), pp. 267ff.

6 Siguður Nordal, Hrafnkatla (Reykjavik, 1940).


8 Rolf Heller, Die literarische Darstellung der Frau in den Isländer-sagas (Halle/Saale, 1958); the table of contents illustrates this well.

9 All quotations from Njála are taken from Brennu-Njáls saga, Íslenzk
Fornrit, v. 12, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavik, 1954); translations are my own.


The techniques used in the oblique portrayal of emotions have been catalogued by: August Goedecke, *Die Darstellung der Gemütsbewegungen in der isländischen Familiensaga* (Hamburg, 1933); Arthur Hruby, *Zwei Studien zur Technik der isländischen Saga* (Vienna, 1932).


I use the term "heroic gesture" to include epigrams and all other forms of heroic posturing.


Ibid., p. 23.

Ibid., pp. 106-109; Andersson admits that there is little sense of climax in the "höfuðlausn" scene.


31 M. C. van den Toorn, Ethics and Moral in Icelandic Saga Literature (Assen, 1955).

32 Ibid., summary on the Hávamál, pp. 29f., on the heroic poems, pp. 32-37; cf. also Turville-Petre, Origins, on the heroic lays, pp. 9f., on the Hávamál, pp. 16f.


35 Dialogue in the sagas is described in three studies: Netter, Direkte Rede; Werner Ludwig, Untersuchungen über den Entwicklungsgang und die Funktion des Dialogs in der isländischen Saga (Grafenhainichen, 1934); Margaret Jeffrey, The Discourse in Seven Icelandic Sagas (Bryn Mawr, 1933).
Einar Ól. Sveinsson, introduction to Brennu-Njáls saga, Íslensk Fornrit, v. 12, esp. pp. cxxivf.

2 See: Jónsson, Litteraturus Historie, pp. 267f.

3 W. A. Craigie, The Icelandic Sagas (Copenhagen, 1913), pp. 67-69; Sophus Bugge, Norsk sagaskrivning og sagafortælling i Irland (Kristiania, 1908), esp. p. 211.


5 Bååth, Studier; this has been the point of Sveinsson's writings; Á Njálsbúð is probably the earliest example.

6 Anne M. Saxon, Unity and Narrative Technique in the Brennu-Njáls saga (Diss., Berkeley, 1964); Richard F. Allen, Fire and Iron: Critical Approaches to Njáls saga (Pittsburgh, 1971); Sveinsson, Á Njálsbúð.

7 Nordal, Historical Element, pp. 27ff.

8 Fox, p. 300; Magnusson, pp. 15f.

9 Sveinsson, Njáls Saga, pp. 157-180.


15 Niels Chr. Brøgger, "Njáls saga," *Samtiden*, 69 (1960), 301-309, states that Njáll let himself be killed because he saw that Christianity was both inevitable and good, but he belonged to the older age.

16 This dispassionate tone has been called a spirit of Christian peacefulness by: Goetz, *Die Njálssaga*, pp. 9f.; Magnusson, p. 27; de Vries, *Altamoresche Literaturgeschichte*, p. 460.

Turville-Petre, *Origins*, pp. 250ff., characterizes Gunnarr as the conventional hero, brave, honorable, athletic and generous, while Njáll is wise and thoughtful, a counsellor rather than an active man; Goetz, *Die Njálssaga*, p. 9, says much the same thing; he sees Gunnarr and Njáll as complementary, Njáll having wisdom and Gunna:r strength. Neither can exist without the other, so that Njáll is naturally doomed after Gunnarr's death.

Lehmann and Carolsfeld, p. 9, comment on this; their explanation is the author's lack of knowledge about legal proceedings concerning a Burning.

Saxon, *Unity and Narrative Technique*, p. 16, defines two standard methods of saga structure also: lineal and panoramic; however, she says that neither applies to *Njál. *

Jolles, *Einfache Formen*, p. 78.

Brøgger, "Njáls saga," p. 309, calls the final reconciliation of Kari and Flosi the dawn of the new age over Iceland; Nordal, *Historical Element*, p. 24, calls *Njál* a swan song of the old belief in man's might and main; Báðth, *Studier*, p. 145ff., interprets the Kristni þáttur as preparation for the final reconciliation; the Christian ending is meant by Báðth's statement that the author of *Njál* had the last line in mind when he wrote the first line, p. 159.
I do not agree that Njáll is a complete Christian at his death, as Sveinsson states, *Njáls Saga*, pp. 157-180; it is less controversial to state that Christian expectation is one method used to motivate his death, and that he is "symbolically" slain by Christianity.

Neusler, "Einleitung," p. 8; Nordal, *Historical Element*, pp. 21ff., speak of Kári as too idealized and tending toward the knightly.


R. George Thomas, "The Sturlung Age as an Age of Saga Writing," *Germanic Review*, 25 (1950), 50-66; p. 62, he states that Njála seeks to give a consummate picture of Icelandic life at the end of the Saga Age; p. 65, he calls it an "apopthesis;" thus he also feels an intent in Njála to be more than an ordinary saga.

Chapter Three

Allen, *Fire and Iron*, pp. 65ff., builds a similar system of motifs repeated from the level of the phrase through the level of the episode to the overall structure of the work.

On methods used to begin and end an episode, see the first of Hruby's *Drei Studien*, and Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga*, pp. 6-11.

Heusler, "Einleitung," pp. 17-18, calls these deviations "mistakes," and enumerates the most striking examples.
4See: Hruby, Drei Studien.

5Sveinsson, Njáls Saga, p. 48, comments on the monotonous and stereotyped nature of the battles abroad; Saxon, Unity and Narrative Technique, pp. 204ff., considers the episodes abroad the beginning of the three major stories in Njála.

6Andersson, The Icelandic Family Saga, p. 305.

7Lehmann and Carolsfeld, p. 131.

8Sveinsson, Á Njálsbóó, pp. 118f., points out the connection Íráinn makes between the two feuds, and it is he who attributes Skarphedinn's revenge upon Íráinn to Ósfór's death rather than to the insult to Grímð and Helgi.


2 Sveinsson, Njáls Saga, p. 49, comments on the external characterization of Hallgerðr and its unsympathetic effect; Á Njálsbúð, pp. 94ff., he also reviews the major opinions on her characterization.


4 Allen, Fire and Iron, p. 60, says "But no other saga is quite so concerned with the attempts to contain the violence of blood feuds within a lawful settlement."

5 See: Lehmann and Carolsfeld.


7 See: Lehmann; this is the point of the book and documented throughout, summarized pp. 138f.
Chapter Five

1. See, again, Coedcke, Gemütsbewegungen; Hruby, Zwei Studien.

2. See: Heller, Darstellung der Frau, pp. 90ff.

3. Again, Heller, esp. p. 103 on this feud.


5. Allen, Fire and Iron, pp. 123f., states that the horror of the Burning, a slaughter and atrocity, is made bearable by Gunnarr's "brave and lonely death," but the reverse seems true; Gunnarr's noble and heroic death emphasizes the ignobility of the Burning.

6. Sveinsson, Njáls Saga, e.g., pp. 55-56 on Hallgerðr's hair; Allen, Fire and Iron, esp. ch. 3; Anna C. Kersbergen, Litteraire motieven in de Njála (Rotterdam, 1927).
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