

resembles that of the legendary hero. In both *Eigla* and the legendary sagas the plot sequence begins with the hero's departure and ends with his final return to his place of origin. Moreover, Egill's major antagonists like those of many legendary heroes are kings. Although there are reversals in his fortune and some painful losses, Egill survives his encounters as does the viking and adventure hero and he is ultimately victorious.

In summary then, the resemblance between the sagas of Egill Skalla-Grimsson and *Án bogsveigir* is due to both general and specific reasons. Because *Ásb* avoids the excesses associated with its genre and shows little or no romance influence, its style approaches that of the family saga. *Eigla*, given its old world focus, its individualistic ethic, the type of hero and the nature of his conflicts and antagonists, has more in common with legendary fiction than other family sagas. Specific analogies between the works include the background, appearance, and personality of the major characters, the themes of "the brothers as contrasts" and inheritance disputes among royal heirs, and many aspects of narrative structure. Thus, when compared systematically, the echoes which were thought to be faint when based on Reuschel's data, are in fact clearly audible.

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Structural patterns in the *Eyrbyggja Saga* and other sagas of the Conversion

by BERNADINE MCCREESH

The *Eyrbyggja Saga*¹ has long been considered an anomaly among the Family Sagas, for, of all these sagas, it alone does not conform to the traditional pattern described by Theodore M. Andersson.

According to Andersson, in a typical Family Saga the plot deals with the fate and fortunes of a single man or single family, and the episodes are presented so as to conform to the pattern of Introduction, Conflict, Climax, Revenge, Reconciliation, Aftermath. Within the saga the various episodes are arranged symmetrically:

The actions may match in several ways, as parallels, contrasts, or repetitions. Though the technique strikes one as particularly artificial and untrue, it can often be very effective in crystallizing an issue. Like the device of retardation it clarifies and fixes a situation. In addition, it affords a purely literary enjoyment; since it is so patently superinduced, the reader becomes consciously interested in the technique *per se* at the same time he is more unconsciously submitting to the author's emphasis.²

There are various uses to which this technique of symmetry can be put: exposition, psychology, characterisation, the creation of atmosphere, and humorous effects.³

¹ All quotations from the Family Sagas are taken from the *Íslensk Fornrit* edition (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1933-). References are to volume (Roman numerals) and page (Arabic numbers).

² *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 43.

³ Jane A. Kalinke, in "The Structure of the *Erex Saga*," *SS*, XLII (1970), 343-55, shows how the redactor and translator of one of the *Riddara Sögur* has altered the original order of episodes in the Old French version so as to make it conform to the pattern described above. In *Erex Saga* not only has the redactor altered the beginning and end of the Old French romance so as to start by introducing the hero and end with an epilogue, as in an Icelandic saga, but he has also rearranged episodes within the romance so that three scenes dealing with self-preservation

The fact that the *Eyrbyggja Saga* does not apparently conform to this pattern has caused a certain amount of consternation to critics, who have striven in vain to find structural unity or a clearly defined pattern of construction. The most ingenious – and undoubtedly the most far-fetched – solution is that proffered by Lee Hollander, who sees in the saga seven separate sets of action “skilfully interwoven”, “just as in Skaldic verse sentences”, producing the pattern ABABCBDCEBFEFGEFE, the resultant interbraiding being, to him, “hardly fortuitous”.⁴ Other critics simply admit that there is no pattern and try to find a unifying factor elsewhere. G.N. Garmonsway, for example, finds that “the merit of the saga lies in the presentation of separate episodes as they occur, and not in the symmetry of the pattern which they form viewed as a whole”, and suggests that “whatever unity the story possesses is achieved ... by the chronological arrangement of events, and to a lesser degree by the successive appearances and personality of Snorri the Priest.”⁵ The most recent editors, Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, see two separate patterns – a historical one, progressing from the ninth to the eleventh century, and a sociological one dealing with neighbouring families in a small community.⁶ Einar Ól. Sveinsson also believes that the *Eyrbyggja Saga* should be read as history:

