NORTH AND WEST

ICELANDIC SAGAS AND AMERICAN WESTERNS

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This Thesis is based on original research carried out by me at the Australian National University, Canberra.
I regret I cannot record personal thanks to all those who have helped me with this thesis. Professor Hans Kuhn not only invited me to embark on this study, but his patient criticism helped complete it. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Emeritus Ian R. Maxwell for his willingness to discuss the Sagas with me. I am indebted to Ernest C. Gould for his personal encouragement and valuable comments. However, my greatest debt of gratitude is to my wife, Birgitta, who gave incalculable help throughout with this work, not least through her forbearance and her support on the home front, down here in Australia, so far away from both the North and the West.
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ich dunke iuch tump oder wise,
ich wage es, swie mirz halt ergât.

Heinrich von Freiberg
The Icelandic Sagas and the American Westerns are separated by a time-gulf of some seven centuries. Yet these forms, so distinct in place and time of genesis, reveal themselves as siblings, as two species of a single literary genus. To trace and expose the evidence of this close relationship is the aim of this thesis.

Like, for example, the lion of Africa and the snowleopard of Siberia, Sagas and Westerns are related in spite of different appearances. The Sagas are told with extraordinary power, tension and directness. A Saga narrator sees his goal clearly and moves irresistibly towards it. He takes pride in telling his story economically and with bracing understatement. He sees events in a dry light. He knows that great quarrels develop from seemingly insignificant incidents. The authors of Westerns, on the other hand, are not guided by such standards and traditions. They lack the eye for dramatic incidents, they take less pride in telling their story as briefly and boldly as possible. But just as a closer look at the lion and the leopard discloses that they are indeed relatives, so it is with the Sagas and the Westerns. A relationship between these two literary forms is immediately, almost obtrusively, discernible. Both occupy themselves with, and treat similarly, such common themes as law and order, violence and headstrong pride; both draw freely on traditional material; and both, even in detail, apply age-old conventions
But the roots of the relationship strike much deeper. They are implanted in the very history of the societies that gave suffrage to these narratives. The Icelandic Commonwealth of the tenth and eleventh century and nineteenth century America alike underwent radical transformations. Both societies then moved from the rough-and-readiness of early pioneering to the staidness of more ordered settlement. From pioneer communities characterised by a crude form of democracy, where people dealt forthrightly and directly amongst themselves, they evolved into societies where much more complex patterns of wealth, status and power determined social life. The freedom of the frontier period, at least for those who availed themselves of its opportunities, was succeeded by an era in which personal liberty became subject to stronger constraints. The age of heroes, with its enlarged characters and heightened conflicts, yielded to more sober and prosaic days.

Yet this age of heroes, be it the Saga Age or the Wild West, would not have imprinted itself so firmly in the collective memories of the Icelanders and the Americans if it had not been for a later and perhaps even more radical transformation: Iceland's great time of troubles in the mediaeval period, the turbulent and violent Sturlung Age; and the ever-accelerating technological and cultural change that even today is threatening to overturn American institutions and shift American values. During such turbulent and uncertain periods, Icelanders and Americans alike looked back to the golden age of heroes. They wanted to escape from their present troubles; but, paradoxically, they found that what happened in those 'good old days' bore a marked resemblance to their experiences now.
In the final analysis, Sagas and Westerns were both induced and shaped by an act of projection: events taking place during later periods were projected across time and space; the turbulence of the later epoch animated literary moulds of venerable age and gave new significance to historical traditions and memories. The past came to be seen in the light of later experiences and knowledge. The past became both history in the sense of a chronological sequence of events and an uncertain mirror image, a projection of the present.

The inherent tensions between now and then, between old and new, between opaque confusion and a clear vision, between legend and reality, between the heroic glow of the frontier days and the depressing scenes of the present, inform the genres' characteristically antithetic structure. Both genres, however, not only express or explore such tensions: they offer a means of mediating between the conflicting social norms and the differing conceptions of society which lie at the root of such antinomies.

The skill in presenting plots which discharge themselves through the actions of boldly drawn characters largely explains the immediate popular appeal as well as the lasting success of Sagas and Westerns alike. But their deeper appeal rests upon the use by the authors of these basic elements to dramatise effectively conflicting social ideals and to set them in a context representing symbolically historical experiences of nations as well as bringing into relief elemental and timeless human experiences.
THE CASE FOR JUXTAPOSITION

For lewed people loven tales olde; swiche thynges kan they wel reporte and holde.

Chaucer
In this chapter arguments for juxtaposing Sagas and Westerns are set out. They refer to geographic bonds and affinities of content, and range from the application of similar literary conventions to the presence of identical themes. Arguments casting doubt upon such an undertaking are also examined, and put into perspective.

A thousand years ago the Scandinavians' historic surge to the West, after having engulfed northern France, the British Isles, Iceland and Greenland, reached the shores of America. The Norsemen failed to establish themselves permanently in what they called Vínland, but they brought back with them vivid accounts of Europe's first glimpse of North America and the Red Indian natives. Later those accounts were compiled into the Sagas known as the 'Vínland Sagas'.

These stories tell how the sturdy Norsemen braved the ocean to reach America, how they built small settlements and encountered the native inhabitants. At first they traded with the Indians, exchanged milk and red ribbons for valuable furs, but soon violence erupted between the two groups. For the first but not the last time the Indian felt the superiority of the white man's weapons:

The place where they intended to have their encounter with the Skrælings, the Red Indians, had the lake on the one side and the woods on the other.

The plan devised by Karlsefni, the leader of the Icelanders, was put into effect, and the Indians came right to the place that Karlsefni had chosen for the battle. The fighting began, and many of the Indians
were killed. There was one tall and handsome man among the Indians and Karlsefni reckoned that he must be their leader. One of the Indians had picked up an axe, and after examining it for a moment he swung it at a man standing beside him, who fell dead at once. The tall man then took hold of the axe, looked at it for a moment, and then threw it as far as he could out into the water. Then the Indians fled into the forest as fast as they could, and that was the end of the encounter.¹

Eventually trouble broke out within the ranks of the pioneers; the deaths of the two Icelandic brothers Helgi and Finnbogi and their men at the hands of Freydis, the daughter of Erik the Red, are the first recorded murders in American history.

Thus, by historical accident, the Sagas of the Icelanders acquired more than a geographical link with a literature which, centuries later, grew up around another wave of westward expansion, the American Westerns. But what invites comparison is not only the location, the new land beyond the setting sun, but the significant common fact that in both literatures nation-building pioneers play a dominant role. Even more striking is the affinity of the predominant subject matter: recurring clashes between strong-willed men.

Moreover, a number of resemblances in details of literary technique are readily discernable. When Gunnarr Hámundarson and his brothers Hjörtr and Kolskeggr are attacked by a group of enemies, Njáls Saga relates that the brothers rode down to the Rang River and made ready to defend themselves. As the attackers came within earshot one of them, a certain Kolr, shouts, 'Are you running away?'. To which Kolskeggr replies defiantly, 'Ask that when the day is over'.²

These snippets of dialogue may be compared with the following: When John Gannon, a central figure of Oakley Hall's
Warlock, returns from a journey he is told by his brother, Bill, that a new marshal has come into town, a gunman from Fort James. The Citizen's Committee of Warlock has hired him to run men like Bill out of town. But Bill is certain that he is not going to run away, and declares defiantly, 'We'll see who is going to run tonight'.

Centuries after the Icelanders, a man of the West is just as concerned as they were with being considered a coward, as someone who runs away from the enemy. In fact, Bill Gannon's statement and Kolskeggr's answer are couched in an ancient heroic topos implying that when evening has come courage and strength will have been displayed.

In the same novel, Warlock, the old rancher McQuown, in a moment of disappointment, exclaims that there is 'half a woman' in his son. He taunts the boy in much the same terms as Geirrídr in Eyrbyggja Saga rebukes her son Thórarinn: 'It is only too true when it is said that you are more of a woman than a man, Thórarinn, because you tolerate all disgrace Thorbjörn puts on you.' In both instances parents feel disgraced by having a son who has 'womanly' qualities in him, in both cases it is obvious how a 'real' man is supposed to act: fearlessly and forcefully.

To a reader acquainted with the Sagas the following scene from The Virginian, a Western classic, will seem familiar:

"Was it sheep you went after in the Tetons?" inquired the proprietor (of the saloon in which this conversation takes place), knowing it was horse thieves. "Did you get all the sheep you wanted?"
the proprietor continued.

"Poor luck," said the Virginian.
Sagas, too, are fond of using such veiled speech, of referring to the enemy as an animal that has to be hunted down:

Njáll called out to Skarphedinn (his son):
'Where are you going, kinsman?'
'To look for sheep', he replied.
'You said that once before,' said Njáll, 'but then you hunted men.'

Ironic understatements add a touch of humour to otherwise frighteningly violent scenes. In the midst of a fierce Saga battle one of the combatants takes a brief rest. His brother notices this and remarks, 'You have been kinder to others than to yourself today, for you have quenched their thirst forever.' Similar humour attaches to a statement such as, 'There is gonna be some scrubby gents in Ironwood next few days. That was the barber you hit.'

In McCabe, McCabe formulates a general principle underlying the actions of heroes in both genres when he maintains, 'If you got to go out (...) you ought to do nothing but go out in style.' The heroes of Sagas and Westerns, if it is their fate to die, meet death stoically and with unconquered minds. In Ljósvetninga Saga, Thorkell hákr is attacked in a farm house by his enemy, the chieftain Guðmundr inn ríki. Thorkell is soon mortally wounded. Then Guðmundr, trying to escape the still fierce attacks of the dying Thorkell, slips and falls into a milk kettle. Thorkell sees this, laughs and quips:

'Now I say that your posterior previously has had something to do with most other brooks, but never before, I think, did it drink milk. But now you may attack from there, Guðmundr. My entrails are hanging out.'

Soon after Thorkell is dead.
In Westerns this defiance tends to have overtones of the 'wisecrack', but essentially it too is an expression of the philosophy of the stiff upper lip. When Butch Cassidy and his friend, the Sundance Kid, are cornered and when it is clear that their position is desperate, Butch comments wryly, 'Good. For a minute I thought we were in trouble.' Seconds later the two outlaws die in a barrage of rifle fire.

The similarities pointed out so far would perhaps not be convincing enough to warrant a study concentrating on Sagas and Westerns alone, for at least some of these touches are found in other types of literature as well - such as the Homeric epics, the Nibelungenlied, or the Japanese Samurai stories. What suggests a special relationship between Westerns and Sagas is not their plain prose style - although this may distinguish them from stories told in verse - but the level-headedness of their heroes. For the most part they are hard-working men; they are often leaders, but they remain subject to social criticism. Even so, their special courage or exceptional skills tend to confer on them mythic stature. But above all it is the stories' express concern for general social values such as the rule of law, and their constant reappraisal of the concept of justice and the ideal of social order that puts them into a category of their own. Thus in Hávardar Saga Ísfirdings, a story from the rugged north-west of Iceland, it is related that the selfish and tyrannical local chieftain Thorbjörn and an old farmer, a certain Havourdr, quarrel over a stranded whale (in those days whales were regarded as a valuable source of food and fuel). By rights Havourdr should take possession of it. Thorbjörn disputes this,
so they both go to have a lawspeaker's verdict:

(Thorkell the lawspeaker) was asked who was to take it. Thorkell answered, but rather softly:
'They should have it, certainly.'
Thorbjörn then went up to him, his sword drawn, and said
'Who then, you miserable wretch?'
Thorkell answers quickly and lets his head hang down.
'You, you certainly.'
Thorbjörn then proceeded with his injustice and took the whole whale for himself.13

Such an imperious abuse of power, with might making right, when weapons are more persuasive than law, as well as the clear condemnation of such an inequitable act immediately suggests comparable Western scenes. The decor may be different, the weapons used may be different, and the names are certainly different, but there is a central core of identity. In The Hell-Bent Kid the young hero, Ted Lohman, is hounded mercilessly by the man whose son he killed in self-defence. When Hunter Boyd is reminded of the inhumanity and illegality of his personal revenge - he shot the boy's horse and made him walk miles for water; he sent other men who tried repeatedly to kill him; he has made Ted fear for his life every night that the boy laid his head on the ground - he answers lamely: 'It's not a case of power. It's a case of law and order. We cattlemen are determined to bring law and order to this country.' To which he receives the curt and cutting reply: 'That kind of law sounds lawless.'14

The gut-feeling that there is a significant affinity between Sagas and Westerns arises readily. It is therefore not surprising that the American sociologist and historian Walter Prescott Webb, as far back as 1931, called the authors of Westerns 'descendants of the tellers of Sagas'.15 He may have been influenced by Walter Noble Burns' 'The Saga of Billy the Kid', a biography of the notorious outlaw William H. Bonney,
published in 1926. More recently, in 1964, the German Scholar Herbert Frenzel edited a collection of Western stories which he entitled 'Western Saga'. Today some Westerns are actually sold as 'Sagas': *Stampede* is subtitled 'A Saga of the Storm Family-- Cattlemen'.

This juxtaposition of the terms Saga and Western has, no doubt, been influenced by the loose usage to which 'Saga' has been popularly put; in its most general sense it designates virtually any longer, chronologically told or unfolding story of unusual events or daring deeds: 'The Saga of the Snowy Mountains' describes how a huge hydro-electric scheme was conceived and built; 'The Watergate Saga' refers to the long drawn-out events culminating in Richard Nixon's resignation from the Presidency of the United States.

This apparent kinship between the two forms, however, has not always been noted enthusiastically. The Australian writer Colin Simpson puts what must be the reaction of many into a nutshell when he candidly confesses that the gore and violence of the Sagas' subject-matter inhibited his interest in the Sagas, and that he did not finish *Njáls Saga* because he could and would not go on reading about 'Martins and Coys with swords instead of shotguns and much more difficult names. But such a judgement and reaction is based on an incomplete and superficial understanding of Sagas and Westerns alike. The purpose of the present study is an exploration of the affinities and differences between these two genres, as well as an investigation of the number and nature of their constituent parts. It will also emerge substantially that there is critical value in using the Westerns as a reference point and a foil for a study of the Sagas; the understanding
of Westerns, in turn, benefits when these stories are viewed in a wider perspective.

Nevertheless, such a project is bound to elicit some scepticism and possibly shocked surprise. For many, Westerns belong to the world of pulp magazines and prefabricated melodrama moving below the dignity of literature and the attention of the serious reader, whereas Sagas are often viewed as a unique and inimitable form of literature. Some Sagas - such as Laxdæla Saga and Njáls Saga - are considered to be among the finest works of world literature. Their niche is secure. Yet amongst the plethora of Westerns, like diamonds among detritus, there are excellent works: The Virginian, True Grit and Little Big Man, to name but a few, are compelling creations, which successfully combine historical reconstruction and national themes with personal drama and archetypal elements. Moreover, writers of serious Westerns consciously dissociate themselves from manufacturers of cheap Western fiction. In brief, Westerns deserve to be taken very seriously. They are little courses in Americanism, and thus enable anyone interested in understanding America to catch a glimpse of the ideas Americans hold about themselves at corporate and personal levels; in terms of vitality and appeal Westerns are an outstanding literary development of the last one hundred years. To-day they are known and even imitated in many parts of the world: the Italians make 'Spaghetti', the Germans 'Sauerkraut', the Japanese 'Samurai', and the Australians 'Bushranger' Westerns.

Even so, given that it is both legitimate and promising to juxtapose Westerns and Sagas, the actual feasibility of such an undertaking could still be challenged.
For one thing, 'Saga' in the present context is restricted to the Sagas of the Icelanders, the Íslendinga sögur. The other kinds of Sagas, the Kings Sagas, the Fornaldar Sagas and the so-called 'contemporary Sagas' such as the Sturlung Saga, are not examined. This bias, however, must not needs be detrimental. On the contrary, as long as it is kept in mind, such a choice helps focus attention more clearly. There are only about thirty such Sagas of the Icelanders; it is simpler to sample among thirty items than among hundreds. Also, Sagas of the Icelanders come to mind first when we talk about 'the Saga'. Therefore, to approach the species 'Saga' through the Íslendinga sögur seems a sound tactic.

Westerns present similar problems: they too are not a homogeneous form. There is a veritable plethora of narratives to choose from. In order to provide a solid basis for comparison, a representative sample of thirteen Westerns has been selected. Some are by older established writers such as Owen Wister (The Virginian, 1902) and Zane Grey (Prairie Gold, 1913) but the bulk are newer works, written during the last decade. Two recent Westerns that may well become classics - on the grounds of being both popular and acclaimed by critics - are Thomas Berger's Little Big Man and William Goldman's Butch Cassidy. Further, as the Western is a phenomenon which pervades many media, from advertising to ballet and music, but mainly literature and film, most Westerns chosen have at some time or other been filmed. The texts have been selected to include a variety of Western sub-genres, such as cattle-drive stories, outlaw stories, revenge, town-taming and Negro Westerns. However, the sample is too small to include all sub-varieties. It is also more representative of the
serious 'adult' Westerns than of the pulp magazine varieties. Yet again, it seems a sound tactic to approach a species of literature through a small but representative selection of texts.

Apart from queries about the sampling procedure, doubts might arise from the fact that Westerns are being mass-produced by an industrial machine and are subject to more or less blatant commercial exploitation - factors which must influence the content, function and nature of the form. On more than one occasion, for example, the commercial success of an individual Western led to the development of a sub-genre such as the Negro Western.  

Further, Westerns are concerned with a large modern and complex nation. The Sagas, on the other hand, are the creations of a small and homogeneous society isolated on a little-known island. They were put down on valuable parchment some seven hundred years ago, which must have made for more care and selectiveness. They form a finite and fairly consistent body of texts, while Westerns as a genre are still in flux: much hard riding and many a saddle-sore is yet to come.

Then there is the question of the availability of sound criticism. The Sagas have accumulated a long and varied history of criticism, and a considerable body of literary studies has come into existence. Of the many contributions to Saga scholarship sampled, the most formative influence on this study was exercised by the writings of W.P. Ker ('Epic and Romance'), T.M. Andersson ('The Icelandic Family Saga') and I. Maxwell ('Pattern in Njáls Saga'). However, the work and the ideas of R.F. Allen, Hermann Pálsson and
Magnus Magnusson, L. Lönroth and E. Ól Sveinsson too
have left their imprint. The thought of still other workers
in the field is also to be found: they are too many to be
acknowledged.

Westerns, by contrast, are just emerging from being
largely ignored - at least by the academic world. Yet there
have already been significant contributions to the study of
the form. Among them H.N. Smith and W. Prescott Webb, but
above all J.K. Folsom and J. Kitses, have been sources of
inspiration - and the quality of their criticism holds its
own against that of the Saga scholars.

Finally and not unexpectedly, a number of problems
are presented by the juxtaposition itself. The theme of racial
conflict - which in the eyes of some observers is essential to
the Western form - remains in the background. The Saga
heroes may have disliked the people they called the Skrælings
and the Lapps, they may have fought against the Irish and the
Balts, but they were no racists in the modern sense of the
word. Another problem is that by concentrating on what is
there, on the literary texts, the fascinating question of the
origin of the species will be side-stepped. No attempt will
be made to catalogue the history of the genres or to chart
the ebb and flow of their usages. Instead of tracing the
genesis of the genres, their inner workings and their
common and recurring features will be explored: the approach
is a phenomenological one.

To summarise; in spite of some methodological
limitations a case can be made for juxtaposing Sagas and
Westerns - as long as the provisional nature of the findings
is kept in mind. There are no previous studies in this field; but that there are good reasons prompting such an investigation emerges from the similarities already pointed to. Just how fruitful and gainful such a project is remains to be shown: this thesis will argue and demonstrate that there is more than a fortuitous affinity between Sagas and Westerns. From certain points of view, their common denominators are so strong and their variations almost trifling that they may be regarded as two species of a single genus of literature.
REFERENCES AND NOTES

CHAPTER I

1. Grænlendinga Saga, ch.7.

2. ch.62. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the various texts are mine. For more detailed information see the appendix where a selection of Old Norse texts is given.

The spelling of Icelandic names: the nominative form of the name has been adapted; however, in quotations the source's spelling is followed.


5. ch.18.


8. ibid. ch.30.


10. p.97.

11. ch.11.


13. ch.3.

14. p.139.


16. The Viking Circle, p.270.

17. Warlock, p.383.

18. H. Frenzel, Die Literatur des Western, p.1038.

19. For other types of Sagas see general introductions to Icelandic literature e.g. B. Phillpotts, Edda and Saga; O. Widding, in Norrøn fortællekunst; Jan de Vries, Altnordische Literaturgeschichte (Vol II); Peter Hallberg, Den isländska Sagan; Stefán Einarsson, A history of Icelandic literature; G. Turville-Petre, Origins of Icelandic literature.
20. Note the many varieties defined by M. Parkinson and C. Jeavons, A Pictorial History of Westerns, pp.11-92. Included are: Western epics; railroad Westerns; spoof Westerns; historical Westerns; badman biographies; range-war Westerns; 'psychological' Westerns; cavalry Westerns.


22. K. Schier has compiled a detailed bibliography of the major contributions to Saga criticism up to 1970.

23. See L.A. Fiedler, Vanishing American, pp.22-23. It is implied in the view that Westerns are stories about Cowboys and Indians.

24. Of course, from time to time aspects of the history of the two genres will be treated, but the stress is not on their continuous historical growth. For material on this process see footnote 19 (Sagas) and 20 (Westerns): the works referred to there contain information on the general development of the genres, although 'Western' there, broadly speaking, means 'Western films'.
Then they sailed out of Eiriksfjord. They were in high spirits and were pleased with their prospects. But they ran into prolonged difficulties and could not reach the tracts they wanted to ...
A study comparing Sagas and Westerns could follow a number of different paths. In this chapter three separate approaches are sketched and evaluated.

a) **Racial substratum**

Some decades ago, when the ideas of nineteenth century genetics still carried weight, a natural starting point for a comparison of Sagas and Westerns would have been the genetic make-up of the societies that gave birth to them. For example, H.A. Taine's view of races - in which race is regarded as being the well-spring of society, history and art\(^1\) - could have been applied with some benefit. But owing to the inherent vagueness of the concept 'race' various tacks would have been possible. For instance, both the Icelanders and the white Americans are, broadly speaking, of Germanic extraction. This consanguinity, then, could have been lighted on to account for the tangible kinship between Sagas and Westerns: an immanent quality in the Germanic race gave rise to each form in turn ... \(^2\)

If 'Germanic' was too general a term, a more specific racial relationship could have been construed. The Angles and Saxons, before migrating to the British Isles, had lived side by side with Scandinavian tribes on the peninsula of Jutland. Later on the Scandinavian invasions and the Danish settlement of northern England undoubtedly reinforced the Nordic strain in the Anglo-Saxons, just as they added
many forceful words to the English language. These more specific racial ties, again, could have been pressed into explaining why, for example, a clash between personal liberty and the law is found in both Sagas and Westerns. Bertha Phillpotts, writing in 1931, comes close to such a position:

Yet the English speaking world should be able to sympathise better than most with the world of the Sagas, for in them is depicted ... the clash between a passionate love of personal liberty and respect for the law, between a strong competitive spirit and the sense of fair play.  

If, on the other hand, one had 'merely' the superiority of the white race in mind it would not have been hard to establish a connection. The hard drinking, hard fighting, fearlessness, and the sense of fairness and squareness found in both genres are 'simply' characteristics for which the white race had 'always been known' - at least according to a publisher of Western stories interviewed by Walter Prescott Webb in 1931.

Today, however, such facile approaches are no longer tenable. Any affinity between the national characteristics of Icelanders and Americans must be seen within a wider socio-historic perspective; the resemblance of Sagas and Westerns is due to a complex socio-literary phenomenon.

b) Missing links

Taking note of such a reservation, a different line of attack might try to trace a genetic connection of another kind between the two genres through well-known literary figures such as Owen Wister, James Fenimore Cooper and Sir Walter Scott. It runs as follows. Wister's The Virginian has been a seminal novel; it has influenced many,
if not most Westerns written after 1902. In the present sample Warlock, McCabe, Butch Cassidy, Bitter Grass and Little Big Man are all more or less indebted to the characters, themes and setting pioneered by Wister. Wister, on the other hand, is said to have been profoundly interested in reading, and ultimately influenced by, the works of both Cooper and Sir Walter. To take Sir Walter Scott first. Wister's protagonist is given Scott's 'Kenilworth' and enjoys reading it. Further, The Virginian is, at least in the eyes of some critics, an adaptation of Scott's 'Ivanhoe': the Virginian might really be a belated knight roaming across the plains of Wyoming instead of questing through the mediaeval forests of Europe. In his introduction to the novel, Wister says as much when he describes the Virginian as the last romantic figure upon our soil, riding into his historic yesteryear, but his wild kind has been among us always, since the beginning.

In case the kinship between the man from Yorkshire and the man from Virginia still seems too far removed, it is possible to follow a different argument which, however, leads to the same conclusion: that modern Westerns may be indebted to Sir Walter's 'Waverley Novels'. A line of descent may be traced through the Virginian back to James Fenimore Cooper's 'Leatherstocking Tales'. The Virginian's main character - and here strong evidence exists - is simply the old Leatherstocking rejuvenated; he is Natty Bumppo without a beard, without his beaver hat, and with a colt instead of a frontloader rifle. The author, Cooper, for his part, was a contemporary of Walter Scott. The fame and the techniques of a novel such as 'Ivanhoe' could not have passed him by. Scott, the American critic L.A. Fiedler maintains, was in fact Cooper's model. Thus Sir Walter may well have exerted weighty influence on the Western genre - whether indirectly
through Cooper's importance for Wister's work, or whether directly through Wister.

The connection between Sagas and Westerns may be made through the Scottish novelist, for it is more than possible that he was influenced in his historical writings by the Icelandic Sagas. For example, he was well acquainted with a Latin version of Eyrbyggja Saga, which he even translated; he is reported to have acquired a considerable knowledge of the substance of the Sagas, and it seems pretty certain that he picked up a limited knowledge at least of the language of the originals. Thus, it may not be too far fetched to maintain that there is a more or less direct 'genetic' link between Sagas and Westerns. The Virginian could be a distant cousin of Eyrbyggja's Thórarinn svarti - both are quiet men, but their quietness is strength from the first; the wickedness and perversity of Trampas, the Virginian's antagonist, might reflect the actions of the evil, vehement and very inequitable character called Thórólfr baegifótr, who happens to be Thórarinn's grandfather.

However, no matter how illuminating such a 'genetic' argument might be, it should not be pressed too far. It suffers from the same weakness as the previous racial-ideological chain of reasoning: it depends too much on conjecture; there are too many ifs and buts, and not enough palpable data. At best, the attempt falls into the class of approaches that might be pursued farther at some other time; but for the present at least there are other more concrete and more down-to-earth as well as more promising avenues of research.

c) Two specimens

Probably nothing could be more down-to-earth than a straight
and point-by-point comparison of a Saga with a Western. For this purpose I have selected Víga-Glúms Saga and the Western Bitter Grass. Both are stories of intermediate length; both are representative of the way plot, character and setting are developed in the genres; structure and style too are illustrative. Víga-Glúms Saga belongs, as far as can be ascertained, to the fourth decade of the thirteenth century - that is about halfway through what is often called the age of Saga writing. The eminent Old Norse scholar Turville-Petre considers it to be one of the finest examples of Icelandic narrative prose, 'the more striking because of its economy and highly polished style.' On the other hand, L.M. Hollander, a recent translator of the Saga, remarks:

... unquestionably inferior in depth and emotional appeal to the best of the sagas of the Icelanders (...) its style also lacks the elegance and incisiveness of the best Icelandic prose. Its narrative often is halting and patchy, and there is comparatively little to mitigate the monotony of constant fighting and feuding, alternating with acrimonious litigation. Few sagas are so devoid of eroticism in any sense ...

However, Hollander's comments are too negative. The Saga has many redeeming features; this will emerge from the discussion of it. Bitter Grass, based on the career of Isom Prentice 'Print' Olive, a real-life pioneer cattleman of Texas and Nebraska, first appeared in 1967 but draws heavily on books and factual accounts that have been published at irregular intervals during the last thirty years. In brief, both stories are more or less typical specimens: a middle-of-the-road Saga and a 'straight' Western based on historical data.

Background and setting. The first and perhaps most obvious aspect to attract attention is the pioneer milieu in which these stories are set. It informs the mores of the characters and shapes the actions encountered.
Most people live on widely separated farms or homesteads. Small towns are absent from this Saga, but are of some importance in Bitter Grass. It is a rude society, its economy in the main based on livestock. Cattle dominate in Bitter Grass; cattle and sheep are both significant in Víga-Glúms Saga, fish is a minor resource. There is some agriculture. In Bitter Grass, the Trask family originally were agriculturalists, but after the return of the oldest son, Jonathan, from the Civil War they turn to cattle. A cornfield, Vitazgjafi, is of relevance to Víga-Glúms Saga: it is the cause of a bitter quarrel between Víga-Glúmr and the men living at Espihóll. There is also some trade: Norwegian merchants visit Iceland, the businesses of Katytown supply the ranches of the district. However, the main economic factors in both stories are livestock and land. Other forms of property are of less significance. Consequently, the theft of animals or encroaching on a neighbour's grazing land leads to serious strife.

Since - in both stories - there is no police force to guard a person's property or to enforce the law swiftly and impartially, the family unit, especially in the sense of the clan, is the natural means of protecting life and property. The ties of blood are, however, supplemented by other bonds. In both stories the leading men have other people working for them. Jonathan Trask employs a large number of Negroes; they become known as Trask's Niggers - a name that they wear with pride. Víga-Glúmr disposes over servants and slaves ('thralls'). On one occasion two thralls save his life (Ch. 23). Bonds could also be created through adoption into a family. Alexander McKenna, in many ways Jonathan's foil, is adopted into the Trask family after his
parents have been killed by Indians. In Víga-Glúms Saga two boys, Arngrímr and Steinólfur, are brought up as foster-brothers. Finally, personal friendships and tactical marriage alliances could amplify the capacity of a particular family to protect the interests of its members.

The presence of clans - such as the Trasks and their opponents, the Cadys, or Víga-Glúmr's clan and the Esphælingar - is consonant with the depicted economic and social conditions. Clans are, however, also knitted together by more abstract ideals. Pride in the position of power and influence enjoyed by the family matters; being able to host large feasts matters; being able to marry women from other important families matters. The Trasks are given back their pride by Jonathan; when they arrange a celebration the whole district talks about it; for a short time Jonathan's marriage with Mercy, a neighbour's daughter, seems to consolidate the Trask empire. Víga-Glúmr knows he belongs to a good and solid family; his readiness to help others is widely known (Hann er þrautgöðr, ef menn þurfa hans, Ch. 16); his kin and friends marry the most eligible women in the district. Glúmr's daughter, at least for a while, is married to the chieftain Víga-Skúta; Glúmr's nephew, Arnorr, marries Thordís Gizurardóttir; Íngólfur, Glúmr's friend, is given the daughter of one of the richest farmers in the district.

However, in both stories alike, it is ironic that marriage, the act meant to stabilise society in general and enhance a family's position in particular, often has the opposite effect. Glúmr arranges the marriage of Arnorr to Thordís and of Thorgrímr Thórisson to Herthrúðr, Thordís' sister. It seems as if all is well, as if he managed to
forestall serious trouble between the two men by acting quickly and even diplomatically. Yet seeds of discord have been sown; a quarrel between Arnorr's and Thorgrímr's offspring involves Víga-Glúmr in a long chain of killing, cajolery and perjury, ending with his exile. Similarly, Jonathan's marriage to Mercy does not achieve that which it was meant to do. Instead of securing an heir to the Trask empire, the marriage helps to bring out the ruthless and self-destructive side in Jonathan (p.103).

On the positive side, the marriage between Alexander, a Trask by adoption, and Jo-Anna, a girl from the Cady clan, works well. It not only brings happiness to the individuals, it is also instrumental in restoring communal peace: The feud between the Trasks and Cadys is settled. Likewise, Víga-Glúmr's marriage to Halldóra Gunnsteinnsdóttir appears to be a lasting success.

The general picture drawn in both stories suggests that at the local level the economic, political and social life is significantly influenced by the decisions of the major clans. They share between them significant power; they form a ruling elite. Yet there is a general public as well. It is more clearly seen in Bitter Grass but is also present in Víga-Glúms Saga. There are other farmers or ranchers; often large crowds attend court sessions; and there are explicit references to a public opinion:

... word had gone around and half the county would be there to witness the first open clash between cowman (i.e. Jonathan) and organised outlawry. The outcome could determine local politics for years to come ... Danziger's smile began to stiffen on his cheeks; he fanned himself harder. Whether he won or lost today, an aware public opinion was forming against him ... (p.65)
and with reversed signs - Jonathan is now the scapegoat:

A reforming zeal, reaction against the crime and terrorism that had plagued Texas since the war, had reached proportions of near-hysteria. The time was ripe for the red-eyed zealots to find a focal point for their indignation, and Jonathan, because his lynching of the Cadys had been attended by atrocity propaganda ... made a convenient target. (p.153)

In Víga-Glúms Saga we read, 'Ok er heraðsmenn urðu varir við, þá drifu þeir til um daginn ok gengu í milli, ok var á komit sættum' (Ch.11)—'And when the people of the district became aware of it they thronged there during the day and they interceded, and a settlement was agreed on'; and, 'Halli inn digri kom fyrstr til meðalgöngu ok mægt manna með honnum' (Ch.23)—'Halli the stout was the first one to intercede, and many people were with him'.

The weight of public opinion curtails the freedom of action enjoyed by the leading clans. It also shows that the clan is not the one and only social institution; other forms of social organisation are already present or emerging. In both works, primitive -pioneer- societies are shown as moving towards more settled conditions. In Víga-Glúms Saga this trend is suggested by the presence of the idea of law, which - from time to time - outweighs the power and influence of even the strongest local chieftain. It is also suggested by the arrival of Christianity: Glúmr dies in 'hvítaváðum', as a Christian. In post-Civil War Texas, changes take place with even greater speed: Katytown grows from a few straggling stores at the crossroads into a prosperous and civilized township. Law and justice - at first an ideal but not a fact - increasingly is asserted more forcefully. Within a decade the wild cattle-country is turned into a safe place, in which cultural activities thrive and where it is safe to raise children.
Furthermore, although there is a ruling class or local elite made up from the leading families, these societies are still relatively open and fluid. Individuals, and even whole clans, can rise or fall in wealth and power within a matter of years. This idea is illustrated by the Trask family's experience. Starting from rock bottom they quickly build up a cattle empire, an empire which they eventually lose because of a fatal flaw in Jonathan's psychological make-up. All his manly pride, his show of strength and determination, cannot hide a strange weakness of character. On the other hand, Alexander enjoys continued success. His dogged efforts and his patient skills help him to become one of the district's most influential man. Similarly Víga-Glúmr's rise and fall is contrasted to his antagonist Einarr Eyjólfsson's growing significance.

In both the Saga and the Western, a person's social position is not automatically determined by his or her background alone. Hard work and good luck, effective management at home and successful trips out of the district (whether to Norway or to Kansas) may exert weighty influence. The society of Víga-Glúms Saga and Bitter Grass alike is a competitive society where initiative and ability counts heavily. Not unexpectedly, competition often leads to friction and conflict. Víga-Glúmr, Jonathan Trask, and their likes, do not side-step conflict. They are tough and violent. Provocations and injuries they answer by retaliating in kind.

To such people the wearing of weapons comes naturally. Jonathan explains, 'Here a man ain't dressed without a gun.' Weapons are treasured possessions and often passed on within a family. Gideon Trask's old gun is handed down to Cortney, the youngest of the Trask boys; Glúmr receives a spear from
his grandfather. Not surprising, in both stories weapons play a significant part in the plot. Cortney kills Jonathan with the family gun. Víga-Glúmr ignores warnings and gives away the family's spear: from that moment on his luck turns. Before long he is forced to live in exile.

A mixture of strongwilled individuals, proud clans, a readiness to use weapons, and a tit-for-tat attitude, easily begets vendettas. Revenge is a natural reaction, even in more civilised societies; but under conditions such as those depicted in the two narratives revenge becomes an institution. Formal law, as we know it, is a weak institution. In both works there are courts of law, but their verdict does not mean much in the absence of effective law enforcement. Yet their existence has symbolic value: at best the ideal of law and justice is paid lip service and, even if only intermittently, guides men's actions. However, in practice 'law and justice' often means being at best able to maintain a rough balance. The men of this Saga and Western will strive hard to get even, to right what they consider to be a wrong; but usually do no more. They may be tough, but they are not cruel or sadistic; they do not molest women and children. Men like Jonathan and Víga-Glúmr are proud, frank and robust. They accept duty unflinchingly; their promises bind them; they do not commit dastardly murders: they kill their dogs for all the world to see. They subscribe to strict codes of behaviour. They are forceful men, who ably and directly guard their integrity, interests and reputation.

Characters. It is evident that Jonathan and Víga-Glúmr, although enmeshed in the affairs of their clans, are also distinct characters. Further, their families do not always
act in unison. There is, for instance, tension between Paul Trask and Jonathan. It erupts when their father is killed in a battle against cowthieves. Paul thinks that the death is due to Jonathan's hard-line approach:

'... Paul is back by the canyon with him. He 'most went crazy. Said he would shoot me if I even touched Pa's body. By Christ, I won't take no blame for that.' 'For that - no,' Alex said. 'It was the shock, Buck. He had to take it out on somebody.' 'A funny thing. We never got on, but I never knew till tonight that he purely hates me.' (p.79-80)

Alexander's attitude to the Trask family is at best ambivalent, and there is a natural friction between his and Jonathan's stubbornly different personalities:

Jonathan was the unreachable one, though he alone of the Trasks had been boisterous and outgoing. The antagonism between him and Alex had never approached hatred or even strong dislike, yet there had been from the first a perplexing, almost instinctive friction. It was like the stiff-backed sidling and sniffing out of two stranger dogs trying to get each other's measure and finding only the chasm that lies between two inherently opposed personalities. (p.23)

The split between the Esphælingar and Glúmr is really one between members of the one extended family - the disputants are all descendants of Helgi inn magri, one of the first settlers in the region of Eyjafjördur. It is conspicuous, further, that Glúmr's older brother Thorsteinn never enters the scene, despite the fact that he lives only a few miles upstream from Glúmr's residence. Finally, the quarrel between the cousins and fosterbrothers Arngrímr and Steinólfur must dispel the notion that Saga clan's would always act in unison.

It is not stretching the imagination to consider Víga-Glúms Saga to be in the main about the chieftain Víga-Glúmr; it is his biography. Likewise, Bitter Grass deals largely with the life and deeds of one man: Jonathan Trask.
(Even so, it must be understood that the stories are more than biographies: they are structured stories employing biographical matter as raw material.)

Both heroes are ruthless and determined men, and do not refuse a challenge. They are typical of their day and age. They are leaders of men. Víga-Glúmr more obviously by virtue of his office as godi, as priestain-chief; but Jonathan, the cattle baron, does not lack authority either. Witness his imperious intervention in a brawl over a mulatto girl:

... Jonathan settling the dispute by having the two participants fight it out with Bowie knives across a handkerchief. However when each had drawn blood, he halted the altercation by rolling out a fresh cask of whisky and making the two drink each other's health. Within minutes the atmosphere was fiercely convivial, with the whole crew toasting Jonathan. (p. 46)

But most saliently, both protagonists are empire-builders. Víga-Glúmr talks of clearing the way for himself by conquest: 'Rudda ek sem jarlar' (Ch. 26). Jonathan sees his own life and ambitions in terms of dynasty (p. 104). Ultimately, both men are over-reachers. They transgress limits, but eventually learn that excess does not pay. For instance, Glúmr ignores the law by hiding his son Vigfúss, who had been sentenced to three years exile (Ch. 23). Equally arrogant, he twists the law by swearing an ambiguous oath (Ch. 25). But retribution is on the way. Before long, we read, he is forced to sell up and move to another district. Ruefully he comments that he himself has caused his land to slip out of his hand: 'Oss kom breiðr böggr i búðir af einu höggvi' (Ch. 26). A similar flash of insight is experienced by Jonathan Trask:
For the first time he was thrown face to face with the fact that he had committed his own raw brand of justice not on a pair of cattle thieves, not on his brother's murderers, but on two guiltless men, men innocent of either thievery or murder. Jonathan had never experienced a small emotion in his life; smallness was not in him, and Alex, seeing a doubt of depth (sic) seizing him for probably the first time in his life thought, My God—what must he be feeling? (p.182)

In brief, Glúmr and Jonathan may be heroes, but they are not demigods above and beyond social mores. But neither are they thoroughly evil men; they are simply too passionate and ambitious even for their competitive societies.

Both major characters are intensely ambivalent figures. And it is their ambivalence more than most of their other features that reveals them as cast in a mould. They are types. Víga-Glúmr is very reminiscent of other ambivalent and aggressive chieftains or hotheaded and unpredictable skalds - Egill Skalla-Grímsson, Kormákr Ógmundarson and Hrafnkell Freysgoði are names that readily come to mind. Ambivalent cattle-barons are found in The Tall Men, The Hell-Bent Kid and Warlock. Other ambivalent figures are Gunnarr Hámundarson, Skarphedinn Njálsson and Guðrún Ósvifrsdóttir, or Butch Cassidy, McCabe and Jack Crabb, the Little Big Man.

In any narrative, secondary characters tend to be flatter and less well defined than the main characters. Nevertheless, the author of Víga-Glúms Saga contrived to present a large gallery of minor characters which are far more vivid and striking than T.V. Olsen's creations. But like the American author he falls back on well worn literary tricks. Thus both writers make use of character contrast: Alexander and Einarr Eyjólfsson serve as foils to the leading men. Other persons appear but briefly, often only with the express function of moving the plot forward. They are one-dimensional
types, either troublemakers or pacifiers. Their type-casting, however, is far more obvious than that of the main personages.

Clichés. At this stage of the examination, the feeling that Víga-Glúms Saga and Bitter Grass are riddled with clichés can become obtrusive. Moreover, clichés comparable to those found in Víga-Glúms Saga reappear in Westerns. Aficionados of Westerns will have no difficulty in recognising the attitudes struck and the tone and turn of phrase used in the following extract:

Word came that a man, together with a group of his companions, had ridden into the settlement. His name was Björn, and they called him Ironskull. He had a reputation for being a bully and a troublemaker and made it a habit of putting in an appearance whenever people were celebrating an occasion. He also had the habit of trying to start arguments, of testing if anybody dared say something to which he could take exception. He would then challenge the man to a duel.

Vigfúss, the host, told his men that they should hold their tongues - 'as this is less of a disgrace than to end up with an even bigger lot of trouble' (...)

Björn, however, went into the hall and asked one man after the other whether he considered himself his (Björn's) equal. He was given different answers, but they were all of one kind, and no-one thought himself as good as Björn. (...) At last Björn comes face to face with Glúmr. (...) Björn kicks Glúmr with his foot and says that he should sit up like a man. Then he asks how he thinks he'd measure up to him. Glúmr answers that Björn had better not try quarrelling with him, and says that he didn't know much about Björn's courage. 'And the reason why I don't intend comparing myself with you is that where I come from a man acting like you do would be called a fool. But I notice that in these parts of the land everyone keeps his thoughts pretty well to himself'.