Here we can clearly see a historian at work. He has several sources; he compares and he chooses between them according to completely sound principles.⁷

Vésteinn Ólason, on the other hand, sees the author of *Eyrbyggja* as a conscious artist rather than as a conscious historian and finds unity in the underlying philosophy of the saga; he suggests reading it on two levels – a secular one, represented by Snorri goði, and a Christian one, represented by the Fróðá marvels; the very lack of unity of plot he regards as a portrayal of human life: “In the saga man’s life moves back and forth, variegated, whimsical and discordant in itself.”⁸ These same critics, with one exception, dismiss the supernatural phenomena as a gratuitous piece of entertainment

tion in the first half of the saga are balanced by three scenes in which the hero saves others, and two tests of the heroine’s fidelity are balanced by two tests of the hero’s love.

⁴ “The Structure of *Eyrbyggja Saga*,” *JEGP*, X (1959), 224-27.

⁵ “*Eyrbyggja Saga*,” *Saga-Book*, XII (1940), 81, 84.

⁶ *Eyrbyggja Saga* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 13.

⁷ Vi ser her netop en historiker. Han har flere kilder, han sammenligner og han vælger imellem dem efter fuldkommen sunde principper. – “*Eyrbyggja Sagas Kilder*,” *Scripta Islandica*, XIX (1968), 15.

⁸ Í sögunni íðar mannlífð, marglitt, fjölbreytt og sjálfu sér sundurþykkt. – “Nokkrar athugasemdir um *Eyrbyggja sögu*,” *Skirnir*, CXLV (1971), 24.

which adds nothing to the story; only Vésteinn Ólason, who believes Christianity to be an integral part of the story, sees in the ghosts something more than a mere embellishment: he regards them as a reproach for Puriðr’s covetousness.

However, if one arranges the various supernatural episodes in the *Eyrbyggja Saga* around the central pivot of the Conversion, a clear pattern emerges: each pagan story has its Christian counterpart.

PAGAN	CHRISTIAN
	1. Death by drowning
Porsteinn Porskabitr (ch. 11)	Póroddr of Fróðá (ch. 54)
	2. Rivalry between two women
Geirfróðr and Katla (ch. 15-16)	Pórgunna and Puriðr (ch. 50-51)
	3. Curse by the dying
Katla (ch. 20)	Pórgunna (ch. 51)
	4. Hauntings
Pórolfr bægifótr (ch. 34)	Fróðá ghosts (ch. 53-55)
	5. Laying of Pórolfr
Pagan (ch. 34)	Christian (ch. 63)

In each set of pairs a contrast is made between the Christian and the pagan way of life. For example, when Porsteinn Porskabitr is lost at sea, his shepherd sees the mountain of Helgafell open up and Porsteinn and his companions welcomed inside to warm fires and a joyful feast; the pagan dead are presumably happy with their lot, for they do not return to trouble the living. On the other hand, when the bodies of Póroddr and his companions are lost at sea, the Christian ghosts do not seem to be at rest, for they return to the feasts and fires of their former dwelling-place. The author comments on how, in pagan times, this was considered a good omen:

Menn fognuðu vel Póroddi, því at þetta þótti góðr fyrirburðr, því at þá höfðu menn þat fyrir satt, at þá væri monnum vel fagnat at Ránar, ef sædaudir menn vitjuðu erfis síns, en þá var enn lítt af numin forneskjan, þó at menn væri skírðir ok kristnir at kalla. (IV, 148)

Póroddr was welcomed, because people thought it was a good omen; at that time men believed that those who had died at sea were well received by Rán [the goddess of the sea] if they came to their funeral-feast. At that time old practices had been only slightly discontinued even though men were baptised and nominally Christians.

Although it may have been a good omen before the Conversion, it certainly no longer is, for these ghosts refuse to be dislodged from in front of the fire even when the funeral feast is over. Christians cannot lie quietly in the embraces of the goddess of the sea, whereas pagans could. The similarity between the deaths of Þorsteinn and Póroddr emphasises the difference in behaviour of their souls after death, and also helps to link the Fróðá episode with the rest of the story.

Two other characters from Fróðá, Þuríðr and Þórgunna, have their counterparts, Geirríðr and Katla, in the first half of the saga. The latter two both have some knowledge of the occult, and their rivalry stems from the fact that Gunnlaugr goes to Geirríðr rather than Katla for instruction. Geirríðr is cleared of the charge of riding Gunnlaugr and causing him grievous bodily harm, and suspicion devolves upon Katla.⁹ Later on, Katla's son is hanged for injuring a woman and Katla herself is stoned to death, presumably for witchcraft. However, before she dies, she lays a curse on the man who convicted her. In the second half of the story the rivalry is over material possessions, over fine linen which Þórgunna has brought with her from the Hebrides and Þuríðr covets. Þórgunna does not lay a curse on her bedclothes, but she does state clearly that they must be destroyed after her death; the implication is that if Þuríðr had not coveted them so much as to refuse to have them destroyed, the hauntings might never have taken place. Moreover, Katla's malice which lives on beyond her death contrasts with Þórgunna's unselfishness when she rises from her coffin to provide her pallbearers with food and warmth.

The episode of Glásir, the magic calf, also seems gratuitous at first, but the author obviously intended to include it from the beginning, for he says after the first laying of Þórólfr, "Lá Þórólfr þar kyrr alla stund, meðan Arnkell lifði" (Þórólfr lay quiet as long as Arnkell was alive) (IV, 95). The Glásir episode is another variation on the theme of greed: Þóroddr would not have the bull-calf slaughtered despite his foster-mother's warnings because he expected it to grow up to be a fine, valuable animal. Glásir was apparently conceived when his mother licked up Þórólfr's ashes, and the author had

⁹ A very similar story is told in the *Landnámabók*; there, however, Gunnlaugr dies of his injuries, but Geirríðr is still cleared of the charge (I, 112-14).

previously given a hint that Þórólfr or his "spirit" would reappear in the form of a bull by describing the corpse in the howe as "digr sem naut" (as fat as an ox) (170). The emphasis has moved as the saga progresses from a study of malicious vengeance to a study of how people bring trouble on themselves through their own covetousness.

A similar type of parallel structure is found within nearly all the Family Sagas set in the years spanning the Conversion of Iceland. The first half of such a saga contains a number of incidents concerned with the pagan supernatural, which are balanced in the second half by an equal number of supernatural incidents, this time with a Christian bias. These sagas have, besides the heroic six-point format described by Andersson, a pagan-Christian format with the Conversion or some other incident of religious significance as the central pivot.

Such a saga is *Hallfreðar Saga vandræðaskáld*. This time the focal point is not the Conversion of Iceland, for very little of the action takes place there, or even Hallfreðr's conversion, but his return to the fold after a sojourn among the heathen. This is very much in keeping with the central theme of forgiveness, for at that point Hallfreðr is forgiven by both God and King Óláfr for the laxity he showed in the practice of his faith. In this saga the focal point is further highlighted by having half the *vísur* preceding it and half following it, as well as having the various episodes, whether supernatural or not, occurring on either side of Hallfreðr's return to the fold.