He then jumps up and throws himself at Björn, knocking his helmet off. Next he picks a wooden log from the fire place and commences to beat Björn with it. That 'hero' ducks, now to this side, now to that, until he
falls down to the floor. When Björn wants to get up, Glúmr hits him again and again, until Björn finally manages to make his escape by scrambling through the door. (Ch.6)

Women. So far the discussion of characters has centred on the male actors. There is a good reason for it: in both stories women are of minor significance and are usually subjects of conflict. For example, when Víga-Skúta divorces Glúmr's daughter he has to fight it out with an irate father. Mercy, for her part, is a source of friction between the two Trask brothers Paul and Jonathan, Jo-Anne Cady between Alexander and Jonathan. However, women in the two stories may also help allay conflict: as mentioned above, marriage is seen as a way to bridging gaps between clans. Bitter Grass, and here the Western differs significantly, also describes in some detail an evolving romance: a chance meeting in the Katytown General Store becomes the starting point for a whirlwind love story. Víga-Glúms Saga, on the other hand, as L.M. Hollander notes, is virtually devoid of eroticism in any sense.

Scenes. As suggested by the lengthy extract from Víga-Glúms Saga, some Saga scenes resemble traditional Western incidents. The so-called berserker scene brings to mind showdowns in what might be any saloon west of the Mississippi river; as it happens, however, such a saloon scene is absent from Bitter Grass. But to make up for that, there are a number of directly comparable scenes. Some even come close to having not only a similar content but also similar intent. Thus the Saga describes how two groups of men quarrel over a stranded whale, and how one side ignores the law and takes unfair advantage of its numerical superiority. The incident comes to a head when the leader of the stronger faction maintains,
'No matter what the laws say, the stronger ones will now have it their way' (ok hvat sem lög eru, þá munu inir ríkari nú ráða. Ch.27) This event - men quarrelling over property rights - finds an echo when we read that Jonathan Trask, who has only a tenuous claim over the wild-roaming cattle of the district, defends his 'right' by all means available to him. He does not hesitate to lynch people he considers to be thieves. When challenged about the legality of his action he retorts:

"Who's wrong?" Jonathan's tone was flinty with self-certainty. "You're wrong? Your fancy-ass courts' wrong?" He tapped his chest. "Out here there is nothing but me. I can name any right, any wrong, because I got the power to make it stick. Ain't nothing else that counts". (p.52)

Jonathan's 'I got the power to make it stick', in particular, seems to be a paraphrase of 'þá munu inir ríkari nú ráða'.

In the two happenings cited, the ideals of law and justice yield to strongarm tactics; yet in both stories the protagonists eventually bow to the law - to the collective will of the people in the district. Large crowds attend the various court sessions in which Jonathan and Glúmr appear. On some occasions they are cheered, on others they are outnumbered by their adversaries and are jeered.

Other types of scenes common to both stories are combats, between individuals as well as between groups, whether known as a hólmgang or a showdown, as a gunbattle or a bardagi. Leading up to combats there are provocation and warning scenes, challenges, the making of plans, and the setting of traps or ambushes - to name but a few examples. Naturally there are also distinctive touches: horsefights, sacrifices in a temple and the reciting of scaldic poetry
are found only in the Saga; cattle drives, campfires in the open, rowdy and noisy towns are confined to Bitter Grass.

Plot. In view of the overwhelmingly similar background, the many similar characters, and the numerous similar scenes, it is consonant to find similar plots. The action is propelled by the efforts of the two main heroes to build up little empires; both rise to considerable power, but fall because they have gone too far, have grown too big and have over-reached themselves. Both plots are made up of a chain of conflicts and frictions, a string of legal actions, and particularly of feuds, even of a feud within a feud. Víga-Glúmr's feud with the Esphælingar is an episode in his feud and powerstruggle with Einarr Eyjólfsson. In Bitter Grass, Jonathan's feud with the Cady clan serves the purposes of a man whose brother had been killed by Jonathan: 'When I felt the time was ripe, Mr Trask, I came here. I learned of your squabble with some settlers and decided to turn your mild feud into a large one. They didn't send for me, you see; I sought them out and offered my services.' (p.181)

The plot in both stories goes through a neatly calculated series of escalations. Verbal provocations are followed by physical retaliations until, finally, blood is shed. In both works, local incidents grow into matters assuming a larger and larger scope. For example, Víga-Glúmr eventually finds that many leading men not only of the district of Eyjafjörd but of the whole country throw their weight behind his opponents: a minor squabble becomes a matter of national significance. More than that, even metaphysical forces seem to be implicated: Glúmr dreams about two women pouring blood all over the district (jósu blóði um heradít allt) and he comments in a verse that this pleases
Óðinn, the god of the slain warriors: 'Vagna vinir fagna þvi' (Ch. 21). In Bitter Grass a local affair finally involves not only the district court, but leads to unprecedented politico-legal manoeuvres in the Texas state legislature: special appropriation bills are rammed through to finance a court case against Jonathan Trask, and later an appeal is made to the state supreme court (p. 160 and 169). What is more, the perspective of the story, too, suddenly becomes very large: Alexander has what can only be described as a vision - a vision which recalls Glúmr's gory dream:

Alex had the obscure, startled thought of how millions of minutiae (sic) had to flow together for eons to converge in a climactic moment and how these crucial instants, for all their flurry and fury, were seconds in duration. Then they were history, the process reversed to an eternal diverging, affecting whatever they touched forever, like outcircling ripples ... (p. 77)

But conflicts cannot go on for ever. Even the fiercest of passions burn themselves to ashes; families are not infinite reservoirs of fighting men: once a clan has been decimated it cannot go on feuding. But usually other parties step in before such a state is reached, and negotiate or enforce a settlement and restore order. Although their efforts may be hampered by troublemakers and people of ill will, the peacemakers have their way in the end. Alexander, a self-confessed pacifist (p. 16) is always ready to return good for harm. Even after discovering that Jonathan has been exploiting his good will, he is prepared to help. The story ends with him promising to defend Cortney, the last surviving Trask. This in spite of his intense dislike for the boy; but, having a legal background, he makes it his duty to see that justice will be asserted and a square deal obtained. In Víga-Glúms Saga we come across men such as Halli innigiri, who gathers all his people, men and women,
and interposes between quarrelling factions: ‘Halli för skyndiligla med alla sinaménn þá er hann fekk, karla ok konur, ok vildi ganga milli manna, ef þyrfti … Halli innigri kom fyrstr til medalögungu ok margt mannamed honum (Ch.22-3). Or we read that the counsel of wise men weighs heavily: er þat af gert med vítra manna ráði (Ch.24).

The grand line of plot is similar in both stories; but once again there are, inevitably, differences. The time span covered by the Saga is much longer: it extends over three generations rather than the thirty-odd years of Bitter Grass. (Although only about one-seventh concerns the generations before Glúmr). Then, as already mentioned, there is a sub-plot dealing with the romance between Alexander and Jo-Anna; it is without a counterpart. There are also a number of self-contained episodes in Víga-Glúms Saga which are sometimes regarded as interpolations. The Western does not contain such well-rounded episodes as the conflict between Víga-Glúmr and Víga-Skúta (Ch.16) or the story of Ingólfur and his horse (Ch.13-15).

It would be possible to continue and pin-point further similarities. However, by now a prima facie case has been established: in spite of a 700 year gap there are many almost obtrusive resemblances between Víga-Glúms Saga and Bitter Grass.

Yet it may legitimately be asked, what precisely does such an analysis prove? Which of these parallels are really important and which of these similarities are significant? And how significant are they? Further still, it might be asked what parallels and similarities would be uncovered if, say, Laxdoela Saga were to be compared with Little Big Man, or Njáls Saga with The Virginian.
To bring order to such perceptions and questions it is necessary to recall what exactly has been undertaken so far: a comparison of Víga-Glúms Saga and Bitter Grass, of a Saga and a Western. But at the same time, far more has been attempted: Saga and Western have simultaneously been viewed both as individual works and as two broad genres. The question arises: what is 'the Saga' and what 'the Western'? There are almost as many definitions of the Saga as there are Old Norse scholars, and nearly every journalist writing about the Westerns supplies a different formula for Westerns.

The way to overcome what appears to be a methodological impasse is to change the perspective. Instead of ignoring the mercurial quality of the two genres by attempting to define precisely what a/the Saga and a/the Western is supposed to look like, the variability of each genre as well as its obvious underlying unity should be taken as a starting point. And thus broadening the perspective changes the problem: Ultimately this pluralistic perspective makes it possible not only to perceive further parallels between Víga-Glúms Saga and Bitter Grass, but also to focus on the deeper roots of the affinities between the two genres.
REFERENCES AND NOTES
CHAPTER II

1. For example, in History of English Literature, he writes: 'such was this (Germanic) race, the last born of the sister races, which, in the decay of the other two, the Latin and the Greek, brings to the world a new civilisation, with a new character and genius.' p.92.

2. For instance H. Pálsson, in Art and Ethics, attacks 'romanticists' who regard mediaeval Iceland as the repository of primitive Germanic virtues, and who treat the art of Saga writing genetically (p.10).

3. op.cit., p.155.
4. op.cit., p.483.
5. p.93 and p.145.
6. pp.5-6.
8. op.cit., p.123.
III

CONTENT, INFLUENCES AND STRUCTURAL FEATURES

... not in words but in weapons is man's perfect mode of expression. Weapons alone reveal the manhood of the hero. Battle, the language of weapons, is the only true language. Art can have no loftier purpose than the praise of the sharp sword and of the hero who bears it in battle.

Halldor Laxness

(Laxness' Gerpla) describes, in all its horrifying nakedness or in grim caricature, the brutality and violence which in the sagas is embellished and admired.

S.J. Thorsteinsson
a) **Towards a broader perspective**

Taking any Western or Saga, it is obvious that each individual story is either a Western or a Saga respectively. But as soon as we read a number of Sagas or Westerns the autonomy of such an individual story becomes less defined: Sagas as well as Westerns are interconnected. Let Víga-Glúms Saga and Bitter Grass serve as examples of how this effect works.

First, sometimes identical incidents are retold in another story. Víga-Glúmr's quarrel with his former son-in-law Víga-Skúta (Ch.16), who rejected Glúmr's daughter because in their marriage they could not see eye to eye (fyrir sakar þeira sundrlyndis), is related in Reykdoela Saga (Ch.26). The coming of Christianity receives only brief treatment in Glúmr's Saga, in other Sagas, such as Njáls Saga, however, it is a significant event. We do not read much in Víga-Glúms Saga about the pioneer phase, the landnám, which figures so prominently in Laxdoela Saga, for example, but we are told that Glúmr is a descendant of the archetypal pioneer Helgi inn magri, who is referred to in not less than six Sagas.

Bitter Grass describes the aftermath of the Civil War. Many a Western would be unthinkable if it had not been for the turbulence and new opportunities created by this war.
The opening up of the Great Plains during the 1870's by means of railroads, the rise and fall of the cattle-boom towns Abilene and Ellsworth, as well as the famous gunfight in which 'Wild' Bill Hickok downed Phil Coe are events that Bitter Grass shares with Little Big Man; the conflict between Kansas farmers ('freesoilers') and Texan cattlemen with Stampede.

Secondly, and here it may be sensed how a Saga's uniqueness or a Western's originality becomes blurred, similar incidents may be told in other stories. Clashes with berserkers or holmgöngumenn, professional duellers, are found outside Víga-Glúms Saga in at least a third of the Íslendinga-Sögur; Glúmr's fight against a bear strongly resembles deeds by Grettir and Finnbogi, heroes of their Sagas, for they too kill their bears with great skill under trying circumstances. But not only in their struggles do many Saga heroes share similar fates, even their sicknesses are alike: in Gumlaugs Saga, Hrafnkells Saga, Hoensa-Thóris Saga and in Njáls Saga a sore foot, usually brought about by a huge and extremely painful boil, plagues otherwise healthy men. Disputes over whales that end in bloodshed are found in Víga-Glúms Saga, as well as in Eyrbyggja Saga, Fóstbræðra Saga, Grettis Saga and Hávardar Saga ísfirðings. Quarrels, secret plots, ambushes and battles, on the one hand, are as typical of Sagas as are legal court scenes, feasts, and marriage celebrations on the other; dreams and predictions of doom are as much the stuff of Sagas as the journey abroad or the reciting of skaldic verse - and all of these touches are strongly represented in Víga-Glúms Saga.

In a like vein, gruelling cattle drives and the merciless lynching of rustlers; high words in saloon bars and quickly provoked gunfights; powerstruggles by fair or foul means, out on the open range or in crowded courtrooms;
tender love scenes and episodes of grim battle - are typical
not only of Bitter Grass but also of most Westerns in the
sample.

Thirdly, we note the ease with which certain
persons reappear in yet another Saga or still a further
Western. It seems as if they simply get up and walk from
one story to the next, rather like, say, the film actor John
Wayne: this week he stars in 'Rio Lobo', next week in 'True
Grit'. For example, Víga-Glúmr's antagonist Einvall Eyjólfsson
reappears in Ljósvetninga Saga, Njáls Saga and Ólkofta Saga, and
his name is mentioned in Valla-Ljóts Saga and Thórdar Saga
hrédru. Víga-Glúmr's son Vigfúss reappears in Ljósvetninga
Saga, where he tries to obtain some satisfaction for the
humiliation his father experienced in Víga-Glúms Saga. More-
over, all three characters also feature in a number of
episodes or short stories called thættir. Other characters, who
play only a minor role in Víga-Glúms Saga, come into their
own more fully in other stories: the people from the
Svarfaðardale, Klaufi and Bardi, appear only briefly to aid
Glúmr in one of his many court cases, yet they are major
characters in Svarfaðarlaga Saga; similarly, Gizurr inn hvíti
comes more to the centre of the stage in Flóamanna Saga and
Njáls Saga.

The characters in Bitter Grass do not quite lead
such expansive lives. Yet there too are persons who reappear
from time to time in other contexts: Josef McCoy, 'Wild'
Bill Hickok, Shanghai Pierce and Wes Hardin figure in
numerous Westerns, although within the sample their
appearance is confined to Little Big Man and Stampede.

Finally, even if the characters found in Bitter
Grass do not actually reappear in other Westerns, they have
nevertheless numerous relatives. Here are some examples: Jonathan Trask, the hard riding, hard living cattle baron is of the same kind as Judge Henry, the patriarchial ranch owner in *The Virginian*, and the tough old timers McQuown in *Warlock* and Hunter Boyd in *The Hell-Bent Kid*; he is next of kin to the upwardly mobile Will Storm in *Stampede* as well as to the relentless Nathan Stark in *The Tall Men*. The cynical and dangerous gunfighter Lat Danziger has doubles in *True Grit* 's Lucky Ned Pepper, in *Barquero* 's Jake Remy and in *Warlock* 's Tom Morgan.

The types of person found in *Víga-Glúms Saga* as well as in the other works of the genre include: the ideal and the not so ideal chieftain, Einarr and Glúmr respectively; troublemakers and their opposites, arbitrators and peacemakers - such as Vémundr kögurr and Áskell goði in *Reykðœla Saga*, or Mördr Valgarðsson and Síðu-Hallr in *Njáls Saga*, *Víga-Hrappr* and *Óláfr pó* in *Laxdœla Saga*; foster-brothers who are doomed to bring about disaster, Kjartan and Bolli in *Laxdœla Saga*; then there are minor characters such as visiting Norwegians who become involved in Icelandic feuds; and finally, vagabonds or travellers whose 'strength' it is to draw their hosts into serious trouble.

The preceding illustrations show just how interconnected the works within each genre are: only a pluralistic vision captures many of the nuances and allusions. But more than this, once adopted, the pluralistic vision facilitates further discoveries because it directs and focuses attention onto aspects that hitherto have been inconspicuous or appeared unrelated. It allows us to note and evaluate the phenomenon that the more Sagas and Westerns we read, the more apparent it becomes that there are definite
rules or conventions to which an author had to submit if he wanted to write a Saga or a Western. Indeed, the more stories we read, the more we become aware of a basic set of conventions which recurs time and time again: As we become more familiar with the genres and the conventions, each of these two sets makes up, or evolves into, a kind of matrix, a fictional world, or to use a more vivid picture, a framework. This framework, although only vaguely felt in an individual story, limits time and place, determines the type of action, and helps crystallize the concerns that particular Sagas or Westerns express. Finally, this framework suggests - if not prescribes - how these concerns might be expressed.

Such interconnectedness is a feature which is found in - and often successfully exploited by - other forms of popular art. Whether it be the television serial, the detective novel or science fiction - all tend to fall back on a narrow set of conventions and become more or less stereo-typed. The dominance of conventions is reinforced where an oral tradition exists or has gone before. Most Saga researchers agree that the Saga form is indebted to an oral tradition; as for Westerns, on the other hand, while there may well be a genuine oral tradition in some parts of the United States, they rely more on traditions circumscribed by the printed word and the celluloid filmstrip.

In order to appreciate the significance the existence of sets of conventions which enshrine fictional worlds had for the Saga and Western genres as a whole, we must now turn our attention to some of the more salient although not always obvious characteristics of these frameworks. In doing so the comparison of Vígur-Glúms Saga and
Bitter Grass must be abandoned - at least for the time being. However, we shall return to it after having followed up further implications of the pluralistic vision adopted here. What is more, it will then be possible to identify still other significant similarities between Víga-Glúms Saga and Bitter Grass, and yet again, between Sagas and Westerns as literary traditions.
b) **Two frameworks**

Before commencing to outline the two frameworks, it is necessary to point out that this sketch of the two worlds will perforce be brief. Also it should be clear that it is not important how accurately and realistically these frameworks explore or present the history of Iceland or of the U.S.A., rather the point ought to be made that the Icelanders and the Americans were, for various reasons, motivated to elaborate a broad and commonly accepted picture of their past, or at least of significant periods thereof.

These frameworks, or worlds, to begin with, are characterized by fairly rigid time limits. The coming to power of King Harald Fairhair in Norway (c 870) and the timely discovery of Iceland form the usual starting date of Sagas. The period up to 930, however, when the settlers took up land and organised themselves into the old Commonwealth of Iceland, is usually of minor significance. The most often recurring time span stretches from 930 to 1030, the period often referred to as the Saga Age. Most Sagas of the Icelanders take place within this narrower Saga Age only; that is, they are set within a narrow segment of what might be called the Viking Age, the age of the great Scandinavian expansion. The 'Wild West', that is the west
of the Westerns, in general is said to begin with the Civil War of the United States (1861) and to end around 1900.

A number of historically verifiable key events are embedded in these frameworks. Some of the more significant ones are:

- c 930 the establishment of the Althing.
- c 960 the creation of Quarter Courts.
- c1000 the general acceptance of Christianity at the Althing.

And within the Western framework:

- c1860 - 1880 a major expansion of railroads - making possible the rapid settlement of the West as well as the large-scale transportation of cattle from the South and West to the big eastern cities.
- 1876 General Custer's last stand at the Little Big Horn
- 1890 the battle of Wounded Knee: the last major clash between the white man and the Indians.
- c1890 the official end of the frontier: an event which had tremendous impact on American ways of life; with all the available land settled, the pioneer phase of the USA had come to an end.
- 1898 the destruction of the Hole-in-the-Wall gang (the so-called Wild Bunch, led by Butch Cassidy); this event did much to dub the West as violent and wild.

A relatively small group of people, for the most part historical characters, belong to the frameworks in the sense of appearing frequently or being referred to repeatedly. The world of the Sagas is thus dominated by leading Icelandic politicians, namely the chieftains Snorri godi, Guðmundr inn ríki, Skafti Thóroddsson, Gestr Oddleifsson, Thorgeir Thorkelsson, Gizurr inn hvíti and Thórðr gellir. Some outlaws become quite familiar, most notably Grettir Ásmundarson, who appears or is referred to in at least ten Sagas. Women met repeatedly are Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, Audr
in djúpúðga, also called Unnr, and Gunnhildr, the bewitching Queen of Norway. Significantly, a succession of Norwegian rulers is also found, the most famous being King Harald Fairhair and the two Olafs - Óláfr Tryggvason and Saint Olaf, Óláfr inn helgi.

The world of the Westerns is dominated by a small group of gunfighter-lawmen including (Wild Bill) James B. Hickok and Wyatt Earp; the judges Roy Bean ('the Law west of the Pecos') and Isaac Parker ('the Hanging Judge'); badmen and outlaws such as Frank and Jesse James, William H. Bonney (Billy the Kid) and Robert LeRoy Parker (Butch Cassidy); women such as Martha Jane Canarray (Calamity Jane), Belle Starr and Lilly Langtry; further, there are men known as 'Cattle Barons', for example John Chisum, Jesse Chisholm and Charles Goodnight; Indians and Indian fighters such as Chief Crazy Horse, Chief Geronimo, and General Custer; and then there are the gamblers such as (Doc) Ben Holladay.

These more or less historical characters seem to have provided models for many minor characters; or conversely, they seem to have been adapted to common social or literary types: - the community leader, the chieftain, the hardworking settler, the peacemaker, the philosopher, the just man, the obstreperous young man, the troublemaker, the haughty woman. Other recurring types are the hired killer, the outlaw, the sick-in-mind and, especially in the case of Westerns, the bandit.

Although there are a number of priests mentioned in the Sagas - most notably that forthright champion of Christianity, Thangbrandr Vilbaldsson - the men of the Church
play a minor role in the Saga World. On the other hand, a special category has to be established for men of the American Churches, whether they be Quaker ministers, lay preachers or Episcopalian bishops: No single name has become associated with the World of the Westerns, yet as a character type they feature in most stories.

Geographically the framework is also defined. Saga action takes place mainly in Iceland, in all regions of Iceland; but owing to strong links between Iceland and the other northern countries, action also occurs in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and the British Isles. However, places as far apart as Vínland (America) and Miklagardr (Constantinople), Rome and the Arctic wilderness, may occasionally be included. Westerns are broadly confined to the regions of the U.S.A. west of the ninety-sixth meridian: Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Wyoming, Oklahoma and Kansas - that is, mainly the Great Plains region and the mountains just to the west - feature most prominently.

It would probably take a social-anthropologist to describe adequately all the social institutions and customs associated with these worlds. Some institutions and customs have been mentioned above when the pioneer society background to Víga-Glúms saga and Bitter Grass was described, but brief mention must be made of some others. The world of the Sagas is characterised by the socio-politically important institution of the thing, the ancient Germanic court or local assembly. Hence for an Icelander of the Sagas a thorough knowledge of law and jurisprudence is obviously an invaluable skill. However, more than providing the setting for legal conflicts, the court sessions also furnish - especially the Althing,
the highest court in the land - an opportunity for people from various valleys to meet each other, to arrange marriages and to exchange news. The courts are presided over by priest-chieftains, the goðar. Naturally, these courts of law are quite different from modern courts. In legal procedures the onus of prosecution, securing a decision, and executing a sentence falls upon the plaintiff and his party (consisting of members of his family, household, friends and political allies). Moreover, feuding is tolerated as a legal principle, especially as long as the dead and injured on both sides can be weighed or balanced out against one another. The hólmgang, a legal duel, is an accepted means of settling disputes with which the legal processes seem to be unable to deal effectively.

Sentences under this system provide only a rough measure of justice. Old Icelandic law is very formalistic; nevertheless, it is important to note how central to the Saga way of life the acceptance of some form of law and the ideals of law and justice seem. The harshest sentence is full outlawing, under the circumstances a virtual death sentence; less severe are sentences imposing temporary banishment. But legal or extra-legal settlements are often arranged by arbitrators who seek to reconcile the quarrelling parties. Arbitration, both formal and informal, helps to temper the severity of Saga law.

Less obviously, slavery is a characteristic institution: the slaves, or 'thralls' as they are called in Old Norse, most of whom are of Irish extraction. They usually work around farm buildings, cut grass out on the fields, tend sheep, or row fishing boats. They are without any real civil rights, they are a sociological neutrum,
although they do seem to be not badly treated. Some of them appear to be quite attached to their masters.

The actual institution of marriage found in the Sagas is similar to that which we know from most traditional European civilisations. Monogamy is the rule. Even so, the fact that women are able to divorce their husbands suggests that they are in an unusually strong position. An appropriate match - a jafnræði - is of great political importance to chieftains and those wanting to improve their social standing: women not only bring property into a marriage, they also bring with them a reputation and a network of connections with other clans. Indeed, it is generally agreed that the extended family group, the clan, is a significant, perhaps even the central social institution characterizing the world of the Sagas; a world where the influence of the 'state' on the lives of individuals is minimal - both in the sense of control or protection. Hence loyalty to the family is of importance for survival; however, this loyalty comes under severe pressure. Instances are related where trouble arises between father and son, between in-laws, and between two branches of the same family, not to speak about friction between husband and wife. (And not to forget the small but recurring group of vagabonds and drifters who seem to have no family, who tend to function as carriers of news, as tools in a conflict or as fomenters of trouble.)

It also seems that loyalty is a desirable quality under any circumstances - whether to kin, friend or ally. To be loyal at all costs is viewed as becoming proper men. In a wider sense, proper behaviour under all circumstances, whether when welcoming or farewelling
guests, or whether in heroic action in a fight or in a futile struggle against fate, is given strong emphasis within the Saga World.

Further important aspects of this framework, at least from a social-anthropological point of view, are pagan practices and beliefs such as witchcraft, casting of spells, foreseeing the future, burial rites. Various feasts such as those held at yuletide ought not to be overlooked.

Other institutions or customs commonly associated with the Saga World are the fostering of children by fosterparents; the swearing of fosterbrotherhood; various kinds of competitive games such as horsefights, or the knattleikr, a relative of cricket; and the educational voyage abroad for the sons of the well-to-do families: during this phase of their lives these young men are expected to gain 'fame and fee' - either by temporarily becoming vikings or by making use of their poetic talents to take up a position as some renowned ruler's skald or court poet.

Still other social institutions and customs are less obviously associated with the Saga World; they belong to what might be called the everyday sphere, often involving the sort of thing an Icelander may, at least up to fairly recent days, have accepted and understood as natural. But unless we are acquainted with the influence of this sphere we might miss many subtleties of Saga art. For example, Icelandic farms usually are isolated, this made surprise assaults easy; often built from wood or turf, they are easily pulled to pieces or set alight. Haymaking in a rugged and cold country like Iceland requires intensive labour; hay therefore is valued both because of its scarcity and the work it represents. Sheep and cows are an important indicator of wealth: they form the economic and, ultimately, political power basis of a family.
Further, they imply shepherds scattered around the mountain sides who could watch all movements of people in the district. In a country with few trees, driftwood is a possession worth fighting for. Stranded whales are a welcome supplementary source of food and fuel. Even the seasons and the weather belong to this sphere: it is not surprising that winter is usually a period during which little happens, for an Icelander could not imagine that much would happen during the months of the year when snow drifts and ice covered the land. Spring and summer, on the other hand, allow planned activity to take place. Sudden changes of weather, which are said to be characteristic of Iceland, frequently cause drastic changes in the fortunes of a Saga character. A good illustration is found in *Bjarnar Saga Hítdælakappa*: the hero, Björn, extends his hospitality to Thorsteinn Kuggason, a potential enemy, when the latter is caught in a blizzard. This involuntary meeting, and the display of humanity it evokes, results in the two men giving up their enemity and becoming friends and allies.

Finally, the many rivers in Iceland, difficult to cross at any time, may suddenly become significant when one party, by defending a ford, prevents another from getting to an important thing meeting; or when a raging river makes it impossible for a man to escape his pursuers - and hence his fate.

The world of the Westerns is similarly characterised by certain social institutions and customs. Probably the most prominent institution is the office of the sheriff-gunman: he usually is the primary representative and enforcer of the law. Courts of law do exist,
but often they are too far away to be effective. The law of the gun, or the rope of a vigilante crowd, is more persuasive than the law of the books. Feuding, particularly in the form of semi-legal duels (the so-called showdowns), is an accepted or least a tolerated practice. Outlawry, either in the form of cattle rustling or bank robbery, is an often recurring phenomenon. Frontier women - like Saga women - are proud, forceful and exceptionally independent. The bonds of family are strong, as witnessed by patriarchial figures who are able to command the unreserved loyalty of their kin, especially their sons. Friendship and romantic love too provide strong although more individualistic bonds. But it is worth noting that many loners, drifters and footloose people inhabit this world as well. They are often cut loose from their family; they are isolated individuals.

A man out West tends to be simply a man, although a somewhat unusual man: he behaves properly and politely if he has to; and he may be relied upon to 'act game', to display 'true grit' if the need for it arises.

Slavery does not exist, but we get glimpses of 'inferior' races: apart from Negroes there are Indians, Mexicans, and, from time to time, immigrants. Yet the world of the Westerns is large or contradictory enough to have at times precisely these races made into heroic protagonists.

So far the Western framework, on the whole, appears comparable to the Saga framework, but there are also some uniquely Western usages and institutions: the cattle drives, the Military Forts, the U.S. Cavalry, the mining camps, and above all the frontier towns.
In *Stampede* such a town is described: false fronted buildings, and single-storey houses pretending to be two-storey houses line the mainstreet. There are plenty of cows around town and many cowmen in town. Texans walk the streets, spurs jangling. The Northerners eye them as they would wild animals. It is a raw town where the North uneasily meets the South. It has not been there for more than a few months, but already hotels, stores, saloons and brothels abound. The respectable, the not so respectable and the plain villainous are here, plying their trades, grabbing money while money is available, drinking, whoring and fighting.

These two frameworks, or more precisely some of their components, possess a property which is of great importance to Sagas and Westerns alike: they have acquired thematic meaning; they have become associated with definite and recurring ideas. The most obvious meaning clusters around the time dimension. For the Sagas there is a general distinction between the older ways (inn forní síðr) and the newer ways (inn nýi síðr). The vital date here is the year 1000, the year Iceland is reported to have accepted Christianity. The older ways are more violent, more uncompromising; the newer ways appear to be more characterised by the values of humility, reconciliation and forgiving. The newer ways are not necessarily to be equated with Christianity, but it is interesting to note how often the stories themselves seem to make this equation. A clear illustration is found in *Bjarnar Saga Háldolakappa*. Björn is told that accepting legal compensation befits Christian men, whereas the craving of bloody revenge
belongs to a past epoch. In Njáls Saga it has been shown that Sídu-Hallr's humility - he desists from demanding compensation for the death of his son - is a manifestation of the Christian spirit which permeates the later sections of the Saga. In Grettis Saga the two brothers Grettir and Thorsteinn are presented as contrasts: Grettir is strong, unlucky, and dies as a heathen; Thorsteinn is rather frail, lucky, and dies as a Christian hermit. Two women - one dark and one fair - appear to Gísli in his dreams; they seem to represent the old and the new ways. Concerning Thorsteins Saga Stangarhöggjs, Hermann Pálsson notes:

The story describes a clash between two moral codes, and it is the new spirit of peace that triumphs in the end over the old ideals.

In Westerns there is a strong sense of a hiatus between the old ways of life, the ways of the Old West, and the new ways, the ways of the new settlers arriving from the East:

"I see they're buildin' a church," a grizzled, tobacco-chewing wagomaster had said to Travis just the other day. "Be a school next. Hell, I remember when there was nuthin' here. Had to go a hundred miles north to cross. Wouldn't be anythin' if you hadn't built the ferry. Folks'd still be goin' the long way. Yep, this is gonna be a real town someday. You ever think about that?"

"Lotssa times," Travis had said. For he had been thinking of moving on ever since the first white man had decided to settle down at the Dell....

Further, the closer the action approaches the end of the century, the stronger the influence of 'civilisation' becomes, and the more out of date a man with the old (heroic) frontier values becomes. One of these 'late men', Butch Cassidy, confides in a pensive moment: "Y'know when I was a kid, I always figured on being a hero when I grew up."
To which his friend, the Sundance Kid, answers wryly: "Too late now."\textsuperscript{12}

The new age is more civilised, but also more prosaic: the culture and customs of the East prevail. The conflict between the old and the new ways thus is also of central importance in the world of the Westerns. But the writers of Westerns explore, and comment on, the ambiguities of the situation more explicitly than the Saga authors. A conversation from Warlock between the old cattle man, Abe McQuown, and the town's judge, Holloway, illustrates this point:

"What have we come to?" he (McQuown) said quietly. "Every man out here used to be a man and decent, and took care of himself and never had to ask for help, for always there was people to give it. Fighting murdering Pache devils and fighting greasers, and real men around, then. Murder done there was kin to take it up and cut down the murdering dog. Those days when there was friends still. When a man was free to come in town and enjoy towning it. Drink whisky, and gamble some, and fight and stomp and gouge sometimes when there was differences, but afterwards friends again. No one to say a man no, in those days, and kill him if he didn't run for cover and shiver in his boots. Life was worth the living of it in those days."

"And men killed sixteen to the dozen in those days," the judge said, quietly too, "And not by murdering Apaches, either. Rustling and road-agenting all around and this town treated as though it was a shooting gallery on Saturday nights, for the Cowboys' pleasure. Miners killed like there was a bounty on them, and a harmless barber shot dead because his razor slipped a little. Yes, things were free in those days."\textsuperscript{13}
Furthermore, within both worlds thematic meanings are frequently attached to persons or types. Within the Saga framework certain characters are, whenever they appear or are mentioned, associated with certain themes or general ideas: Snorri godi is always involved in political intrigue, in manipulations of the legal system; King Harald Fairhair is connected with tyranny; the kings Olaf Tryggvason and Saint Olaf are ever eager to convert Icelanders to the Christian faith. Practising vikings - such as Valgardr inn gráí - if inside Iceland, even if only for a friendly visit, are usually evil characters who spread discord; even retired vikings often have a hidden fire lurking under their weak exteriors. Saga women are closely allied with destructive, archaic forces: they often admonish their menfolk to live up to the demands of the law of blood feuds: an eye for an eye ...

Within the Western framework, women are usually portrayed as a civilising force. The heroine frequently is a pretty schoolteacher who either marries the hero (as in *The Virginian*), or leaves him after discovering that she cannot help him (as in *Butch Cassidy*). The function of incitement is usually taken over by the reactionary old cattle baron, although women like Mattie Ross in *True Grit* may assume the role: she engages the men who help her to hunt down the murderer of her father.

Parsons are frequently at least mildly ridiculed messengers of Christianity. Cowboys are as a rule connected with youth and daring. The names Wyatt Earp and Bill Hickok usually connote efforts to restore law and order, whereas Jesse James and Billy the Kid and Butch Cassidy typify
the defiance of a rotten society by an individual who is exceptionally courageous but misunderstood. Lawyers and old judges philosophize on the nature of law and justice. Citizens, town dwellers, if they appear, are represented as the new breed of men, the men who live prosaic and unindividualistic lives. More often than not they are weak and cowardly, but their number makes them significant; the future is theirs.

Geographically, the framework allows further thematic (here in the sense of constant) meaning to be attached to various regions. The Saga framework requires that events in Iceland are more real to life: as a rule of thumb, the further away from Iceland events are located, the more unlikely they become. This could be because people were better acquainted with the conditions and realities of life in Iceland than they were with those of distant lands and remote regions. If events are located in the North - in the extreme north of Norway, or generally in the arctic wilderness - witchcraft, trolls and monsters become more frequent. The South takes on thematic meaning because the centres of civilisation are there: Trondheim, Denmark, France, Rome and Constantinople. Fringe areas of human settlement, inside and outside of Iceland, are also charged with thematic meanings: they are the realm where the revenants lurk, in the wilderness human passions easily run riot, but somewhere in the wilderness there may also be a place where the outlaw finds at least temporary refuge from his hunters.

The degree of realism within the Western framework is not as contingent on geographical location; it seems to depend largely on the author's intention whether he wants to write a more or less realistic Western.
All of the West tends to be a mythical region. It is a fringe area - the frontier, the wilderness. The West is thematically ambiguous: it may be the testing place for gallant young men enjoying the thrills and exhilaration of the outdoor life; but it may also be a place where man is brutalized and becomes almost an animal. Or it may be the home of the outsider who has turned his back on a decadent or restrictive society.

The thematic opposition between the East and the West is well known, as is the distinction between the character of the chivalrous South and that of the puritan North.

In summary, this sketch of the Saga and the Western frameworks, although incomplete, suggests how the characters, events and themes likely to be found in individual stories are subject to definite constraints or conventions. Individual Sagas and Westerns, in part, derive their strength, meaning and resonance from being related to a larger body both of fact and historical traditions. Obviously the contents of the frameworks are of special interest to the Icelanders and the Americans respectively. Much of what has been said so far suggests that these frameworks were viewed both as being connected with and as enshrining ages of high action and great energy. That is to say, they approach the archetypical notion of the Heroic Age.
c) The Heroic Influence

The notion that there was an age once when men were stronger taller and more able, when life was both simpler and more heroic, is by no means the monopoly of the Icelanders or the Americans. It appears to be deeply rooted in the human psyche.

The idea of the Heroic Age, further, frequently pervades the work of scholars discussing older forms of literature. One of the most illuminating yet succinct characterisations of the 'typical' Heroic Age is found in W.P. Ker's 'Epic and Romance'. He considers the Heroic Age to be a natural consequence of simple social and political conditions that do not hinder the individual talent and its achievements. Ker observes that the great men of the Heroic Age are the men who do the things with which every member of the heroic society is familiar. It is only in the degree to which they possess skill, knowledge and ambition that they surpass their fellows. Moreover, Ker suggests, such an age may be full of all kinds of 'nonsense and superstition', but its motives of action are mainly positive and tangible; they ultimately derive from the felt need to preserve life, dignity and property. Pride and courage are the natural attributes of men whose behaviour is controlled by the heroic code - whether it be known as the Code of Chivalry, the Code of the West or the Saga Code. Such men prove their worth most vividly in physical action, in fierce
competition. To them both welfare and warfare are a private matter; politics too are a personal affair, man-to-man, unorganised and on a small scale. The conflict of large factions, the collision of assemblages made up of anonymous men is unknown in their society.

Since Sagas and Westerns clearly relate to what a later generation saw as Heroic Ages - enshrined in the frameworks discussed above - a common denominator suggests itself: Sagas and Westerns are branches of heroic literature. This observation is given substance by the many discernible conventions of heroic literature. Some such conventions have been mentioned in chapter I; here are some further examples.

Perhaps most obviously, weapons, the almost inevitable implements of heroes, play a key role in both genres and are often accorded detailed description. Whenever a conflict between the men of the Sagas or Westerns reaches a stage where words of insult are no longer emphatic enough, weapons speak - a situation which recurs with almost monotonous regularity in heroic literature.

Only slightly less obviously, a hero's traditional companion, the horse, is significant in both genres, albeit in different ways. In the Sagas horses are associated with serious discord. Hrafnkell Frey's Priest, for example, has a horse that is both his treasured possession and friend; in his own words, it is his 'fosterling'. It is this very horse that involves him in the chain of tragic events told in Hrafnkel's Saga. In many other Sagas the theft of a horse or the arrangement of a horsefight augurs ill. In the Westerns, by contrast, the horse is viewed simply as the hero's trusty friend for war and work. In Zane Grey's
Prairie Gold the following symptomatic description is found; it suggests an almost human understanding between Blanco Sol, a magnificent Mexican horse, and Richard Gale, the main character of the book, who at this point is fleeing from some Mexican bandits:

Blanco Sol showed no inclination to bend his head to the alfalfa which swished softly about his legs. Gale felt the horse's sensitive, almost human alertness. Sol knew as well as his master the nature of that flight.

Brave men, horses and weapons, the basic ingredients of much of heroic poetry, however, are rarely found alone. These ingredients enter into more complex combinations with other literary conventions.

In True Grit the heroine, Mattie Ross, recalls her father as he set out on the journey from which he was not to return. In her description heroic conventions fuse with the more general literary convention of the farewell and departure:

Papa left us on his saddle horse, a big chestnut mare with a blazed face called Judy. He took some food and a change of clothes rolled up in some blankets and covered with a slicker. This was tied up behind his saddle. He wore his belt gun which was a long dragoon pistol, the cap-and-ball kind that was old-fashioned even at that time. He had carried it in the war. He was a handsome sight and in my memory's eye I can still see him mounted up there on Judy in his brown woollen coat and black Sunday hat and both of them, man and beast, blowing little clouds of steam on that frosty morn. He might have been a gallant knight of old.

In Njáls Saga, in the chapter describing how the outlawed Gunnarr prepares to leave Iceland, the ingredients man, horse and weapon also coalesce with the convention of the farewell and the departure; but at a decisive point a new convention
appears: the decision to turn back and fight it out, no matter what the cost:

Early next morning he made ready to ride to the ship, and told all his people that he was going abroad for ever. Everyone was dismayed at the news, but hoped that some day he would return. When he was ready to leave, he embraced them all one by one. The whole household came out to see him off. With a thrust of his halberd he vaulted into the saddle, and rode away with Kolskegg (his brother).

They rode down towards Markar River. Just then Gunnar's horse stumbled, and he had to leap from the saddle. He happened to glance up towards his home and the slopes of Hlidarend.

'How lovely the slopes are,' he said, 'more lovely than they have ever seemed to me before, golden cornfields and new-mown hay. I am going back home, and I will not go away.'

A recurring heroic situation is the defence of a narrow place against great odds. When Gísli Súrsson is surrounded by Eyjólfr and his men, he jumps up onto a rock and defends himself successfully for a while before being brought low. Ted Lohman, the young hero of The Hell-Bent Kid, also makes use of a rock from which he defends himself with great determination; but in line with the change of weapons - guns instead of spears and swords - he defends himself from behind the rock. Even so, like Gísli he has no real chance; the odds are against him. He too is killed after stubbornly resisting for a while.

A further trait that Sagas and Westerns share with other forms of heroic literature are 'high words'. Heroes in both genres tend to be grave in bearing and of infrequent speech, but when they express themselves they usually do so with devastating effect. The following excerpt from The Virginian contains what must be one of the most memorable
lines ever spoken by a Western hero. To capture the full impact of the laconic reply given by the Virginian it is necessary to quote a larger segment:

.... Trampas spoke again,
"And ten," said he, sliding out some chips from before him. Very strange it was to hear him, how he contrived to make those words a personal taunt. The Virginian was looking at his cards. He might have been deaf.
"And twenty," said the next player, easily.
The next threw his cards down. It was now the Virginian's turn to bet, or leave the game, and he did not speak at once. Therefore Trampas spoke.
"Your bet, you son of a ----." The Virginian's pistol came out, and his hand lay on the table, holding it unaimed. And with a voice as gentle as ever, the voice that sounded almost like a caress, but drawling a very little more than usual, so that there was almost a space between each word, he issued his order to the man Trampas:
"When you call me that, smile." And he looked at Trampas across the table.
Yes, the voice was gentle. But in my ears it seemed as if somewhere the bell of death was ringing; and the silence, like a stroke, fell on the large room. All men present, as if by some magnetic current, had become aware of this crisis.

Even more than in Westerns, the use of litotes and other forms of ironic under-statement is one of the most noticeable features of Sagas; we saw how bluntly Víga-Glúmr answered the boasts of Björn Ironskull. Another Saga hero, Grettir Ásmundarson, is described as 'very difficult in his youth, of infrequent speech and rough, trickish both in word and deed'. He displays this trait of infrequent speech at telling moments throughout his Saga - for example, when taunted by a berserker, 'You'd be rather afraid to deal with me if I got angry', Grettir answers as laconically and every bit as devastatingly as the Virginian or Víga-Glúmr: 'We shall see about that when it's been tried.'
When in a critical situation, heroes of Sagas and Westerns react in the way a Hagen von Tronje would. Guðríðr, Gísli's faithful servant, is sent over to Sæból the morning after the murder of Vésteinn, Gísli's brother-in-law and friend. On her return she reports:

Thorgrímir sat with his helmet, sword and armour, Thorgrímr Nef had an axe in his hand, and Thorkell had his sword drawn a hand-span.