Hallfreðr Forgiven (VIII, 178)

1. Kolfinna (pp. 140-50)	Kolfinna (pp. 180-90)
2. Már (pp. 144-50)	Már (pp. 187-88)
3. Þorleifr inn spaki (pp. 163-67)	Þorleifr inn spaki (pp. 195-96)
4. Hallfreðr's conversion (pp. 153-54)	Rejection of his <i>fylgja</i> (p. 198)
5. Óláfr's reproach – apostasy (p. 178)	Óláfr's reproach – vengeance (p. 195)
6. Óláfr's help – alive (p. 170)	Óláfr's help – dead (p. 199)

The *Fóstbræðra Saga* is also structured very similarly to *Hallfreðar Saga* with half the *vísur* in one section and half in the other according to one of the manuscripts. Since the action is set entirely within the Christian period, the turning-point cannot be the Conversion; this time it is the death of Þorgeirr and his sworn brother's transfer of allegiance to St Óláfr. The *vísur* themselves are clustered in symmetrical groups: eight at the beginning describe Þorgeirr's manslaughters and eight at the end describe the Battle of

Stíklastaðir; five describe Þorgeirr's death and five the vengeance Þormóðr takes for him. The saga is further balanced by having two witch-figures, both called Gríma, one of whom hinders Þormóðr in the early part of the narrative and one of whom helps him later on.

Þorgeirr's transfer of allegiance is partly symbolic. Þorgeirr represents the old heroic mode of life in which a man killed his enemies on little or no provocation, whereas St Óláfr stands for the moderating influence of the new faith. Þormóðr is the type of the early Christian, swearing fealty to the new religion while continuing to honour the obligations of a pre-Conversion code of ethics. The whole saga is set in a time of transition when nobody is quite sure what constitutes good Christian behaviour:

En þó at þá væri menn kristnir kallaðir, þá var þó í þann tíð ung kristni ok mjök vangor, svá at margir gneistar heiðinnar váru þó þá eptir ok í óvengju lagðir. (VI, 125)

Although men were called Christians, Christianity was young and imperfect at that time, so that many traces of paganism were left and wicked practices continued.

Men still swear oaths of blood-brotherhood, women still practise witchcraft, and nobody realises that such things are contrary to the teachings of the Church. The society depicted by the author of *Fóstbræðra* is still semi-pagan, but men are gradually turning towards Christianity.

Another saga in which pagan practices are continued after the coming of Christianity is *Eiríks Saga Rauða*. *Eiríks Saga* is very similar in outline to the *Grænlandinga Saga* but differs considerably from it in details; it is, however, considered to be a reworking of *Grænlandinga*, the earlier of the two.¹⁰ One area in which *Eiríks Saga* and *Grænlandinga Saga* differ is in the treatment of the Conversion and the supernatural. The author of *Eiríks Saga*, like the author of *Eyrbyggja*, makes the Conversion the focal point of his story, with contrasting Christian and pagan incidents arranged on either side of it. This time, however, the Conversion in question is that of Greenland, not of Iceland. According to the author of *Eiríks Saga Rauða* Christianity was brought to Greenland by Leifr after his visit to the court of Óláfr Tryggvason. This episode is not found in the *Grænlandinga Saga* and may well be an invention on the part of the author of *Eiríks Saga*.

The contrasting Christian and pagan incidents are not found in the *Græn-*

¹⁰ I have accepted Erik Wahlgren's argument that *Eiríks Saga Rauða* is basically a reworking of the *Grænlandinga Saga*. See "Some Further Remarks on *Vinland*," *SS*, XL (1968), 26-35.

landinga Saga either. The most famous of these is the scene in which Þorbjörg litilvölva, the Greenland prophetess, foretells a glorious future for Guðríðr, the heroine of the saga.¹¹ Þorbjörg's prophecy has a double function: firstly, it increases Guðríðr's stature by promising her a glorious future; secondly, it balances the long account of Christian hauntings and Þorsteinn's prophetic speech to Guðríðr after he rises from the dead. This latter apparition is unique in the Family Sagas and has strong religious overtones; this is in direct contrast to the scene in *Grænlandinga Saga*, in which Þorsteinn Eiríksson apparently returns from the dead because Farmer Þorsteinn is making advances to his widow. According to Þorsteinn, God has given him this respite to put his affairs in order; he uses it to tell Guðríðr to give their money to the church, to instruct her on how the bodies of those who had died should be treated, and to encourage men to keep the Faith (IV, 216). His remark about men keeping the Faith *illa* (badly) paves the way for the episode of Þórhallr veiðimaðr and the whale.