Her account, focusing in the Saga fashion on the postures of the men and the deployment of their weapons, reveals indirectly the anxiety the three at Sæból must be feeling. Only men who are tense and worried about something would sit up early in the morning wearing weapons, or draw their swords - it seems involuntarily - when hearing someone approach the house.

The tension and strain experienced by Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid during their flight from the indefatigable Superposse trailing them finds expression in similar postures and movements:

.... the wind dies. Then as it starts to build again there comes the sound right behind them of a rock slipping down and the sound means the Superposse has them dead but Butch jerks around desperately getting his guns out and Sundance's are already free and he fires and fires and as the sound explodes off the boulders ... A little dead lizard. It has caused the sound they'd heard, the little rock rolling away a little way.

Like their Homeric cousins, the heroes of Sagas and Westerns indulge in sports and games with competitiveness and zest. No wonder then that such entertainments frequently flare up into dangerous situations. Saga games - horse fights, wrestling matches and ball games - more often than not erupt into bloodshed. Even the play of Saga children
could end on a bloody note. The following story is told about the seven-year-old Egill Skalla-Grímsson and his dealings with his playmate Grímr Heggsson:

Grímr was ten or eleven years old and his strength was normal for his age. Now when Egill and Grímr finished playing against each other, Egill was the weaker. Grímr also did everything he could. Then Egill became angry and lifted the bat-trap and hit Grímr, but Grímr picked him up and threw him down with force and rather maltreated him and said that he would maim him if he did not behave. When Egill came back on his feet he went away from the game. The boys jeered at him. Egill went to meet Thódr Granason and told him what had happened. Thódr said: "I will come along with you and we will get even with him."

He gave him an halberd which he happened to be holding in his hand. Those weapons were then in use. They then go to where the boys' game was being held. Grímr then had hit the ball and the other boys were running after it. Then Egill ran up to Grímr and drove the axe into his head, so that it lodged in his brain.

Western games are less physical, though still conceived as being heroic. They usually take the form of a shooting contest or, more typically, of a card game. Raymond Bellour, a French connoisseur of Westerns, in his analysis of Westerns entitled 'Le Grand Jeu', argues that the life depicted in the genre is 'entièremenrisquée, une vie d'aventure, fondée sur le pari, et qui du jeu a tous les signes'. While he may be overstating the case by calling Westerns 'art ludique', the art of play, he correctly points out that a willingness to take risks, the spirit of gambling, pervades the genre—a point that hardly needs amplification. But even in the Sagas heroes often decide to take risks, to test something: phrases such as 'haetta til þess virding þinni', to stake your honour on it, or 'hefir sá er hættir', he wins who risks, are not uncommon. Even so, in Westerns the notion of
risk-taking is more strongly developed. It permeates the narrative:

Nathan Stark never gambled, he only took chances. The difference was that between a busted flush and a businessman. He had come out of the East ten years before, an eighteen-year-old farm lad without a penny in his patched jeans. He had built a solid future for himself in that decade and men called him a gambler for it. They had called him wrong. He played the percentages, always, and never bet against the house. And when he played, he did so with the bluest of all chips - brains.

and it finds expression in the appearance of men who gamble only from time to time, such as the Virginian and Butch Cassidy. It is personified by professional gamblers such as the enigmatic Morgan in Warlock; McCabe's story carries the significant sub-title 'The Great Presbyterian Church Wager'.

But whether they are full-time or only occasional gamblers, or whether they are Icelanders or Americans, or Greeks for that matter, heroes are not afraid to take risks, display their courage and test their skills.

One of the reasons why so many games and gambles end on a violent note is that, like most figures of heroic literature, the heroes and heroines of Sagas and Westerns are endowed with uncommon and instantaneous insights into almost any situation: they accurately guess an opponent's hidden and often evil intentions, evaluate his true character, and are not easily deceived. What is more, they understand at once why a man turns pale, why his eyes narrow, or why he falls silent. They assess the qualities of a weapon by just looking at it. One glance at a horse and they know whether it is a good one. If they find themselves in unusual circumstances they are always able to think of a way out or
forestall a plot of the enemy. In a contest of wits they always outwit their antagonists. However, this superior intelligence frequently finds a strange bed-fellow: an obsession with a single task, with one cause - whether it be the avenging of a relative, the defence of law and justice, the accumulation of property, the loyalty to an ideal, or whether it be the preservation of honour, personal elbowroom and self-respect at any price.

Many other narrative conventions of heroic literature could be pointed out, but for the present purpose it is sufficient to remember that many of the similarities found between Sagas and Westerns are due to the circumstance that the two genres are branches of heroic literature. Resemblances, however, are not found purely in the narrated details; at a deeper level they are due to the spirit that informs the genres: the spirit of heroic literature, which C.M. Bowra has defined as 'unfettered individualism and self-assertion' 19.

The various manifestations of this spirit and the significance of the hero worship implicated form the subject matter of the next sub-sections.
d) Myth and myth-making

The heroes of Sagas and Westerns, although usually sharing a community of interest with the people around them, surpass their fellow countrymen in significance. On the whole they tend to be more than usually unfettered, aggressive and self-assertive; what is more, their extraordinary skills and strengths make it appear at least that they transcend the limitations of ordinary humans, and thus they readily become associated with the supernatural. If myth, in a broad sense, is a traditional story into which the supernatural enters, then it is seen how thin, even artificial, the line is that separates a great deal of literature, and in particular heroic literature, from myth.

A conception of myth that links the notion of the transcending hero with a more general sociological and even political perspective has been elaborated in the work of George Dumezil, the French scholar and expert on Indo-European mythology. In 'Heur et Malheur du Guerrier' he points out that myths serve to:

... express in a dramatic fashion the ideology sustaining a society, to keep in front of its consciousness the values which it accepts and the ideals which it pursues from generation to generation, but above all its being and its structure, the elements, the interconnections, the equilibrium, the tensions that go to make it up, finally, to justify the rules and traditional practices without which it would disintegrate1.
A similar sociologically founded perspective on myths, but one which is more useful in the present context in that it connects myth and literature, has been formulated by Lars Lönnroth. Myths, he maintains, are:

a complex of ideas like "the saga writers' myth about the Landnáms-time", the Christians' myth about the thousand-year kingdom" or "the Marxists' myth about the transition from public-ownership to feudalism", i.e. an ideologically determined complex of ideas which need not necessarily find expression in a definite narrative (like "Balder's Death"), but, on the contrary, acts as a guide for the structure in a whole series of narratives of historical or pseudo-historical content.2

The concept of myth, in this broader modern sense, is no longer necessarily connected with religion or tales of great antiquity, but rather represents a fusion of metaphysical, sociological and literary components. In this subsection salient myths embedded in and mythopoeic tendencies associated with Sagas and Westerns will be explored briefly; the consequences of their presence will also be examined briefly; a more comprehensive discussion of their significance will follow later.

The most obvious of these mythical patterns is a 'freedom myth': in both genres we are told many times how men and women left their homelands because they would not brook oppression and tyranny, and how these emigrants became the progenitors of vigorous and freedom-conscious sons and daughters.

A more general underlying myth that determines much of the sequence of events related in individual stories, is the idea of the birth of new nations: the evolving local communities, whether they be Katytown in
Bitter Grass or the Eyjafjördur region in Víga-Glims Saga, are symbolic of the growth of the United States and of the Icelandic Commonwealth respectively.

Other generally held ideas that act as guides for the structure of narratives, concern events that took place - or are supposed to have taken place - after the sturdy pioneers came to the new land and founded the new nations. In the Sagas, thus, we read about a gradual growth of law, about the increasing influence of Christianity and, most notably, about the rise of the institution of kingship.

In many Sagas the growth of royal power in Norway is given as the prime motive for emigrating to Iceland. Yet the royal courts in Norway, Denmark, Sweden and England continued to play a major role in the life of the Icelanders; most of all in the life of those who travelled abroad, that is the sons of the well-to-do families. On the one hand, Egill Skalla-Grimsson, born and bred in Iceland, becomes the bitter enemy of the Norwegian rulers; but on the other hand, in some Sagas, Laxdaela Saga is a clear example, the royal court bestows great prestige on visiting Icelandic heroes, and they become virtually royal figures in their own right. During his stay in Trondheim, Kjartan emerges as the acknowledged leader of the Icelandic community in the town. This puts him into a position where he is able to negotiate with King Olaf Tryggvason as if they were peers. He even proves to be almost the equal of the king in a swimming competition. Most telling is the scene where the king gives Kjartan a complete outfit of newly made clothes of scarlet cloth: 'They suited him well, for it is said that King Óláfr and Kjartan were of the same height and build when they were measured'. But to cap it all, it is
even rumoured that the king would like to see Kjartan marry his sister, princess Ingibjörg. Back in Iceland, however, Kjartan, partly because of jealousy aroused by his royal splendour, partly because of his involvement with the king's sister, becomes entangled in a chain of sordid and tragic events culminating in his death.

Generally, the Sagas do not present the idea of kingship in a favourable light. Vatnsdæla Saga appears to be an exception in that one of its heroes, Ingimundr, is one of the few pro-royal chieftains, but even he is told that kings are aggressors. In Bjarnar Saga Hitdaelakappa, the comment that Björn is behaving as if he were 'konungr yfr mönum', king over people, is a censure, not a compliment. It signals how sensitive the Icelanders were about the institution of kingship, and more than that about the ideas of feudalism. What is probably the locus classicus is found in the strongly anti-aristocratic Bandamanna Saga. A band of chieftains are attempting to deprive Ófeigr's son, Oddr, of his possessions. In a court case the chieftain Járnskeggi—who adopted the habit of having a merki, a standard, carried before him at local thing meetings 'sem fyrir konungum'—is ridiculed by Ófeigr, for aping this outlandish custom. Turning to the next chieftain Ófeigr goes on to say:

'There you sit, Skegg-Broddi. Is it true that King Harald said, that you were best suited to be the King of Iceland?'

Skegg-Broddi answers, apparently taking Ófeigr's remark as a compliment:

'That I do not know. King Harald has said many things to me of which I do not know how seriously he meant them'.
To which Ófeigr answers, closing the trap into which he led Skegg-Broddi:

'I should be the last to agree with you becoming the King of Iceland, and you are not to be "konungr" in this court case .... '6.

Such scenes not only illustrate the Icelanders' reaction to kingship, they also show how popular ideas on social phenomena enter a narrative: the scenes dramatise the negative view of kings prevailing among the Icelanders.

Looking for similar elements of myth in Westerns, we find that these stories are guided by the idea of the coming of law, or rather the assertion of the rule of law, as well as by the coming of a new civilisation. The two are usually interdependent events, but there are distinctions: Law is generally welcome, the new civilisation is regarded with suspicion. Apart from being characterised by new public buildings such as churches and schools, the new civilisation is marked in the main by the advent of new powers such as high finance, symbolised by the Chases in Prairie Gold:

.... he learned some interesting particulars about the Chases. They had an office in the city, influential friends in the capital. They were powerful men in the rapidly growing finance of the West7.

More explicitly, the Chases are described as 'grasping and conscienceless agents of a new force in the development of the West'8. Another new force is the increasing influence of big corporations. In McCabe - as in other Westerns - these companies are perceived as a threat. The Snake River Mining Company is likened to an animal organism that grows 'by corruption and fear'9: the Company attempts to take over the Presbyterian Church mining settlement, and when its plans are thwarted by McCabe, it sends in gunmen
who kill him. Railway companies and crime fighting organisations too emerge as powerful new institutions in *Butch Cassidy* the Union Pacific Railroad is able to hire - presumably at great financial cost - the Superposse, consisting of the most capable of the famous Pinkerton Detectives, who hunt and track down the two outlaw heroes with great efficiency. But even the evolution of pastoral companies, such as the Trask's cattle enterprise in *Bitter Grass*, belongs here: they are presented as a new social phenomenon which is changing the ways of the old frontier society.

The young nation's social institutions and possibly its very existence are continuously threatened. In the Sagas, ghosts, witches, monsters, bears, berserkers, vikings and outlaws threaten the community from without; human passion, pride, arrogance, acquisitiveness, and a lust for power from within. In the Westerns savage natives, dangerous rustlers, hired gunmen and outlaws threaten from the outside; ruthless, corrupt, power-hungry and self-seeking men disturb the normal life from within. Even so, the forces of chaos do not overwhelm the community, because there are always men who will take it upon themselves to struggle against the dangers and the threats. Óláfr, the son of Hávarðr from the Ísafjörðr, coming to the aid of a poor widow, wrestles with the havoc-wreaking revenant Thormóðr; the determined chieftain Snorri destroys a gang of outlaws led by a certain Óspakr; Óláfr pái continuously seeks to reconcile people and prevent communal strife; Ölkofra Saga relates how an idealistic young man, Broddi Bjarnason, is moved to help an old man against the injustice and greed of powerful chieftains.
In the Westerns too there are such idealistic and idealised defenders of social order: the Virginian successfully fights against the evil influence of Trampas on many occasions; deputy John Gannon grows morally to become the true defender of law and order in the town of Warlock; Zane Grey's Richard Gale not only chivalrously defends beautiful women against Mexican bandits, he also protects the property and interests of his friends and, in doing this, defends a little Western settlement against being tyrannised and exploited by ruthless businessmen from the East.

The struggles of these men are variations of the myth that there is a never-ending battle between anarchy and order, between good and evil. Yet, at times, the battle between these opposing forces receives a more complex treatment. For instance, the most famous fighter of monsters, bears, witches and vikings is Grettir Ásmundarson. His great strength and aggressiveness equip him to fight on behalf of various settlements against evil creatures - but at the same time these very attributes make it impossible for him to settle down peacefully. The source of his strength appears to be an anarchic streak which ultimately may derive from his viking ancestry. His tragedy is that, in spite of many accomplishments, he dies as an outlaw.

In the Westerns this notion or myth - the ambiguous nature of some exceptionally strong or courageous champions of the community - is found more frequently. In Warlock the citizens of a small town agree to hire a marshal to protect them. The new marshal is a renowned gunman, and for a while the town lives in his shadow,
marvelling at his fearlessness and power. 'But' - we are told - 'he was not and never could be the law, and in the end his very presence unleashed a storm of violence which almost engulfed the town'. The ferryman Travis in Barquero is a similar figure. He helps a group of squatters fight off a gang of bandits, but in spite of helping these people he is marked as an outsider; his values - individualism and direct physical expression - are at odds with those of the community he protects. The little town of Presbyterian Church, in turn, finds its champion in McCabe, a gunfighter, gambler, and whore-house proprietor. McCabe, although essentially an anti-bourgeois type, comes to a silent agreement with the local community 'that anything that had to do with violence was for him to settle'.

The often observed tendency of myths to proliferate as if of their own accord must have facilitated the coalescing of various 'single' myths into larger units. Many individual stories contain such larger and more complex patterns. Thus in Hávarðar Saga Ísfirðings a narrative pattern with mythical overtones is established when various events thought to be unlikely occur (Hefir þetta meir gengit eftir málefnum en líkfendum ... Spyrjast nú þessi tiðendi víða, ok þótti með mestum olíkfendum verða). This pattern coalesces with the notion, or myth, that the God of the Christians has the power to make unlikely events happen. The second half of the Saga shows how Christian ideals, against expectations, influence the actions of the pagan hero more and more - for example, he restrains his men from unnecessary though excusable bloodshed. But it is most significant that in the end the 'new and better' faith is embraced by all Icelanders, and that the former viking Hávarðr is buried
in a Christian church, in a land which has been converted to Christian ways.

By pointing to three phases characterising the structure of *Laxdæla Saga* - an orderly pioneer phase, a period of bloody conflict, and finally a period of new harmony - the Danish scholar T. Bredsdorff analysed such a larger mythical pattern in this, one of the best known Sagas. Bredsdorff considers that there is enough evidence to call this Saga the Icelandic myth of creation, sin and salvation. *Njáls Saga* incorporates a similar pattern: a basic curve which descends through disorder into terrible bloodshed and is followed by a slow re-establishing of order.

This pattern, indeed, is a very general one in literature. It is already found in Greek tragedies. Therefore it is not unexpected that, on returning to the Westerns, a similar pattern is discernible. It is, for example, found in *Little Big Man*. Spanning events from 1852 to 1876, it depicts the malaise of the white American civilisation and contrasts it with the less complicated and more humane world of the Indian. Throughout the book, the two civilisations are depicted as being in conflict: the white man gradually fragments and finally destroys the age-old ways of the Indian. *Little Big Man* may be viewed as encompassing the myth of the rise of a new civilisation at the expense of an older one. The birth, rise and subsequent decay of the little mining and trading town in *Warlock* is an even more complex pattern, although Oakley Hall's novel is not necessarily a more complex book than Thomas Berger's description of the vicissitudes experienced by Jack Crabb, the Little Big Man.
At this point it is useful to look beyond individual works and enlarge on the notion of the fictional worlds that both genres are connected with: each Saga or Western contributed shorter or longer myths to these worlds; gradually veritable mythologies evolved. These mythologies, however, are not clearly ordered entities: they arose by means of what might be called syncretism. We thus have, generally speaking, the 'Myth of the West', a myth so fertile that it is not contained in the Western genre alone: it pervades other forms of art, and is even at home in the political arena. In order to appear typically American, politicians have been known to speak and dress in Western style. The Sagas, too, have become associated with or are even the vehicle of a general myth about early Iceland.

Here it must be noted that we move outside the specifically literary field and meet with the people who formed, and form, the audience for these stories. To a degree the growth of such general mythologies has been enhanced by the tendency of audiences to mythologise certain character types: most obviously the viking and the cowboy. According to myth, the viking is a bloodthirsty pirate who drinks out of the skulls of his slain enemies, and is able to declare that death in battle is as enjoyable as the kisses of his lady-love. The figure of the cowboy, too, has been magnified and romanticised: he may have been merely a unique occupational type who was concerned with 'cow work' on the range, raising, rounding up, branding, railing, haying and mending, but the American folk-mind likes to enshrine him as a creature beyond and above the law, a cavalier who rode with the gods and who rode like a devil, administering law himself; he may not have been lawless, but the American imagination will keep him that way.
Such extrinsic mythologising tendencies in themselves are not unusual, popular literature in particular, by its very nature, is open to them. Yet if not taken into account, if allowed to go unchecked, they interfere with the understanding of Sagas and Westerns.

For the Sagas an extreme but illuminating illustration, of how an excuberant fusion of the texts with such mythologising tendencies may lead to a misreading of the stories, is found in R. Pörtner's 'Die Wikinger Saga', which appeared in 1974:


In defence of Pörtner and his likes it may be said that it is true that there are many vikings in the Íslendingasögur. And indeed, here and there, the Sagas have made use of the theatrical viking, the swashbuckling buccaneer; he is usually met in the Baltic and carries names like Snækollr, or Kolgrímr. Characters such as Skarphedinn, Björn Hítdaelakappi and Thorgeirr Hávarsson may appear to us as 'typical' vikings - tough, arrogant warriors who meet their fate unflinchingly. Yet we should note that Skarphedinn never leaves Iceland to participate on a viking expedition, and that Björn is actually reprimanded for participating in acts of piracy - King Olaf tells him: 'I'd like you to give up going on viking raids, although I think that you do comport yourself well - but God's law is often disturbed during such raids.'
are only temporarily vikings; their normal way of life revolves around the everyday chores of their farm. Mediaeval Icelanders were essentially farmers, not vikings who happened to live in Iceland instead of in Norway or Denmark.

Bertha Phillpotts traces the mis-reading of Sagas back to the seventeenth century translators of the Sagas who, looking for savagery, 'found it, and created a Viking unknown to the authors they were translating'.

The emergence of the viking as an archetypal figure who comes to mind almost automatically when we hear the word 'Saga' must further have been reinforced by generalisations such as 'the Íslendinga-sögur are stories about Icelanders of the Viking Age'. Such a statement, although not incorrect, uses the word Viking in a chronological sense — over-simplifies the issue.

The only major character coming close to the stereo-type of the viking is Egill - his mother even calls him 'vikingsefni', viking material - yet he is much more complex than being a bloodthirsty and looting pirate, as G. Vigfusson observes: 'In his life and character, as in his person, he seems to unite extremes which make him a type of the age in which he lived. Steadfast in love and hate, cool and passionate to madness, crafty and reckless, grasping and generous, he passes through a chequered life as poet and pirate, chief and champion, the henchman of Aethelstan and the hereditary foe of Eirik, now an honoured guest at court, now a helpless prisoner, now a mighty lord ...'.

In a similar way, the reception and perception of Westerns has been influenced by the cowboy myth. Yet
it must be granted that the figure of the cowboy emerges more clearly than his counterpart, the longbearded, helmet-wearing, axe-wielding viking. He appears more vividly not only in his 'cowboy regalia' - boots, shirt, hat and a heavy gun-belt glittering with bullets, a low-slung holster tied to the thigh, and a colt or two - but also as an acting hero type. A cowboy plays a leading part in about half the stories, an important role in most others. Only in one text, in Barquero, is he completely absent. Nevertheless, to call the Westerns 'Cowboy Stories' is to misunderstand the range and complexity of the genre, just as it would be too simplistic to call the Íslendinga-sögur 'Viking Stories'.
e) **The major theme: headstrong men and society**

In popular opinion Sagas and Westerns are tales of violent conflict and high adventure. Indeed, it is not hard to show that there are numerous instances of battle, murder and sudden death. Life, as described in the two genres, is seen as being insecure, and weapons are freely worn by most people at most times. Some people go around killing with great gusto and, at least for a while, get away with it. We think of Víga-Hrappr, Killer-Hrappr, in Njáls Saga, an engaging rascal who leaves behind him a long trail of theft, murder, rape and trouble; or we might remember the deeds of Hrafnkell, Björn hítdælakappi, Víga-Glúmr and Brodd-Helgi - to name but a few of the more notorious Saga characters. In Westerns, we hear about gunmen with notches on their guns, each notch representing one man killed; or we hear of professional killers such as the gunfighters hired by the mining company to dispose of McCabe. Nevertheless, to view Sagas and Westerns merely as action-packed tales amply decorated with blood and gore would be erroneous, for everywhere in the two genres we find a serious concern with and reflectiveness on the subject of violence.

In Laxdæla Saga Bolli regrets killing his foster-brother Kjartan:

... Bolli caught him as he fell, and Kjartan died in Bolli's lap. At once Bolli repented bitterly of what he had done.¹
An almost identical incident is reported in *Vápnfirdinga Saga*: Bjarni Brodd-Helgason regrets having dealt Geitir Lýtingsson his death blow and takes the dying man into his arms. A variation of this scene is found in *Thorsteins Saga hvíta* where Thorstein Thorfinnsson puts his head in the lap of the man whose son he killed. This moving gesture expresses the repentance Thorstein feels, and that he is prepared to atone for his violent deed. But probably nowhere is the insidious nature of violence in a society such as the Old Icelandic Commonwealth expressed more explicitly than in Gunnarr Hámundarson's frank admission:

'But I wish I knew ... whether I am any the less manly than other men, for being so much more reluctant to kill than other men are.'

To cite an opinion about the phenomenon of violence in the Sagas:

The sagas constantly deal with themes of violence; this was not, as is often assumed, from any admiration for killings and vengeance, but arose from a deep concern about the seriousness of violent action ... they (the Saga writers) were more concerned with the motivation and consequences of violence than with violence itself; death was only important in the effect it had on the people who caused it, and on the people who suffered from its consequences.

Taking a similar viewpoint, T.M. Andersson asserts that the idea of conciliation, not top-dog morality, appears to be 'the heart of the sagas'. Similarly, in the Westerns violence is frequently deplored. Tot Lohman in *The Hell-Bent Kid* asks dejectedly, '... can't any people in the world understand that killing a man sickens a man?' In *The Virginian*, which according to the critic L. Fiedler is supposed to show how religious pacifism only too readily capitulates to violence, there are scenes exploring the deep ambiguities of violence. When the Virginian is about
to step out to face Trampas in a showdown, the woman who loves him tries to stop him:

She had grown very white. "Can't you see how it must be about a man" he repeated. "I cannot," she answered, in a voice that scarcely seemed her own. "If I ought to, I cannot. To shed blood in cold blood. When I heard about that last fall, - about the killing of those cattle thieves, - I kept saying to myself: 'He had to do it. It was a public duty.' And lying sleepless I got used to Wyoming being different from Vermont. But this -" she gave a shudder - "when I think of tomorrow, of you and me, and of - If you do this, there can be no tomorrow for you and me".

The same point of view is expressed by Mrs Miller in McCabe. She locks away McCabe's shotgun and insists that he does not need the weapon: she considers his heroic attitude - and the violence that it implies - pointless: 'You enjoy being a hero, don't you? ... You must want them to build you a statue,'

Furthermore, there is much in both forms that indicates not only a concern with violence but seems to be demonstrating how social accommodation may be achieved.

In his article 'The Displacement of the Heroic Ideal in Family Sagas' T.M. Andersson makes a passing reference to what seems to be a major aspect of Sagas:

It strikes me that there is a real analogy between the development from heroic megalo-psychos in Homer to the civic virtues of sophrosyne in later Greece on the one hand and the development from warrior's honor in Germanic heroic poetry to the social ideal of moderation in the sagas on the other hand.

It seems that a similar shift took place in the Western genre, or else it is the natural consequence of the fact that Westerns were and are regarded by some writers as a suitable vehicle to explore serious themes and problems, such as the maintenance of social consensus.
There are numerous mediators, wise men and arbitrators in the Sagas who settle - or at least attempt to settle - disputes between opposing parties. The chieftain Áskell in Reykdæla Saga is one of these peacemakers. Time and time again he attempts to prevent the outbreak of violent disputes, and when he is unable to prevent open hostilities he tries to bring about some form of settlement acceptable to all parties concerned. His goodwill is so great that he even keeps a serious injury secret and attempts to forestall the grave consequences he knows his death would have - both because of his social standing and because of the unconciliatory attitudes of his relatives. An almost identical scene is found in Vatnsdæla Saga: Ingimundr dies with as much composure and altruism as Áskell.

In the Westerns, in addition to such men of good will - Alexander 'the counsellor' in Bitter Grass, Amos Bradley in The Hell-Bent Kid, Judge Holloway in Warlock -, there are men who, like Old Testament prophets, have lived in the wilderness and who come into settlements to warn, and to preach a new way of life based on non-violence, co-operation and wisdom:

Then one evening I fired my rifle in the air and people collected around me and I began to speak. I hadn't spoken to men in ten years, and I found it very difficult. People have changed, and they talk and listen differently. It's the killing. We're an unfortunate lot, for we always have to kill. Our wilderness breeds killers, cowards, and hermits. The wilderness is the great challenge for us. There is great power in it and we must decide what to do with this power. We must build a house for mankind here such as the world has never seen. I respect he who labors and invents so that we may have such a house. It seems to have been reserved for the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question,
whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether we’re forever destined to depend on accident and force.¹⁴

If we view violence as the breakdown of social order then we may say that both Sagas and Westerns are concerned very much with the maintenance of social peace. Throughout both genres there is a persistent dialectic between the forces of social order and disorder, between social balance and imbalance. This vacillation influences not only the content but also the form of the stories, as Andersson observed with regard to the Sagas:

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 ... The saga is not complete until a perfect equilibrium is restored between the conflicting parties ... ¹⁵

Elsewhere he adds: 'the saga, from its social vantage point, always ends with conciliation and with the restoration of social balance.'¹⁶

In broad terms, Westerns too depict a progression towards greater social balance. However, there is not the same near ritualistic and predictable sequence of events that characterises the Sagas. In Westerns extremes are met. Some commence when a situation is already in imbalance: when Benjie McMaster returns from the Civil War, he is confronted by an already hostile town. In other stories, as in _The Virginian_, conflict rears its ugly head only some time after various characters have been presented, after the scene has been carefully set. Further, some Westerns close as soon as a crude form of social equilibrium has been established: _McCabe_ ends with McCabe’s successful fight against the gunmen hired by the Snake River Mining
Company. Although he himself is killed, he has at least temporarily stalled the Company, and thus defended the status quo. On the other hand, True Grit closes only after a lengthy description of what happened to the trio - Mattie Ross, 'Rooster' Cogburn, and La Boeuf - after their mission had been accomplished; in the final pages of the book Mattie is an aged person. Compared with Sagas, the disruption and final re-establishment of social order in Westerns thus is more varied. However, the treatment of this sequence is rarely as complete as in the Sagas. This line of thought, touching on the narrative structure of Sagas and Westerns, will be taken up later. For the present it is more to the point to examine the concept of social harmony further.

Probably the most important prerequisite of social peace is the existence and acceptance of law. Both genres reflect this thought; however, they delve deeper than this, and may be seen as embodying a persistent and searching analysis of the relationship between the similar - but not identical - concepts of law, justice and order.

An exceptionally penetrating and patent analysis is found in Njáls Saga, which the great Icelandic scholar G. Vigfússon called 'The Saga of Law'. The eponymous hero, Njáll, one of the greatest lawyers and counsellors in Saga literature, is adamant that it would be 'quite wrong to have no law in the land'. He sees law as the pillar of social order and unity, and on a momentous occasion he quotes the famous saw 'With laws the land shall be settled, but without it shall be ruined'. In this he is supported by the lawspeaker Thorgeirr Tjörvason who on the occasion of a major legal reform, the legal acceptance of Christianity, declares: 'It seems to me that an impossible situation
arises if we do not all have one and the same law. If
the laws are divided the peace will be divided, and we
cannot tolerate that.\textsuperscript{19}

But on the other hand, \textit{Njáls Saga}, at least
from certain points of view, demonstrates that the growth
of formal jurisprudence easily leads to the decay of law\textsuperscript{20}. Under these conditions legal institutions cannot function
properly and violence erupts: throughout \textit{Njáls Saga} there
are many court cases and major court reforms, but rarely does
effective peace prevail. The theme, that legal proceedings
easily degenerate into formalism where the letter of the
law is more important than the spirit of the law, is taken
up in \textit{Bandamanna Saga}: a jury is explicitly reminded that
a mistake in formal presentation should not be considered
as sufficient reason to invalidate a justified charge\textsuperscript{21}.

The Sagas also reveal an awareness that the law
may be abused by powerful or clever people. In both
\textit{Bandamanna Saga} and \textit{Ölfrofra Saga} chieftains put their greed
before justice and responsibility to the community,
and try to abuse the legal system to exploit other people.
In the Saga named after him, Hænsa-Thórir, on the other
hand, uses his money to buy the support of chieftains in
legal matters, and thus, in spite of being generally
despised, he is able to assert himself and twist legal
cases to his advantage. Weak and poor people find it
difficult, if not impossible, to assert their legitimate
grievances against powerful chieftains - the existing social
order makes it hard for members of the lower classes to
make their claims for justice through the legal system.
Not many are as fortunate as Sámr Bjarnason to gain the
support of idealistic or daring young men and score against
a chieftain such as Hrafnkell, about whom we read:

Hrafnkel took possession of the entire valley and gave land to other settlers, on condition that he should be their overlord. He became their priest and chieftain ... Hrafnkel was a bully despite his many qualities, and he forced the men of Jokulsdale to submit to his authority. He was kind and considerate to his own men, but harsh and ruthless to his enemies and to them he showed no justice. Hrafnkel fought many duels, but refused to pay compensation for the men he killed, and no one got any redress for the wrongs that Hrafnkel committed.

Frequently, when justice and order could not be restored through the legal process, people in the Sagas take the law into their own hands - a situation in which Hávarðr finds himself in Hávarðar Saga Ísfirðings, or as happens repeatedly in Njáls Saga: Hrútr and Gunnarr both bypass the legal system and challenge their opponents to a duel; Ámundi inn blindi, an illegitimate son of Njáll, takes the law into his hand and avenges his father.

In Egils Saga, Egill pursues with grim, almost fanatical determination, what he considers to be 'lög ok rétt', law and justice. A similarly determined but much more likeable character is Thorgils Thórdarson, the hero of Flóamanna Saga, who displays his sense of justice and his high-mindedness in many trying situations.

Much more could be said about the theme of law in the Sagas, or about the legal system in old Iceland, which often seems to have been an uneasy substitute for physical conflict and revenge. But on the strength of the evidence presented, it may be said that the picture the Sagas give of old Iceland is one of a community with a dynamic veneration for law and order. Yet it is also aware of the ironies inherent in the legal process, and of the elusive nature of the concept of justice.
Likewise, in nearly every Western the complex nature of law, justice and order is discussed at some stage. In McCabe a lawyer observes succinctly and explicitly:

Most people expect justice from the law; can't get it; shun it. Don't understand that justice isn't the business of the law. Childish concept. Justice belongs to ... God. Law uses rules to make society orderly enough to live in. Sometimes justice comes out of that; sometimes it doesn't.

Another view of the nature of law, its source and purpose, is found in The Virginian. The Virginian's nominal boss, Judge Henry, attempts to explain to Miss Wood why he considers the vigilante action, as a result of which three rustlers were hanged, to be defensible. He delivers a virtual lecture on the nature of law, and about the law on the frontier in particular:

"Call them the ordinary citizens," said the Judge. "I like your term. They are where the law comes from, you see. For they chose the delegates who made the Constitution that provided for the courts. There's your machinery. These are the hands into which the ordinary citizens have put the law. So you see, at best, when they lynch they only take back what they gave ... in Wyoming the law has been letting our cattle-thieves go for two years. We are in a very bad way, and we are trying to make that way a little better until civilization can reach us. At present we lie beyond its pale. The courts, or rather the juries, into whose hands we have put the law, are not dealing the law. They are without hands, or rather they are imitation hands made for show, with no life in them, no grip. They cannot hold a cattle-thief. And so when your ordinary citizen sees this, and sees that he has placed justice in a dead hand, he must take justice back into his own hands where it was once at the beginning of all things. Call this primitive, if you will. But so far from being a defiance of the law, it is an assertion of it - the fundamental assertion of self-governing men, upon whom our whole social fabric
is based. There is your principle, Miss Wood, as I see it. Now can you help me to see anything different?"28

In *The McMaster*, on the other hand, the discussion of law is integrated more smoothly into the narrative:

They went to the saloon, had a few drinks, talked in solemn tones, and then went on down to the church. They filed into the church. At the door the Reverend Murphy said with a feeble smile, 'You should remember what it says in the Bible, "Vengeance is mine saith the Lord ..."' 'We (are) messengers of the Lord,' Kolby said at his elbow. He made his way to the pulpit, removed a pistol and showed it to the men who now occupied the varnished pews. 'Today we talk with this here gun. Bible is for Sundays.' 'Amen,' muttered a voice from the back of the church. 'Now we get down to business,' Kolby said, and returned the pistol to his belt.29

Looking at the relationship between social harmony and law from society's point of view, law becomes the expression of the collective will of the social group, the community. Thus it is natural that the community should be of great significance in both genres - and not only in the passive sense of needing a hero to defend it against the forces of chaos and anarchy. Although the antagonists usually confront each other in single combat, their man-to-man confrontation takes place within a social context. Trampas is acutely aware of this social context:

Trampas looked at the sun and the shadow again. He had till sundown. The heart inside him was turning it round in this opposite way: it was to himself that in his rage he had given this lessening margin of grace. But he dared not leave town in all the world's sight after all the world had heard him. Even his friends would fall from him after such an act. Could he - the thought actually came to him - could he strike before the time set? But the thought was useless. Even if
his friends could harbor him after such a deed, 
his enemies would find him, and his life would be 
forfeit to a certainty\textsuperscript{30}.

The community as an entity plays an even more 
important role in \textit{Warlock}, especially in the guise of the 
citizens' committee which hires Blaisdell, the gunman, to 
come and 'clean up' the town. In \textit{The Hell-Bent Kid}, a 
callous crowd watches how Tot Lohman makes his last stand 
against a dozen or so men. The little settlement of 
Lonely Dell collectively fights off an invasion by Jack 
Remy and his marauders (\textit{Barquero}). In \textit{McCabe} the opinions 
and reactions of the little mining town of Presbyterian 
Church are carefully sampled throughout, making the little 
community come to life in its own right\textsuperscript{31}.

In \textit{Butch Cassidy} the community appears in the 
guise of a crowd which, for example, when harangued by a 
US Marshal about its civic responsibility of going after 
the outlaws, replies cowardly: "-head 'em off - you crazy? - 
we do that and they'll kill us"\textsuperscript{32}. But when presented 
with a bicycle this same crowd catches fire: it is 
seduced by this gadget introduced by a salesman as 'the 
future mode of transportation for the weary Western world'\textsuperscript{33}. 
In this scene, indeed as it does throughout the story, the 
cowardly mob represents the 'weary Western world' and, what 
is more, the future. The modern mass civilisation, which 
has no understanding or sympathy for individualists such 
as Butch and the Kid, receives its satirical treatment 
and is judged to be contemptible.

The community - that is the social group beyond 
the clan - is of greater importance in the Sagas than is 
often thought. Andersson spoke of the Saga's social 
vantage point; more specifically, the community is present
as the 'watching countryside', that evaluates or comments on the continuing action; or as the crowd at legal meetings enjoying the battle of wits between lawyers such as Eyjólfr and Thorgils in Njáls Saga; or as the neighbourhood getting together to rid itself from a gang of bandits as in Hardar Saga. The decision made by well-meaning people in Gunnlaugs Saga, to amend the law of the land in order to make it impossible for two promising young men to keep on clashing needlessly, also belongs here, as do the many instances when a third party intervenes in a quarrel between two factions.

In Old Norse, a person felt by the community, or more specifically by the people of a (law-) district - the lög, literally the 'laws'- to be an undesirable was called an 'útlagi' an 'out-law', that is someone who lives beyond the pale of the community, beyond laws. However, like the concept of law, the figure of the outlaw proves to be equivocal. For there are many kinds of outlaws.

In the Sagas we encounter villainous vikings, berserkers and petty criminals who freely roam the seas and the countryside. They are the 'Intriganten and Bösewichter' studied and described for example by W. Emmerich in his very readable dissertation 'Untersuchungen zur Rolle von Intriganten und Bösewichtern in einigen Íslendinga sögur'. At the other extreme, and more significantly, there are the outlaw heroes, those who are wronged by society as much as they may have wronged it: Grettir Ásmundarson, who on many occasions defends groups of people, that is the community, but whose great physical strength proves to be more of a handicap than an advantage; Gísli Súrsson, the ógæfumadhr, the congenitally unlucky man,
is made an outlaw for carrying out what was expected of him: he avenges his brother-in-law Vésteinn. Even Hörðr, the leader of an outlaw band called the Hólmverjar, is rehabilitated after his death. His Saga closes with an epilogue in which the positive sides of his character are stressed. It may be sensed that the Saga author felt that Hörðr had not really deserved the cruel fate of being an outlaw:

He was 39 years old when he was killed, and most of the time he was an honoured and esteemed man except for those three years that he was an outlaw. Styrmir the Priest says that he was the foremost of all the outlaws because of his intelligence and skills of using weapons and all his exploits, those (reported in this Saga) and others; and that he has been esteemed abroad so much that the earl of Gautland married his daughter to him; and thirdly, that after no one man in Iceland have so many men been killed in revenge, and they all were slain with impunity.

Other Saga heroes are not so much depicted as outlaws, legally and systematically hunted down by their enemies, as they are men who suddenly find themselves in a difficult position. We think of Gunnarr Hámundarson who, against his will, comes to defy the community and pays for it with his life. Or of Hrafnkell who, by underestimating Sámr's support at the Althing, temporarily becomes an outlaw.

Thorgeirr in Fóstbreedra Saga and Halli in Valla-Ljóts Saga, too, are not so much criminal outlaws as high-spirited and aggressive young men who become a social nuisance because they persistently flout social norms.

In spite of the significance of clans within the Saga World, and in spite of the role played by the general community, Saga writers on the whole were more fascinated by the exceptional man - whether he be a shrewd politician such as Snorri goði, resourceful like Njáll, unusually
good-willed like Áskell godi, or aggressive and ambitious like Helgi Droplaugarson in Droplaugarsona Saga. Andersson aptly summarises the relationship between the community and the individual hero:

The family sagas, despite all heroic modes and gestures borrowed from tradition, portray a normal society. They tell the stories of strong individuals who disrupt the social fabric, but despite the respect paid many of these strong personalities, the sagas are ultimately opposed to social disruption⁴⁰.

Much the same may be said with regard to the Westerns. In spite of a glorification of the man with some dimension whether he be a bad-man, an outlaw, or an exceptionally strong-willed man: he is seen and judged from an essentially social vantage point. In Butch Cassidy it is made clear to the dare-devil outlaw pair by an old friend, a sheriff, that the days of carefree individualism, when all that counted was individual skill and daring, are over:

... it's too late. You may be the biggest thing ever to hit this area, but in the long run, you're just two-bit outlaws. I never met a soul more affable than you, Butch, or faster than the Kid, but you're still nothing but a couple of two-bit outlaws on the dodge ... you just want to hide out till it's old times again, but it's over. It's over, don't you get that? It's over and you're both gonna die bloody, and all you can do is choose where⁴¹.

Jack Remy, the brutal outlaw, and Travis, the strong-willed ferryman, are both doomed - the civilisation of the squatters, the ways of the East will win. Remy dies and Travis will soon see his settlement, Lonely Dell, become a town - in which there is no room for him.

Nathan Stark at the close of The Tall Men is both admired and criticized for his extreme individualism by his former partner, Ben Allison. Ben views Stark from a social vantage point:
"Mr. Stark", he said at last, "your kind grows big. Mine allus stays the same size. We don't eat the same grub, you and me, nor we ain't meant to share the same bunk. I could stay in your Gallatin Valley a hundred years and never learn your ways nor profit by 'em. We ain't cut from the same stick and will never sprout good nor do well in the same soil. Your kind of tree puts roots a mile down, sixty sections square. You pull all the water and sap out'n the ground as fur as you kin reach, and any man that's tryin' to grow on it alongside of you is goin' to drouth-out and die young ... I jest reckon ... that I'd rather die my own size, and in my own way and time."42.

But it must be noted that the writer of Westerns are not as consistently concerned with portraying - and studying - the strong individual as the Saga authors seem to be. This may in part be due to the fact that in most Westerns a man-woman relationship is structurally important. The theme of love - which is not insignificant in the Sagas but which more often than not leads to conflict and bloodshed between men rather than being explored for its own sake - is treated more thoroughly in Westerns. In a like manner, the theme of friendship between men seems to be more significant in Westerns. Although many friendships in the Sagas are memorable - Gunnarr and Njáll, Skarphéðin Ólafsson and Kári, Kjartan and Bolli, Thorgeirr and Þormóðr, Gísli and Vésteinn - they are not as significant (as structural elements of the total story) as the friendship between Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, between the 'counsellor' Alexander and the cattle-baron Jonathan Trask, between Jack Crabb and the Indian chieftain Old Lodge Skins, or between the gunman Blaisdell and the enigmatic gambler Morgan.

To put it another way, although the two genres focus on the interaction between the individual and the community, there are some differences in the treatment of this theme. Because the Sagas often tell the total
biography of an individual, or the fortunes of a family over a number of generations, personal relationships, even if they are as intense as the friendship between Gunnarr and Njáll, assume an episodic quality within the whole Saga, whereas in the Westerns, because of a much more limited timespan, we are presented as a rule with only a small, albeit significant segment of the life of an individual; but in exchange, this period is viewed more intensely, leading inevitably to a closer scrutiny of a character's personal relationships. The Western authors' major theme, the interaction between the community and the individual, is thus complimented at an intermediate level by the depiction of relationships between the individual and his more immediate social context - his friends, his partners, and, last but not least, the woman he loves.
f) **Thematic Clusters**

From the preceding examination of the most commonly found themes it emerges that a narrow range of recurring ideas, concerns and attitudes characterises Sagas and Westerns. These themes determine much of the idea content of a particular story. They make up, so to speak, a matrix onto which a work is fitted. The stress put here on the existence of a thematic core, needless to say, should not be interpreted as arguing that an author could not give a common Saga theme an unusual twist, or that he cannot introduce into a Western a concern or attitude that is expressive of his personal preoccupations. Nevertheless, it is significant that a small number of major themes help shape individual Sagas and Westerns, and contribute to the effect that a Western is identifiable as a Western, and a Saga as a Saga.

As far as the Sagas are concerned, had such suggestions been made some years ago, they would almost certainly have been rejected. For a long time it was held that Sagas were pure chronicles, taken from 'life' with no other aim than being objective and impartial accounts. W.P. Ker had insisted that Sagas are not ethical or sentimental (that is dealing with ideas) treatises. In a similar vein T.M. Andersson had argued that the Sagas are free of the allegorical or metaphysical penchant. Andersson, in *The Icelandic Family Saga* (1967), maintained that there is no guiding principle laid down by a Saga author to give his material specific import: 'He draws no general conclusions and invites his reader to draw none. In this
sense the saga is not interpretable'. Clearly, such a view of the Sagas simply precluded the high degree of selectiveness - that is, the distortion of 'life' - implied by the existence of a thematic core.

In recent years, however, partly as a result of the investigation of narrative techniques used in Sagas, partly owing to the growing acceptance of Sagas as works of the thirteenth century, it has become increasingly clear that Sagas are, as for example argued and demonstrated by Lars Lönnroth in 'Rhetorical Persuasion in the Sagas' (1970), homiletic, rhetorical and even moralistic. Individual Sagas are now being read more and more as literary works, rather than as documents valuable because of their historicity. The underlying concerns, the didactic and indoctrinating, the ideological and the idealising, as well as the 'zeitkritische' elements have been uncovered and stressed.

In what amounts to a major revision of his earlier opinion - that Sagas are extremely 'objective' narratives - T.M. Andersson recently (1970) defined as a key to the thematic structure of Sagas the concept of sophrosyne:

In short, I can find no better key to the spirit of these sagas than the concept of sophrosyne. Most other sagas, it seems to me, conform to the same ideal.

Such a view of the Sagas of the Icelanders is compatible with the argument presented here. The concept of sophrosyne, which broadly speaking connotes moderation, must, however, be seen in juxtaposition with its antonym, the more familiar concept of hybris, which is translated by excess. But there is more to it. Viewing these two concepts as the extreme poles of an underlying dimension makes it possible to bring a simple order to the various Saga themes uncovered at
irregular intervals in previous chapters and sections. Methodologically, such a position is a reversal of the one espoused in this study so far: Instead of sifting through large amounts of data to find a few underlying factors, we now make use of a factor to explain a large amount of data. In particular, this view holds that the dimension stretching between hybris and sophrosyne acts as something like a carrierwave onto which the other themes are superimposed:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{hybris} & \quad - \quad \text{sophrosyne} \\
\text{freedom} & \quad - \quad \text{restraints} \\
\text{Iceland} & \quad - \quad \text{Norway} \\
\text{older ways} & \quad - \quad \text{newer ways} \\
\text{Heathendom} & \quad - \quad \text{Christianity} \\
\text{woman} & \quad - \quad \text{man} \\
\text{the strong-willed individual} & \quad \text{the larger social group} \\
\text{personal law} & \quad \text{orderly law} \\
\text{violence} & \quad \text{social accommodation} \\
\text{chaos} & \quad \text{order} \\
\text{evil} & \quad \text{good}
\end{align*}
\]

This schematic representation of the thematic core, however, needs some further commentary. The various antinomies have been arranged in such a manner that the tops and the bottoms of the table in turn form yet other antinomies. This is to account for the ambivalence residing in a term such as hybris: On the one hand, there is admiration for
the strongwilled individual; on the other, fear and distrust. By the same token, sophrosyne may mean social accommodation, but it also implies the acceptance of restraints. Further, it is obvious that such a division into isolated extremes oversimplifies. In an individual Saga, we find themes, as it were, drawn from this central cluster or thematic core. At the same time only some aspect of these thematic possibilities is stressed. The narrator wove them into a complex of themes that makes up the intellectual content of a Saga—which, while it is made up of familiar themes, also gives each Saga its distinct 'complexion'.

One such complex has already been traced in Víga-Glúms Saga. Víga-Glúmr, the warrior type, represents the older ways; Einarr Eyjólfsisson, clever and patient, the newer ways. Strongwilled Víga-Glúmr finds himself increasingly at odds with the larger social group made up by the fellow settlers in the Eyjafjördur region. For twenty years Glúmr was able to impose his personal law on those who dared to oppose him, but finally he felt the strength of more orderly law. In his dreams he becomes aware of the chaos that he brings to the herad, the district, but in the end he dies as a convert in white clothes and is buried in a Christian graveyard. Even the antinomy between Iceland and Norway is present: for example Glúmr shows his timid Norwegian hosts how Icelanders deal with an intruder such as Björn Ironskull.

Looking at what must be the touchstone for such general arguments, Njáls Saga, the task has been considerably simplified through the work undertaken by scholars such as Ian Maxwell. He has in fact isolated a complex which overlaps with the one presented here. He notes a
conflict between good and evil; he mentions the coming of Christianity which changes old ways of thinking and behaving; and he points out that over large sections of the Saga 'the forces of friendship and kindness, justice legal and humane, good sense, moderation and social conscience oppose the envy, animosity, vanity and self-interest of human kind'.

By way of further illustration, a similar complex of themes may be pinpointed in the often underrated Hávarðar Saga Ísfirðings. There is, on the one hand, the chieftain Thorbjörn. Identified with violence, evil and injustice, he not only asserts his individuality too vehemently, but also tyrannises people around him (the 'community') by, for example, taking their women and sending them back when they are of no further use to him. Some of his unlikeable qualities are brought out in the scene - quoted in Chapter I above - where he and Hávarðr clash over the carcass of a whale. On the other hand, the eponymous hero of the Saga, Hávarðr, is not simply a reverse image of Thorbjörn. Gestr Oddleifsson, a chieftain also met in other Sagas, qualifies much more: he is the representative of social order, of social accommodation, of justice. In brief, Gestr is the responsible chieftain, Thorbjörn the self-seeking tyrant. Thorbjörn's self-seeking is also in sharp contrast to the unselfish conduct of Óláfr, Hávarðr's son, who, for instance, returns sheep that have been lost to their owners and who fights the nefarious revenant Thormóðr to keep the forces of anarchy at bay.

Hávarðr himself, however, illustrates the dialectic between old and new ways. The first thing we hear about him is that he once was a youthful viking, a vigorous
warrior. But when the Saga opens he is an elderly man, living in semi-retirement and engaged in running a small farm. Yet when his son Óláfr is accused of stealing sheep, Hávarðr is portrayed as the old warrior who is concerned with his family's good name, with honour:

It happened one evening that father and son sat at the table. Before them on their plates lay the thigh-bone of a ram. Óláfr took it up and said: "This is a very big bone, and a thick one". Hávarðr said: "But I expect, kinsman, that it is off our sheep and not off Thorbjörn's, and it is difficult to put up with such meanness". Óláfr put down the bone onto the table and flushed, and those who were sitting close by thought that he thrust it against the table. The bone broke apart and so quickly that one piece lodged itself in the wall. Hávarðr looked up and did not speak, but he smiled.

For a while the Saga focuses on the inevitable conflict between Óláfr and Thorbjörn, which comes to a bloody end when Óláfr is ignobly attacked and killed by Thorbjörn. At first, Hávarðr repeatedly attempts to obtain justice through the legal system, but is unsuccessful: Thorbjörn is a powerful chieftain, Hávarðr is, after all, only a poor and old man. His grief for Óláfr makes him take to bed for long periods of time. But finally, after having been stirred into action by his wife's remonstrations - here we have the figure of the Icelandic woman as the representative and guardian of archaic traditions such as the blood feud - he becomes his old self. Once he has taken up arms against Thorbjörn he seems to recapture some of his youthful elan.

The distinction between tyranny and responsible leadership, between self-seeking and altruism, between old and new ways, such as between seeking blood revenge at any price and exploring as far as possible a legal settlement,
provides the extreme poles of the Sagas' thematic structure.

The theme of old and new ways is further mirrored in the scenes involving Thordis's sister Thordis\(^{11}\). She eggs her son to join the fight against Olafr. But she undergoes a change of heart when she discovers that her son has been killed, and she regrets having called him a 'woman'. Her change of heart stands in marked contrast to her earlier action which was still steeped in the archaic tradition of the hvot, the ritualistic incitement of a man by a woman. But most importantly, on at least one other occasion the figure of Hvardr serves to illustrate the dialectic between old and new ways. When Hvardr finally confronts Thordjorn, he is in danger of losing his life: as Hvardr swims to a little island to which his enemy has escaped he realises that he has acted rashly and is at Thordjorn's mercy. Things then develop quickly:

(Thordjorn) picks up a big stone and intends to drive it into his (Hvardr's) head. And when Hvardr sees him, he remembers that he has heard it said when he was abroad that there another faith (the Christian faith) was taught - which was different from the faith held in the North; and now, if anyone could tell him that this faith was better and more beautiful, he would believe in it - if he defeated Thordjorn. After that he swam as quickly as possible to the island. When Thordjorn intended to throw the stone, his feet stumbled and he slipped on the gravel so that he fell on his back and the stone fell down on his chest and he lost consciousness. Meanwhile Hvardr reached the island and he straightaway drove the sword Gunnlogi through Thordjorn\(^{12}\).

Thus Hvardr experiences that, although he has regained his old vigour, he is not strong enough to overcome his enemy. He needs more than his old elan and courage; he needs the help of the God of the new faith: The 'nýi sidr' proves to be stronger than the 'forni sidr'.

\(^{11}\) Thordis

\(^{12}\) Thordjorn
Before leaving this Saga, a note of warning must be sounded. Such an analysis of the major themes of Hávarðar Saga Ísfirðings is not to be regarded as being more than a start towards an interpretation. In fact, a fuller analysis of this Saga must take into account the three-fold occurrence of something explicitly thought to be unlikely: Hávarðr avenges his son; two young boys kill Thorbjörn's brother; Atli, a wretched fellow, turns out to be kindhearted and a capable leader of men. This is a pattern that is at once independent of the thematic core as well as connected with it: the coming of Christianity may be another instance and perhaps the major example of something which seemed unlikely finally taking place. Nevertheless, such an analysis shows how useful the concept of a thematic core may be for the general understanding of Sagas, how it may function as a key to the deeper meanings of a Saga.

Many of the problems posed by the Sagas' 'objectivity' have no counterpart among Westerns. Westerns have never enjoyed a reputation for being historically accurate, for being taken from 'life'; their didactic streak is obvious; the 'zeitkritische', the ideological and the idealising elements have always been closer to the surface. Indeed, this constitutes one of the major differences between the two genres: Sagas at least appear to be less didactic and homiletic than Westerns. However, once the Saga's surface of 'objective realism' is penetrated, the significance of this difference wanes and the similarities assert themselves again strongly.

In his penetrating analysis of Westerns in 'Horizons West', Jim Kitses provides a sketch of the thematic
core underlying the genre. He writes: 'central to the Western form we have a philosophical dialectic, an ambiguous cluster of meanings and attitudes that provide the traditional thematic structure of the genre'\textsuperscript{14}. Kitses bases his sketch on an underlying dialectic between 'The Wilderness' and 'Civilization', a theme that does not receive explicit treatment in the Sagas. This is not surprising since this antithesis in such strong form goes back to Rousseau\textsuperscript{15}. Even so, it is striking how compatible Kitses' schema is with the thematic core described for Sagas; although Kitses central dichotomy Wilderness-Civilization at first sight appears to differ substantially from the Sagas' hybris-sophrosyne dimension, both antinomies deal with the same basic ideas: social values on the one hand, a-social ones on the other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE WILDERNESS</th>
<th>CIVILIZATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Individual</td>
<td>The Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freedom</td>
<td>restriction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>honour</td>
<td>institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-knowledge</td>
<td>illusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>integrity</td>
<td>compromise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-interest</td>
<td>social responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solipsism</td>
<td>democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purity</td>
<td>corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experience</td>
<td>knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empiricism</td>
<td>legalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pragmatism</td>
<td>idealism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brutalization</td>
<td>refinement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>savagery</td>
<td>humanity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The West</td>
<td>The East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the frontier</td>
<td>America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equality</td>
<td>class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agrarianism</td>
<td>industrialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tradition</td>
<td>change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the past</td>
<td>the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kitses explains that, in reading this grid, we should not only look at the various antinomies he uses; that is, we should not read only horizontally. We should also read vertically. If we compare the tops and tails of each sub-section, an ambivalence is seen at work. This ambivalence is indicative of the mercurial nature of Westerns: freedom quickly changes into solipsism; restrictions are essential for democracy; Nature may be equated with purity as well as with savagery; Culture connotes not only idealism and humanity but also corruption and legalism.

Although Kitses' grid proves useful as it stands, it is more expedient for the purposes of this study to draw on the preceding analysis of themes and thematic meanings, and to substitute, where necessary, other terms. (The fact that Kitses' grid has to be adapted and notions such as industrialism deleted should be a reminder that the context within which the Westerns arose is more modern and more complex than the society that gave rise to the Sagas.) The adapted grid looks as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Individual</th>
<th>The Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>freedom</td>
<td>restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>integrity</td>
<td>compromise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-interest</td>
<td>democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orderly law</td>
<td>personal law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>violence</td>
<td>social accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the West</td>
<td>the East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tradition (older ways)</td>
<td>change (newer ways)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td>woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the past</td>
<td>the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such a thematic core is detectable in all Westerns of the sample. It was traced in *Bitter Grass*: Jonathan and
Alexander between them reflect many of these juxtapositions. Jonathan is the empire building man who, in ruthlessly pursuing his self-interest, scoffs at the suggestion of compromise. Alexander, half cowboy and half lawyer, both instinctively and by his profession prefers social accommodation to violence; in vain he attempts to persuade Jonathan to accept the due process of law rather than go ahead with his cruel lynchings. Although Alexander fails to save this hard man from destroying himself, he wins victory in another sphere: he abandons his own cowboy activities to settle down with the woman he loves. And together they will build a future for their family. They will live in a community that is a better place now that Jonathan Trask and his likes are no longer required to fight widespread lawlessness and organised outlawry in a primitive manner.

But once more, it may be appropriate to illustrate the dynamics of the thematic core in more detail. Let us analyse The Virginian, the oldest and most famous among the Westerns of the sample. And yet again, it should be remembered that such an analysis is no more than a demonstration of the usefulness of the thematic core concept; it does not pretend to be more than a starting point for an interpretation.

Wister's novel is essentially the story of the gradually intensifying conflict between two cowboys, the Virginian and Trampas, and of the love developing between the Virginian and the schoolteacher Miss Wood.

The thematic complex at the heart of the novel is already circumscribed by such a statement. The conflict between the two men is a variation of the conflict between
good and evil. 'He knew that Trampas was an evil in the country, and that the Virginian was a good', we are told explicitly: the thoughts are those of a bishop who, apart from being a friend of the Virginian, is in a position to observe the rivalry between the two men. However, he analyses the conflict more deeply. He regards Trampas as being in league with the forces of chaos and corruption, especially the corruption of the legal system; the Virginian, on the other hand, he views as a representative of decency, order and justice. The clash between the two cowboys, moreover, troubles his conscience: as a man of religion he cannot entirely approve of violence, no matter what its antecedents or justification. Similar misgivings about violence are voiced by the Virginian's nominal boss, the patriarchal Judge Henry, and by the heroine, Miss Wood. All three are opposed to using violence to solve complex problems. But they come to see that it is impossible to hold in check 'the whole instinct of human man'. The bishop, finally, even calls on God to bless the Virginian. Trampas' death restores the reign of law and order, represents the triumph of good, and enables the community to return to its previous state, where weapons did not have to arbitrate in a conflict between men and where violence was minimal: sophrosyne prevails once more.

The love story brings into contrast two civilisations. The Virginian, youthful, free, and naturally aristocratic, is the heroic male of the male West; Miss Wood is the educated and proud woman from the sophisticated but somewhat effeminate, decadent and class-conscious East. Her arrival in the little frontier community of Bear Paw Creek, her success in educating the
children of the pioneers and in 'civilizing' the Virginian heralds the coming of a new way of life; soon the wilderness of Wyoming will give way to towns and communities, in which life follows the patterns of the Eastern cities: Wyoming will become a more civilised, but also a less free place. Finally, the ensuing marriage - the Virginian makes his prediction, 'you're goin' to love me before we get through' 18, come true with the aid of his natural charm - is more than a synthesis of the civilisation of the East and the West, it is also a synthesis of the Old South, the Virginian being named after his old homestate, and the Puritan North, Miss Wood being a descendant of the New England Puritans.

The allusion to and the inclusion of all major historic regions of the United States is typical. The West is not only contiguous to the North and the East (that is, mainly the New England states), and the South, it is also the zone in which the different traditions readily intermingle: being the youngest part of the nation it both bore the imprint of the other areas and defined itself as the opposite - the East is old, the West is new; the South is socially stratified, the West is open and democratic; the North is Puritan, the West is 'wild', and so on.

Thus The Virginian and ultimately the Westerns as a genre, encompass the whole country. This feature has been noted by commentators as diverse as J.K. Folsom, L.A. Fiedler and J. Kitses 19. Concerning the complex of themes he analysed as lying at the heart of Westerns, Kitses writes: 'What we are dealing with here, of course, is no less than a national world-view' 20.

For their part, the Sagas too embody a national
world-view: after reading the Sagas we are able to look at the world in the way a thirteenth century Icelander did. W.P. Ker already drew attention to how in the Sagas the life of an age is 'interpreted and represented by the men of that age with (...) clearness and understanding'. More recently and more explicitly Thomas Bredsdorff, to mention but one Saga researcher who holds such a view, maintained that at least the longer Sagas are an interpretation of the historical situation of thirteenth century Iceland; that is, they incorporate the world-view - he calls it livsbillede - elaborated by the Icelanders of broadly speaking the Sturlung Age.

Sagas and Westerns, of course, are not unique in this respect, other forms of literature also embody such a national world-view. For example, writing on heroic poetry, C.M. Bowra stresses that it is 'a well of information on what people think and feel, and even when it reports history incorrectly, it is none-the-less informative because it shows up facts which affect living men and women and made them find their own interpretations and form their own myths'.

Or more to the point, the world-view elaborated in American science fiction may be just as American as that of the Westerns: the same ideology seems to permeate both kinds of literature. Nevertheless, the detailed correspondences between Sagas and Westerns - between their thematic cores, and the world-views that underlie these - are striking and cannot but suggest an especially close link between the two genres.

To conclude: the two thematic cores, and the two implicated world-views, are of course not identical.
The thematic core of Westerns is more complex and ambiguous as well as more explicit and dichotomous. Even so, it is remarkable how similar these thematic complexes are: Saga after Saga, and Western after Western appears to be concerned with the problematical nature of law, order and justice; with the relationship between strongwilled individuals and the larger social group; and, with the clash between old and new ways of life. The longing for a more refined, rational and humane civilisation emerges, as well as a later generation's nostalgia for the freedom and passion of the old days. Adding these similarities to the fact that it is possible to find, in both forms, similar character types, similar motifs, and similar sources of friction and conflict - it seems that what one is dealing with are stories which might as well be called Icelandic Westerns or American Sagas.

Such an impression, however, would be an oversimplification, and in part is possibly due to the latent bias in this study so far: parallels have been stressed at the expense of differences. To correct this, it will be necessary to turn to the differences. The best way to expose these is to look more closely at precisely how Sagas and Westerns are told. But before investigating the narrative techniques of the Saga authors and the writers of Westerns, it remains to round off the inquiry into parallels - that is, resemblances, correspondences and similarities - by examining still more agreements between the two forms, agreements that run deeper than most of those uncovered so far.
REFERENCES AND NOTES
CHAPTER III

Section (a)

2. W.N. Burns, for example, in The Saga of Billy the Kid (1926), writes that innumerable stories in which Billy figures as a semi-mythical hero are examples of oral legend kept alive in memory and passed on by the story-tellers of one generation to the story-tellers of the next in Homeric succession. They are folklore in the making. This outlaw, Burns maintained, was destined to evolve into the hero of the 'Southwestern Nibelungenlied'.

Section (b)
1. For more thorough information see E. Ól. Sveinsson, The Age of the Sturlungs; H. Kuhn, Das alte Island, chapter IV; and N. Njardvík, Island i forntiden.

2. More detailed information is found in D. Lavender, The American West, especially pp.351-454. For pictorial evidence and further information see Pictorial History of the Wild West, by J.D. Horan and P. Sann. However, any history book describing the United States after the Civil War will provide similar accounts.


4. ch.27.

5. e.g. Njáls Saga, ch.41.

6. e.g. McQuown in Warlock; Hunter Boyd in The Hell-Bent Kid; Will Storm in Stampede. Other indications of the strengths of family bonds are the attachment between father and daughter in True Grit; in The McMasters, Benjie's loyalty to old Mr McMaster; he identifies with the McMasters. Many Westerns are concerned with brothers: Warlock, The Hell-Bent Kid, The Tall Men, Bitter Grass, Stampede. Yet it must be noted that, compared to the Saga clans, Western families are more 'nuclear'; that is, they do not include as many distant relatives as Saga clans.
7. p.118f.
8. ch.29: 'en gerum þar á grein nókkura, er þú ræðir um hefndirnar, þui at nú vita menn gerr en fyrr ... ok sömir þat betr kristnum mönnum.'
11. Barquero, p.120.
15. See the analysis of The Virginian below on p.109f.

Section (c)

1. pp.6-9, 13.
2. On branches of heroic literature, see Bowra, op.cit., pp.15, 469, 474. On Sagas as heroic literature see Ker, op.cit., p.199 and 209, and G. Vigfusson, Sturlunga Saga, p.xxi. For the Westerns see for example Owen Wister, who writes that the civilisation of the cowman was heroic (op.cit., p.5f).
3. For a useful exposition of the content and conventions of heroic literature see Bowra's 'Heroic Poetry' and Chadwick's 'Heroic Age'.
5. J.K. Folsom, Western Novel, p.100-103 discusses the horse and the conventions surrounding it in Westerns.
8. ch.75 (Njáls Saga, p.166).
10. Grettis Saga, ch.14: mjöð óðæll í uppvexti sínum, fátaladhr ok ópyðr, bellin bæði í orðum ok tiltekðum.
11. ch.40: "þá veit þat, er reynt er".
15. In Le Western, p.8.
16. ibid.
17. See Víga-Glúms Saga, chs. 6 and 19; or Grettis Saga chs. 18, 21, 28, 31, 33 - this Saga is especially full of references to risk taking, testing, trying out. See also Njáls Saga, chs. 9, 21, 31, 33, 58, 61.
18. The Tall Men, p.16.

Section (d)
1. p.11. The translation is mine.
2. In an unpublished paper circulated to participants of a workshop on Old Norse held in Canberra during 1975.
3. ch.40-43. Text used from Laxæla Saga, p.150.
4. ch.10.
5. ch.20.
6. ch.10.
7. p.112.
8. p.131.
9. p.32 and 51.
10. ch.2.
11. chs.57-62.
12. e.g. ch.37 and 50.
13. See the back cover of the Pan edition.
14. McCabe, p.34f.
15. See also p.10f below.
16. op.cit., p.56.
17. R.F. Allen, Fire and Iron, p.10f. But see also I. Maxwell, op.cit., p.44.
18. B. Phillpotts, op.cit., p.17.
20. p.86f. Yet it must be pointed out that Pörtner later on modifies this statement (p.98f).
21. ch.9. "En þat vilda ek ... at þú letir af hernadî. þott þú þykkist vel með því fara, þa verðr þó oft guðs retti raskat".
22. op.cit., p.16f.
24. ch.40: 'Bera kvad Egil vera vikings_efn.'
25. op.cit., p.xlviii.
Section (e)

1. ch.49.
2. ch.14.
3. ch.8.
4. Njáls Saga, ch.54.
5. M. Magnusson, Laxdœla Saga, p.32.
6. The Displacement, p.590f.
8. op.cit., p.140f.
9. p.301.
10. p.45.
11. p.588.
12. ch.16.
13. ch.22.
14. Barquero, p.117. In this excerpt it is largely the gestures that remind one of the Bible. Other Westerns employ direct quotations from the Bible ('Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord'). Explicit allusions to religion, to Puritanism in particular, are found in most Westerns. It might be possible to equate the spirit of Christianity in the Sagas with the spirit permeating Westerns; however, I refrain from doing so because I feel that this aspect deserves separate attention in another study.
15. Family Saga, p.23.
16. The Displacement, p.593.
17. ch.97.
18. ch.70.
19. ch.105.
20. T. Bredsdorff, op.cit., p.94.
21. ch.6.
22. ch.2 (Hrafnkel's Saga, p.36f).
23. See below on page 103.
24. chs.8,24.
25. ch.106.
26. The phrase is M. Magnusson's, see Laxdaæla Saga, p.32. But see also B. Phillpotts, op.cit., p.244.

27. p.53f.


29. p.97.

30. p.303.

31. For example pp.17, 29-33, 56f.

32. p.39.

33. p.44.

34. B. Phillpotts, op.cit., p.172.

35. chs.139-144.

36. ch.32.

37. ch.11.

38. Apart from men such as Njáll, Áskell godi and Óláfr pái, there are Kódrán in Ljósvetninga Saga (ch.16) and Arnorr from Reykjahlíð (Reykdæla Saga, ch.19).

39. ch.41.

40. The Displacement, p.593.

41. p.86.

42. p.152.

Section (f)

1. op.cit., p.206. See also p.204.

2. Family Saga, p.32.

3. ibid, p.32.


5. See for instance N. Njardvík's Laxdœla Saga - en tidskritik?

6. The Displacement, p.588.

7. op.cit., p.44.

8. ch.7.

9. ch.2.
11. ch. 4.
12. ch. 11.
13. See p. 77 above.
14. op. cit., p. 11.
15. Rousseau, inter alia, is associated with the concept of the Noble Savage, the 'natural' man, who is supposed to be superior to 'civilised' man.
17. p. 297.
18. p. 87.
19. J.K. Folsom, op. cit., p. 96; L.A. Fiedler, op. cit., bases much of his discussion of the Western genre on such an observation.
20. op. cit., p. 12.
21. op. cit., p. 182.
22. op. cit., p. 143-146.
23. op. cit., p. 535.
IV

SOCIO-HISTORIC DETERMINANTS

Throughout the last chapter there have been several important collective ideas such as communism and various national world-views; these are all socially based. More specifically, literature does not exist in a vacuum but is made by people for people, it is imperative to look at and compare the societies that gave birth and shape to these literary forms.

Comparing any two societies is a major task. Consider comparing the medieval Icelandic concept with that of the Inca or the Aztec.

With thee Time voyages in trust, the antecedent nations sink or swim with thee,

With all their ancient struggles, martyrs, heroes, epics, wars, thou bearest all the other continents.

Walt Whitman
The socio-historic background

Throughout the last chapter there have been references to collectively held ideas such as conventions, myths and national world-views: these are all socially based. Since literature does not exist in a vacuum but is made by people for people, it is imperative to look at and compare the societies that gave birth and shape to these literary forms.

Comparing any two societies is a major task; comparing the mediaeval Icelandic Commonwealth with the United States of America in detail is obviously outside the scope of this study. All that can be attempted here is a sketch of the major socio-historic features which are characteristic of the historical experiences of the old Icelanders and the Americans, and which throw light onto the Sagas on the one hand and the Westerns on the other.

A fundamental similarity, patently obvious but easily overlooked, is that both societies are extensions of European civilisation. Iceland is the oldest European overseas colony, the United States the most important. It is significant that the founding of these societies was not carried out at the behest of a central government - as was for instance the case in Australia. The settlement of Iceland and the U.S.A. took place unsystematically, although there are reports of whole communities moving at the same
time. Unnr, the widow of a Norwegian aristocrat, reportedly led her clan to settle a whole district in Iceland; in the U.S.A. the collective settlement of the Mormons in Utah is well known. On the whole, both societies initially appear to have been conglomerate ones, with many different regions contributing settlers. The U.S.A. received immigrants from all over the world, although the bulk came from North Western Europe. Icelanders are descended mainly from Norwegians, but contingents from Denmark and Sweden, as well as the numerous Irish thralls, probably accounted for a considerable portion of the original population.

The magnitude of these movements at first seems to be quite different. Overall, the settlement of the U.S.A. involved millions of immigrants who colonised a continent in 300 years. The pioneers coming to Iceland scarcely would have numbered more than 60 - 100,000, and they took possession of a relatively small island within 60 years. Yet if their landnám is viewed within its mediaeval context, and if it is considered how much activity, how much skill and daring went into transporting these people and their household belongings and domestic animals across the treacherous North Atlantic in small wooden boats, then it must be appreciated that this undertaking too was gigantic. The settlement of Iceland and the U.S.A. both were veritable Völkerwanderungen, or mass migrations.

The causes behind these movements were varied. Beside a thirst for adventure and riches, or a lust for personal power and gain, many undoubtedly were driven by restlessness. Or they were perhaps trying to escape domestic responsibilities. Over-population, poverty and land shortage
must also have contributed. But significantly, in both countries, it is frequently asserted that the primary motives for coming to the new land were a love of freedom, a strong sense of self and an unwillingness to tolerate injustice and tyranny. (Obviously, this could not apply to Irish thralls and Negro slaves.) In the case of Iceland, the most explicit cause behind the exodus to the new land reportedly was the attempt by King Harald Fairhair to centralise the political control of Norway and unite the country under him. Many local rulers - petty kings and earls - saw their power being whittled away and felt that their autonomy was threatened. Rather than serve a powerful lord, they went into exile and preferred to continue their self-rule and aristocratic way of life in a new land.

Those who attempted to resist were forced to flee, for it seemed that no-one could stand against King Harald: in Egils Saga we find the opinion that Harald was invincible because he was aided by his 'hamingja', his fortune or luck\(^1\) - a quality the old Scandinavians believed persons could possess almost like a personality trait, although kings were more likely to enjoy it than simple farmers.

Among the early emigrants to the U.S.A. many disliked the Stuart doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings\(^2\). More generally, a self-view of being a nation descended from people who fled the crushing burden of the European establishment, mainly the aristocracy and the Church, was - and is - not uncommon\(^3\).

A question that poses itself in this context is whether these new societies were new in spirit too. To attempt an answer is difficult. Emigrants ordinarily want new opportunities, not social innovation. They tend to be
conservative. They cling to their cultural inheritance and preserve it carefully (this is one of the reasons why the Icelanders of today still speak the language of the Sagas).

The Norwegian aristocrats' opposition to centralised rule in Norway was essentially conservative; if not reactionary. According to many historians, political progress in the Middle Ages meant the growth of central government, whether it be the rule of a king or the grip of the highly centralised Christian Church on the life of a people. The American's commitment to free enterprise and laissez-faire individualism has often been regarded as being at bottom based on conservative values. Further, according to the historian Lynn White, the central issue in American domestic politics today is whether, or to what extent what he calls America's 'mediaeval legacy' is still viable. Under the term 'mediaeval legacy' he includes America's attachment to the value of pluralism - as opposed to centralism. He regards the minute splintering of sovereignty, characteristic of the American political system, as a basically mediaeval method of running the affairs of a nation.

An answer to the question concerning the 'newness' of these societies thus must be ambivalent: they are neither wholly new nor old. On the one hand, it is clear that the settlers of Iceland and the United States went to a new land and created new nations. On the other, they brought with them conservative values - which tended to become even more conservative under the social conditions developing.

Thus both nations possess a paradoxical quality - politically and otherwise. Iceland is reported to have
been praised - somewhat with tongue in cheek - as a land where butter dripped from every blade of grass. Another description paints a picture of a good land, where animals feed out on the pastures during winter and where there is plenty of fish in every stream. But Iceland has also been described as a barren land, an eyðisker, as a land of snow and ice. The U.S.A. have been viewed both as the Garden of the World and as a wild and desolate country, as the New World and as the refuse heap of Europe.

Such conflicting values and contradictory images have had an impact on the political thought and literature of these nations: ambivalence is a feature of both Sagas and Westerns. Even so, it must be noted that this dialectic was - and is - of more importance to the Americans and thus is more strongly felt in Westerns.

In the new country the settlers faced the practical problems of taking up and naming the land, and of constituting a society. They had to define not only territorial boundaries but also boundaries of behaviour. In this they were greatly helped by a feature that is often ignored especially by those who project a romanticised image of nations descended from proud yeomen and sturdy pioneers. Although they were a heterogeneous group, they did not really have to start all over again. Certain characteristics of the sub-groups within the immigrant population asserted themselves quickly. In both countries a three-level social structure evolved:

Level (1), the upper level, consisted of leading men and their families. Included were, in Iceland, the dominant aristocrats. Their descendants became the priest-chieftains, the godar, who looked after both the spiritual
and the more worldly affairs. In the U.S.A. this level included the well-to-do business men, the affluent farmers, lawyers, judges and the clergy; in brief, the prominent men of whatever occupation. These old and new aristocrats formed the local elite and the community leaders.

Level (2), the middle level, included the men of average means. In this sector resided the sturdy pioneer, the small scale farmer or pastoralist.

Level (3), the lower level, included the poor - honest or not -, the servants, and in Iceland the thralls; in short those who worked for others.

Initially these social levels do not appear to have been rigid. For a long time both societies seem to have remained upwardly mobile societies. The accumulation of property by private individuals or by larger units such as clans was central, and a poor man with a strong will could rise to power and influence. For the U.S.A. the success story of the 'self-made man', of the poor boy who became a millionaire through hard work, is frequently attested. An Icelander could rise in social esteem and power either by gaining 'fee and fame' abroad or by working hard within the country and increasing the numbers of his livestock. E. Ól. Sveinsson remarked on this point that (if the Sagas are to be at all believed) Iceland must have been an 'open' society:

The Sagas of Icelanders are above all stories of valiant men, of heroes, of men of great deeds, and many of their protagonists have no other possessions than their virtue of hand and mind, their human excellence and prowess.

Marrying well or winning court actions were also possible avenues to better social standing - in both Iceland and the
On the other hand, this openness meant that a leading person - or the clan to which he belonged - could lose social prestige and move down the social scale. In brief, these three social levels are not to be equated with a rigid class structure - they are porous social strata, and to this extent both societies were marked by a crude form of egalitarianism. This egalitarianism, however, was probably not so much the result of a genuine love for democracy as of the rough-and-ready circumstances and the uncertainty of the early pioneering days. Be that as it may, in both societies elites eventually asserted themselves and firmly controlled the political and economic life.

The early phase of settlement - the Americans call it Frontier, the Icelanders Landnam - was characterised by sparse population. Distances between places of settlement were appreciable, communications were difficult. Amusements were rare, but when indulged in they frequently led to trouble. A relative self-sufficiency emerged, small units or communities could produce and hand-make most of the things that were required for daily life. Production and consumption was both local and immediate.

Adaptability to the new environment, pragmatism, self-reliance, aggressiveness and courage were of greatest survival value. So was self-help in legal matters, for the influence of a protective central authority was minimal. The power of courts of law was weak; at times this encouraged a tendency to act violently and to dispense summary and rough justice. Often the men of a district collectively hunted suspected evil-doers.
In the U.S.A. the tradition of vigilantism appears to have entrenched itself right from the start, whereas in Iceland the law of the blood feud seems to have been more important.

In sparsely settled areas, politics inevitably become a personal affair and conflict tends to take on an elemental directness. Since weapons were worn by most Icelandic and American men, bloodshed could easily take place. Human life, as in other young societies, was not valued very highly, especially if it was just an 'average' human life. It appears that under such conditions the extended family, the clan was invaluable. In Iceland the significance of family ties seems to have been greater than in the U.S.A. The importance of the clan in the old Icelandic society is one of the reasons why the Íslendingasögur often were and are called 'Family Sagas'. However, even on the American frontier large families or clans were not unknown.

Yet in both societies bonds of friendship, or loyalty to a foster-brother or a partner, were important as well. Hospitality, too, would emerge as significant. Turning someone away in a land where population is scarce could mean great distress and create enemies. If allies were sought, generosity would help to secure them. Guests were welcome for the news and stimulation they lent to the daily routine. Further, a man's reputation, his 'name' or the verbal report about him, had a heightened value. For us today this is perhaps exaggerated and slightly theatrical. But to a pioneer, his reputation was of utmost importance, since in a materially relatively poor, if not primitive society he may have had no other explicit proofs or emblems...
of his social standing. Yet even the community as a whole benefited: a man with a good reputation could be trusted by everyone, a man with a poor or unknown reputation would have to be guarded against.

To the extent that a man took his reputation as actually representing him and his worth it became his personal honour; a prized possession. If a man felt that somebody infringed on his honour he would react to restore it, even if its restoration meant killing a person. His sense of honour and justice was highly egocentric. However, if a man tempered his sense of personal worth with an awareness of the rights of those around him, he became what the Icelanders called a 'mikillmaðr', literally a big man; that is, someone who is esteemed for his high-mindedness, his 'drengskapr'. The Americans tended to praise such a person by calling him simply 'a real man'.

The stress on the 'ideal' man, however, should not be construed as sexist. By all accounts, Icelandic women, at least during the early Middle Ages, were in a strong position vis-à-vis men; but even in the U.S.A. women have apparently always been in a stronger position than women in, say, Southern Europe. Yet in areas that mattered, in positions of social power, women in both countries had little say: they could not officially become chieftains or community leaders, nor could they become lawyers or arbitrators. And what is of significance in this context, nor did they normally wear weapons and actively partake in battles. There may have been exceptions, but they would only confirm the norm.

In these rudimentary societies the word, in the sense of the word which one has given (especially in the presence of witnesses), was of increased significance. The word was the basis of social cohesion and the brick
of social institutions. Written documents were rare or even worthless. Social interactions in these societies took place in a face-to-face manner and were viewed not so much in terms of status or position as man-to-man interactions. This early phase of settlement displays many traits of what sociologists call a 'Gemeinschaft'.

The simplicities of the pioneers' social life determined much of the character of both nations. Mediaeval Iceland retained much of the rawness of a pioneer atmosphere right up to the middle of the thirteenth century. It remained essentially a subsistence economy based on scattered settlements. But the Old Commonwealth also saw the rise of certain general institutions - courts of law, a national parliament, the acceptance of Christianity and a gradual organisation of the Church, as well as the imposition of various taxes. In the U.S.A., pioneer conditions did not at any one time prevail in the whole country. But at least part of the nation, in a gradually moving zone, experienced them. They lasted from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the official close of the frontier in the 1890's; each region of the U.S.A. at some time was a frontier area.

In common with all emigrant societies, Iceland and the U.S.A. share ambivalent relationships with the mother regions. Although the emigrants had turned their backs they were not able to overcome a certain fixation on their homelands. With reference to Iceland, homeland means Norway; however, in the case of the U.S.A., homeland can mean a number of places. It may refer to England, or more generally to Europe; but within Westerns the home region, broadly speaking, refers to the more easterly
regions of the country. Politically and culturally, both Iceland and the frontier or West of the U.S.A. eventually were overwhelmed by the mother regions. Yet in turn they influenced their homelands as well. Icelanders became the official historians of mediaeval Norway\textsuperscript{10}. And today any book on Norwegian literature and culture will refer to Icelandic material for evidence concerning old Norwegian cultural and literary achievements\textsuperscript{11}. Or we read that the pioneer period, the frontier, is the most important single factor of the American experience, and that it means 'all that America ever meant. It means the old hope of real personal liberty, and yet a real human advance in character and achievement. To a genuine American it is the dearest word in all the world'\textsuperscript{12}.

Only one more point needs to be made before this sketch of the general socio-historic background to the Sagas and to Westerns may be rounded off and, in turn, serve as the basis for further investigation: From a literary standpoint the most important parallel is that this general background is reflected in literature. Ultimately it was instrumental in giving rise to comparable types of narratives.
b) The concept of Transition Ages

Taking a step back from the line of investigation pursued so far in this study, it would seem that the similarities between Sagas and Westerns are above all rooted in the pioneer society milieu that they reflect. But this is only half the picture. Other societies have experienced pioneer conditions - the British in Australia and Canada, the Portuguese and Spanish in South America and the Dutch in South Africa. Yet none of these societies has produced literature comparable either to Sagas or Westerns. A bushranger story, with its daring hold-ups of coaches and confrontations between outlaws and the police, or a story about the intrepid Voortrekkers fighting their way through hostile Zulu territory differs markedly from, say, Vígþ-Glúms Saga or The Virginian. A more satisfying answer must be found. To do this, a change of perspective is required. It is not enough just to look at more or less superficial or static features of the old Icelandic Commonwealth and the U.S.A.; they must be seen as growing, evolving and changing societies.

All societies are located between their yesterday and their tomorrow, and in a sense every society is perpetually at the interface between the past and the future. But only from time to time are there instants when a people experiences radical and rapid change, when it goes through a Transition Age.
This concept of a Transition Age will make it possible to look beyond the partial answer arrived at previously. First, however, a definition is called for. It is a general term and refers to a process rather than a content. A Transition Age is an epoch of major changes, when radical transformations take place, be they the change from tribal to feudal society, from heathen to Christian ways, from an agricultural to an industrial society, or from an industrial to a post-industrial society. For an indefinite period of time, a society going through such a major transition presents the picture of a disunited and heterogeneous culture.

A particularly succinct and clear picture of such a culture in transition is drawn by the American political scientist Harvey Wheeler in his book 'Democracy in a Revolutionary Era'. To begin with, Wheeler identifies an underlying philosophical dialectic, a thematic core as it were, that characterises a Transition Age:

The old form of economic endeavour is at war with the new form. The old form of religion is at war with the new form. The old form of politics is at war with the new form. The old form of education is at war with the new form. The old form of family organization is at war with the new form, and so on throughout the social order. With all of these built-in situations of diametric conflict, the result is a culture in which every one of the fundamental institutions is capable of being detonated at any moment and of sending explosions throughout society like a pack of firecrackers ignited by a spark.

Wheeler thinks this unstable situation is made even more explosive because people:

are only dimly aware of the fundamental transition taking place in their midst. They are even less aware that they actually live in two cultures at once. Finally, there is an underlying conflict
produced by the discord between the stability required of any ongoing social order and the instability that always accompanies profound cultural transformations.

And further still, Wheeler's sketch enables us to see why certain concerns - such as law and order - move to the fore during a period of rapid transformation:

No social order can work unless men can go about their daily affairs with some assurance that the arrangements, contracts, and institutions on whose basis they plan for the future will remain predictably stable so that day-to-day plans can be expected to bear fruit in the future.

This is one of the primary functions provided by law. Men think and plan their way into the future on the basis of the laws, traditions, and institutional forms they have always known. The maintenance of law and order supports men in the assumption that the future will look pretty much like the present. If this were not believed to be true no form of social organization could exist. Cultures depend upon the ability of men to control their future in this fashion. But what control is possible in a time of widespread transformation?

Finally, Wheeler indicates how a conservative reflex, to fall back on old strategies of behaviour, may be inadequate to handle new problems, especially in a Transition Age:

In such a time if men follow their hallowed traditions the result is not the stability they expect but rather the aggravation of instability. The very behaviour which in normal times produces peace and tranquillity turns back upon itself and in times of fundamental transition aggravates the causes of discord and stimulates the outbreak of violence.