The story of the whale is found in the *Grænlandinga Saga*. However, in that saga the whale is washed ashore by chance, is *bæði mikil ok góð* (both large and good) (261), and provides food for Karlsefni's party. In *Eiríks Saga* the whale is sent in response to pagan Þórhallr's prayers to Þórr and makes Christians ill. Þórhallr veiðimaðr himself is an addition to the story, probably a literary creation inspired by Tyrkr in the *Grænlandinga Saga*.¹² Why should Þórhallr have been added to the story? One reason is that he forms a contrast to Þorbjörg: she is a good pagan, whereas he is a bad Christian. She has not had an opportunity to be converted, whereas Þórhallr had the Faith preached to him and rejected it. While Þorbjörg is not condemned for her prophecies, Þórhallr's sad end as a slave in Ireland seems to be a punishment for his lack of faith.

Of all the Family Sagas centred around the Conversion, *Laxdæla* is the only one which does not have this structural pattern. But even then it has episodes which balance each other. Auðr, the Christian woman who lived in pagan times, has her counterpart in Christian times in the old *völva* who appears to Herdis in a dream. Guðrún's first and last husbands are drowned: Þorðr, who lived in pagan times, was killed by the magic of the Kotkell clan, whereas Þorkell was punished by Fate(?) or God(?) for his presumptuousness in taking with him to Iceland enough wood to build a church larger than

¹¹ *Eiríks Saga Rauða* is, as Dag Strömbäck has pointed out, the story of Guðríðr rather than of her second husband, Karlsefni. See *Sejd, Textstudier i Nordisk Religionshistoria*, Nordiska Texter och Undersökningar, vol. 5 (Stockholm: Hugo Gebers Förlag, 1935), p. 57.

¹² Tyrkr and Þórhallr are direct opposites in both character and appearance. See Wahlgren, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

the king's in Norway. In *Laxdæla* as well as in *Eyrbyggja* a moral lesson is preached through implication: one should not set too much store by the things of this world. In Christian times people are no longer the playthings of supernatural forces but are responsible for their own actions.

This same type of parallel structure extends beyond the Family Sagas, into the Kings' Sagas. In the monk Oddr's account of the life of Óláfr Tryggvason there are two basic structural patterns which complement each other.¹³ The first concerns the depiction of Óláfr's life as similar to Christ's. This is done at three points in his career: at his birth, at the height of his power, at his death. Like Christ, he is born in lowly circumstances; he undergoes a transfiguration; he vanishes into heavenly light, as Christ vanished at His Ascension. The second structural pattern shows how the transfiguration is further highlighted by having episodes clustered around it in symmetrical pairs.

Birth and childhood ch. 2-8	Transfiguration ch. 51-52	Death and disappearance ch. 73-78
	Obdurate pagans tortured (ch. 44-45)	Obdurate pagans tortured (ch. 55-56)
	Óðinn overcome (ch. 43)	Þórr overcome (ch. 59)
	Wizards banished (ch. 36)	Trolls banished (ch. 60)
	Old Finn prophecies (ch. 19)	Old man prophecies (ch. 64)
	Receives hound (ch. 16)	Hound dies (ch. 77)

The second half of the saga is basically a mirror image of the first: for each of Óláfr's encounters with the supernatural world before his transfiguration, there is a corresponding encounter after it. His hound, it is true, does not

¹³ *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar eftir Odd Munk in Konunga Sögur* I, 1-192.

belong to the world of the supernatural, but the acquisition of the dog and its pining away pinpoint the beginning and end of the king's career as a soldier of Christ.

The two episodes dealing with prophets are connected not only by their positions near the beginning and end of Óláfr's career but also by the imagery of light and darkness which they both use. The wise Finn is a heathen prophet, and Óláfr and his companions approach his house through the darkness associated with the old religion:

Síðan gengu þeir í myrkrinu um nóttina, ok var þar fenjótt mjök ok blautt at fara. (*Odd*, 61)

Then they walked in darkness through the night, and the going was very marshy and murky.

Óláfr, however, is preceded by his *fylgja*, light, which the Finn is very much aware of:

Ok eigi fara litlar fylgjur fyrir þér, því at í þín föruneyti eru björt guð, en þeira samvistu má ek eigi bera, því at ek hefí annars konar náttúru. (*Odd*, 61)

And you are preceded by no mean *fylgjur*, for in your company are bright gods, which I cannot stand being near, for I am of a different persuasion.

Whereas the Finn realised who Óláfr was before his arrival, the blind prophet whom the king consults towards the end of his reign does not realise to whom he has been speaking until after Óláfr's departure. The old man then exclaims:

At eigi at eins tekr líkamliga sýnina frá, heldr verðu vér ok at þola ok at reyna þoku ok myrkr hugarins, því at eigi vissa ek, at ek talaðu nú við sjálfan konunginn. (*Odd*, 152)

Not only is the light of our eyes taken from us, but we must also suffer and experience the darkness and murk in our minds, for I didn't know that I was just talking to the king himself.

In the first episode the imagery was of light piercing the darkness, as when the Finn opened his door so that the light from his house could show Óláfr

the way, whereas in the second darkness is closing in again as Óláfr's reign draws to a close.

The other pairs of complementary anecdotes are more simply conceived, serving simply to balance each other. Early in his reign Óláfr banishes human beings who practise magic, and then, towards the end of his reign, he banishes supernatural beings with the help of his bishop. Before his transfiguration he pits his wits against Óðinn, and after it against Þórr. The result of this balance is to frame his transfiguration, making it the central moment of the saga, thus helping to emphasise the fact that he is a man of saintly stature as well as a great warrior.

What conclusions can be drawn from this? If saga-writers of the thirteenth century have deliberately chosen to make an incident of Christian significance the focal point of their story, Christianity must have meant a great deal to them. They must have seen the Conversion as a landmark in Icelandic history, after which the power of the supernatural decreased and the power of man's free will increased. Although Icelandic warriors still adhered to the old heroic code of ethics, their behaviour was being gradually altered by the new religion. To the already complex structure of the saga, writers have added a second structural pattern emphasising the importance of the Christian faith. For such a thing to have happened, the Conversion of their country must have been considered an event of great moment by the early Icelanders.

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Reviews and Notes

Hans Frede Nielsen, *De germanske sprog. Baggrund og gruppering*. Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1979. 130 pp.

The author, who has already made worthwhile contributions to our knowledge of the relationship between Old Norse and Old English¹, writes in his preface:

This book is to be seen as an introduction to a research project on the relationship between the early Germanic languages, which is in progress at the Centre for the Study of Vernacular Literature in the Middle Ages, Odense University. Previous attempts at classifying the early Germanic languages have been based on a limited empirical material and the approach has often been narrow, probably because of the division of Germanic language studies among several departments. German studies have been traditionally concerned with the broadest spectrum (Old High German, Old Saxon, Old Frisian and Gothic) and have consequently made most impact on comparative Germanic linguistics. But there is no doubt that new approaches, more interdisciplinary in character, could bring fruitful results. (p. 7)

These words must receive our unanimous approval. H.F.N. continues:

At an early stage, however, I realized that I had to review the scholarly arguments, which, since the beginning of the 19th century, have been advanced in the debate on the relations between the Germanic languages. The results of this survey can be found in Chapter IV of this book.

¹ "Morphological and Phonological Parallels between Old Norse and Old English" (*ANF*, XC (1975), 1 ff.); "A List of Morphological and Phonological Parallels between North and West Germanic" (*APhS*, XXXI (1976), 96 ff.); "The Earliest Group of the Germanic Dialects" (*ANF*, XCIV (1979), 1 ff.).

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