With this new concept firm in mind it is possible to turn back to the main purpose of this study: to throw light on the deeper similarities between Sagas and Westerns.
But next, the description given above on page 61 of the Heroic Age must be completed: A Heroic Age is not merely a period of great energy - it is also a Transition Age. As Chadwick notes, it has usually been an age of significant transition. Eventually the individual talent and its achievements, praised by Ker, are hindered by prosaic, that is to say, more complex social and political conditions. New institutions and new forms of political control curb the energy of the old-style heroic individual; social power and the making of decisions become invested in abstract authority, whether it be a universal church, the crown, the state, or the rule of law - in what is, broadly speaking, a new civilisation. This is not to say that a pope or a king cannot wield power as an individual, but it is clear that a king, surrounded by etiquette, ceremony, and symbols of authority, is no longer the great man of the Heroic Age, who, as Ker saw it, surpasses his fellows only in the degree to which he possesses skill, knowledge and ambition. He has become the representative of an institution; he is an office holder.

In brief, the turbulent periods forming the factual basis of the World of the Western and the Saga World were not only heroic, but they were also Transition Ages. But there are further reasons for considering the periods referred to in the two genres as Transition Ages.

In the case of the U.S.A., there is that nation's general experience of transition - the Frontier. F.J. Turner defined it in his key-book 'The Frontier in American History' as a continually receding line, as an area of transformation, where savagery gradually yielded to civilisation. But it is equally clear that the post-Civil War period was a
particular Age of Transition. To choose one voice from among many, the historian John A. Garraty describes it as follows:

Few periods in the history of any nation saw such rapid and startling changes as those which occurred in the United States in the decades of the 1870's and 1880's. During these years, what we think of as modern American civilization was born. Industrialization was pushing society in new directions. The economy was revolutionized: manufacturing expanded at a fantastic rate and took on many fundamentally new characteristics, but agriculture changed almost as radically. And economic change was accompanied by drastic adjustments in how men lived and how they conceptualized their relationships to one another. Even the American political system, which seemed to contemporaries corrupt and so archaically inefficient as to be incapable of dealing effectively with current needs, was undergoing important alterations, the effects of which would only be clear in the next century ....

In the case of the Sagas evidence is less certain. Much depends on how far the Sagas' reports are taken at face value. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that during the period 930 to 1030 Iceland underwent significant changes. By the year 1030, the previously heathen pioneer society had evolved into Christian community which was marked by what has been called an aristo-democracy: Although a group of chieftains seems to have controlled most of the political affairs of the nation, and although a common farmer had to be affiliated with a godi, the godar had no formal power over individual farmers; these could - at least in theory - opt to be affiliated with any godi. Thus the power of a chieftain was contained; while his followers (þingmenn) depended on him, he also depended on their support.

If the application of the concept of a Transition Age were to stop here, little would have been gained. The
concept must be applied to later periods - to the times during which Sagas and Westerns were written. Thus the focus moves from the period around the year 1000 to the thirteenth century, and from the nineteenth century to the twentieth. Shifting the focus in this manner may seem arbitrary; but it is both legitimate and fit to examine the actual context in which the genres reached full flower.

Concerning the Sagas such a shift avoids a number of still smouldering issues such as the dispute over the origin of the Saga genre - that is, whether the Sagas are the faithful records of an oral tradition or whether they were mainly invented in the thirteenth century. Whatever school of thought one subscribes to, it seems reasonable to assume that much of the raw material, the stuff Sagas are made of, derives from the period before 1200; but it is equally reasonable to assume that the period during which the Sagas as we know them - and as far as we know - were written down was of great significance too. It would be naive to maintain that the final version of a Saga - usually the only existent one - was not influenced by its general social context, that is, thirteenth century Iceland.

Westerns had their forerunners in various forms of adventure fiction popular during the nineteenth century, especially the dime stories published by the house of Beadle and Adams. Stories about the Frontier naturally would appeal to people, especially to those in big cities, interested in what was happening in other parts of the land. Yet many authorities in the field, including J.K. Folsom, and J.B. Frantz and J.E. Choate see in *The Virginian*, which appeared in 1902, the first 'real' Western. Owen Wister made a literary figure out of the cowboy; he caught the type just before it vanished. His colonial romance, as
he called *The Virginian*, has sold well over 5 million copies and has been made into a number of films, including 'High Noon'. Thus Westerns, as they are defined here, are essentially a product of the twentieth century, and they too were - and are still being - influenced by their social context.

But before it is possible to show how the concept of a Transition Age throws new light on various key facts underlying the correspondences between the two genres, it remains to sketch the most characteristic events of the Icelandic thirteenth century and the American twentieth, and to show why they too may be classified as being Transition Ages.
c) Two further Transition Ages

Late in the twelfth century, the long period of stability and calm which had succeeded the Saga Age came to an end. Slowly at first, but more quickly with each passing decade, the aristo-democratic society of the Icelandic pioneering age, marked by a relative openness, came to an end. By the thirteenth century more and more wealth and power accumulated in the hands of fewer and fewer men. Not surprisingly, most of them were goðar. They grew rich largely because of the considerable benefits derived not so much from holding the office of goði, as from their successful introduction of taxes such as a sheep and a Church tax. The differences in wealth between the rich families and the rest of the nation were intensified by the general economic situation in which Iceland found itself: the fertility of the land was decreasing, the control of Norwegian merchants over exports and imports increasing. This meant that at a time when the overall national wealth was declining, a growing proportion of what remained was controlled by fewer and fewer people.

The wealth gained by the leading houses was used to buy up more goðards - this public office could be bought or sold or transferred at the discretion of private individuals - so that these too accumulated in fewer and fewer hands. With wealth and political power thus concentrated, the previous power balance - based on a diffusion of wealth and a splintering of authority - broke
down. This imbalance was aggravated by a gradually worsening conflict between the Icelandic aristocracy and both Norwegian and native bishops, who were influenced by the hierarchy and organisation of the 'universal' Church. In particular, these bishops held that the aristocrats' share of the Church tax was illegal; such a claim, however, threatened the power base of the aristocracy. The previous co-existence and co-operation that had benefited both the aristocrats and the men of the Church during the Age of Peace soon broke down. Indeed, the Church's claim endangered the very roots of Icelandic culture, based on precisely the interlocking of the older native and the newer ecclesiastic interests. Such clerical activism soon led to extended constitutional wrangles: whose law - the Church's or the chieftains' - was to be the corner-stone of the country and its institutions? Was the clergy subject to the law of the land or subject only to Church law; that is to an authority whose source lay outside the Icelandic community? Looking at this discord from another point of view, the chieftains' desire for more political influence was partly a counterpoise to the power wielded by the centrally organised Church. The Church acted both as a threat as well as a political and social model for the godar.

This unstable political and social imbroglio finally degenerated into chaos when the ideas and practices of feudalism gained currency in Iceland. They manifested themselves, for example, in the way the office of the godi became increasingly identified with outright ownership of land previously held by farmers. Even nominally free farmers were no longer able to choose the godi they wanted to be affiliated with. The wealth gathered by a few families
made it feasible for them to maintain private armies - which they did not hesitate to employ. A concern with individual glory and a feeling of being superior to the community dominated the actions of the rich families. But most importantly, the idea of kingship appealed to the leading men of the country. Power struggles broke out between the five or six leading families - as well as within their own ranks - and from the early thirteenth century onward there was widespread internecine strife and feuding. The whole country was plunged into a civil war. The law of the strong arm prevailed, the voice of moderation was not heeded.

Some of the main protagonists of this battle royal called on the Norwegian King, thinking that they could manipulate him for their own ends. The King was ready to help - but himself only. He saw Iceland as a domain of the Kingdom of Norway, as many other Norwegian rulers before him had done more or less openly, and he now took advantage of the chaotic situation. He interfered in Icelandic politics, threatened economic boycott and even an invasion if Iceland did not submit to him. The disunited Icelanders had no choice but to surrender. In the year 1264 they accepted the King's overlordship.

Despite popular resistance, such as that which flared up around the year 1300, the Norwegian crown and its reliable ally, the Church, continued to rule firmly, bringing to an end a world which E. Ól. Sveinsson describes as 'perhaps corrupt and full of suffering, but wonderful in many ways'\(^2\) - the civilisation of the Old Commonwealth of Iceland.

Thus the Iceland of the Sturlung Age, broadly
speaking the first half of the thirteenth century, fits the general paradigm of a Transition Age. On the other hand, it seems more difficult to apply this concept to the American twentieth century; yet it is evident that the U.S.A. have undergone significant changes since 1900. Many trends and developments that had made their impact first felt during the late-nineteenth century continued into the twentieth century. If anything, their impact has become even more strongly felt. What is more, the nineteenth century impulses towards industrialisation already have been superseded by a new set of forces which have pushed the U.S.A. headlong into the so-called post-industrial era. The means by which this leap into the future was made possible is the 'scientific revolution': the systematic application of scientific methods to all spheres of industrial and social activity.

The marvel of the industrial revolution was the mass-production factory. Cybernation - the application of computer technology and advanced mathematical techniques - now promises to invade the production lines in the factory and the clerical corridors of its offices, displacing blue- and white-collar workers right and left - this is how political scientists like Harvey Wheeler see the situation.

During the 1960's and 1970's in particular, many trends that were already present in nineteenth century America and that gathered momentum during the first half of the century seem to have come to a head. Ronald A. Wolk in the Report of the Task Force on Law and Law Enforcement to The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, entitled 'Law and Order Reconsidered', to quote but one informed opinion, gives a description of America
The Republic is plagued with problems that defy solution. Despite great national wealth, millions of Americans are poor. In a land dedicated to the idea of freedom and equality, many of our fellow citizens still struggle for basic human rights. Our cities are decaying and appear to be ungovernable. Our countryside is blighted and reveals a callous disregard for natural beauty and natural resources... violence and mounting crime at home mock our laws and erode our unity. Age-old conflicts flare with reviewed intensity - between order and justice, between the individual and the state, between private rights and public welfare, between the older and younger generations.⁴

Wolk then turns to the root of all this turmoil:

The context of modern life is change - bewildering, buffeting, incessant change. Problems multiply faster than solutions. Events transpire so swiftly and so inexorably that they seem to have a force and a direction unto themselves. Our institutions, like sluggish ships, creak and strain in these winds of change. And our people grow weary.⁵

What Wolk almost poetically calls 'winds of change' underlines the fact that the U.S.A. of the twentieth century has been, and still is, undergoing a significant period of transformation. That it shares such an experience with many other peoples - on the one hand with the newly emerging nations of Africa and Asia, on the other with technologically developed nations such as West Germany and Japan - does not take away anything from the significance of this experience for the United States.
REFERENCES AND NOTES

CHAPTER IV

Section (a)

1. ch. 3.
2. L. White, op. cit., p.191.
3. ibid, p.193.
4. e.g. W.P. Ker, op. cit., p.58. G. Vigfusson, in Sturlunga Saga, speaks of the great growing ideas of the age: Unity, Christendom and Feudalism (p.xxi).
5. op. cit., p.191.
7. Vatnsdæla Saga, ch.10.
8. ibid.
9. op. cit., p.52
10. They wrote most of the Kings Sagas.
11. T. Støverud, Milestones of Norwegian Literature, p.7: 'the men who put the literary heritage of this age on paper were for the most part Icelanders, but they had a keen feeling of family links with the old homeland and kept in close contact with Norway.'
12. E. Hough, The Passing of the Frontier, p.1. For a general critical discussion of the 'Frontier Hypothesis' (the formulation of which is ascribed to F. Turner) see R.E. Riegel, America moves West, especially chapter 40.

Section (b)

1. p.221f. See also pp.219-228 for general background.
2. Heroic Age, pp.433-463, but see especially p.442.
4. See for example E. Ól. Sveinsson, Sturlungs.
5. See for instance R.G. Thomas, The Sturlung Age as an Age of Saga Writing.
Section (c)

1. For more information on this 'Age of Peace' see E. Ól. Sveinsson, Sturlungs. The term appears to be his.

2. ibid., p.102.

3. op.cit., p.222.

4. p.234.

5. ibid.
HISTORY AND STORIES

En hvatki er missagt er í fræðum þessum, þá er skylt at hafa þat heldr, er sannara reynist.

Íslendingabók

Like a mirror facing the past, the literature of America affected a grand reopening of the frontier in the years following its official close. Since 1900 many novels have chronicled and recreated the early American drama ... with each succeeding decade, the number of such novels does not lessen but rather increases.

N.J. Karolides
a) Sagas and Westerns and their socio-historic background

Part I: theory.

Many minor and more weighty parallels isolated thus far are at once drawn together when it is asked, what is the connection between the two literary genres on the one hand and the various Transition Ages on the other.

To begin with the Sagas. They are largely a literature of retrospect. The Icelanders of the thirteenth century looked back to the early days of their republic as a period during which many of the problems and forces that were to finally destroy their independence already were present - at least in embryo. The Icelanders of the thirteenth century ascribed to the Saga Age not only their own strained relationship with Norway, principally with the Norwegian rulers; their difficulties in accepting Christianity, especially the kind of Christianity that flourished on the continent and that was propagated by the Norwegian kings; important constitutional wrangles; or the attempts they witnessed in which the mighty suppressed the small farmers; but also a tendency by those in a position of authority to feel themselves to be above the law and the community; as well as constant power-struggles between and within the big clans and the ruling cliques. A delicate balance of social power (which meant that if the chieftains did not voluntarily exercise self-restraint there were no ways of making them accept their responsibilities as social
leaders), repeated legal battles, armed clashes and feuding were seen as further hallmarks of that past epoch. But most notable is the tendency to ascribe to the early period a conflict between two ways of life: one based on an ancient scale of values concerned with honour, self-assertion and vengeance, and the other resting on a newer scale, probably strongly influenced by Christian teachings, and stressing humility, moderation and forgiveness.

Indeed, it seems that thirteenth century Icelanders came to see the period 930-1030 as archetypal, as representative of their total historical experience. When this vision fused with the ability to tell a story concisely and vividly - there is evidence in plenty that they were great raconteurs and a highly literate people - the Sagas of the Icelanders materialised.

The Sagas, while locating actions and events in the past, mirror, comment on, and interact with the more immediate society that spawned them - the Iceland of the thirteenth century. For example, the Sagas may be viewed as informative social and ethical lessons and illustrations as well as a conservative response to the foreign secular and churchly pressures that were working to tear apart the structure of Icelandic society: 'The sagas are a defense called forth to reaffirm the old values, perhaps not the old pagan values of the saga-age they tell of, but the ones the Icelanders had worked out in the two centuries after their conversion'. Equally strong impulses must have come from the amply documented Icelandic pride and interest in family traditions, and the probability that the Icelanders felt the need of new nations to create their own history and mythology, and to sink their psychological roots into the new land.
Similarly, the period 1860-1900 may be said to be archetypical or representative of the historical experience of the U.S.A. In popular imagination the period after the Civil War became the most graphic and perhaps most significant period of American history. It is not too far-fetched to argue that much of what we associate with the U.S.A. today was either already prominent or emerging during that period: hamburgers, coca cola and chewing gum, as well as mass production, big business and military might.

Although the changes taking place during the late nineteenth century affected the whole of the U.S.A., the changes and events taking place in the Far West were perhaps the most arresting, in view of the large number of people involved, the huge areas of land settled within a generation, and the astronomical amounts of money that were won or lost. Even before Wister wrote *The Virginian*, these spectacular events, such as the rise of the cattle industry, were soon embroidered, exaggerated, added to, and fed to masses of eager readers in all sections of the U.S.A., but mainly the big cities of the East, by means of the mass circulation of pulp paper magazines. Even so, it remains enigmatic why the cowboy, above all other frontier heroes such as David Crockett and Daniel Boone, caught the fancy of the American imagination; why this slave of a particularly stupid and unattractive animal could become the symbol of the West's - and eventually America's - vaunted freedom, and more than that, a symbol capable of expressing the many tensions underlying the American way of life.

Among the deeper causes for the rise of the Westerns must be that a young and exceptionally energetic
nation like America had to create a history and mythology of its own.

Moving to the socio-psychological level: it has been repeatedly suggested that after 1900 many Americans felt that, although it made them into a wealthy and powerful nation, industrialism and the progress achieved through it was unworthy of the past which it had destroyed for them. Progress became two-faced. In one sense it was an expression of the 'manifest' destiny of the American people, the realisation of the American 'Dream'; in another, it plunged them into a new age filled with conflict and uncertainties. In such a time they longed for simple conditions, and like the Icelanders, they let a bygone era embody their collective fantasies. The following sentiment voiced by a prominent American citizen furnishes a clear illustration:

As technology thrusts us relentlessly into the future, I find myself, perversely, more interested in the past. We seem to have lost something - something vital, something of individuality and passion. That may be why we tend to view the western outlaw, rightly or not, as a romantic figure. I know I'm guilty of it ...²

But, unlike the Icelanders, the era that the Americans turned to - the Wild West - was a recent epoch, not a distant past. Yet chronological time is not as significant in this instance as the fact that that recent epoch was considered to have been utterly different. The qualitative difference between what had been and the present (1902) was stressed by Owen Wister when he wrote The Virginian:

(The cow-puncher) and his brief epoch make a complete picture, for in themselves they were as complete as the pioneers of the land or the explorers of the sea. A transition has followed the horseman of the plains;
a shapeless state, a condition of men and manners unlovely as that bald moment in the year when winter is gone and spring not come, and the face of Nature is ugly. I shall not dwell upon it here. Those who have seen it know well what I mean.

Since 1902, as the Wild West became more and more removed in time, the importance of the time factor has increased. The greater the separation in time, the more 'romantic', that is, heroic and mythical, the Wild West has become.

In conclusion, such an escapist hypothesis may be supplemented by noting that the twentieth century American would find the story of the nineteenth century colonisation of the West of no particular interest were he not, as J.K. Folsom maintains, unsure of how his life ought to be led, and did he not have real commitments to contradictory points of view.
b) A sub-total; or a pattern emerges

A sub-total of the various lines of investigation pursued in this study so far may be presented. A pattern emerges:

- The Saga Age and the Wild West, the periods enshrined in the two general frameworks, are, as far as can be established, Transition Ages.

- The thirteenth century in Iceland, commonly known as the Sturlung Age, was an era of widespread violence: a handful of leading families fought between them for the rule over the island; a civil war raged. This period, clearly, is also a Transition Age - as is the twentieth century in the U.S.A. Since 1900 America has experienced an ever accelerating technological and cultural change that even today is threatening to overturn American institutions and values.

- Since the Saga Age and the Wild West came first and captured the imagination of people as Heroic Ages, other, later events (that is, the problems of the thirteenth and twentieth century respectively) were projected and assimilated into these already available frameworks. The earlier period became
symbolic of the Icelandic Commonwealth's total historical experience; the post-Civil War period of the American experience.

- The frameworks, and therefore the genres, each encompass a complex national world-view; but this world-view is in the main that of the later epoch, of the thirteenth and the twentieth century.

The similarities between the two genres do not end here. On the contrary, it is at this point that they become especially close. When we ask how these genres function in their respective 'host' societies, we come first upon the concept of epic function:

- The genres give symbolic expression to the fundamental unity of the societies from which they stem and to the goals at which each society aims. From this point of view, Westerns and Sagas are tales about symbolic culture heroes (some of whom are quite ambivalent figures) who are somewhat larger than life; yet they confront the typical problems of life in these societies and cope with them - often in ideal ways. But they also clearly show up the limits which a man, even if he is a chieftain-hero, may reach in such a society, but which he may not overstep.

Secondly, there are the notions touched on above from time to time:

- Both genres served - or serve - as a vehicle of social comment, as an instrument of self-analysis, as a means of constantly redefining and re-interpreting the Old Icelandic way of life and the American way respectively.
Finally, we are led to a perspective which sees these two forms as serving as a means of mediating between - that is, reconciling - conflicting sets of values or norms.

Although all of the components of the pattern have received attention throughout preceding chapters, it is not out of order to illustrate them, but in particular the last three points, more fully by looking at Víga-Glúms Saga and Bitter Grass, the two works examined at the outset. This renewed focussing, moreover, makes it possible to continue at the point where their close comparison was previously left in abeyance; the new perspective makes it possible to see further significant parallels and similarities between these two texts.
c) Sagas and Westerns and their socio-historic background

Part II: a practical demonstration

T.V. Olson's *Bitter Grass* is a Western with a message, to be more precise, with a number of messages. Some of these have been worked out previously; in this section it will be investigated in how far *Bitter Grass* is a document of the late 1960's; that is, how it relates to or is in tune with the social context in which it was written. As this examination calls for a scrutiny of what is often called the American way of life, it can only be exploratory; only the most relevant features can be covered.

Two steps are involved. Step one is to look at how *Bitter Grass* reflects the general American way of life; that is, trends, ideas, values and norms. Step two probes how *Bitter Grass* comments on this context and suggests how (possibly) conflicting values can be reconciled or mediated between.

Each of the fifty-one entities making up the federal republic known as the United States of America jealously guards its rights as a state within the Union; in particular, it guards its rights against the federal government in Washington, D.C. Yet this does not mean that the larger historic regions of the country, the East and the West, the North-East, and the South, have lost
their influence. A recent example is that a Southern candidate for the presidency in Washington thought it good strategy to select as a running mate a man from the north - midwest State of Minnesota in order to attract the votes of people in the non-southern states. In Bitter Grass the distinctions between the various historic regions, as well as the underlying unity of the U.S.A., are reflected when we hear Alexander explain to Jonathan Trask:

... 'Did you object to using Yankee facilities to fight for Texas? Then why object when I turn their means to the benefit of Texas (...) Your way can't help Texas any more, if it ever did. She is whipped and belly-down, and setting her up proud for good and all will take knowledge and industry, not bullets and bravado. I've always believed that; it's why I went North ...' (p.16)

Although the distinctions between North and South are presented as historical differences - the conversation is supposed to take place towards the end of the Civil War - they are still found today. The North is still the region with knowledge and industry; the South is largely an agricultural community dependent on the North.

The notion of the fundamental economic unity of the U.S.A. - whether in the 1860's or the 1960's - is expressed simply when we hear that Jonathan had accurately predicted that the future of Texas depended on three things: 'the vast increase in longhorn cattle and the demands of a hungry public in the East. The northern ranches had a crying need for beef stock too ...' (p.90) The economic interdependence is more strongly underlined when we read:

... most Texans had cause for jitters. There was a depression in the East; the newspapers reported long queues of unemployed being fed at the Tombs in New York City ... (p.92)
or when we are told that the Texan cattle were shipped to the East via the Western towns of Abilene and Ellsworth.

The growth of cities, which was given major impulses by the advent of industrialism in the nineteenth century, continued into and even accelerated during the course of the twentieth century. Today seventy to eighty percent of the American population reside in urban areas, and the mass media often laments the 'exodus' from the land. A vast number of adult Americans either grew up in the countryside or are only one generation removed from it (whether as immigrants or as 'native' Americans). Both the growth of urbanism and the 'agrarian roots' of the American nation are depicted in Bitter Grass.

In the foreground is the (fictional) Texan township of Katytown: it was founded by Jonathan's father, Gideon Trask, and other settlers in 1848 with a crossroads' store. It remained a small sleepy town until Yankee gold, earned through selling the district's Yegua longhorns, brought mild prosperity. People had money and wanted to spend it, and as a result Katytown grows. If not into metropolis, it grows into the district's social, economic, legal and political focal point. But the growth of towns is also seen in the rise to prominence of the Kansas cattletowns Abilene and Ellsworth. The notion is repeated when we hear about booming eastern cities and the growth of Chicago (p.91).

The agrarian roots of present day Americans are symbolised by the setting of Bitter Grass (if not the title itself): Texan cattle territory. Yet we also must take account of the presence of the Cady clan, the farmers from Missouri, the 'freesoilers'. But most relevant to mid-twentieth century Americans is Alexander's compromise:
he manages to be both a city man and a country person:

He and Jo-Anne divided their time between weekdays at their town house and weekends at her father's ranch, now kept up by two hired hands. It was touch-and-go a long while, but they managed to hold onto both ranch and town practice, and by the time Alex was getting more clients than he could handle, the pinch was off. (p.168)

During the 1960's, the U.S. economy was based as much as it ever was in the 1860's on the principles of free enterprise, on capitalism and big business. In Bitter Grass there is an almost paradigmatic demonstration of how an aggressively and efficiently run small economic unit, in harmony with the ideas of liberalism and laissez-faire capitalism, may grow into a big company - into an empire.

Upon his return from a Northern prison camp, Jonathan Trask transforms the family's rundown farm into a successful business enterprise. He possesses the will, drive, ingenuity and leadership qualities that are required; and he is not too proud to use the former enemies' gold ('Yankee gold shines the same as anyone's') to get him started. He is a man of action, he does not waste time:

We will burn the old GT on every God damned thing we see that moves and wears horns and a tail. When them Yankees quit crowing and start rubbing their bellies, we'll be ready. We'll start a range count tomorrow. (p.37)

A man of vision, possessed by a dream of empire, he turns what happened to be an underutilised local resource into a highly profitable commodity: the native longhorns roaming in the brush turn into steaks on hoofs.
He secures his assets, the wild cattle and the land, through brute force if need be - he hangs a number of competitors whom he considers to be criminals or thieves - but more usually he secures his assets through some ingenious business deals with his neighbours:

By now many neighbours had trickled back from the war, men tired and sick and discouraged, flung into deeper gloom by the conditions they found at home. Rounding up and driving the hundreds of wild cattle meant Herculean labors for a meager profit. Jonathan went from one to the next, putting an identical proposition to each: he would round up and drive to Galveston as many trail-broken cattle as they wished sold, dicker the best price available, and turn the entire proceeds over to them. For this service, Jonathan made a novel charge: an acre of land per cow or steer sold on a rancher's behalf. (p. 45)

We read that many scoffed at the suggestion, but also that a surprising number of disheartened men, caught up by the lure of a new rumoured gold strike in California, accepted the offer. While those men gave up, Jonathan was prepared to invest in future growth, to opt for the tight profit-margin.

Like many modern American businessmen, he introduces profitable innovations unhesitatingly. His new-fangled branding traps, the first in the region, enable him to brand cattle with three times the speed and ease of the old rope and throw methods. (p. 71) More explicitly we hear:

His reputation widened as a champion of progressive methods; but the innovations he prompted meant more gold in the Trask pocket. (p. 91)

But what stamps him into a dyed-in-the-wool capitalist who would have fitted perfectly well into the 1960's is his zest for taking calculated risks, his better than
average ability to read the market, and above all his eagerness to invest his profits to generate even more profit; his ambition dictates that no amount of success was ever success enough. (p.104)

Last but not least, what makes Jonathan into an exponent of free enterprise is the manner in which he is able to weather disasters and temporary set-backs:

Jonathan, always ready for a calculated risk, three two large herds on the trail. He was hoping that if enough cattlemen stayed home, the tight, limited market that did exist would offer a bonanza to the drovers who arrived first. He could command his own price. (p.92)

It was a shrewd gamble, but it fell through thanks to a cholera epidemic and a depressed eastern market; Jonathan writes if off as 'the kind of bad break a man never takes account of' and he promptly sets his sights on the year to come.

Although Jonathan's profit per head of cattle is usually quite small, he has hit upon the idea on which much of modern American industrial strength and wealth is based; by means of mass turn-over, the sale of large herds, he is able to make large overall profits. The mass consumption of Texan meat in eastern seaboard cities, thousands of miles away, is paralleled today by the mass consumption of cars made in Detroit, of films made in Hollywood, in all parts of the United States.

Jonathan, the self-made man, who pulls himself up by his bootstraps, shows how far an individual can rise in a society subscribing to the 'capitalist ethic', an ethic which sanctions and gives dignity to work, to the quest for material success and the accumulation of wealth,
while, at the same time it condemns idleness, waste, and indifference to material goals. This capitalist ethic was as typical of the U.S.A. of the 1960's as it used to be of the U.S.A. in the 1860's.

Up to a point, Jonathan is an exponent of extreme laissez-faire individualism: in his Texas there are few or no government controls on his economic activity - he is free to do as he pleases. His economic prosperity results from his personal efforts, but not only does money flow into his own pockets, but those working for him are handsomely rewarded for their contributions. Although there were still traces of extreme laissez-faire rhetoric to be found in the 1960's, it is clear that by this time a large segment of the American people saw the untrammelled freedom of the individual as a form of social anarchy, leading to the oppression of the weak by the strong and exploitation of the poor by the rich.

In the figure of Jonathan Trask this latter opinion finds expression. He is the untrammelled individual who makes his own law, as described in the scene where Jonathan first meets his future right-hand man, a Mexican with the name of Chino Lucero:

"You are push' pretty damn hard, maybe," Chino Lucero said through his gapped teeth, sleepily smiling. "She is no crime, the branding of plent' loose stuff, eh? My brand is in the county book."

Jonathan lifted his fist and pointed his thumb at Lucero, shaking it gently. "I just made her a crime, Pancho. Cut that calf loose and haze him along. He's the last for you." (p.43)

While such an action may still accord with the notion of laissez-faire, to let competitors settle issues between
them, Jonathan's unjustified aggression against the Cady clan, a group of struggling farmers, drives home the danger inherent in a situation where an individual grows too strong. This causes fear and resentment.

However, a growing public interest in Jonathan's actions, whipped up by mass-circulation newspapers and by the unprecedented politico-legal manoeuvres carried out to bring him to sentence in a climate of near hysterical public opinion (p.160f), underline the widespread American concern with that other main component of liberalism: the rule of impartial law. Jonathan demonstrates that in American society no person is - at least officially - above the law; and that every one accused should be given a fair trial. Alexander's effort to see to it that justice ('a square deal') - but no more - should be done, is a course of action with which most mid-century Americans would have agreed.

In the eyes of the law all men are equal; but not so in daily life. Even today there are disadvantaged social groups, whether they be the poor white from the Appalachians, Negroes, or Spanish speaking Americans. In Bitter Grass the poor white are represented by the Bittercold Creek bunch, Missouri rawhiders who eke out a bare living from their land; the most prominent among them are the Cadys. Negroes are treated by Jonathan both patronizingly - he treats them well enough physically, and for a while they are proud to be called 'Trask's Niggers' - and with open contempt:

..."God damn burheads" had been stingless. Remarks like "Christ, next you niggers will get the notion if you take on white airs a spell, the color will rub off," were something else. (p.132).
There is a barely suppressed friction between Jonathan and the Mexican Chino:

"... I have tell you a few Mexis have live' off your good Anglo beef time to time, but they poor peons, all." He nodded at the tracks. "Boots, not guaraché track. This was work of vaqueros, like me, like you. No grease-balls, I'm think. Only Anglo balls. Haah."

"Watch your talk about white men," Jonathan growled as he tramped to his horse and stepped into the saddle. (p.47)

Another kind of friction found in the book - that between the hardliner Jonathan and between the pacifist Alexander - seems to breathe the spirit of the anti-Vietnam War movement of the late 1960's and early 70's. When Alexander says, 'I'm against all war is why, but that doesn't change a man's feeling for his home ...'(p.16), when he maintains that knowledge and industry are more significant than bullets and bravado, he is using arguments which were relevant to the late 1960's. By the same token, Trask's hard-line approach could have been used by anyone who saw the struggle against the Vietcong as an either-or, that is a no-compromise situation:

"Because it's that way, him or me. Got to be." Jonathan picked a burning twig out of the fire. "There ain't no bleeding heart's going to understand. No God damn pacifist like you. With you, everything's in the head. You ain't going to savvy how two men can look at each other and hate clear through, so hard it don't leave their guts till one is dead ..." (p.75)

On 4 April 1968, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. One of the last speeches he had given, and which was replayed all over the U.S.A. and even around the world, contained an invocation
of his 'dream', the dream of an America where people, irrespective of colour or creed, would be free, equal, and live together in harmony and prosper. Such reference to an American 'Dream', although often reduced to a cliche', is found in Westerns. In *Bitter Grass* Alexander's dream of settling down to a law practice, of running for a place in the State Senate, and of ensuring that progress and the future do not bypass Katytown, is a positive version of the American Dream. It is not unlike Dr King's: the dream of the decent little man. But Jonathan's dream of empire (p. 38) is the American Dream dreamed to its most subjective extreme; and by being extreme it negates the essentially democratic ideal animating the dream. It is consistent with the logic of the dream of empire - since dominion connotes struggles and violence - that Jonathan should fail and die on a whisky-fouled saloon floor. It is also consistent, however, that Alexander should see his version of the dream come true in most aspects: in a bourgeois society it is the dream most likely to do so.

An important aspect of the American Dream is that it regards the present as transitory, as moving towards a better society - better usually refers to improved material living conditions, although it may also connote ideals such as prosperity for all. America has undergone significant changes throughout its history, but as shown above, during the 1960's she was again - or still is - undergoing rapid change. A feeling of change, of transition, is reflected in *Bitter Grass*.

On the whole, the book breathes a sense of transition, of change. There is the change brought about
by the Civil War - it destroyed the old Texan or Southern way of life. There is the emergence of a new way of life, in which Texans are, to a certain extent in spite of themselves, integrated into the United States of America as a whole. Change is also heralded by the growth and development of Katytown, and by the appearance of farmers in what used to be mainly cattlemen's territory. In *Bitter Grass*, however, these aspects of change receive minor attention; transition is more clearly illustrated by the relationship between the two main characters of the book.

Transition is apparent when the forceful, dominant and strongwilled Jonathan comes to depend on the physically less impressive but morally strong lawyer Alexander. Transition is also felt when we see Alexander - Jonathan's fosterbrother - gradually emerge as a true independent McKenna, after having been under the spell of the Trask family and empire, and all that it meant. This change is illustrated by three quotations. On page 41 Jonathan says to Alexander, after hearing about plans for a law practice, 'Law practice, hell. You're a cowman, same as any other Trask.' Here Alexander is completely under the influence of Jonathan; his plan languishes and fades into the background as 'the old free life of the cowhunter claims him once more' (p.44). However, gradually the situation changes. Alexander becomes Jonathan's legal adviser, and more than that, his 'conscience' (p.75) - albeit one that Jonathan does not often listen to. The differences between the two men come to a head when Alexander learns that his sense of duty has been abused by Jonathan: he had been ruthlessly manipulated, and is told that he had
been tricked into talking Jonathan out of a hangrope:
Now this physically weak Alexander McKenna dares to
hit Jonathan with a full arm smash on the jaw - Jonathan,
the man feared by all the people in the region (p.165).

But the clearest illustration of the concept of transition is furnished by the analysis that is put into Alexander's mouth. He describes Jonathan as a man who, by exterminating organised outlawry, had fought a war for the whole region, 'and because he did, it's a decent place for men to live and raise their families.' (p.128). Jonathan is regarded as a transition figure, as a man whose efforts were invaluable 'a few years back', but whose habits now are at odds with the society he helped to forge. In the court case following the lynching of three members of the Cady clan, Alexander repeats this analysis, but he also elaborates it further. Jonathan was not only useful 'then': 'he is a product of our times - as much yours and mine and his. When we repudiate his ways, we repudiate our own.' (p.163)

Like any skilled lawyer, Alexander, while stating the facts, tries to present his client in a favourable light. But this analysis of Jonathan's career and deeds not only both affirms and repudiates the man and his actions, at the same time it is an example of how mediation takes place: Contradictory facts or images are reconciled - at least temporarily.
Bitter Grass is not only in tune with the U.S.A. of the late 1960's, it is also a justification of the American way of life. The story of Jonathan Trask serves both as an ideal and a warning. On the one hand, it is asserted that an American should be strong and forceful, but on the other it is warned that there is a price that has to be paid for being big and successful. The story suggests that war is evil, but that it may be necessary; that free enterprise is effective, but that people must be guarded against its potential excesses. The story is about Texas, yet also involves the whole of the U.S.A.; it talks about the growth of cities, yet presents mainly a picture of Americans and their agricultural roots; it asserts that the individual is free, yet shows how potent the forces of public opinion and the mass media can be.

On the whole, Bitter Grass mirrors a range of values held in tension. Its main mode of mediating between them is to simply affirm most of them - thus the American way is seen as being both good and bad, as being both desirable and in need of modification; individualism at one and the same time is admirable and suspect; law and order are seen as desirable, yet it is recognised that their rigid enforcement can lead to lawlessness and chaos; and finally, the United States are presented as one nation, yet the different geographic regions, such as the South, have retained distinctive characteristics.

Turning to Víga-Glúms Saga, an analysis is both simpler and more difficult: Simpler in that of late more and more researchers have shown how much the
Sagas of the Icelanders are in tune with the thirteenth century; more difficult because of the apparent lack of 'ulterior' meanings below the surface of objectivity and realism which Víga-Glúms Saga shares with the other Sagas of Icelanders. That Víga-Glúms Saga contains some direct echoes of the thirteenth century has been shown, for example, by Peter Foote. He holds that it is hard to avoid making a connection between this Saga and the region of Eyjafjörður in the years when Sighvatr Sturluson - one of the famous Sturlung family - lived at Grund as the chief man in the valley (1217-38): Sighvatr's life and Glúmr's career have much in common. Further, Foote suggests, a local event from 1222 seems to have been taken up and used in the Saga - the so-called Hlóðu-Kálfr episode (chapters 13-14). But the question remains: in how far does Víga-Glúms Saga document the mood of the thirteenth century?

As with Bitter Grass, only an exploratory analysis is possible; but once again, general trends are clear. Ingjaldr Helgason, Víga-Glúmr's paternal grandfather, we are told, dislikes merchants - it is implied that they are Norwegian - because 'he did not want to put up with their arrogance' (vildi(hann)ekki yfir sér hafa þeira ofsa, Ch.1). His words may be construed as referring to the pressure - economic, ecclesiastic, political - that Norway was exerting on thirteenth century Iceland. Although in this Saga the Norwegian kings are not portrayed as actively interferring in Icelandic affairs, the influence of the kingdom of Norway is felt. Glúmr's mother comes from a noble Norwegian family, and Glúmr himself has to make the
obligatory trip 'in' to Norway in order to show to his relatives that 'out' in Iceland there are valiant and promising people, worthy of being accepted by a Norwegian clan. His visit proves so successful that, when his maternal grandfather Vigfús dies, the family's protective spirit, a giant woman (fylgja), comes to take up residence with him in Iceland: 'mundi kona sjá hans hamingja vera, er fjöllum hæra gekk ... ok hans hamingja mun leita sér þangat staðfestu, sem ek em.' (Ch.9). The fact that the spirit is portrayed as actually wanting to come to Iceland fits in with the general manner with which the Icelandic relations behave in Norway: Eyjólfur and Víga-Glúmr, father and son, alike impress the Norwegians with their quick wit and physical courage. For example, when taunted as being either a man or an animal (maðr eda kvikendi), Eyjólfur answers simply, 'Ek em íslenskr maðr ok heiti ek Eyjólfur, ok ætla ek héðr at vera í vetr' (Ch.3) - I am an Icelander and my name is Eyjólfur and I intend staying here over Winter. Glúmr, in his turn, remarks wryly about a berserker: 'út á Íslandi mundi sá maðr kallaðr fól, er þann veg léti sem þú lætr (Ch.6) - 'Out in Iceland a man behaving like you do would be called a fool.' The idealising tendency is strong here: it is easy to see thirteenth century Icelanders assuring themselves that they are 'as good, if not better' than the Norwegians. Idealisation may in part be a natural literary tendency, but it is here also a rejection, a reaction against Norwegian ascendancy in Icelandic affairs.

The next echo strongly recalling the thirteenth century is the social status of the Saga's eponymous hero.
On both sides he is related to the chieftain class. His paternal grandfather is a 'forn goðórðs-madr ok höfðingi mikill' (Ch.1), his maternal grandfather a hersir (a local ruler) who ruled 'fyrir á Vors' (Ch.3). However, even on his own account he is a formidable chieftain. Again there may be other, literary, reasons why Víga-Glúmr should be portrayed as belonging to an aristocratic family; but seen against the background of the Sturlung Age - when a handful of the leading families formed an oligarchy that fought for the rule of the land - his family connection becomes significant, especially if put together with his 'Hausmachtpolitik', which parallels Jonathan's empire building.

He resembles thirteenth century chieftains in the way he asserts and expands his influence over the district of Eyjafjörðr: through marriage alliances if convenient, cajolery if practicable, prompt action if called for, and legal trickery if left with no alternative. But most of all he resembles the feudal warlords of the thirteenth century when he recalls, in a scaldic verse, that he 'cleared himself land together with his men' (Ch.26). Although he goes on to compare himself to the 'earls of the old days' (jarlar forðum), the similarity with the 'earls of the new days' is striking.

Like the 'earls of the new days' Glúmr is frequently involved in feuds and power struggles; he justly earns the epithet 'killer', or 'battler' (Vígi). The thirteenth century was a time of stress - a civil war raged. There was feuding between ambitious clans and individual chieftains, and the loyalties of the community were divided: this is exactly the picture that emerges
from Víga-Glúms Saga; the Saga's scenario is in tune with the Sturlung Age.

During a period of extended violence the institution of law becomes the major means of restoring order, by substituting legal battles and procedures of redress for direct conflict. But at the same time it may intensify instability - legal courts may be abused to gain tactical advantages over competitors, false oaths may be sworn and a person's word loses its binding strength. Once this state has been reached, the moral fibre of the community becomes frayed. Cleverness is turned to cunning, loyalties become uncertain, and the ideals of law and justice part company. Again, such a picture fits both the actions of thirteenth century men, as portrayed in the Sturlunga Saga, and the actions of Glúmr and his son Vigfúss, as well as of men like Thorvaldr or Haga, who humiliates Víga-Glúmr's relatives (see p. 34 above) in a clash over a whale carcass.

The confusion and strain that mark the thirteenth century way of life, the conflict between Christian precepts and culture on the one hand, and a thirst for power and the expression of natural impulses on the other, reverberates in Víga-Glúms Saga. The Saga often refers to problems, and on many occasions characters betray their perplexity or state that they are in a quandary: 'Vandi er þá á báðar hendr. þú ert vinr mín, en hann er broðir mín, ok ann ek honum mikit' (Ch. 2) - 'It is a difficult position either way. You are my friend, but he is my brother, and I love him very much'; 'En oss er vandi á mjök mikill við Glúm fyrir [fræندsemis] sökum, en við yðr um mægðir' (Ch. 8.) - 'We are in great difficulties
because we are blood relatives of Glúmr and your in-laws';
'... ok er nú á vandi nökkur, svívirðing ef kyrrt er,
en allósýn virðing, ef við er leitat at rétta'(Ch.11) -
'this causes difficulties: we shall be disgraced if we
do not act, but it is unlikely that it will bring us
honour if we press for our rights'.

Confusion is reinforced by ambivalence in the
Saga's structure. Nominally Víga-Glúmr is the hero of
the Saga, yet from about half-way onward the ascendancy
of Einarr Eyjólfsson interferes with the focus of the
narrative: Einarr replaces Glúmr as the most important
man in the district, and his patience and wisdom outshine
Glúmr's self-willed and headstrong actions.

The Saga describes a situation that is in flux:
there is a sense of transition. The old is making way for
the new, the heroic warrior-like spirit yields to a more
pragmatic temper. But most significantly, older religions
are losing ground to newer conceptions. Víga-Glúmr
himself is a transition figure: the atavistic warrior,
who calls on the warrior god Óðinn, meets with a loss
against the god Freyr, the object of a newer, agricultural
cult. Freyr's cult in turn is driven out by the Christian
faith. Ultimately Glúmr dies 'í hvíta-váðum', as a neophyte,
and receives a Christian burial - in the church his son
Már had built. For many years this was the only church
in the district. Once again the erratic pulse of the
Sturlung Age is felt, the ambivalence and confusion of
a Transition Age, of a period when old and new values clash.

Just like Bitter Grass, however, Víga-Glúms Saga
does not merely 'reflect' its social context - it functions
also as a means of mediation. It reconciles conflicting forces - at least symbolically - and suggests a solution. This must have helped its audience to see the desperate events taking place round about with some detachment, for it is implied that bloody days are not merely the fate of the thirteenth century but are part of the Icelandic heritage, part and parcel of the Icelandic way of life, perhaps of life itself. Yet in the end, somehow, order is restored and calmer conditions prevail.

Mediation also takes place at the level of national self-conception. In Víga-Glúms Saga thirteenth century Icelanders found 'proof' that, really, they were an exceptional nation and were every bit as good as the Norwegians - at a time when Norwegian influence was growing steadily. Yet all of these forms of mediation - whether escapist or delusionary - are subsumed under the clever political mediation at work.

The half dozen or so chieftains who in the thirteenth century determined the affairs of Iceland between them cannot have been very popular personages. Their selfish quarrels implicated many innocent people and brought hardship to whole districts. This is echoed in our Saga by Glúmr's dream before the major battle at Hrístateigi. In a near apocalyptic vision he sees two women who pour blood all over the district (sá ek konur tvær. þær höfðu þrogu í milli sín, ok námu þær staðar á Hrístateigi ok jósu blóði um heraðit allt, (Ch.21).

The Saga author deplores such a state of affairs, but instead of analysing the situation and seeing that large-scale bloodshed was made possible by the accumulation of power in the hands of a few men, he offers a threadbare and
deeply conservative solution. Instead of advocating, for example, the whole-sale abolishment of chieftainships he resolves the difficulties by a change of occupancy. The 'bad' chieftain is replaced by a 'good' chieftain.

Political mediation here takes the form of criticism which serves ultimately to confirm the status quo; the excesses of the ruling class are attacked but not the ruling class itself. This is not to suggest that the author ought to have vociferated against the oligarchy, but it shows how Sagas could function as an instrument of political indoctrination - a function that is never far removed from mediation.

In both works, thus, events and trends occurring at the time of writing are obliquely referred to or reflected. But more than that, both Víga-GLúms Saga and Bitter Grass mediate between the conflicting values they dramatise. They serve to make palatable contradictions inherent in their societies' status quo; they offer tenuous solutions that amount to glossing over deep cracks; and they express an essentially conservative point of view.
REFERENCES AND NOTES

CHAPTER V

3. p.6.
4. op.cit., p.136.
5. Talking Points, p.18.
VI

TWO NARRATIVE METHODS

Grey-beard skald at boar's-head feast when the foaming goblets of mead went round the board in the gaunt hall of vikings never sang to his wild hord saga more thrilling than the story of Billy the Kid...

W.N. Burns,
The Saga of Billy the Kid
After having argued at length that there are many reasons indeed for considering Sagas and Westerns to be literary siblings, it remains to be shown that the terms 'Saga' and 'Western' are not interchangeable. Westerns are not American Sagas, Sagas are not Icelandic Westerns. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the way the stories are told. However, a glance at the literature on Sagas reveals that information about their style, narrative conventions and integration is abundant, whereas Westerns have attracted little scholarly interest. It is therefore appropriate to abandon for the time being the double harness employed so far, and to treat the narrative method of the Sagas first and separately. Once the Saga method has been described in some depth, it may serve as a foil and reference point for the subsequent discussion of the narrative method used by the writers of Westerns.
(A) Saga Method

(a) Narrative Perspective

An upshot of recent discussions about the techniques used by Saga authors has been the realisation that whether they are chroniclers of true history and traditions or not, they strike us as being reliable narrators. They persuade us to accept them as reliable by:

(a) fitting their stories into a recognisable chronological, social and geographical framework
(b) claiming that only pertinent details are included
(c) admitting that variant opinions were held about an event
(d) referring to reliable persons as authorities on the events described
(e) making use of skaldic verse either reputed to have been composed by Saga heroes themselves or about their deeds by other skalds of the same period
(f) pointing to archeological evidence
(g) frequently relating onomastic episodes explaining why or how a place or an object obtained its name

1. The often noted overall unity of the method of Saga composition greatly facilitates the enterprise in hand. Without overlooking the significant variations between individual Sagas, for present purposes, the overall similarities need to be recognised and stressed.

2. See R. F. Allen, op. cit., p. 100ff. But even earlier on this point was raised, e.g. F. Ranke, Kleinere Schriften, p. 173, writes that Saga authors strive for an impression of "Unbedingter Glaubwürdigkeit" and he speaks about the "dem wirklichen Leben nachgezeichnete Handlung". The illusion of reliability is so strong that many scholars were, and are, led to accept the Sagas as historical sources.

3. "I do not mention those minor matters which happened between Björn and Thódr before Björn came to Skúla, because they do not belong to this Saga", Bjarnar Saga Hfðaðalakappa, ch. 1.


5. e.g. Laxdæla Saga, chs. 4 and 78.

6. This is an involved question. It is treated at some depth by O. Widding, in Norrøna Fortællekunst, p. 83ff.

7. e.g. Grettir's spear which is reported to have been found many years later, or Egill's skull which amazed people by its size, solidity and appearance. Other Sagas simply mention "ruins are still there" or "signs of this may still be seen".

8. e.g. Hrafnkels Saga, chs. 1, 2, 6. This does not
(h) cross-references to other "reliable" Sagas

(i) brief, authoritative, and scholarly assertions and explanations, often making them within parenthesis\(^9\)

(j) asserting simply "it is said" nor "now we turn to" or "now we leave X" or "it happened" or just "now"

(k) never appearing directly, letting the facts speak for themselves - this may give rise to the impression that the story, as it were, tells itself\(^10\)

(l) adopting a dispassionate, registering stance, and seeing things in a dry light\(^11\)

(m) making use of a perfectly natural and plain style.

Many of the devices used to vouchsafe the "reliability" of the Saga authors are formulaic, tending to give the Sagas a homogeneous quasi-formulaic texture. Moreover, the authoritative-ness and ease with which formulae such as "now we must take up the story as...it is said...now we must leave off here" control the flow of the narrative is reminiscent of the leaping style of ballads\(^13\). But another comparison may be made, such directive formulae are reminiscent of the formal instructions found in filmscripts: "cut to...pan to...hold...pull back to reveal...dissolve to...fade out". Comparing the Sagas with filmscripts is not as inappropriate as it might seem at first sight. There is indeed much about Saga method, the techniques and devices used by Saga tellers, that anticipates the making of films. Under point (k) it was mentioned that Saga narrators never appear directly, that they prefer to let the facts and characters speak for themselves - this feature of the Sagas has frequently been commented on, although under different names.

mean that such anecdotes may not have possessed other functions, or that they may be related to the "Ortssage" as described by Max Lüthy in: Volkssage, pp. 11-27.

9. See the extract from Gísla Saga below on page 84.

10. M. C. Van den Toorn, Erzähltsituation, p. 79: "Es ist nicht von ungefähr, dass man anlässlich dieser neutralen Darstellungsweise behauptet hat, es sei hier kein Erzähler tätig, sondern die Erzählung erzähle sich selbst". I. R. Maxwell, op. cit., p. 19: "But in a saga events move under their own power, seemingly independent of the author's will or any intrusive demands of art or morals or any passionate claims of the dramatis personae, with the casual inevitability of life itself."


Andreas Heusler says the narrator adopted the point of view of a spectator\textsuperscript{14}. G. Neckel speaks of an unprepared eyewitness\textsuperscript{15}. H. Koht even writes about living images of situations and characters which are called up before our eyes\textsuperscript{16}. We might expand the film making analogy and note that such statements suggest that the Saga authors use as it were a movie camera. This analogy has indeed already been made by van den Toorn who wrote:

Es wird von der Aussenseite zugeschaut, und nur das Äussere wird registriert, wie es das Auge einer Kamera tut: auch die Linse registriert nur die Lichteinfälle auf einer photographischen Schicht, und erst das Auge des späteren Betrachters interpretiert...\textsuperscript{17}.

Further, the Saga-men successfully use, so to speak, not only a camera but also a microphone. Saga dialogues have been described as "dem Leben abgelauschte"\textsuperscript{18} and are invariably favourably mentioned\textsuperscript{19}. We thus would seem to be dealing with a percursor of sound films. However, at this point the analogy breaks down, or at least requires modification.

Van den Toorn must also have been aware of this problem, for in another article, published some years later, he writes:

Die neutrale Erzählssituation, die wir in der Saga vorwiegend antreffen, weil sie die wenigen Äußerungen der auktorialen und personalen Erzählhaltung überschattet, gipfelt in einer Art Fernrohrperspektive: es wird gleichsam von beträchtlicher Entfernung zugesehen - der Erzähler mischt sich nicht ein - und doch, deutlich, gleichsam vergrößernd oder näher herbeiziehend dargestellt...\textsuperscript{20}.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Kleine Schriften II, p. 426 "Die isländische Saga stellt sich gern auf den Standpunkt des Zuschauers"
\item G. Neckel, Altnordische Dichtung, p. 110.
\item Op. Cit., p. 12.
\item Saga und Wirklichkeit, p. 198. But see also W.P.Ker op, cit., p. 237 for a similar point.
\item F. Niederer, Wikingerzeit, p. 105.
\item e.g. W.P. Ker, op. cit., p. 183.
\item Saga und Wirklichkeit, p. 198.
\end{enumerate}
It should also be added that the camera (or telescopic lens, as van den Toorn puts it) is trained usually on people, their actions and interactions. Only rarely is the focus on other information or detail necessary for the smooth understanding of the story. There are no tableaux poétiques; panoramic shots of landscapes for example, unless functional, are not included. Colours too are usually absent. In short, we do not get a slow second by second, detail by detail account of the "here and now", the Sagas are not made up of long sequences, capturing, say, the flavour of everyday life in Old Iceland, or the atmosphere of the Althing, or the everyday life at the court of Norway.

Sagas are carefully 'edited', the Saga-men are very selective, even restrictive in the situations or events reproduced in the Sagas. Often we are given glimpses only, vignettes rather than full-blown scenes. The narrative tempo of the Sagas on the whole is very rapid.

Similarly any assertion that conversations are "lifelike" has to be modified. To begin with, Saga narrators make extensive use of indirect (reported) speech, which, while it may give an impression of natural talk, is not free conversation. Further, Saga conversations when they are reproduced in direct speech are still not real to life: e.g.

21. It is inserted as brief impersonal comments, or introduced in static blocks, see p.190 below.
22. Note how brief even the tableaux isolated by Magnusson and Pálsson in Laxdaela Saga, (p. 41) are.
23. See R. F. Allen, op. cit., p.35. There is very little 'milieu' in the Sagas.
24. Although there is a cumulative effect which enables the reader familiar with the other Sagas to imagine such scenes quite vividly.
25. Certain scenes such as legal battles, quarrels over a whale, horsefights, the defence from a house etc. recur frequently. This recurrence however may be due to extra-literary features of Old Icelandic life; the Sagas describe a relatively simple community.
26. A. Heusler, op. cit., p.63, speaks of "Kleinmalerei".
27. Van den Toorn, Zeit und Tempus in der Saga.
there is no interruption of another person's speech, the vagueness and looseness of everyday talk is absent, and more often than not situations are presented, we might even say contrived, where two persons only rather than three, four, five or more converse. But more significantly, Saga dialogue is concentrated, compressed, often consisting only of brief single speeches - frequently gnomic expressions, or proverbs; also it is used rhetorically to mark moments of great emotional stress.

An excerpt from Gísla Saga will illustrate some of these Saga techniques:

Now somebody enters, sometime before dawn, quietly, and goes to where Vésteinn rests. He was then awake. The next thing he knows is that a spear is thrust toward his breast, going right through. But when Vésteinn received the thrust he then said this "A serious wound", he said. And presently the man went out. Vésteinn wanted to get up. He, at once, fell down dead in front of the bed. Auðr wakes up and calls Thórdr the fearful and asks him to remove the weapon from the wound. At that time it was said that whosoever lifted the weapon from a wound was obliged to take revenge, but they were called secret slayings not murders if men let the weapon remain in a wound. Thórdr was so afraid of bodies that he did not dare to come anywhere near it. Gísli then came in and saw what had happened and told Thórdr to be quiet. He himself took the spear from the wound and threw it, bloody as it was, into a chest and let no-one see it and he sat on the bed. Then he had Vésteinn's body laid out according to the customs then prevalent. Vésteinn's death greatly grieved both Gísli and other people.

The initial 'now' directs our attention to the action that is to follow. Events are narrated simply, we are presented only with the 'facts': somebody enters, thrusts a spear through Vésteinn's breast and then leaves again; Vésteinn dies, his sister wakes up, calls Thórdr; and so on. Most of the 'facts' are visible actions: Vésteinn wants to get up; he at once falls down in front of the bed; Gísli takes the spear, throws it into a chest, and sits on the bed, etc. Audible 'facts' are also related - Auðr calls Thórdr

28. This concentration on two people at a time seems to be a typical trait of folktale.
30. ch. 13.
31. The impact of the 'now' is even greater when we realize that it is part of a series of 'nows' which gradually concentrates our attention on the decisive moment, the killing of Vésteinn.
and asks him to remove the spear. Gísli tells Thórdóttir to be quiet. But only once, at the moment of greatest emotional stress, is there direct speech: "A serious wound", "Hætti þar".

No apparent attempt is made to interpret these 'facts'. We are not told, "Gísli sat on the bed because he was furious, or because he felt ill, or was thoughtful": any such explanation of Gísli's frame of mind has to be supplied by us; though subsequent events may help us in explaining retrospectively what must have gone on in Gísli's mind: he sends a servant woman across to the farm at Saeból, which indicates that he was suspecting the 'somebody' to have come from there.

A brief (scholarly) comment is made on a point of law. Apart from informing us, it draws our attention to Gísli's unflinching acceptance of the obligation to avenge Vésteinn; an obligation which, we later discover, forces him into the tragic situation of choosing between vengeance for his brother-in-law and hurting his sister, by killing her husband.

Finally, this excerpt also illustrates the high tempo of narration found in the Sagas: with utmost economy of words a complex of actions spanning at least a few hours is related, we might even say "recreated", although descriptions are minimal; we are given a series of glimpses rather than one extended (mimetic) action.

32. Such retrospective filling-in is a common Saga technique, e.g. see Egils Saga ch. 78: Egill returns with the body of his son. He is silent. We do not know how he feels. Then we read that his clothes have been rent by a powerful grief he had felt when he first saw his dead son: "hann þrútnaði svá, at kyrtilinn rifnaði af honum ok svá hosurnar" In Víglundar Saga, ch. 22, the hero is told that the man he had thought to be his enemy only had tried and tested his character and courage. His supposed enemy turns out to be a well-intentioned uncle.

33. This comment could also draw our attention to the weapon itself, the spear which we later hear is Grásiða, the weapon fashioned from the pieces of a sword which in one version of Gísla Saga is cursed. It may also explain why Gísli would not allow anyone to look at the bloody spear - he may have recognised it and therefore have been led to suspect his brother, Thorkell, or his brother-in-law Thorgrímr.
Character Portrayal

The techniques used to portray character in the Sagas are often misunderstood. Many an enthusiastic but naive reader must have had thoughts akin to those expressed by the Australian writer Colin Simpson, who exclaims:

there is something disconcerting about storytelling that relates actions but leaves out the thought processes that lead to them... the characters seem to have a dimension missing... And so much of the masterly Njal's Saga seems to me a string of killings as senseless as the feud murders among the Kukukukus of New Guinea.

To those readers better acquainted with Saga techniques, it need not be stressed, Saga characters are not defective. The Saga-men use more unobtrusive means to convey the psychology and motives behind the actions.

A Saga author, although he restricts his point of view and is cool and detached in his presentation, provides us with many hints enabling us to compensate for the "missing dimension"; what Simpson deplores is praised by others, because the readers are forced to fill in, to form their own conclusions (as was shown in the excerpt from Gísla Saga) and are thus drawn into the story. "In fact", R. F. Allen observes, "the saga reader must involve himself in the sagas to explain and understand them; he must try to adjust his inner life and emotions to the saga world he is shown so that he may re-create emotions and motivations of the actors in that world".

In his task of 're-creating' the Sagas a reader is given more help than is at first apparent. A closer look at the Sagas reveals that their heroes think, observe, and guess shrewdly concerning their own actions and those of other people. We thus have to modify the theory of complete objectivity and accept, as van den Toorn pointed out, that at times actions are seen not from a neutral observer's point of view but from a character's point of view; the narrative perspective momentarily may be 'personal'. There is little "objectivity" in a sentence like:

Then he noticed the horses farther down by the river and he decided to catch one of them to ride on, for he kept thinking how much more ground he could cover by riding than by walking.

1. The Viking Circle, p. 270.
2. op. cit., p. 35.
3. Van den Toorn. Note this momentary lapsing into a personal perspective, i.e. the reporting of thought, may be a natural extension of reporting speech.
In spite of such momentary changes of perspective it nevertheless remains true - as a general rule - that Saga narrators convey the innermost emotions of characters while seeing them from the outside. They possess a gift for choosing the telling detail, and for suggesting much between the lines.

One of the devices used most effectively to portray Saga characters is dialogue; the Sagas are stories of men and women who speak for themselves. Even their silence speaks. Sometimes they talk about themselves. Thórdr, the foster-father of Njáll's sons confesses: "I have never seen blood shed...and I do not know how it will affect me". Hallgerdr talks of her pride: "Pride is a thing you and your kinsmen have in plenty, so it's not surprising if I have some, too". Kormákr speaks of his fickleness, and attempts to excuse himself: "This is caused more by the spell of evil beings than by my uncertain temper". But much more often they analyse each other: Egill is correctly 'diagnosed' as a viking by his mother. Hœnsa-Thórir is recognised as the evil man that he is:

"I think that to help you means helping an evil man...It will become clear that you will not turn out to be a lucky man and ill will be caused by you".

Halli's mother in Valla-Ljóts Saga accurately estimates her son's character and future career when she says:

"I think that you'll stretch out your hand to many evil deeds, and this will be the beginning of your misfortune".

The action of characters, and thus obliquely their personality, are further frequently commented on or analysed by the general public, the countryside. Such comments are introduced by fixed expressions such as "the people thought" or "people said".

4. Hrafnkels Saga, ch. 5. (p.40).
6. Ibid, ch. 10.
10. Ch. 7.
Techniques which are more subtle but enable the initiated reader to infer whole thought processes are the descriptions of involuntary physical and physiological reactions displayed by characters in moments of great stress. Symbolism too provides the reader with information about character: in Kormáks Saga the sword Sköfnung symbolically underscores Kormákr's personality: Kormákr, by not bothering about the rules that go with the effective use of the sword, displays his impatient disregard for all rules. Brodd-Helgi in Vánamörđinga Saga early reveals his cunning and meddlesomeness when he intervenes in a fight between two oxen: he ties a spike to the head of one ox, giving it an unfair advantage. In Njáls Saga, Otkell, an opponent of Gunnarr, is shortsighted—both in a physical and intellectual sense. Víga-Glúmr, in giving away three family heirlooms, symbolically reveals that he has foolishly given away his good luck.

Akin to symbolism are indicative names: they may help in the understanding of a character's action. In Fóstbraédra Saga the two heroes Thorgeirr and Thormódr show a tendency to act according to their names. Thor—geirr ('geir' meaning spear, the favourite weapon of the old Scandinavians) is a rough warrior; Thor-módr ('mödr' deals with the mind, the 'mood') is the more intellectual type, a gifted skáld who lives by his wits rather than by brawn. Grettir's name too is consonant with his character: 'grettir' means wriggler, dragon, snake, with the connotation of uncanniness, trouble-making: "one with a surly and mean temperament." Somebody with a name like Svartr, indeed, does not surprise us when he perpetrates black deeds. Nicknames are a further shorthand notatio of a character's psychological make-up. R. Pörtner observes:

Die Wikinger pflegten aber auch die Kunst des kurzen, treffenden Beiwortes, ja, es scheint ihnen ein diebisches Vergnügen gemacht zu haben, die besonderen Kennzeichen ihrer Mitmenschen sozusagen auf die Kürze eines Markennamens zusammen zu drängen.

11. T.M. Andersson, Family Saga, p. 49, mentions that the Sagas are fond of symbolic psychology—"a device according to which a person betray his emotions physically, with a change of color in medieval style and with some violent muscular constriction in heroic style." In Fóstbraédra Saga there is a virtual catalogue of such psycho-somatic reactions at the end of chapter 2.
Víga-Glúmr and Víga-Hrappr acquired their reputation for obvious reasons (víga means warrior, killer). Hávarðr's nickname "the Lame", "the Halt" mirrors his indecision in Hávarðar Saga ísfrjótingr; Hallfreðr Óttarsson vandrafaskáld constantly lives up to his name of the "troublesome poet".

More explicit means of portraying character and of assistance in filling in the 'missing dimension' are the formal introductions of characters into Sagas. The first time a character of some importance appears we are given a virtual information capsule, usually telling us about his or her kin, marital status, place of residence, social position and personality:

There was a man called Hrapp - who lived in Laxriverdale on the north side of the river, opposite Hoskulsteð. The farm then became known as Hrappstead; it is derelict now. Hrapp was the son of Sumarlidi, and was known as Killer-Hrapp. He was Scottish on his father's side, whereas all his mother's family came from the Hebrides, and Hrapp had been born and brought up there. He was a big, strong man who would never yield to anyone, whatever the opposition; and because he was so overbearing, as has just been written, and refused to pay compensation for his misdeeds, he fled to Iceland and bought the land he was now farming. His wife was called Vigdis Hallstein's daughter, and they had a son called Sumarlidi.15

Characters who are of only minor interest in a Saga are introduced more abruptly:

A man called Runolf, the son of Ulf Aur-Priest, lived at Dale, east of Markar River16.

On the other hand, characters who play a major role are introduced with more detail and care. For example, Gunnarr's presentation in Njáls Saga includes, in addition to the usual information, an extended family tree and a thumbnail sketch of his external appearance17. But one common feature is found in all these introductions: the salient personality traits mentioned - eg. "he would never yield to anyone" - function like a leitmotiv; they become attached to a figure and are displayed by him or her in situation after situation throughout the Saga.

15. Laxdaela Saga, ch. 10. (p. 61f.)
17. ch. 19.
Killer-Hrappr, for instance, displays his overbearing nature whenever he appears in Laxdæla Saga. This dominance of one trait or set of related traits, which at times tends to make a Saga character into a type and to explain most if not all the actions of a person, highlights the need for a modern reader to be acquainted with the Sagas' conventions of portraying character, many of which they share with much of the older literature. Saga characters on the whole are static, although certain traits may become more pronounced as a character grows older. Heredity is seen as being more important than the environment. Social class, on the whole, determines a character's intelligence: there are few stupid chieftains; most slaves and servants are rather dull-witted. Members of the great families are usually courageous, a brave thrall is rare. There is also a certain idealization of Icelanders, especially when they are confronted with Norwegian royalty, or when they are abroad.

All of these narrative devices, techniques, and conventions must be kept in mind by the reader as he recreates the emotions and motivations of Saga characters. Further, the involved reader knows that, although the thoughts of Saga characters are not directly revealed, the characters are not thoughtless. To note the Saga writers' self-effacement is not to deny their ability to portray characters. Recently, M. Magnusson fittingly described the skill of the Saga-men in general when he wrote (about the characters of Njáls Saga):

They spring to life in a few vivid sentences; some (...) are glimpsed only in a paragraph - but with what telling effect. Others (...) grow with the saga, deepening and broadening until we seem to know them like neighbours (...) The secondary characters - and what a host of them there is - are never perfunctory. How subtly individual they are (...). The women (...) in fact, have no less significance than the men, although there are not many of them; they are forceful, intensely individual, unforgettably real.

18. As he is portrayed in his Saga, Egill becomes more and more cantankerous, in Eyrbyggja Saga, Snorri Goði becomes more successful, Thorólfur bægifótr increasingly obstreperous, whereas Thórir in Thorskríðinga Saga becomes greedier for money.

Overall the narrative tempo of Sagas is quick. This is achieved by a consistent economy of words, by making every word count. It is accomplished by reducing descriptions, reflexions and commentaries to a minimum; the frequent use of dialogue; the continuous interchange between vignettes, scenes and reports; the telescoping of the narrative by means of phrases such as 'nothing is reported about their journey until...'; frequent allusions to the passage of time (um morginn, um kveld, eitt haust etc.); the use of short and mainly para-tactically joined sentences; and the general absence of elaborate figures of speech.

However, this generally rapid pace of narration is interrupted with telling effects if the lean narrative, the rapid unadorned style, suddenly becomes dense and slowed down by the introduction of more details, descriptions and quick asides; lapses into the present tense, the use of similies, plunges from reported speech into direct speech.

— It is as if the hypothetical camera suddenly zoomed in on a situation or person to provide a close-up. W.P. Ker pointed to this effect many years ago:

The Sagas give the look of things and persons at the critical moments, getting as close as they can, by all devices, to the vividness of things as they appear, as they happen...1

The best way to show how effective this technique may be is to let a segment of the narrative speak for itself. An extreme illustration, and probably the best known close-up of Saga literature, is that of Egill at the court of King Athalstan:

Next Egil went with his troop to find King Athalstan, and at once went into the king's presence as he sat at the drinking. There was a great noise of rejoicing there. Once the king could see that Egil had come inside, he ordered that the lower dais should be cleared for them, saying that Egil should sit there in the high-seat opposite the king. Egil sat down there and drew his shield

in front of his legs. He wore helm on head
and set his sword across his knees, and from time
to time slid it halfway out and then slammed it
home into the scabbard. He sat upright, but his
head was deeply bowed. Egil had strongly marked
features, was broad of forehead, heavy browed;
the nose not long but very thick, his lips wide
and long, the chin notably broad and so through-
out the jaw, thick-necked and big-shouldered, so
that in that respect he surpassed what other men
were: hard-faced and forbidding and taller than
any man else, the hair wolfgray and thickset, and
he had become bald early. And while he sat as
has already been described, he was twitching one
eyebrow down on to his cheek and the other up
into his hair-roots. Egil was black-eyed and
with brows of dark brown. He would drink nothing,
though drink was fetched him, but twitched his
eyebrows up and down, now this way, now that.\(^2\)

The flow of the narrative has been slowed down
by a detailed description of Egill; his formidable appearance
emerges with almost photographic precision. He is clearly
displeased. Next the narrative becomes more lively: the
king makes gestures to pacify Egill, and gradually Egill's
malcontentment yields to cheerfulness. In typical Saga
fashion the change is suggested indirectly, with a sure eye
for the telling detail:

King Athelstan was sitting in the high-seat. He
too had laid his sword across his knees, and when they had
been seated so for a while, the king drew his sword out of
the scabbard and, taking a fine big gold ring off his arm,
drew it over his sword's point, stood up and walked on to
the floor and reached it across the fire to Egil. Egil
stood up, picked out his sword, and walked on to the floor.
He stuck the sword in the round of the ring, drew it towards
him, then went back to his place. The king sat down in the
high-seat. When Egil sat down he drew the ring on to his
arm, and with that his eyebrows fell into line. He then put
down sword and helm, took hold of the horn which was brought
him and drank it off. Then he chanted:

"King, corslet's god, has given me
A ringing springe for clawtongs,
To swing from hawkstrid hangtree,
Handgallows goldenhaltered.
Aloft on sword I lift it,
My gallows-spar of spearstorm;
This swordhand's snare wins favor
And fame for ravens' feeder.\(^2\)
From then on Egil drank his full share and conversed with other men. Later the king had two chests carried in, and it took two men to carry either. They were both full of silver, "Egil", said the king, "you shall take these chests, and if you reach Iceland you shall convey the money to your father, to whom I am sending it as payment for his son. But some of the money you shall share out among those of your and Thorolf's kinsmen who seem to you of most account. You yourself shall receive payment for your brother here along with me, land or movables, whichever you prefer; and if you are content to stay with me for the future, then I will provide you with such glory and honor here as you yourself can name to me".

Egil took the money and thanked the king for his gifts and friendly words. From then on Egil began to grow cheerful.

The author's skilled use of the zoom-in technique not only underscores that Egill now has moved into the centre of the stage, it also makes this meeting of the Icelander Egill and the English King Athelstan one of the most impressive encounters of Saga literature.

In between these two extremes - the rapid flow of the narrative and the close-up — are scenes: reported scenes and more mimetic scenes, usually with a considerable proportion of dialogue. They are found throughout the Sagas, and their frequency, or at least their effectiveness, must have given support to the view that the Sagas are an essentially dramatic form.

But an inspection reveals that scenes are not major narrative units. Chapters have been examined as to whether they are a characteristic narrative unit. On the whole, they have been found to be "notoriously inconsequential".

However, there is a commonly agreed-on unit, which may be called the episode or narrative block. Episodes of varying lengths, of course, are convenient narrative units found in most narratives. But in the Sagas a special kind of episode or narrative block, a relatively long and well rounded unit, a short story, or to give it its Icelandic name, the tháttr, appears to be a characteristic feature. Much of Saga

3. e.g. S. J. Þorsteinsson, Halldor Laxness and the Icelandic Sagas, p. 114, and T.M. Andersson, Family Saga, p. 16, 26, 30, 33.
5. I.R. Maxwell, op. cit., p. 25: "Sagas prefer to deal with whole episodes, not pieces or aspects or reflections of them".
research and criticism has revolved around this narrative unit.

One of the Sagas in which the presence of tháettir has been frequently noted is Njáls Saga, I. R. Maxwell gives the following analysis of the Saga; many of the units he isolates are in fact tháettir:

A prologue of eighteen chapters leads into the first main story: how the hero Gunnarr and the counsellor Njáll maintain their friendship despite a feud between their households, and how Gunnarr falls at last to a confederacy of enemies. The second story (commonly divided into two) is of the feuds that lead to the burning of Njáll, the consequent conflict, and final reconciliations. In this part there are two substantial sections that were once thought interpolations... the Conversion of Iceland in 1000, and Brian's Battle (Clontarf) in 1014.

It is possible, on the other hand, to break up what Maxwell calls the prologue into two sections - one showing the events involving Hrútr and Möðr, the other describing Hallgerðr's first two marriages. This is followed by the feud between the two women - Gunnarr's wife Hallgerðr and Njáll's wife Bergþóra. Violent as the feud between the two women may be, it does not diminish the friendship between Gunnarr and Njáll. The Saga then introduces a character called Otkell, who promptly gets into trouble with Gunnarr and finally is killed by Gunnarr...and so forth. A more detailed analysis is given at the bottom of the page.

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7. See for example, A. Heusler, op. cit., pp. 449-453. Other scholars concerned with tháettir were A.U. Bálath and more recently Lars Lönnroth.
8. op. cit., p. 23.
9. Basing it purely on the author's statement "...and so ends the episode (tháttir) of Hrútr and Möðr gígja" (ch.8)
10. The anatomy of Njáls Saga when dissected for major narrative units looks as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Approx. Length</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - 8</td>
<td>1 - 23</td>
<td>23 Möðr tháttir: the story of Hrútr Unnr and Möðr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - 17</td>
<td>23 - 45</td>
<td>23 Hallgerðr's first two marriages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 - 33</td>
<td>45 - 74</td>
<td>29 Gunnarr and Njáll; Gunnarr regains the dowry for Unnr; he goes abroad and returns to Iceland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 - 45</td>
<td>74 - 107</td>
<td>33 Gunnarr marries; feud between Hallgerðr and Bergþóra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 - 56</td>
<td>107 - 133</td>
<td>26 Gunnarr and Otkell conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57 - 66</td>
<td>133 - 153</td>
<td>20 Starkadr and his sons introduced; a horsefight results in troubles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It may seem arbitrary to divide *Njáls Saga* into such narrative units or thaettir if it were not for two facts: (a) the broad agreement among readers and critics that there are such narrative units and (b) the definite slowing down, even momentary suspension of Saga action at the points felt to be the junctions of such thaettir.

Typically such a junction includes a deliberate rounding-off of the preceding matter, as for example at the end of chapter 56: after Otkell has been killed by Gunnarr, first the lawcase to settle the killing is described:

> Wise counsel prevailed, and the outcome was that all the actions were put to the arbitration of six men, who made their assessment immediately. It was decided that no compensation should be paid for Skamkel, and that the compensation for Otkel's killing and Gunnar's wound should cancel each other out. The other killings were assessed on the basis of worth. Gunnar's kinsmen contributed enough money to pay all the compensation immediately, at the Althing. Then Geir the Priest and Gizur the White went to Gunnar and gave him pledges of peace.

| 67-81 | 153-182 | 29 | Gunnarr and Starkadr clash again, Thorgeirr Otkelsson is drawn into trouble. Finally Gunnarr is outlawed. His last stand. Revenge after him. |
| 82-90 | 182-211 | 29 | Thráinn and Njáll's sons abroad; trouble in Norway (Víga-Hrappr) |
| 91-99 | 211-237 | 26 | Thráinn and Njáll's sons clash. Thráinn and Víga-Hrappr are killed Njáll fosters Thráinn's son Höskuldr. |
| 100-112 | 237-262 | 25 | The coming of Christianity. |
| 113-123 | 262-291 | 29 | The killing of Thráinn's son; big court case. |
| 124-132 | 291-323 | 32 | The burning of Njáll |
| 133-138 | 323-346 | 23 | Preparations for the court case between Kári and Flosi. |
| 139-144 | 346-376 | 30 | Legal to and fro. |
| 145-151 | 376-409 | 33 | Battle at the Althing; attempts by Hallr to achieve a settlement; further battles; Kári and Björn í Mörk. |

11. See, for example, T. M. Andersson's anatomy of *Njáls Saga*, in *Family Saga*, pp. 293-303. But see also p.38. On this point Maxwell notes: "the first thing the Saga does on examination is to fall apart. No wonder that it was once thought a compilation, or that summarizers give us a list of headings, not a narrative argument" (op.cit., p.22).
Next the rounding-off is continued on a more general level:

Gunnar rode home from the Althing. He thanked people for their support, and gave many of them gifts. He gained great credit from all this; and now he stayed at home, in high esteem.

Further, a junction is usually marked either by a shift of the action in time or place, by the introduction of new characters and new information, or both. In the present example, chapter 57 is given to introducing Starkadr and his sons; they are described as "arrogant, brutal men, who had no respect for the rights of others".

R. F. Allen, noting this feature of Njáls Saga, described it as follows:

In Njáls Saga, episodes and episode clusters are often marked off by sections which I call interludes. These are the sections described above that pause to introduce new persons and to present their genealogies, chief characteristics, and such vital statistics as are necessary to the plot...the plot absorbs it, and works upon it, advancing to a new and seemingly inevitable conclusion that is a new point of balance, a completed narrative, which demands more facts before it too can develop. 

Unfortunately, Allen seems to underestimate the significance of the rounding-off of preceding sections. Hence I propose the more descriptive term "juncture" for such static sections marking a deep incision point in the narrative. Interlude, as a point of introduction of some new plot parameters, however, is still a useful concept: it describes minor incision points.

In other Sagas too there are such clearly recognisable junctures, suggesting the presence of thaettir. In Egils Saga, for instance, junctures may be viewed as marking off chapters 63 to 70 into an "Egill and King Athelstan Tháttr", chapters 63 to 70 into an "Egill and King Hákon Tháttr", and chapters 79 to 84 into a "Thorsteinn Egilsson Tháttr". In Hrafnkels Saga such a juncture is found in chapters 13 and 14, separating the first part of the Saga, Hrafnkell's loss of power, from the second part, Hrafnkell's gradual regaining of power and his eventual triumph over Sámr.

12. op. cit., p. 67.
Talking about junctures instead of about interludes may seem to be splitting hairs, if it were not for the fact that, while there may be quite a number of interludes, the deep incision points marked by junctures seem to come at fairly long and roughly regular intervals. And not only in the Sagas discussed above. This leads me to suggest that the tháttir - as described here - may well be a kind of mechanical narrative unit. This would be supported by the consideration that most Sagas hardly would have been read or told in a single night. What could be more natural, then, than to break up a Saga into distinctive stories, into instalments, into "tales of the hall". Assuming sessions of approximately equal duration, we ought to get approximately equal lengths of narrative.

In brief, the Saga's major unit of narration seems to be the tháttir. Between a tháttir's two clear junctures, however, there are other, minor narrative units such as incidents, scenes or chapters. An example from Grettis Saga will help to clarify this point further as well as lead into a discussion of the integration of Saga narrative - which an analysis of narrative units more frequently than not tends to ignore.

13. Approximately twenty-five pages in the Guðni Jónsson edition, but the length may vary between 20 and 30-odd pages.

14. Other possible thaettir are the so-called Bersi Saga in Kormáks Saga (chapters 7 to 16); in Bárðar Saga Snaefellsáss chapters 1 to 10 could be named the "Bárðar Tháttr" and chapters 11 - 21 the "Gestr Bárðarson Tháttr"; this is confirmed in part at the end of the story: "Ok lýkr hér sógu Bárðar Snaefellsáss ok Gest, sonar hans".

15. Even in Eyrbyggja Saga, which structurally seems to be one of the most disjointed Sagas, such thaettir may be isolated. Major junctions that seem to mark off thaettir are formed by the end of ch.14 and the beginning of ch.15, chs.24 and 25, 29 and 30, 37-39, 48 and 49, and 56 and 57.
The existence of large narrative units such as thaettir inevitably has consequences for the structural reading of Sagas. In Grettis Saga chapters 32 - 35 form such a thaettir. An introduction (the distress of the farmer Thorkell, which leads him to hire shepherds who are not afraid of supernatural powers) is followed by a section in which there is a rising conflict (two shepherds are killed by supernatural forces, the second man turning into the ghost Glámr). Grettir is introduced in chapter 34 and undertakes to look after Thorkell's sheep. Then there is a climax marked by Grettir's fight with and conquest of the ghost Glámr, but at the same time the ghost puts a curse on Grettir. A summary section follows: people thank Grettir for this valiant deed, which is reported and marvelled at far and wide; Grettir, on the other hand, begins to feel the first effects of the curse ("all kinds of monsters appeared to him") and finally we read:

"Grettir rode home to Bjarg, when he had accomplished his task, and stayed at home during the winter"

Indeed the thaettir reads like a little Saga, displaying already the features of general Saga technique. Yet its lead-up to the climax, relating a number of adventures in which Grettir is not involved but which set the stage for the contest with Glámr, at first appears to the reader to be an unnecessary deviation. Throughout chapters 32 and 33 the plot seems to meander, until we retrospectively recognise the purpose of the 'deviation'. On the one hand, the Saga-man uses it to retard the progress of the main action, thereby increasing the tension of the narrative even further after having already aroused our expectations at the end of chapter 31 which closes with Grettir thinking it "a great pity that he could not test his strength anywhere, and he enquired if there was anything against which he could pit himself". On the other hand, the 'deviation' introduces Glámr in a vivid and convincing manner, while at the same time underlining Grettir's unusual courage and strength, for to take on such a fiend requires more than a modicum of prowess. The keyword in this context is dramatization: - the threat Glámr poses and Grettir's daring are both dramatized. In fact, Saga-men
make consistent use of dramatizing techniques. However, deviations from the plot, such as the one just noted, should lead us to question attempts to view the Sagas too narrowly as dramas, and to refute claims such as that in the Sagas there is - or at least ought to be - no proliferation of action. \(^1\) On the contrary, there are many such 'deviations' in Grettis Saga as well as in the other Sagas. The thorny questions concerning the artistic structure of Sagas, which these considerations lead up to, have been discussed for many years. Recently Robert G. Cook, among others, has commented on these questions. He maintains that many critics have not disentangled themselves from scholarly problems and false conceptions about the nature of Sagas.\(^2\) But what is of most interest in the present context is his warning that a judgement that material is irrelevant to the main narrative ought to come only after a serious exposition of what the main concern of the narrative is. Finally he insists - and his position is one that I feel has to be strongly agreed with - that if we are willing to grant the Saga writer any artistry, we ought to grant him sufficient imagination to have handled competently the material he selected to work with.\(^3\) Cook's argument underlines that plot, the main strand of the narrative, especially if thought of as a 'dramatic' plot, does not adequately explain the unity of a Saga. Other narrative principles and techniques are used to shape the narrative, to tie the various strands together, and to weave a Saga into a complex whole.

An integrative principle that hitherto has received only passing interest by Saga researchers is the tectonic shaping of Sagas.\(^4\) In a large number of Sagas, the central segment of the story - the mathematical halfway mark - seems to have been consciously used to underline important themes and events.

1. e.g. Andersson, op. cit., p. 33: 'The saga has a brand of unity not unlike the classical injunction against the proliferation of plot in drama.' But see also p. 182 above.
3. ibid., p. 6.
4. e.g. I. R. Maxwell briefly notes that there is something almost geometrical about much of Njáls Saga (op. cit., p.22)
In the three outlaw Sagas - the stories about Gísli, Grettir and Hóðr - the central part of the narrative marks the beginning of the outlaw story proper: exactly halfway through the text the three men lose the protection of the law. From that point onward their valiant but vain struggles against misfortune become the focus of interest.

In a number of Sagas the halfway mark is associated with the coming of organised Christianity, or at least the introduction of Christian ideals into the story. In Gísla Saga, Laxðæla Saga and Hávardar Saga Ísfirdnings this is clearly demonstrated. In Njáls Saga the so-called Kristni Tháttr follows soon after the "geometric" centre of the narrative.

Exactly at the mid-point of Höensa-Thóris Saga Thórir's evil influence and power reach their zenith; he is able to trick people into burning Blund-Ketill, one of the most reasonable and honourable chieftains the Sagas depict. In Bandamanna Saga the halfway point marks the end of Ófeigr's first successful court case and the beginning of the even more complicated court action by the confederate chieftains, the "bandamenn", against Ófeigr's son, Oddr. The encounter between Egill and King Athalstan during which Egill finally emerges as the chief figure of his Saga is located near the halfway mark of the text. Other Sagas in which there seems to be evidence of such tectonic shaping and hence of conscious formal construction are Ljósvetninga Saga, Vatnsdæla Saga and Eyrbyggja Saga: in each of these narratives a leading personality - Guðmundr inn riki (ch. 13) Ingimundr inn gamli (ch. 22), the godi Arnkell (ch. 37) - dies and the action comes to a momentary halt at the halfway mark.

At this stage an examination of the interaction between the major narrative unit, the tháttr, and the tectonic shaping of the narrative is perhaps suggested. But for the purposes of the present study it is more fruitful to turn to other, more generally recognized integrative techniques. Most of these are based on the notion that Sagas are a quasi-dramatic genre.
For example, T. M. Andersson in his book dealing with the structure of the Saga puts forward a principle which at first sight seems to avoid the defects of a too narrow reading of the Sagas:

It is a very universal rule... that a saga is built around a conflict. This principle has not been sufficiently grasped. It is the conflict that gives the saga its special character, its narrative unity, and its dramatic tension. It is the conflict that polarizes whatever else is in the saga. It is the sense of the saga and the organising concept.

No doubt such a structural reading was a great step forward, especially on persistent efforts to relate Sagas to more or less doubtful sources. And when applied to certain Sagas, especially the shorter ones such as Thorsteins Saga stangarhögg or Hoonsa-Thóris Saga, it provided indeed a key to their understanding. However, throughout his book Andersson is forced to explain away segments of Sagas that do not fit his paradigm. Although Andersson defends his conflict model by saying that this is an instance where a reduction to a single principle is not a case of oversimplification, the difficulties he has in making all Sagas fit - something which he in fact does concede repeatedly - indicate that the conflict principle still is a simplification, even if it is not necessarily an oversimplification.

The defects of Andersson's view were avoided by Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson who describe the coherence of Sagas - especially of the longer stories - with a fitting analogy. Although they are speaking about Laxdæla Saga their observation holds for other Sagas as well. They compare Laxdæla Saga to the course of a long river, starting in a slow trickle "but gradually increasing in volume and power as new tributaries swell its waters; these tributaries give the Saga-pattern a herring-bone effect in places, for the author often jumps from the main flow to trace a tributary right from its source."

5. op. cit., p. 11.
6. e.g. on page 16 he writes about Hallfreðar Saga and Kormáks Saga that in these Sagas the heroes are left to die as an 'afterthought and under un-heroic circumstances'.
7. e.g. p. 21: 'in some sagas the revenge section is promoted from information into a narrative in its own right.' See also p. 27.
The importance of such a general Saga pattern and narrative principle is that it defuses the discussions about (doubtful) local traditions⁹, and draws attention to the epic features of Saga narrative. The structure of Sagas is best understood when they are viewed as epic-dramatic works rather than as an off-shoot of drama, or as pure chronicles of Icelandic history. If we are to insist on using the term "drama" when talking about the Sagas it may be best to consider most of them, especially the longer ones, as strings of short dramas—an idea towards which many Saga researchers have tended to move¹⁰. Sagas are dramatic in presentation but epic in conception.

On a less general level we find devices and techniques which interrelate segments of the overall story with each other. Some of the more frequently used ones include those which play on and manipulate the expectations of the Saga audience.

To begin with, the audience expects a Saga to be one integrated story—purely because it is presented as a unified story: even an involved Saga like the so-called Eyrbyggja Saga closes with "and thus closes the Saga of the Thóraesninga, Eyrbyggja ok Alftfirðinga"—if the author had viewed it as a disjointed work he would have called it "the Sagas of". Thus the very emphatic presentation of Sagas as unified narrative arouses expectations concerning the wholeness of the story.

The clear titles of Sagas—most of them have been given the name of the central hero—also help to integrate: although Egill does not appear until one third of the story is over, he clearly is the central character of his Saga. The expectations of the audience are aroused by the Saga's name ("Egils Saga") and it knows that Egill will come into the Saga sooner or later—hence the stories involving Egill's ancestors are felt to be preparatory but not superfluous to Egill's career. Thus the name of a Saga becomes what T. M. Andersson would call a "give-away"¹¹ and an integration device.

⁹. which may or may not have given rise to some thaettir in the sense in which they are discussed above.
¹⁰. Ker, op. cit., p. 189. V.W. Turner op. cit., p. 353; he views the Sagas as "nothing but connected sequences of social dramas".
The Sagas in fact are full of give-aways. As we become better acquainted with the Sagas, we become more familiar with their method of story telling, and we recognise more and more the meaning behind a word, a gesture, or the mentioning of an object\(^\text{12}\). This recognition is an important skill the Saga audience must acquire. To a sophisticated audience in the end virtually anything becomes a give-away\(^\text{13}\). Further, the audience becomes familiar with the laws of action of Sagas, ie. with patterns such as refused compensation\(^\text{14}\) or staging\(^\text{15}\), or with the almost inevitable circle of events consisting of insult, killing and revenge\(^\text{16}\). Saga actions are also subject to a specific Saga moral code: most anti-social actions are eventually paid for, evil thus is usually punished; but good actions are not always rewarded immediately\(^\text{17}\).

These 'give-aways', coupled with the high speed of the narrative, lend the Sagas a definite quality of pointing forward to a goal, and thus of purpose and unity.

More specifically still, there are various prognostic devices. They include the assigning of predictive powers to many Saga characters: some dream about events that will happen in the near future, others dream about far away events; their dreams adumbrate the plot. Others read the future as if it were an open book - we think of wise men such as Njáll and Gestr Oddleifsson. Still others voice apprehensions about a certain person's future behaviour or safety, about his fate: Grettir's father Ásmundr predicts that Grettir will turn out to be an "óeirðamadr", an unruly man, a prediction that is echoed among many others by Earl Sveinn. "That will be the death of many a man's child if you live"\(^\text{18}\), and by Thórarin Thorvaldsson:

"It is true that Grettir is different from all other men now living in this country. It will be difficult to attack him with weapons as long as he is healthy. But in his mind there now is great overbearing, and I have doubts as to whether fortune is on his side"\(^\text{19}\).

\(^{12}\) For similar comments see Allen, op. cit., pp. 21, 48, 68, and Andersson, Family Saga, p. 7.

\(^{13}\) This effect is produced by learning that every detail in a Saga is significant, there are virtually no blind motifs in Sagas. Allen notes that the Sagas possess an 'inbuilt allusiveness'.

\(^{14}\) Andersson, Family Saga, p. 260.

\(^{15}\) ibid., p. 7.

\(^{16}\) H. Koht, op. cit., p. 79.

\(^{17}\) Andersson, Family Saga, p. 31 and W.P. Ker, op.cit,p.22:

\(^{18}\) Grettis Saga, ch. 23.

\(^{19}\) ibid., ch. 31.
It goes almost without saying that such predictions always prove to be correct.

A related device serving to tie together the Saga narrative are warnings. A Saga reader learns that warnings are always well founded and that ignoring a warning has dire consequences for a Saga hero - even if the interval between the warning and the ignoring is long. In Víga-Glúms Saga young Glúmr is told by his uncle:

"My mind tells me that we'll never meet again. But I will give you special presents: a cloak, a spear and a sword. Our family has always had great belief in them. While you have the presents I do not expect that you'll lose your honour, but I am afraid if you should give them away" 20.

and indeed when Víga-Glúmr as an old man ignores this warning and gives away these presents, he soon finds himself driven away by his enemies from his property in Thverá. But the normal course of events is that a warning is ignored usually soon after it is given. Subsequently, dire effects follow and often continue to be felt throughout the Saga: in Hárðar Saga Hörðr is warned by his sister not to allow a certain Helgi, the son of Sigmundr, to be his companion: "I advise against this because it seems to me that everyone of Sigmundr's family brings bad luck" 21. Hörðr ignores the warning and consequently finds that this companion constantly manages to get them all into serious trouble. Curses too thread different parts of a Saga together: the ghost Glámr lays a curse on Grettir (chapter 35) which is a major contributing factor in Grettir's ill-starred future, culminating in his death (chapter 82); Kormákr's whole adult life is darkened by the curse put on him by the witch Thorveig who tells him "pú skalt Steingerðár aldrí njóta" - "You shall never obtain Steingerðr's love" 22.

It has been noted above that Saga characters are introduced by means of an 'information capsule'. But as well as introducing characters it acts as a prognostic device in that it reveals a character's dominant mode of behaviour. However, probably the most specific prognostic

20. ch. 6.
21. ch. 12.
22. Kormáks Saga, ch. 5.
aids in the Sagas are the prefigurations of events in previous generations. In Egils Saga Egill's grandfather, father and uncle are involved in struggles against the rulers of Norway, a struggle which becomes virtually hereditary in the family. In Laxdæla Saga a bloody family conflict threatens to erupt when Hrútr and Thorleikr clash, anticipating the tragic events involving Kjartan and Bolli. But in some Sagas it might be better to speak of a (prognostic) keynote scene. Njáls Saga opens with children playing - one of the children is beautiful, longhaired Hallgerðr, the girl with the thief's eyes: yet she does not become involved in theft until chapter 48. The significance of the reference to her long hair does not become clear until chapter 77: her refusal to allow her husband Gunnarr to use a strand of this hair to mend his bowstring enables enemies to close in on Gunnarr and kill him. Young Helgi's interference in a fight between two oxen sets the scene - Vápnfirðinga Saga is a series of violent clashes in which Helgi constantly interposes. In Thorskfiringa Saga Gull-Thórir, while on a visit to Norway with a group of youths, discovers that he is a descendant of trolls. This incident leads us to anticipate the violence and intrigues he will be involved in once he returns to Iceland, especially in conjunction with statements made by his uncle the viking Agnarr:

"You promise to turn out as an evil man since you want to rob your relatives... You will come to love money excessively before you die" 23.

On the other hand, there are brief summarizing and recapitulating devices which obviously serve to bring into relation with each other various parts of a Saga. They include:

(a) intermittent summaries, usually at the end of a chapter, which read much like a running commentary on a character's popularity, the general state of affairs, or of the seriousness of the current action - as seen for example in Gísla Saga: And when that had been done everyone went home to his residence, and now everything was quiet (chapter 14); Gíslí stayed there during the winter, and nowhere during his period of outlawry had he been received equally well (chapter 23); Gíslí accepts this and things are quiet for a while (chapter 24), and after that Gíslí went to Geirthjófsfjörð to his wife, and his fame has increased a lot through this deed.

23. ch. 3.
and it is true that no one has ever been a more accomplished man and more full of courage than Gísl, and yet he was no lucky man (chapter 27); Eyjólfr went home to Otradal and was displeased with his journey and people thought this journey a very disgraceful one (chapter 32); and so forth.

(b) explicit summaries at the end of a Saga:
"People say that Glúmr had been the foremost of chieftains in Eyjafjörð for twenty years, and for another twenty years no one was more than his equal. People also say that Glúmr had been one of the most successful of the fighting men this country has ever known".

(c) more skilful, indirect summaries such as the conversation between Guðrún and her grandson Bolli Bollason when the aged woman evokes much of Laxdæla Saga in one memorable sentence "þeim var ek verst, er ek unna mest", "To him I was worst whom I loved best", or the mentioning that Egill's skull, when unearthed many years later, made people understand "at hauss sá mundi ekki auðskaddr fyrir höggum smámennis, meðan svördr ok hold fylgði" - that this skull would not be easily damaged by the blows of insignificant men while scalp and skin were attached to it.

Shorter or longer sections of a Saga are further integrated by means of repetition. A question may recur in an identical or similar form. In Njáls Saga "Hvat er nú til rads?" "What are we to do now?" or variations such as "Hvat skulum vit nú til raða taka?" recurs like a leitmotif. Its very frequency underlines the constant helplessness of people in this Saga and their persistent search for answers, for solutions to great legal and ethical problems. Authorial statements also may be repeated - in Bjarnar Saga Híldœlakappa the reference to things being "kýrrt", quiet, underscores the growing tension between the rivals Thordr and Björn: and yet it remained quiet at first (p. 220); and yet it is quiet, but each one thought his own thoughts (p. 220); now it is quiet and each one was more displeased than before (p. 225); and things are now quiet "at kalla" for awhile (p. 229); Thordr did not answer to this at first, and it is quiet (p. 233); things were quiet, "at kalla" (p. 236); they are reconciled "at kalla" and things now remain quiet for two years so that nothing is reported (p.237); etc. The repetition of events -

24. Víga-Glúms Saga, ch. 27
25. ch. 78.
26. ch. 86., See Maxwell, op.cit.21.
repeating a theme - integrates Sagas such as Egils Saga where there are numerous clashes with Norwegian rulers; in Laxdæla Saga, frequent visits to royal courts, constant efforts to improve the family estate and Guðrún's four marriages possess similar integrating power; Kormáks Saga is dominated by Kormákr's repeated failures to win Steingerðr; Hörðr in Harðar Saga gives in repeatedly against his better judgement; Gísli has repeated dreams, calls repeatedly on his brother Thorkell to ask for aid - which his brother consistently refuses. Indeed, repetition is an obvious Saga device, especially in the form of triads such as the three slaps in Njáls Saga, or the three evil characters by the name of Kolr; three times something unlikely comes true in Hávarðar Saga Ísfirdings; Gísli escapes three times by a narrow margin from his pursuers; Grettir kills, one after the other, the three brothers Björn, Hjarrandi and Gunnarr. Moreover, triads are not only an obvious Saga device, they are also ubiquitous, being found on nearly every page of a Saga.

A special form of repetition is symmetry, a device for which Saga authors have an obvious fondness, as they also have for parallels and contrast.

But without any doubt the most ubiquitous and effectively employed device to avoid a more stringing together of details and episodes is escalation. Not all Saga-men handle it as skilfully as the author of Njáls Saga, who was able, by means of gradual escalation from a simple scene in an Icelandic farm house when children are playing on the floor watched by their proud relatives, finally to portray events that shock the world as known to a mediaeval Icelander. Yet, as a rule, Saga-men handle this device continuously, insistently and with great skill. Some commonly used forms of escalation are:

(a) simply asserted escalation, eg. the early became reiðr, mjök reiðr, alreiðr - angry, very angry, absolutely angry.

27. See Andersson's excellent exposition of this device, Family Saga, p. 35-38.

28. eg. See Allen, op. cit., p. 76: "Saga composition is an art of comparison and opposition of thematically contrasting material!"

29. Note how much space Andersson, in Family Saga, devotes to escalation per se (p. 38-40) as well as to related concepts scaffolding, stageing, retardation, and conflict.

30. Njáls Saga, ch. 156: Ën þar sem þér heyrduð gný mikinn. þar mun ydr sýndr heimsbræst, ok munud þér deya allir brátt, "the great clamour you heard signifies the rupture of the world: you shall all die soon".
(b) escalation by increments: eg, the number and/or rank of people involved gradually increases, distances involved become larger, the importance of the social institutions involved becomes greater (eg. local thing or althing), the seriousness of a conflict tends to follow a curve than changes from dislike to insult to injury to fatal encounters.

(c) increasing the density of narration, zooming in, switching from straight narration to reported speech to direct speech (increasing the dramatic impact) - Note that only significant matter is treated in detail and magnified.

(d) escalation (in the sense of increasing tension) is achieved by the many new starts, such as when a new scene or chapter simply follows what already amounts to a crisis situation; an already explosive situation becomes even more explosive: in Laxdaæla Saga, in the interval between Kjartan's return from Norway and his last stand, this principle is used with particular effect.

Saga authors close their stories deliberately and move the narrative line always back to balance, to a perfect equilibrium; there are no loose ends. They do this by means of de-escalation techniques such as accounting for all characters describing settlements and reconciliations between conflicting parties; and, by quietly unravelling complications that seem to be working up for a tragic ending. W.P. Ker calls this the "dissipation of the storm before it breaks". A sense of decreasing intensity in the narrative is further created by the recapitulation of the Saga's substance. Finally, there may be a list of descendants (kynsbogi) and a few biographical details from the remainder of a main character's life - whether he undertook a pilgrimage to Rome or whether he settled down on some farm in Iceland.

The structure of Sagas is anything but inartistic. Although Saga plots do meander, at times considerably so, and although many sections of a Saga may read like separate short stories, Sagas are integrated narratives. The authors succeeded in integrating their stories in terms of large patterns as well as in the handling of minor details.

31. op. cit., p. 226.
32. I. Maxwell notes on this point: "the sagas seem to be unwilling even to narrow their theme to what we should think a manageable and shapely story. In their own way they are extremely concise and selective, but they seldom select a plot that Aristotle would have approved," Pattern, p. 19.
Sagas may be compared to earthworms: when they are cut into pieces, all the pieces seem to be able to live on their own — yet they obviously make up one whole.

In conclusion, it need hardly be stressed that this survey of Saga method is not in any sense exhaustive. One important aspect, it has received only marginal consideration, would be how far the Saga-men employed or refined devices and conventions of the folktale. Yet this overview provides enough material to facilitate a comparison of the narrative techniques found in Sagas with those made use of by the authors of Westerns; and to expose the differences.

33. eg. "Objective" or external description of characters, magnification of the exciting moments (zoom-in), "scenic duality" — usually only two persons appear in or dominate a scene—, contrasts, epic triads, dreams, warnings, the notion of fate, the view that social class determines a person’s intelligence, nicknames. Some obvious folklore motifs are the casting of spells, witches and trolls, the winning of treasure, the Kolbítr, the idle youth. See Stith Thompson, The Folktales, p. 456f. For further discussions André Jolles Einfache Erzählformen, may be consulted, but see also H. Dehmer, Primitives Erzählgut in den Isländersagas.
(B) Western Method

(a) Narrative Perspective

A commonly held view of Westerns is that they are tales of fantastic adventure and unrealistic stories about glorified heroes, fancy shooting, melodramatic rescues and plenty of dead Indians\(^1\). However, on closer acquaintance with the genre it emerges that most writers of Westerns put much more store on appearing plausible or reliable than they are commonly given credit for. Among the sampled Westerns only Zane Grey's *Prairie Gold* is pure fabrication - the note "Any similarity or apparent connection between the characters in this story and actual persons whether dead or alive, is purely coincidental", which appears only in this book, would hardly seem necessary. The authors of Westerns, like their counterparts, the Saga-men, convince us of their veracity - but they do so in a different manner. Whereas Saga-men remain anonymous and impassible, letting, as it were, the facts speak for themselves, the writers of Westerns use more explicit means of underlining the 'reliability' of their works.

To begin with, they often preface their stories: Owen Wister prides himself on having faithfully presented a day and a generation - Wyoming between 1874 and 1890;\(^2\) William Goldman introduces \textit{Butch Cassidy} laconically, "Not that it matters but most of what follows is true"; Oakey Hall notes in *Warlock* that "any relation of the characters to real persons, living or dead, is not always coincidental" and that he consciously combined what did happen with what might have happened\(^3\). In other novels we find fictional narrators interposing a wedge of reliability; they claim to have been personally involved in the events described. For example, Mattie Ross, the narrator and heroine of Charles Portis' *True Grit*, repeatedly insists that she is giving the true account of how she avenged her father's blood "over in the Choctaw Nation when snow was on the ground"\(^4\) and that she is in a position to "know the facts"\(^5\).

2. \textit{The Virginian} p. 5.
3. See Prefatory note.
4. p. 155.
5. p. 8.
Thomas Berger in *Little Big Man* even makes use of two more or less reliable narrators - one is the central character, the Little Big Man, Jack Crabb, the other is the editor of Mr. Crabb's biography, a certain R. F. Snell. At the end Berger lets this 'editor' expound on the veracity of Jack Crabb's story and thus on the reliability of the book:

...in concluding, I must make a frank admission. I have never been able to decide on how much of Mr. Crabb's story to believe. More than one night, I have awakened in the wee hours with a terrible suspicion that I have been hoaxed, have rushed to my desk, taken out the manuscript, and pored over it till morning. It is of course unlikely that one man would have experienced even a third of Mr. Crabb's claim. Half? Incredible! All? A mythomaniac! But you will find, as I did, that if any one part is acceptable as the truth, then what proceeds and follows has a great lien on our credulity. If he knew Wild Bill Hickok, then why not General Custer as well? The case is similar when we suspect his veracity at a certain point: then why should he be reliable anywhere?

I can certify that whenever Mr. Crabb has given precise dates, places and names, I have gone to the available references and found him frighteningly accurate...6.

Still other authors go to great lengths to stress their historicity by incorporating court reports, sworn testimony, statements, letters, diaries and eye witness accounts. Some novels like *True Grit* and *Warlock* largely depend on these devices; in Charles O. Locke's *The Hell Bent Kid* they carry the whole story. Although such devices may be unmasked as modern literary conventions, for very few of the letters or other documents would be genuine, their use contributes toward giving the story greater verisimilitude.

Most writers of Westerns, in what must be viewed as partially a narrative convention and partially an attempt to appear objective and hence reliable, give a balanced account of events; ie., if there is a conflict involving two sides, the actions, motives, fears and aspirations of both sides are brought out. Within the sample, balanced accounts are the norm except in cases where there is no identifiable single opponent or where the one-sidedness of the account serves some definite narrative purpose, as in *Stampede* where the Storm family, in succession, faces up to mortal danger from flood and fire, from marauding Indians, and from ruthless gangs of rustlers. Here the stress is on Will Storm's being a true...6. p. 439.
man, a man "who didn't scare easy", and who "didn't know the meaning of quit". Other one-sided accounts involve the hunt motif - in Butch Cassidy we never see the hunters clearly, they are merely the Superposse which keeps the two outlaws on the run, and about whom Butch repeatedly asks: "Who are those guys?". This one-sidedness is germane to the structure of the work: the faceless Superposse is in sharp contrast with the two individuals it pursues relentlessly. True Grit is told from the point of view of the hunter. The man whom Mattie hunts down is not as important within the book as the fact that a young girl could avenge the blood of her father. The story revolves around Mattie's "true grit", which is even truer than that of men like La Boeuf and "Rooster" Cogburn - because of the immense disadvantages she has to overcome.

A special problem facing the writer of Western novels, when he wants to appear plausible, is that most non-Americans and probably many Americans simply do not know enough about the events that actually did take place in the Old West. For example, Clay Fisher in The Tall Men relates how a certain Nathan Stark together with a small crew of cowboys drove a herd of Texas longhorns 3,000 miles through "hell and high water" from Fort Worth in Texas, through the very heart of the Seven Sioux Nations, in what is now Wyoming, to the hills north of Virginia City in Montana. Such a story, especially once we hear about clashes between cowboys and Indians, could easily be viewed as fictitious and fanciful. But such a reaction would only betray our ignorance - for on closer inspection it becomes clear that Fisher's novel is a reasonably accurate account of the achievement of a certain Nelson Story which is chronicled by David Lavender as follows:

"Story was a Montana placer miner who in 1866 had sewn ten thousand dollars into the lining of his clothes and had ridden south with two friends to buy beef for the hungry mining camps around Virginia City. He bought his herd near Fort Worth, worked a way through Indian country of eastern Oklahoma, cut north to the Oregon Trail, and then moved slowly west to Fort Laramie. By that point, he had covered some twelve hundred saddlesore miles and was unimpressed when Army officers told him the Indians along the Bozeman Trail were feeling ugly. Purchasing repeater rifles for his men, he pointed his longhorns northwest and kept going."
Indians attacked as predicted, wounded two men, and swept off the herd. The cowboys tracked the raiders down, annihilated them, and kept the recovered steers pointed toward Montana. They disdained Carrington's orders to wait for reinforcements and had no more trouble with the Sioux. In the opinion of one of the drovers, the Indians had no desire for a second taste of the new rifles.

But whatever the authors of Westerns may do to underscore the reliability of the actual substance of the story, in the unfolding of the narrative they do not seem to be concerned with creating a suggestive lifelikeness. This illusion, which Saga writers create by allowing the bulk of the narrative to develop dramatically and by disappearing behind their creation, is not usually striven for by the writers of Westerns. They make their presence felt throughout, they are not passive recorders of fact:

In the day and place it was not uncommon to settle matters involving thousands, even millions of dollars with a few words and a firm handshake. The language was simple, the men who used it even simpler. They understood one another. There was no room among them for a man whose word was not the easy equal of his bond, no time among their number for the long talker or the Philadelphia lawyer.

or:

The others who had been watching Benjie had mistaken him for a 'big ignorant nigra'. But now they were surprised.

Further, compared to Saga-men, Western narrators do not focus as insistently on their characters, nor do they focus only on the visible interactions between them. Descriptions of nature, the sky, mountains and deserts, and of the Western milieu - a small frontier town, or an Indian village - are commonly found. Use is made of broad description, which at times is close to being lyrical or rhapsodical:

"One night they were encamped at the head of a canyon. The day had been exceedingly hot, and long after sundown the radiation of heat from the rocks persisted. A desert bird whistled a wild, melancholy note from a dark cliff, and a distant coyote wailed mournfully. The stars shone white until the huge moon rose to burn out all their whiteness..."

7. op. cit., p. 382
8. The Tall Men, p. 23.
Use is also made of more closely observed detail:

The valley grew clear of grey shadow except under leaning walls on the eastern side. Then a straight column of smoke rose from among the mesquites. Manifestly this was what Ladd had been awaiting. He took the long .405 from its sheath and tried the lever. Then he lifted a cartridge belt from the pommel of his saddle. Every ring held a shell and these shells were four inches long. He buckled the belt round him. 11

In a Saga the subtle play of light or the exact measurement of objects would not be mentioned. The realistic illusion, the verisimilitude striven for in the Westerns thus depends largely on the presentation of local colour, on the setting, on authenticating details. The Saga-men by contrast proceed simply from the situation, from the observable "reality" of actions and interactions, without being concerned about creating a specific Saga milieu. If the camera analogy is to be used again, it would seem that Saga-men use something like an 8mm movie-camera provided with a zoom-in lens to shoot a basically black and white documentary, whereas the authors of Westerns seem to use a wide-angled camera suitable for panoramic shots with which they shoot a colourful wide-screen feature film.

At this point it may be appropriate to comment on the significance of the fact that for many decades now Westerns have provided the main staple for the film industry of Hollywood 12. Most Hollywood producers and actors have tried their hand at making Westerns 13. But what could be important here is the possible feedback from Hollywood's Western films to Western novels: for example, the preference of John Ford the film-maker for the grandiose setting of Monument Valley 14, for the Wilderness with a capital "W", or Hollywood's great experience in conjuring up the set of yet another typical frontier town, could have influenced the imagination of the writers of Westerns. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that the obsession of both writers and film-makers with the spectacular setting, with the wilderness, the fringe

11. ibid, p. 67.
14. ibid, p. 40-41, p. 57.
area of civilization, may be rooted in a general American fascination for the contrast between the Western wilderness and the civilized East; for Americans have widely accepted, H.N. Smith notes, the paired but contradictory ideas of nature and civilization as a general principle of historical and social interpretation. In the Icelandic Sagas such a philosophical view of nature and such an explicit exploration of Icelandic civilization is less pronounced - although there are traces of a thematic opposition between life in settled communities and the life led by outlaws in the wilderness of the lavafields and the deserts of the interior.

(b) Character Portrayal

Traditionally Westerns have been associated with local colour, action and violence. Character portrayal, however, in the sense of delineating plausible, life-like people, on the whole, is something for which Western fiction is not celebrated.

Such a view seems to echo the definition and defence of Western stories as proposed by Bret Harte, a pioneer of Western fiction\(^1\). He wrote:

> I might have painted my villains of the blackest dye - so black, indeed, that the originals thereof would have contemplated them with the glow of comparative virtue. I might have made it impossible for them to have performed virtuous or generous action, and thus have avoided that moral confusion which is apt to arise in the contemplation of mixed motives and qualities. But I should have burdened myself with the responsibility of their creation, which as a humble writer of romance and entitled to no particular reverence, I did not care to do.

However, at least as far as the Westerns of the sample are concerned, character portrayal is not ignored so ostensibly. They claim to be more than humble writers of romance. To begin with, some Westerns are prefaced by remarks such as:

> "The action of this novel takes place in the 1880's, the time when the imperishable legend of the West was being created. Realism and character are the keynotes".\(^3\)

Moreover, Western writers consciously use devices by means of which they are able to present and delineate more complex characters, and to delve into the mind of a character. Herein they differ significantly from the method of strictly external observation found in the Sagas. A popular device - and one which indicates that the writers of Westerns have widely adopted modern narrative techniques - is the gradual unfolding of a character's past. Thus use is made of the confidential conversation - as in True Grit where Mattie Ross candidly asks "Rooster" Cogburn, the man she has engaged to bring to justice the murderer of her father, about what he had done before he became a Federal Marshal. Rooster then tells of his career as a soldier for the Southern armies during the Civil War, his unsuccessful marriage, his involvement in

1. H. Frenzel calls him "das unerreichte Vorbild aller Autoren von Western Stories", see Western Saga, p. 13.
2. Bret Harte, The Luck of Roaring Camp, p. XIX-XX.
robbing "little high-interest banks" - his actions were of the Robin Hood variety - the droving of cattle, and finally how and why he became a Federal Marshal\(^4\). Likewise in \textit{Butch Cassidy} the two outlaws discuss their past from time to time. Thus they reveal more and more about themselves, until the reader knows their biography in some depth\(^5\).

A character's past may also be revealed by a narrator within the story - as in \textit{The Virginian} where he not only introduces us to the 'present' Virginian but gives a gradually unfolding account of his past life as well. Similar revelations are made by narrators in \textit{Bitter Grass}, \textit{The Hell-Bent Kid} and \textit{Warlock}.

Short passages of thought-association initiated by a stimulus, may serve to delineate some of the deeper layers of a character in other stories: when McCabe stands in a church, a dank and heavy smell reminds him of churches he has been in when he was a boy. The associations evoked allow us a brief but instructive glimpse of McCabe's childhood:

He could remember going to church on Sunday with his father. His father cried when he listened to the sermon. McCabe could remember the tears glistening down his father's cheeks and glistening on the black beard - and touching the blue marks on his own body the next day. They came from the beatings he often got after his father cried in church. The beatings never came for any reason. McCabe could remember going to church to ask why the beatings happened and getting a lecture that he should respect his father; and going home ashamed for both of them. He remembered staying in a cool smell in the back of the church awhile, and feeling not satisfied and leaving. He could remember all of it with the smell here\(^6\).

In \textit{The Hell-Bent Kid} we find another, related device. It is often used to bridge a time gap in a story. It consists of simply letting the mind of a character wander, of letting him reflect on and (conveniently) analyze his whole past life:

\begin{quote}
That night I did not sleep well. I kept thinking about the trip, but also my mind kept going back to the past. I had been the houseboy of my family. I was with my mother a lot until she died, because she needed me, and what she told me stayed with me a long time. This all took place while my two brothers
\end{quote}

were growing up, getting to be peace officers and getting killed fast. My mother taught me to read and write and counselled me good. My mind kept going back to the times when on fair days my mother would take me out on the flat under some trees where the only sound except her reading was the wind and the rustle. She had a mouth like a girl. I used to watch her lips forming the words. She read slowly and carefully and then would stop and explain. She was a Quaker woman my mother was.

Womenkind have soft ways and I think my mother prevented me from hardening up like my brothers. But after she died I toughened up fast. My father taught me to shoot. But you don't have to be hard to shoot. In fact in some ways it helps to be soft when shooting - and careful. To be easy. To use your mind.

Whatever we may say about the effectiveness of such an exposition of Ted Lohman's character, he nevertheless does gain in depth: we understand his inner conflict better, the tension between being hard and being soft, between taking life and respecting it. We see his attraction to the soft ways of womankind, which is at odds with his natural and masculine ability to shoot fast and accurately, an ability which finally becomes his curse: the cattleman Hunter Boyd ruthlessly avenges the death of his son, who has been killed by Ted in a gunfight provoked by the young Boyd.

Character portrayal in the Westerns is even more heterogeneous than has been suggested so far, but one touch is generally found. At the opening of a Western, character presentation is, as a rule, dramatic: a rider enters a frontier town. Initially, tension is aroused by the reactions of the town-folk and the air of mystery surrounding the rider. He is portrayed as being no ordinary man; typically, he does not waste words. When John Gannon enters Warlock the following scene is described:

7. p. 15.
8. Even a story such as McCabe, which commences in medias res, introduces this pattern in chapter 2.
Gannon reined left into Southend Street and turned at last into Acme Corral. Nate Bush, the Skinner Brothers' hostler, came out to meet him. Bush took the reins as he dismounted, spat sideways, wiped his moustache, and without looking at Gannon directly, said, "Back, huh?" "Back," he said. "McQuown pulling them back in from all around, I guess," Bush said, in a flat, hostile voice, and immediately turned away and led the mare clop-hoofing toward the water trough. Gannon stood looking after him. He felt heavy and tired after a day in the murderous sun...

However, this technique of direct presentation is not maintained throughout the rest of the story, at least not in such a pure form. Often the author, or his mouthpiece, the narrator, underlines — at times rather heavily — the extent to which a situation reveals character:

Two gaunt riders from fifteen hundred miles south had highwayed and hoisted the foremost citizen of the toughest mining camp west of Denver and north of Laramie. Two lean gentlemen from Texas, ployers of a trade which their silent guest had stamped out in Montana with twenty-two hangings in six weeks, had their wolf by the tail and knew it.

There was one way out for them and they were taking it.

To Ben and Clint Allison it was only interesting, and beside any point of personal fear, they were sharing that way with the fabled head of Virginia City's dread vigilantes,\textsuperscript{10}

Similarly exuberant and explicit, formal character description and portrayal in most Westerns is a rather prolix matter\textsuperscript{11}, especially if we recall the terseness of Saga method. Nevertheless, character in many Westerns emerges quite forcefully by more subtle and oblique methods. One of these is the use of dialogue — which at times can be as brief and full of understatement as Saga dialogue. A glimpse of this may be seen in John Gannon's laconic reply, "Back". In True Grit a few words are enough to suggest the rivalry between Rooster and La Boeuf, and to portray Rooster's determination and courage:

"We are on Ned's trail anyhow," said Rooster.

9. Warlock, p. 16f.
10. The Tall Men, pp. 14f.
11. eg. the description Jack Crabb gives of his father, Little Big Man, p. 23-25
"I expect it is the same thing. I wonder how Quincy got aholt of this (coin). Is this Charly a gambler?"

La Boeuf said, "He likes a game of cards. I reckon Ned has called off the robbery if he is not here by now".

"Well, we won't count on that," said Rooster. "Saddle the horses and I will lug these boys out."

"Do you aim to run?" said La Boeuf. Rooster turned a glittering eye on him. "I aim to do what I came here to do," said he. "Saddle the horses."

Perhaps the most typical means of portraying Western characters is to let them lapse from time to time into an earthy and forthright idiom. Jonathan Trask's "All you got to worry about is me, because I'll be enough. You got to walk over me first, and you won't never make it", and "If you're working for me, don't maybe me, boy. Be sure" are as pithy as McCabe's "You'll not see me behind no woman's skirts" or "Butler ain't hired here to attend no church meetings".

On the other hand, such a typically Western way of speaking militates against a differentiation of characters. The typical quality is further reinforced by Westerners frequently speaking about risking something, about taking a gamble, and above all, their predilection for interpreting life as a card game:

"I used to be the only one dealin' from the bottom of the deck. An' I'd get all the aces," Remy said as he walked to a table, sat down, and started to deal the cards. But then the Barquero started dealin' an' the cards got damn stinkin'. He dealt from the bottom awfully good," he said admiringly. "Since we got to this damn place he's been givin' me nuthin', an' himself all the aces." Sawyer stood still and watched as Remy held up the deck.

"But I've got the cards again, Sawyer. An' I'm gonna win this little game," he grinned. "Because I got me a Marquette up my sleeve." Even tender emotions may be expressed by such gambling metaphors: "Nella", he said softly, "in my game you could never deal anythin' but double aces."
Whether this cowboy finally wins the heart of the girl or not, he is true to the ideal of the taciturn and pithy Westerner. But on the other hand there are characters like Judge Henry who, as we saw above, deliver formal disquisitions on subjects such as the nature of law and civilisation.

Finally, apart from using occasionally what appear to be speaking names such as Stark, Storm, Gale, Trampas and Hunter, symptomatic psychology is made use of. It closely resembles Saga technique, and ultimately may go back to heroic traditions. Symptomatic psychology suggests indirectly how a character feels at a particular time, or what sort of a man he is:—a shaking hand when he is pouring a whisky, perspiration on his forehead, narrowing eyes, white lips, hands hovering near his guns reveal a tense man; a surreptitiously cocked hat, a cigar or a pipe smoked with stoic calm reveal a self-confident man, someone who does not scare easily. But there are characters who are presented, as it were, as anti-types: for example, Jack Crabb and Mattie Ross show none of these traditional traits of a Western hero. They tend toward the humorous; they live because of the incongruities they embody: Jack Crabb, a puny man, survives everything by relying only on his wits; Mattie Ross, a little girl, sees to it— with dogged determination—that justice is carried out against what seem insurmountable difficulties.

Space does not permit a thorough analysis of individual characters. However, in general, it would seem that as yet the ideal of realistically presenting people in action and speech is one that has not really preoccupied the writers of Westerns: we have the feeling that often characters are either poorly or unconvincingly drawn. For instance, Nathan Stark in *The Tall Men* is self-contradictory and suffers from the author's inability to fuse historical material and psychological insight. The author lacks empathy with this character.

Other characters really are ideas dressed up: in *The McMaster* s Benjie McMaster is more significant as a black man fighting for civil rights than as a character, in *Stampede* Will Storm epitomizes the unconquerable spirit and ingenuity of the South, whereas in *Warlock* the gunman Blaisdell embodies the contradictory nature of law.

enforced by violent means. Yet in spite of this tendency towards presenting Western types rather than rounded characters, it would be unreasonable to overlook that the writers of Westerns, in their best moments, are capable of creating a Virginian, a Mattie Ross, a Jack Crabb, and a Butch Cassidy - characters who, like the people of the Saga world, are quite capable of speaking for themselves both in words and actions, and who, like Saga characters, vividly imprint themselves upon the mind with each successive appearance.\(^{20}\)

The narrative tempo of Westerns, in contrast to the Saga's concision and rapidity, is slow. Westerns are told in a more leisurely fashion. Not every detail related is vital for the evolution of the main action:

McCabe attached the saddle girth again. He knew it was tight, but he felt compelled to check it just the same. He didn't want to go down to Bearpaw. The lawyer was all her idea. McCabe knew him by reputation: an old man from back East who had fought every losing case against the company in Bearpaw. There was a rumour the man had his own income secured, and did it for a hobby; another that he wasn't all there. No use in seeing him, McCabe thought. He pulled the gun from under his belt now, put his foot in the stirrup and swung into the saddle. He didn't know exactly why, but he didn't want to go to Bearpaw in the buckboard this time. For one thing, he could get off the bay faster. McCabe tucked the revolver under his waist again (it would bounce out of the holster he had designated for town wear), and felt for the shotgun butt behind him. It was tight in the scabbard and freshly loaded with ball shot that morning. McCabe didn't think he'd have to use it. Sheehan hadn't acted like the gunman had come or would be waiting for McCabe on the way to Bearpaw. When McCabe had the Socialist Swede check the shoes on the bay earlier in the morning and had waited leaning against the leaning stable doors, he had watched Sheehan as he sat in front of his bar...1.

Like Sagas, Westerns bristle with activity. In the example given, McCabe saddles his horse, checks his gun and swings into the saddle; in a brief flashback we hear that McCabe earlier on had the horse's shoes inspected and that he had observed his opponent, the saloon keeper Sheehan. Throughout, McCabe's mind is portrayed as being active: he reflects that he is going to see the lawyer to do Mrs. Miller a favour; his instinct tells him not to go to Bearpaw in the buckboard; finally, he does not expect any real trouble as yet, Sheehan does not act as if he, in turn, is expecting it. Thus, although the passage is crowded with incident, the main plot advances only slowly: we could

1. McCabe, p. 48f.
easily lose sight of McCabe's purpose, which is to secure legal aid against the Snake River Mining Company. Yet this represents an important phase in McCabe's fight against the company.

Of course, Western writers may also increase the rapidity of the narrative tempo. In McCabe, for example, concisely related scenes like the following may be found:

Once he did stop a lynching by strapping on and posing his hand near the walnut butt of his revolver. He dared the toughest miner in the crowd to take the rope past him.
"I don't have no gun", the miner said.
"Go get one".
The miner never went and the crowd backed off. McCabe's reputation was really strong after that.  

But such vignette-like scenes prove the rule by being the exception. Typically one extended scene provides the bulk of a chapter. It is a set piece produced in considerable detail. Thus in Prairie Gold the prologue revolves around the chance meeting of two men out in the wilderness. It transpires that they are linked to each other - they are father-in-law and son-in-law. The prologue is essentially a recognition scene, where two men who thought they were deadly enemies confront each other and discover that they had been mistaken. Chapter one is another recognition scene; this time two old friends meet, and they tell each other about their recent past. In particular, George Thorn tells Richard Gale about a woman, Mercedes Castañeda, whom he loves and who is threatened by a Mexican bandit called Rojas. The chapter ends with Rojas' sinister face appearing outside the window. Chapter two describes how the beautiful Mercedes is rescued from the clutches of Rojas by Richard. At the end of the chapter, Richard and Mercedes are fleeing from the bandit. In chapter three, a group of cowboys comes to their aid, and just as they reach safety, Richard faints. Chapter four opens with Richard recovering consciousness; he finds that he is at a farm called Forlorn River. The people running it take to him, and he is offered a job on the farm. The chapter closes with Richard regaining his strength and appetite. He wholeheartedly enjoys the homecooking of Mrs. Belding.

the wife of his new boss. The rest of the story is told in a similar fashion, each chapter forming a recognisable unit, centered around a main event or scene.

In McCabe an analysis of some chapters shows the following arrangement of the story: Chapter 5 - an offer is made to buy out McCabe: the mining company wants to take over the town, and they seem to calculate that once they have disposed of McCabe, the most important citizen of the town, they will have no problem in persuading the other townfolk to yield. Chapter 6 - Mrs. Miller persuades McCabe to see a lawyer instead of personally trying to fight the mining company. Chapter 7 - gives a description of McCabe riding away to meet the lawyer; he talks to the lawyer; and in the evening of the same day he returns to Presbyterian Church. Chapter 8 - deals in detail with a false alarm: someone who was rumoured to be a dangerous gunman hired by the company turns out to be a harmless cowboy looking for some fun in town. Chapter 9 - the hired killers arrive; they confront McCabe for the first time. The guns are not yet in action, the two parties take the measure of one another. More serious clashes, we sense, are a matter of time. The chapter closes with the anticipatory remark: "McCabe knew that Butler had decided to kill him with the rifle".

A random sample from Stampede reveals the following: chapter 15 is dominated by a long conversation between Will Storm and one of his sons. They discuss their future. In chapter 16 Will and his men enter Abilene, they look at the sights of the town. Meanwhile, they are spotted by a certain Sloan, who stirs up trouble against them. The chapter closes with Will in jail. The next chapter, however, describes how he is rescued.

In brief, Western chapters, like Saga chapters, are broadly speaking scenic; but whereas a Saga chapter is typically made up of a string of vignette-like shorter scenes, covering a longer span of time, and may read like a short story, a Western chapter treats, as a rule, only one scene covering a short span of time. Western scenes are consistently fuller and more mimetic.
On the other hand, in Westerns less use is made of rhetorical techniques to enliven and tauten the narrative. Thus, for example, the significance of a scene is not usually suggested by the density of narration. Important and unimportant scenes often receive the same indifferent and detailed attention. There is no equivalent to the Sagas' zoom-in effect.

From this point of view, the Westerns may be characterized as an epic-dramatic genre: epic in presentation, because of the broad and almost leisurely unfolding of the story and because of the narrator interpolations; dramatic in conception, since normally only a small number of closely connected scenes or 'appearances' are found. The dramatic nature of the genre is further enhanced by the fact that most Westerns obey the classical drama's prescriptions concerning the unity of time, place and action. Not all Westerns are as close to this kind of drama as *Barquero*, where the time covered is two days, the place is fixed by a ferry-crossing of the Paria river, and the main action concerns the struggle for the barquero's boat. Nevertheless, in most stories place and action are narrowly circumscribed, and the time-span rarely exceeds a matter of weeks.

The epic-dramatic nature of the Westerns becomes even clearer when it is compared with the dramatic-epic features characteristic of the Sagas. Thus both genres emerge as mixed types of literature, in the sense that they are neither pure epics nor proper dramas—a point which will be further explored later on. However, for the present it is more instructive to investigate the narrative integration of Westerns; a more thorough-going typology of Sagas and Westerns should then become feasible.
The discussion above of the thematic core concept suggested that Westerns are integrated, both structurally and thematically, around a conflict. However, Westerns are more complex than being simple conflict dramas. The tight-lipped confrontation of men is usually contrasted on another level by an evolving relationship between the main hero and a woman. Moreover, the presence of women does not detract from the masculine conflict central to the genre. On the contrary, the need to protect a woman may provide an important impetus to the central conflict. The presence of women makes Westerns thematically more complex. As noted, women in Westerns, unlike the proud and harsh women of Sagas, are usually the representatives of a more civilized and softer way of life - which the hero sooner or later finds inimical to his masculine and rough-and-ready way of life. To escape from this dilemma, he may reform, allow himself to be re-educated as in *The Virginian* and marry the girl; or he may persist in his old ways and lose the woman as in *Butch Cassidy*, where Etta the school-teacher walks out on Butch after she realizes that there can be no common future for them.

The presence of a narrator too does not interfere with the central, dramatic events: in *Warlock* he introduces the main characters and describes their various encounters without actively intruding into the story; in *Bitter Grass* he observes Jonathan Trask's life from close up - Alexander is Jonathan's foster-brother - but because he has no effect on Jonathan's decisions it is as if he were absent from the story. Trask's life and conflict unfolds gradually and of its own accord, following its internal dynamic. But, of course, these narrators superimpose a different form of narrative integration on their respective Westerns. Apart from providing a narrative frame, they may make a story thematically more complex; for example, in *Bitter Grass* the relationship between the sexes indicates how the treatment of a theme in the genre may vary over time. In older novels the man-woman relationship is more idealized and chivalrous whereas in the latest novels it is described in a more direct and less euphemistic manner.
narrator Alexander, a methodical lawyer, contrasts sharply with the impulsive Jonathan, who at times considers himself above the law.

Another previously noted means of integration is provided by letters, diaries or journals which are supposedly written by persons involved in the story: The Hell-Bent Kid makes most consistent use of this device, but it is also found in other stories. In The Virginian a number of letters are used to inform of coming events and to provide continuity when Molly Wood briefly returns to her native Vermont and the Virginian remains in Wyoming. In Warlock the journal of Henry Goodpastor provides a running commentary on the events agitating the citizens of the small town.

Apart from such general integration devices there are more subtle means. More often than not, Westerns are given cohesion and direction by statements made early in the piece, statements that point forward and already suggest the outcome. Thus in True Grit little Mattie, when seeing the body of her father, reacts by vowing to herself that his murderer, a certain Tom Chaney, would pay for this: "I would not rest easy until that Louisiana cur was roasting and screaming in hell!". This vow sets the plot in motion, from that stage onward everything points to the moment when Tom Chaney pays for his evil deed, when his body falls down into a snake infested pit. In The Virginian Molly Wood, while regarding the Virginian coyly, tells him, "I don't think I like you" - to which he replies simply, "That's all square enough. You're goin' to love me before we get through...". Benjie McMaster, the Negro soldier, upon returning home is told bluntly by a fanatic Negro hater: "I say you gonna pay black boy...We gonna kill you...". This threat suggests the coming troubles. The ferryman Travis defines his stand clearly when his boat is threatened by Remy's raiders, who need it to cross the river and to escape to safety. Travis' "I'll be damned if they'll get it" lets us sense that, once the mind of this man is made up, the bandits are doomed to fail.

1. p. 15.
2. p. 87.
in their enterprise, no matter how hard they may try. Early in The Tall Men, Ben Allison predicts to his brother that they are about to make the biggest strike since Comstock. The story then unfolds to prove exactly that prediction. Together with Nathan Stark they set out on a history making long cattle drive. The integrative effect of this statement is underlined at the end of the book: an explicit back-reference is made to that hunch as having come true.

Narrative integration is also effected by editorial comments such as: "...one doubt remained: what kind of a man was Trampas? A public back-down is an unfinished thing - for some natures at least. I looked at his face and thought it sullen, but tricky rather than courageous." Here the future conflict between the Virginian and Trampas is already outlined, the conflict that is to end almost three hundred pages later in a showdown.

Related to such anticipations are remarks found occasionally at the beginning or end of a chapter: Chapter 10 in McCabe opens with "They took a week to impress the town", the rest of the chapter then goes on to show in detail how the three hired gunmen gradually impress the town with their shooting skills. In The McMaster's chapter 10 closes with the following remark:

"I have a feelin' that somethin' awful will happen. An' that he'll be the cause of it" Spencer didn't answer because there was nothing to say. He had the same feeling of doom.

Westerns, however, are not punctuated regularly by such anticipatory comments, nor are brief summaries or recapitulations of the main action used as frequently and persistently as they are in the Sagas. This, among other factors, contributes to the impression that Western narratives are less taut and purposeful than Sagas. Much the same may be said about the integrative effect of titles. Saga titles are very definite, and, on the whole, they focus our attention on the main character whose biography we are reading. The titles of Westerns are, in the main, less pointed although

5. p. 5.
7. The Virginian, p. 25.
they may at times be quite apt: True Grit, McCabe and Mrs. Miller, The Hell-Bent Kid or Little Big Man are suggestive titles which assist in the summarizing of the story. However, titles such as Prairie Gold and Stampedede are quite irrelevant, they do not shape our expectations as to what we might be reading about: gold is only of minor importance and there is no prairie in Prairie Gold! Stampedes are of no real significance in Stampedede, which might more appropriately be called "The Long Drive" or such like.

More ambitious Westerns make use of foreshadowing to integrate the narrative. In Butch Cassidy the opening scene shows how an attempt to rob a bank is foiled not only because the bank is closely guarded, but also because it is "new, and ugly, and squat, and functional, and built like a tank". This touches on the main theme of the book, that a new and prosaic age, the age of technology and urban civilization, has come and that from now on men like Butch Cassidy and his partner, the Sundance Kid, are really no longer able to rely on their old tricks and routines based on individual skill and daring. Later on in the story the two see themselves represented in a film, outnumbered, surrounded and killed pitilessly by a Superposse working with mechanical precision and consisting of the most capable of the Pinkerton Detectives. This is an amplification of the initial scene, but also a recapitulation of much that has happened up to that point in the story; they had managed to escape the Superposse only by a virtually suicidal jump off some rocks into a raging river. But what is more, this film is also a prefiguration of their actual death: Shortly after, they are trapped and killed mercilessly by an army detachment - another and even more formidable Superposse.

The first time we meet Jonathan Trask he is a Southern prisoner of war in a Yankee jail. He has been there two years. He has spent some months in solitary confinement. This should have changed the man. But he has

8. p. 3.
borne the imprisonment unaffected: his back is ramrod-straight and his head is high. He has not changed because he is strong, inhumanly strong. He looks older and harder, but no other change is discernible. This hardness and inflexibility is his fatal flaw, the seed of self-destruction. As his wealth and power grows after his release, this seed of self-destruction grows too. The note struck in the first chapter is repeated throughout the book. In the final chapter we read what appears to be an explicit counterpoint to this first scene, a summary of Jonathan's character and life:

Jonathan's strength was all of a kind. He could master anything that demanded only a blunt, single decision backed by insensitive force or a show of it. The trouble was, he saw all of life in the same simplistic terms, a wrong set of terms. The complexities involved in realistic living were infinite, and to a perceptive man who could escape the corrosion of cynicism, this same complexity gave life a richness and variance that made it worth the candle. Jonathan had all of an instinctual man's appreciation of the sensual fullness of existence, but he lacked the perceptive man's eye to uncompromising reality.\(^{11}\)

Compared to the Sagas, less use is made in Westerns of parallels and symmetry to interconnect segments of the narrative, whereas repetition and contrast are often met. Some authors overuse these devices and as a result tend to be either repetitious or come to polarise the conflict, to interpret it in terms of black and white. In Prairie Gold the bandit Rojas repeatedly - or insistently might be better - attempts to abduct the beautiful Mercedes. He is contrasted to Richard Gale who, just as persistently, foils such designs. Later on in the book Richard foils, with equal deftness, the repeated and evil machinations of the Chases. Benjie McMaster is continually abused, ridiculed and threatened by the racist Southerners of his hometown. More subtly, the same features are found in other Westerns: the closer Nathan Stark and his men get to Montana, the more formidable obstacles appear

\(^{11}\) ibid., p. 189.
to become - the weather, the U.S. Cavalry and the Sioux Indians, in turn, oppose the progress of the herd in an ever more threatening fashion.

Even a book like *Little Big Man* makes use of such devices. The repeated attacks on Indian villages by the U.S. Cavalry serve to bring out the contrast between the white man's world and that of the "human beings", the Cheyenne. However, what distinguishes *Little Big Man* from say *Prairie Gold* is that Thomas Berger, by making use of less abrupt, less ritualistic escalation, avoids the trap of becoming predictable. Each attack by the Cavalry is described with more sympathy for the Indians and increasing indignation against the methods of the white soldiers, until the battle of Little Big Horn becomes the culmination - at least within the book - of the historic struggle between the Indian and the white man.

Although some form of escalation is found in all Westerns - for instance, the clash between the ferryman Travis and the leader of the bandits, Remy, becomes more and more a man-to-man affair; Benjie McMaster is insulted in an ever meaner fashion, Ted Lohman is subjected to more and more chicanery by Hunter Boyd - the insistent, subtle and skilful use of escalation techniques that we find in the Sagas, right down to the briefest scene or vignette, is absent here. Writers of Westerns, on the whole, seem to be content to let a conflict advance to its climax in simple steps. The difference between the two forms of escalation might be characterized as follows: in both genres little incidents lead to tense confrontation scenes which, in turn, ultimately lead to big quarrels. But whereas Westerns rely primarily on the increasing significance and excitement of the subject matter, Sagas enthrall because of the carefully worked-out psychology which seems to lurk below every word and incident, as well as because of the carefully calculated escalation of their subject matter.
Furthermore, just as Westerns make less use of calculated escalation techniques, so they make less use of de-escalation. They end more abruptly than Sagas. In the more ambitious stories - eg. *Little Big Man*, *Warlock* and *True Grit* - a postscript adds extra thematic meanings, such as the contrast between 'then' and 'now', or it may tie up loose ends. De-escalation is of less importance because the high point of the story, the climax, is the end of both plot and conflict, and results in the restoration of a rough social and moral balance. The disturbance in the order of things, caused by the villains or by the men who ignored social conventions, is overcome; good triumphs over evil, order has been restored. There are no counter-revenges; protracted feuds are unknown. The finale may be a happy-end, as in *The McMasters*, where Benjie walks back to the formerly so racially bigotted town, his wife by his side and *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, a famous song of the Civil War, on his lips; or it may be more ambiguous, as in *McCabe*, where Mrs. Miller, the woman who had eschewed violence, is seen wielding a gun; in *Butch Cassidy* the story comes to an abrupt end as Butch and his friend die in a hail of bullets - the two outlaws have no chance against the well organised army detachment that has them surrounded.

12. The conflict principle T. M. Andersson proposes for the Sagas (See p. 195 below) fits the Westerns as well, if not better than the Sagas.
In conclusion, compared to the sophistication and artistic dispatch of the best Sagas, Westerns are somewhat rude and unpolished. But they contain a great promise. And their significance can not be ignored. Thirty years ago Walter Prescott Webb, the historian of the Great Plains, spoke of the potential of Western literature. To-day his words are as true as they were then, and what is more, many of his hopes have been realised:

What is the significance of this Wild West literature? What is the significance of its popularity? Does not its volume, which no one can calculate, tell us that there is something in it that strikes deeply into the hearts and desires of men? Are these story-tellers the direct descendants of the tellers of sagas and the troubadours of medieval times? There is much to be hoped from it. Eventually there may come forth a writer or a group of artists who have within them the distilled genius, spirit, and understanding to put in stone, on canvas, and in the printed word the realities, the verities of the Great Plains...13.

VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

"... and after noting what appear to be essential differences between the two and evaluation of major points is called for.

The dominant characteristics shared by Saxon and Western is that they are concerned with history, history provides the action and the drama. The two powers reflect the semi-historic conditions experienced by the medieval Icelanders and by the American people. The rise of strong central government, the opposition of independent related people to what they considered to be intolerable restrictions upon their freedom, and the promise of the future period and the hope of the future, which corresponds to the genesis. The germ of a particular virtue rises.

They place action of a decisive but ambiguous aspect of their nation's past: the parliamentary, not of less inclusive conditions of the early days of settlement and there is no give way to more complex social systems, the consciousness of the pioneer slowly yields to a more advanced civilization. Although peasants and members of the society and taking place in the mind and in the people, respectively, they are a complex reality, not a mere and transformation that made society unrecognizable.

In spite of secular opposition, Iceland bases itself and gradually integrated into the general structure of the..."
After this investigation of numerous similarities and after noting what appear to be material differences between the two genres, a recapitulation and evaluation of major points is called for.

The dominant characteristic shared by Sagas and Westerns is that they are concerned with history: history provides the milieu and the mores. The two genres reflect the socio-historic conditions experienced by the mediaeval Icelanders and by the American people. The rise of strong central government, the opposition of independent-minded people to what they considered to be intolerable constraints upon their freedom, and the pioneer efforts of the landnám period and the Western frontier supply the raw material of the genres. The frontier spirit permeating the Westerns corresponds to the pioneer ethos of the Sagas.

The genres possess a particular thrust because they place action at a decisive but ambiguous moment in their nations' past: the rudimentary, more or less bucolic conditions of the early days of settlement are about to give way to more complex social systems; the tumultuous age of the pioneers slowly yields to a more settled civilisation. Although Sagas and Westerns refer to events taking place in the ninth and nineteenth centuries respectively, they are a response called forth by the major transformation that each society underwent later on, broadly speaking in the thirteenth and twentieth centuries. In spite of secular opposition, Iceland became christianised and gradually integrated into the orbis christianus; on the
worldly scene the grip of the leading families on political affairs became stronger; an all-out power struggle between members of the Icelandic oligarchy ended with the exhaustion of the whole country and its submission to the Norwegian crown. On the other hand, since 1900 the United States have not only grown into the world's major industrial power and one of the two superpowers, but they have steadily moved into the post-industrial era. According to some social scientists, the United States are experiencing complex changes - technological and social - too quickly: a massive 'future shock' may be in the offing. 

The popular nature of the stories is another important underlying factor. They are popular literature in the sense of making some use of folktale motifs and conventions. But in the main both kinds of stories are popular in that they appeal to a wide cross-section of people; the taste and expectations of popular, if not national audiences have helped to shape them.

The genres are the product of many minds. In each form - although this is not to deny the significance of the man - the personality of the author of a particular story is largely irrelevant. He makes use of narrative conventions and employs traditional material both in the sense of legend and handed-down historical fact. He does not study history 'scientifically'. Politics he regards to be the outcome of the actions of individual persons who are motivated by values such as honour and shame; events he depicts as being shaped by abstract forces such as fate, manifest destiny and luck (gæfa). Sagas and Westerns help crystallise an author's preoccupations - each genre makes salient certain emphases while it also helps to express them.
These two literary forms stand between authentic chronicles, popular history and deliberate fiction. Sagas lean more toward the first two poles, but the factual basis of Westerns should not be underestimated.

Repetition, a ubiquitous trait of popular literature, inter alia, fostered the growth of comprehensive fictional worlds which are only loosely related to historical reality. These worlds, or frameworks, possess genre-defining characteristics. They are somewhat monotonous and restricted, especially if variety and originality are looked for instead of variations on recurring events and themes. Within each certain historical persons recur; a small number of character types, at times coming close to being stock characters, are found over and over again. Some elemental social institutions - such as the blood feud and law courts - are brought into prominence. Time and geographic dimensions are circumscribed and gain thematic force.

Most importantly, however, the popular success of the forms at first isolated and then transmuted relatively narrow periods of history - 930 to 1030, 1860 to 1900 - into representative epochs, into ages that seem to show up paradigmatically the underlying tensions, contradictions and problems of the two nations; that is, express the inner dynamic of the nations' total historical experience. Here the two basic factors history and popularity interacted.

Yet Sagas and Westerns are not 'history'. Standing back from them, we are less aware of historical (or representational) detail than of form and archetype. Indeed, the very pervasiveness and widespread popularity of the genres, in part, must have opened them up to the influence of myth; that is, facilitated the entry of collectively
held ideas. Not only of ideas about Iceland or America - that is, national world-views - but also of notions about man in general and about his place in the scheme of things.

Recurring general ideas, often with overtones of myth, are the movement into the new and strange land; the establishment of a new society; the growth of social institutions; and the unceasing struggle to maintain social order. The defence of the community against the forces of evil and anarchy, at work both from the outside and from within, is the task, and it seems at times the raison-d'être, of certain courageous and heroic individuals, some of whom assume the stature of culture heroes.

Sagas and Westerns bristle with heroic deeds. Traces of the heroic outlook, heroic conventions, and a nostalgia for a by-gone Heroic Age are found everywhere. The forms were influenced by heroic ideals, they are an adaptation of heroic fable to the temper and conditions of everyday prose. Yet both forms are not simply concerned with the heroics of events, they are concerned with the rights and wrongs of situations in which credible characters find themselves.

Thus the trend toward mythologising and heroising history is counterbalanced by a rational approach and a spirit of inquiry. In the Sagas, things are seen in a sober light; Westerns often make use of narrators expressly presented as trustworthy, objective and 'in a position to know the facts'. Even the most valiant Saga heroes and the fastest Western gunmen do not stand above the collective will of the community; they are subject to the law of the land. Although the exceptional, the strongwilled individual, his exemplary conduct or his spectacular misconduct, receives
most attention, both genres ultimately judge the individual from a social vantage point, from a standpoint which more often than not is conservative.

This makes for ambiguity: Is individualism, in the sense of unfettered activity and headstrong pride, when or where and however it expresses itself, applauded or is it deplored? The figure of the outsider, for one, illustrates the vacillating attitudes towards the selfwilled man: at one extreme there are outlaw heroes, who are outlawed because they are simply unlucky or because they obey a higher law than that of the current worldly authorities; at the other extreme are the malefactors whose death is welcomed as a 'landhreinsun' or the 'cleaning up of a town'.

A dialectic between the interests of the ambitious clan or the intense person, and those of the community, between excessive self-assertion and necessary social cooperation characterises the forms. Excess and moderation, hybris and sophrosyne, underlie a central cluster of themes, a thematic core. The dialectic is always at work and the components are never pure. The genres are not empty forms filled by authors - they are vital structures animated by many themes and concepts as well as adaptable conventions. And as such the genres can furnish a range of possible connections and the space (framework) in which an author selects the effects and shapes the meanings he wants to express.

So far Sagas and Westerns have been viewed from a considerable distance. On looking closer, differences emerge. In details of narrative method they are manifestly distinct. Sagas read like chronicles of history, their style
is documentary, realistic and laconic. They interpret the life of the Saga Age through fully realised characters. They are severely pruned narratives, including in the main dialogue and sketchy descriptions. Their narrative method of direct presentation may be called 'dramatic'. Westerns, on the other hand, unfold in a leisurely way. The author has space not only to enlarge on the action and the setting, but also to describe character in depth, though without necessarily achieving more penetration than Saga authors. In fact, there often is room for the author's persona, a narrator, to come into the story. Broadly speaking the presentation of Westerns is 'epic'.

Structurally, the inverse holds. The overall composition of a Saga is more akin to epic literature. As Ian Maxwell pointed out, it is quite imperative to remember one principle when reading Sagas: the principle of the integrity of Saga episodes. Sagas prefer to deal with whole episodes, not pieces or aspects or reflections of them. The partial digressions which cause the plot, particularly in the longer Sagas, to appear loose and meandering are not so much undigested historical matter as manifestations of the Sagas' affinity with the epic kind. Westerns, on the other hand, are structured more like dramas. Usually they obey the unities of time, place, and action. Compared to the broad sweep of a Saga, which may cover many countries and pursue the total biography of an individual or the destiny of a family and even a whole countryside across generations, Westerns typically are content to deal with a short interval in the life of an individual or a small town and the surrounding district.

Thus Sagas and Westerns are both epic and dramatic, but they distribute their accents differently. Sagas tend
to be strings of connected short 'dramas'. Short scenes predominate, but on more momentous occasions - such as Gunnarr's wedding, the burning of Njáll or Grettir's struggle with Glámr - the narrative is denser. Here a zoom-in effect comes into operation and magnifies such high points of action. Westerns confine their scope to one 'drama', but treat it broadly, in consistently longer and more fully realised scenes.

However, the label 'epic-dramatic', which would seem applicable to both Sagas and Westerns, is of greater significance than being a mere statement that Sagas and Westerns are 'impure' or 'mixed' forms. In order to enlarge on this point it is necessary to clear up a certain ambiguity which so far has been left unmentioned. Sagas and Westerns alike exist on two levels. They are discrete, individual stories, but they are also collectives - a body of many Sagas or Westerns. The collective nature of each genre, the sharing of a large number of common traits, allows a Saga to be immediately recognised by the audience as a Saga, and a Western as a Western.

On the whole, the parallels discussed in this investigation are those found on the more abstract, collective level. A close comparison of an individual Saga with a single Western in effect is quite difficult; and although it rewards the effort - as was seen in the juxtaposition of Víga-Glúms Saga and Bitter Grass - it is limited.

The fact that Sagas and Westerns exist on two levels reveals a general pattern of similarity which, in one significant way, overshadows the differences between, on the one side, the two narrative methods and between individual stories on the other. The association of an
individual story with a collective, with a larger body of knowledge, gives it extra resonance and depth of meaning. Indeed only a pluralistic vision makes sense of our appreciation of the genres and begins to explain their vigour and adaptability. Single stories seem to dramatise fragments, or facets, of this larger body, of this more comprehensive fictional world. They interact with it, examine it, and thus the past of the nation, from different, sometimes contradictory points of view. But they superimpose on this past echoes of the present. A story may contain, but need not necessarily even attempt to resolve paradoxes and contradictions of the Icelandic or American situation.

Hence the term 'epic-dramatic', at least in the present context, has a definite meaning: individual more or less drama-like stories - both as individual works such as Barquero or as segments of larger works such as Njáls Saga - contribute to and are related to a larger whole - to an epic background.

Overall, however, the influence of the epic concept seems to be the more significant. For one thing, individual works, especially later ones, tend to become more and more inclusive. They presuppose many of the other works and become more than dramatised 'fragments'. Works like Njáls Saga and Little Big Man come close to being national epics - in scope, weight, form, function and appeal. Secondly, individual works - in the mind of the audience - become assimilated to the broader body of knowledge, to the epic background. The result is that individual stories lose much of their independence and originality. The fictional worlds themselves gradually assume the proportions and weight of epics. To allow a play on words, instead of
forming epic backgrounds they grow into background epics. Parallels to come to mind are the epic cycle of the ancient Greeks, and the set of interconnected novels making up Balzac's Comédie Humaine. The Saga World and the World of the Westerns, each forms something like a 'Comédie Humaine'.

In these two worlds action predominates. Dramatized snippets of high action probably gave rise to the two species and helped elaborate the broader fictional worlds. These worlds are essentially masculine. In spite of haughty and impressive Saga women - who in many ways mirror the men of the Sagas - and in spite of gentler but nevertheless unusually determined and resourceful Western frontier women, quarrels pitting man against man predominate.

Apart from being viewed as instances of a struggle between Good and Evil, and apart from being ascribed to metaphysical forces such as ill fate, the men's quarrels are commonly motivated by a concern with honour and pride. The maintenance of self-esteem, the duty to avenge the death of a relative or friend, and the unswerving commitment to a task also figure prominently in the catalogue of motives. A strong sense of what is fair and square, as well as attempts to protect private property are further significant motives. Expressed negatively, conflicts are precipitated by character traits such as arrogance, self-deception and meanness, by injustice, aggressiveness and greed.

The general pattern of the conflicts is as follows: minor irritations and frictions, or minor breaches of rules and norms lead to an increasing cleavage between two parties. Adjustive and redressive procedures accompany the gradually worsening quarrel. Eventually the conflict becomes
irremediable. A climax, usually bloody, follows. Thereafter some sort of social balance is restored - either quickly as in the Westerns, or slowly as in most Sagas.

In spite of many episodes depicting battle and sudden death, Sagas and Westerns are not wholly 'hard' genres. There are touches of humour. There are 'softer' emotions such as friendship and love, the former is more characteristic of the Sagas, the latter of the Westerns. What is more, violence is viewed and presented as being self-defeating and socially undesirable, as being at best a dubious means of establishing order and justice. In both genres, court scenes and scenes involving the discussion of law suggest that legal arbitration is preferred to personal violence.

On a deeper level, Sagas and Westerns are concerned with the problematical interrelationship between the concepts of law and justice, of order and social equity. More deeply still, both forms are concerned with ideas such as moderation and self-restraint, with humility and compromise.

Westerns comment explicitly on abstract ideas and concepts. Sagas are more reticent, they deal more in actions and characters. But this does not mean that the Sagas, for example, may not function as vehicles of social comment and criticism. Much is suggested obliquely or between the lines, as was shown in Víga-Gláms Saga; Laxdaela Saga, on certain planes, is a critique of the Sturlung Age; the man who composed Njáls Saga, on the internal evidence of the Saga, must have been urgently aware of the larger issues and events of his day. The writers of Westerns too were - and are - aware of such larger matters. Butch Cassidy dramatises and openly expresses the view that the spirit of individualism
has yielded to the pressures of mass-civilisation; a problem which even to-day continues to pre-occupy Americans. McCabe's fight against the Snake River Mining Corporation refers as much to the U.S.A. of the early 1970's as it depicts the growth of big corporations after the Civil War. The control of big business has been a major issue of American political life for almost a hundred years. The rise of multi-national companies has given this problem a world-wide dimension. The McMasters refers to racial conflict. The fact that the hero, Benjie McMaster, is a Negro seems to be connected with the new respect that black people have gained in the U.S.A. after the growth of the Civil Rights Movement and the emergence of black militancy in the 1960's.

On a psychological level, the genres function partly as entertainment, as invitations to escape into a somewhat idealised world, and partly as models of and for social life. More significantly, however, they seem to have been a response to the need of young nations to create their own mythology and history. Which once more brings us back to history. Overall, history - in a broad sense- emerges as the major underlying factor. It pervades the subject matter, form, ethos, ideas and function of both genres.

A general typology emerges. Sagas and Westerns are two species of a genus of literature showing the following features:

1. It summarises and represents the history experienced by a people. It both stems from and depicts a society undergoing massive cultural transformations.
2. It is in the widest sense of the word popular literature; that is, it belongs to the people, it is traditional, conventional, and open to myth.

3. It freely utilises the pattern of gradually intensifying heroic quarrels between strongwilled men, set against the general backdrop of a Heroic Age.

4. But it also depicts characters who live within and interact with the community: they are unusual people, but they are subject to social criticism. They are often ambivalent figures that serve both as an ideal and a warning.

5. It manifests itself through discrete stories of variable length which on a more general level complement each other to give rise to a 'framework'; that is, to something like the Comédie Humaine, peopled by the proud and the good, as well as by the bad and the ugly.

6. While providing entertainment, this literature serves as a vehicle for social comment and criticism, most of which has a distinctly conservative flavour about it. Finally, the genus serves as a means of mediation between conflicting sets of norms which are simultaneously affirmed by the nation that give rise to it: it enables the society to simultaneously criticise and affirm the status quo.

Naturally, such a typology suffers from all the disadvantages to which general classifications are prone. But if it is understood as something like an x-ray picture that allows a glimpse of underlying structures - those discernible from a particular vantage point - and if it is not seen as normative, then it may prove to be a useful analytic tool.
For instance, the differentiation of Sagas and Westerns from related types of literature becomes feasible. Compare the typology with the following descriptions:

Arthurian romances are not so much history as they are dramatised legends. They are traditional and conventional, but they are not truly popular, for they express the views and ethos of only one social class, the aristocracy. Long smouldering heroic quarrels are replaced by random combats. Their heroes are idealised figures wandering through wild and desolate forests on some chivalric quest. The individual stories do complement each other, and thus build up something like a conglomerate epic, but social comment is less important than the illustration of the virtues a good knight ought to possess - courtly manners, courage and devotion.

Australian bushranger stories, on the other hand, embody recognisable history. But the view of history is one-sided and narrow. Similarly, their heroes are variations of one type only: the typical bushranger is an outlaw who is a hapless victim of circumstances, injustice and tyranny. He is an outsider who challenges the establishment, often with the open support of the common people, especially those of Irish descent. The ancient tales told about Robin Hood, the outlaw who fights on behalf of the poor against the rich, seem to have supplied both the inspiration and the theme for these stories. Bushranger stories as yet do not give a comprehensive or widely shared picture of Australia's past. They have not yet become a conglomerate epic. However, it is noteworthy that at least one bushranger, Ned Kelly, has been the central figure of a large number of stories,
dramas, films, and even of a cycle of paintings by the Australian painter Sidney Nolan.

Historical novels are 'scientific' and complex in their view of history. They range, as a collective whole, freely over mankind's total past. The personality of the author expresses itself more directly, his personal style and story-telling technique are often consciously original. His 'heroes' may be un-heroic and passive; they frequently are modern personality types projected into a historical setting.

Closer to home, this typology could be used to distinguish the Íslendinga-sögur from the Fornaldar-sögur or the Konungasögur, or the Westerns forming the basis of this study from the so-called B-Westerns or the 'penny dreadfuls'. However, as this would be a major undertaking by itself, it cannot be attempted here. It would be a logical follow-up to this study.
REFERENCES AND NOTES

CHAPTER VII

2. op.cit., p.25.
3. M. Magnusson, Njál's Saga, p.11.
Appendix: Icelandic Texts.

Selection of passages in the original inalphabetical order according to the name of the Saga from which they are taken (Guðni Jónsson edition)


Pást sitr þú, Járnskeggi. Þat er mér sagt, at þu léttir bera merki fyrir þér norðr á Vöðlapingi sem fyrir konungum. Nú skil ek eigi, hvar koma mun metnaði þínnum, ef þu hef af þessu virðing, ok kys ek þik frá, ok verð ek fyrir þínnum hlut at sjá, at eigi geysist þú ör virðingunni. Pást sitr þú, Skegg-Broddi. Hvárt var sagt, at Haraldr konungr mælti þat, at værir bezt til konungs fallinn á Íslandi?

Hann segir: "Eigi veit ek þat. Margt mælti Haraldr konungr þat til mín, er ek veit eigi, hverr alhugi því fylgði."

Öfeigur segir: "At síðr mynda ek því sambykkjast, at þu værir konungr á Íslandi, at eigi skaltu konungr yfir þessu máli, ok kys ek þik frá..."


Grímur var ellifu vetra eða tíu ok sterkr at jöfnunum aldri. En er þeir lékust við, þá var Egill österkari. Grímur gerði ok þann mun allan, er hann mátti. Pá reiddist Egill ok hóf upp knattrét ok laust Grím, en Grímur tök hann höndum ok keyrði hann niðr fall mikit ok lék hann heldr illa ok kveðst mundu meiða hann, ef hann kynni sik eigi. En er Egill komst a færtr, þá gekk hann ör leiknum, en sveinarnar æptu at honum.

Egill for til fundar við Póðr Granason ok sagði honum, hvat í hafði gerzt.

Póðr mælti: "Ek skal fara með þér, ok skulum vit hefna honum."

Hann seldi honum í hendr skeggöxi eina, er Póðr hafði haft í hendi. Þau vápn váru þá tíð. Ganga þeir þar til, er sveinaleikrinn var. Grímur hafði þá hent knöttinn ok rak undan, en aðrir sveinarnir sóttu eftir. Þá hljóp Egill at Grími ok rak öxina í höfuð honum, svá at þegar stóð í heila.
mælti hann, at rýma skyldi pallinn þann inn óðra fyrir þeim, ok mælti, at Egill skyldi sitja þar í öndvegi gegnt konungi.

Egill settist þar niðr ok skaut skildinum fyrir færtr sér. Hann hafði hjálm á höfði ok lagði sverðit um kné sér ok dró annat skeið til hálfs, en þá skeldi hann aftr í slíðrin. Hann sat uppréttr ok var gneyptr mjúk. Egill var mikilleitr, ennibreiðr, brúnamikill, nefit ekki langt, en ákafliga digrt, granstæðit vitt ok langt, hakan breið furðuliga ok svá allt um kjálkana, hálsdigr ok herðimikill, svá at þat bar frá því, sem aðrir menn váru, harðleitr ok grimmligr, þa er hann var reiðr. Hann var vel í vexti ok hverjum manni hæri, úlfgrátt hárít ok þykkt ok varð snemma sköllótt. En er hann sat, sem fyrir var ritat, þá hleypði hann annarrri brúninni ofan á kinnina, en annarrri upp í hárætr. Egill var svarteygr ok skolbrúinn. Ekki vildi hann drekka, þó at honum væri borit, en ýmsum hleypði hann brúnunum ofan eða upp.

Aðalsteinn konungur sat í hássæti. Hann lagði ok sverð um kné sér, ok er þeir sáttu svá um hríð, þá dró konungr sverðit þó slíðrum ok tók gullhring af hendi sér, mikinn ok góðan, ok dró á blóðrefilinn, stóð upp ok gekk á gólfot ok rétti yfir eldinn til Egils. Egill stóð upp ok brá sverðinu ok gekk á gólfit. Hann stakk sverðinu í bug hringinum ok dró at sér, gekk aftr til rúms síns. Konungr settist í hássæti. En er Egill settist, dró hann hringinn á hönd sér, ok þá fóru brýnn hans í lag. Lagði hann þá niðr sverðit ok hjál míninn ok tók við dýrshorni, er honum var borit, ok drakk af. Þá kvað hann:

Hrammtangar lætr hanga
hrynvirgil mér brynju
Höðr á hauki troðnum
heiðis vingameiði.
Rítaðis knák reiða,
ræðr gunnvala bræðir,
gelgju seil á galga
gæirveðra, lof ð meira.

Þaðan af drakk Egill at sínnum hlut ok mælti við aðra menn.


Konungr mælti: "Kistur þessar, Egill, skaltu hafa, ok ef þú kemr til Íslands, skaltu fára þetta fél föður þínnum. Í sonargjöld sendi ek honum. En sumu fél skaltu skipta með frændum ykkrum Pórólfs, þeim er þer þykka ágætastir. En þú skalt taka
hér bróðurgjöld hjá mér, lönd eða lausa aura, hvárt er þú vill heldr, ok ef þú vill með mér dveljast lengðar, þá skal ek hér fá þér sameð ok virðing, þá er þú kannt mér sjálfr til segja."

Egill tók við fénu ok þakkaði konungi gjafar ok vinmæli. Tók Egill þaðan af at gleðjast...


Nú er gengit inn nökkut fyrir lýsing, hljóðliga, ok þangat at, sem Vésteinn hvílír. Hann var þá vaknaðr. Eigi finnr hann fyrir en hann er lagður spjóti fyrir brjóstit, svá at stóð í gegnum hann.

En er Vésteinn fekk lagit, þá mælti hann þetta: "Hneit þar," sagði hann.

Ok því næst gekk maðrinn út. En Vésteinn vildi upp standa. Í því fellr hann niður fyrir stokkin dauðr. Auðr vaknar við ok kallar á þóði inn huglausa ok biðr hann taka vápnit ór undinni. Þat var þá mælt, at sá varði skyldur at hafna, er vápní kippði ór sári, en þat váru kölluð launvíg, en eigi morð, er menn léti vápn eftir í beninni standa. Póðr var svá líkblauður maðr, at hann þorði hvergi í nánd at koma.

Gisli kom þá inn ok sá, hver efni í váru, ok bað þóðr vera kyrран. Hann tók sjálfr spjótið ör sárinu ok kastaði alblóðugu í örð einna ok lét engan mann sjá ok settist á stokkinn. Síðan lét hann búa um lík Vésteins eftir þeirri síoventju, er þá var í þann tíma. Vésteinn var mjók harmdauða bæði Gísla ok öðrum mönnum.


Torfi mælti þá: "Einsatt er mönnun þeim, sem hér eru við staddrir ok verða allir at því samráða at taka þessa vandismenn af lífi, eða munu þeir gervir fyrst alránir, sem nástir eru, en síðan allir aðrir heraðsmenn. Meguð þer þat sjá, at þeir munu eigi öðrum hlífa, er Hörðr vildi brenna inni mága sína. Snúum brátt at nökkuru ráði góðu, svá at engi njós komi þeim. Er þetta öllum it mesta nauðsynjaverk."

p. 291. Chapter 41.

Pá hafði Hörðr níttján vetr ok tuttugu, er hann var veginn, ok höfðu honum flestir tímar til heiðrs ok metnaðar gengit
útan þeir þrír vetr, er hann var í útlegð. Segir ok svá
Styrmir prestr inn fróði, at honum þykkir hann hafa verit í
meira lagi af sekum mönnnum sakir vízku ok vápnfimi ok allrar
atgervi, hins ok annars, at hann var svá mikils virðr útlendis,
at jarlinn í Gautlandi gifti honum döttur sína, þess ins
þriðja, at eftir engan einn mann á Íslandi hafa jafnmargir mann
verit í hefnd drepnir, ok urðu þeir allir ógildir.


* Pat var eitt kveld, at þeir feðgar sátu yfir borðum ok á
diskinum fyrir þeim lá langleggjarstykk. 
 Oláfr tók upp ok mælti: "Petta er furðu mikill leggr ok digr."
 Hávarð mælti: "Pat ætla ek þó, frændi, at hann sé af okkrum
sauðum, en eigi Óorbjarnar bóna, ok mikit er at þola slíkan
ójafnað."

Oláfr leggr niðr legginn á borðit ok roðnar við, ok þótti
þeim, er hjá sátu, sem hann þyrsti við borðinu, en þó brast
sundr leggrinn ok svá snart, at annarr hluttrinn stökk útar í
björinn, svá at þar var fastr. Hávarð leit upp ok mælti ekki,
en brosti þó at.

p. 133. Chapter 3.

Porkell lögmaðr var þar kominn. Var hann þá at spurðr. hverr
ætti.

Porkell svaraði ok heldr lágt: "Peir eiga hval víst,"
sagði hann.

Þorbjörn gekk þá at honum með brugðit sverðit ok mælti:
"Hverir þá, armi?" segir hann.

Porkell svarar skjót at drap niðr höfðinu: "Þér, þér, víst,"
segir hann.

Þorbjörn gekk þá at með ójafnað sinn ok tók upp hvalin
allan.

p.162. Chapter 11.

Nú verðr þar til at taka, er þeir Þorbjörn eru ok Hávarð.
Þeir leggjast frá landi. Var þat langt sund, þar til Þorbjörn
kom í eitt sker, er þar liggr frammi fyrir. Ok er hann kemr
í skerit, þá kom Hávarðr at framan. Ok er Þorðjörn sér þat, var hann vápnlauss fyrir, þríf þá upp stein mikinn ok ætlar at keyra í höfuð honum. Ok er Hávarðr sér þat, kom honum í hug, at hann hafði heyrt sagt útan ór lóndum, at þar var annarr síðr boðaðr en norðr í lónd, ok með því ef nókkurr kynni honum þat at segja, at sú trúó væri þetri ok fegri, þá skyldi hann því trúó, ef hann sigraði Þorðjörn. Ok eftir þat lagði hann sem harðast at skerín. Ok er Þorðjörn átlaði at kasta steininum, skruppu honum færtnir, ok varð honum á hált á grjótinu, svá at hann fell á bak aftr, en steinninn fellr ofan á bringspalir honum, ok verðr honum ósvipt við. Ok í því komst Hávarðr upp á skerit ok lagði hann þegar í gegnum með sverðinu Gunnloga.


Hrafnkell byggði allan dalinn ok gaf mönnum land, en vildi þó vera yfirmaður þeirra ok tók goðorð yfir þeim. Við þetta var lengt nafn hans ok kallaðr Freysgoði ok var ðjafnaðarmaðr mikill en menntri vel. Hann þröngði undir sik Jökulsdalsmönnum til þingmanna hans, var linr ok blíðr við sína menn, en stríðr ok striðlyndr við Jökuldalsmenn, ok fengu af honum engan jafná. Hrafnkell stóð mjök í einvígujum ok bætti engan mann fé, því at engi fekk af honum neinar bætr, hvat sem hann gerði.


Hrappr hét maðr, er bjó í Laxárdal fyrir norðan ánna gegnt Höskuldsstöðum. Sá bær hét síðan á Hrapprostöðum. Par er nú auðn. Hrappr var Sumarliðason ok kallaðr Víga-Hrappr. Hann var skozkr at fóðurætt, en móðurkyn hans var allt í Suðreyjum, ok þar var hann faðingi. Mikill maðr var hann ok sterkr. Ekki vildi hann láta sinn hlut, þó at manna munr væri nókkurr, ok fyrir þat, er hann var óðæll, sem ritat var, en vildi ekki bæta, þat er hann misgerði, þá flyði hann vestan um haf ok keypti sér þá jörð, er hann bjó á.

Kona hans hét Vigdís ok var Hallsteinsdóttir. Sonr þeirra hét Sumarliði.

Urðu þar nú málalykðir með ráði inna vitrustu manna, at málin váru öll lagið í gerð. Skyldu gera um sex menn. Var þá þegar gert um málit á þingi. Var þat gert, at Skammkell skylti ógildr, en manngjöld skyltu jöfn ok sporahöggvit, en bátt váru víg, sem vert þótti, ok gáfu frændr Gunnars fé til, at þegar váru bátt upp vígin á þingi. Gengu þeir þá til ok veittu Gunnari tryggðir Geirr goði ok Gizurr hvíti.

Reið Gunnar heim af þingi ok þakkaði mönnum liðveizlu ok gaf mörgum gjafar ok fekk af ina mestu sæmð. Sitr Gunnar nú heima í sæmð sinni.


Þat er (mál) manna, at Glúmr hafi verit tuttugu vetr mestr höfðingi í Eyjafirði, en æra tuttugu vetr engir meiri en til jafns við hann. Þat er ok mál manna, at Glúmr hafi verit bezt um sik allra vígra manna hér á landi.

Ok lýkr þar sögu Glúms.

Chapter 6.

... þá var sagt, at sá maðr var kommin at bænum með tölfta mann, er Björn hét ok kallaðr járnhauß. Hann var berserkr mikill ok var því vanr at koma til mannboða fjölmenna ok leitaði þar orða við menn, ef nökkurr vildi þat mæla, er hann mætti á þiggja, ok skoraði á menn til hölmöngu.

En Vigfúss bað þessa, at menn skyltu vel stilla orðum sínum, - "ok er þat minni læging en taka meira illt af honum." [Ok hétu menn honum góðu um þat.]

En Björn gekk í skálann inn ok leitaði orðheilla við menn ok spurði á inn æðra bekk inn ýzta mann, hvárt hann væri jafnsnjallr honum, en [hann] kvað fjarið þat fara. Síðan spurði hann hvern at öðrum.....
Hann snýr á brott þaðan ok ferr útar með öðrum bekk ok spyrr enn, ef þeir þykkjast jafnsnjallir honum, en þeir kváðust eigi jafnsnjallir honum. Þá kom hann at, þar er Glúmr lá í pullinum.

"Hví liggr sjá maðr svá," kvað Björn, "en sitr eigi?"

[Seinnautar hans svöruðu, veittu honum orða fullting ok kváðu hann svá óvitran, at ekki mark mátti at þykkja, hvat hann mælti.] Björn spyrnir á honum fæti sínum ok mælti, at hann skyldi sitja upp sem aðrir menn, ok spurði, ef hann væri jafnsnjallir honum.

En Glúmr kvað hann ekki þurfa at eiga við sík ok kváðst eigi vita um snílli hans, – "ok vil ek af því eng við þik jafnast, at út á Íslandi mundi sá maðr kallaðr fól, er þann veg léti sem þú lætr. En hér hefi ek vita þall bezt orðum stilla," – hreypr upp síðan ok at honum, þrífr af honum hjálminn. Síðan hnykkir hann upp eldistokki ok keyrir á milli herða honum ok lýtr kappinn við, ok þegar annat ok hvert at öðru, svá at hann fell. Ok þá er hann vildi á fætr farast, þá laust hann í hófuð honum og lét svá, þar til at hann kom út fyrir dyrr.
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