

SUMMARY

The works of Sturla Þórðarson have more direct historical implications than certain other sagas. But a balanced interpretation of his work will consider its literary as well as its historical implications, and will place it within the context of the unified literary tradition of Iceland, to which he was conscious of belonging. I would regard as of questionable value any historical speculation on his political career that did not take this literary context fully into account.

After the perils of his life in Iceland in the Sturlungaöld, Sturla came into his own when King Magnús commissioned him to write Hákonar saga. If there are literary short-comings in this work, they may be attributed to the author's prior unfamiliarity with his theme, rather than to political timidity. Within his narrative, written in the laconic saga-style, Sturla nevertheless seems to offer a justification for the strong monarchy of Hákon, as bringing peace to Norway. Some touches bring out Sturla's personal involvement with his theme.

Sturla seems to have been whole-heartedly in support of King Magnús's efforts at Icelandic reconstruction. Whether or not Sturla had a hand in compiling Járnsíða, we can understand why he was prepared to help introduce that code to Iceland. Sturla, again for reasons that are perfectly understandable, may not have been a very effective or enthusiastic lögmaðr, but the evidence is very inconclusive.

Íslendinga saga shows how the practice of literature had helped Sturla to develop political objectivity. The saga, as Björn M. Ólsen and Pétur Sigurðsson have pointed out, is marked by fairmindedness. It is also distinguished by its author's compassion for his country.

It is regrettable that only fragments of Magnús saga lagabætis remain, but there are touches that show Sturla's sympathy with Magnús.

Sturla's objectivity appears not to be a political caution that then found literary expression, but a literary quality shared with the Íslendinga sögur, that in turn no doubt led to a mature and fairminded political outlook.

Even when we know a mediaeval Icelandic writer by name, we usually know little else about him beyond what can be learned from his works themselves. From the standpoint of the New Critic, this may be a thoroughly satisfactory state of affairs. But our response to Sturla Þórðarson is bound to be a distinctive one. In Íslendinga saga he presented a group-portrait of the Icelanders in the last few decades of their independence from Norway: in Hákonar saga and Magnús saga lagabøtis he provided individual portraits of Iceland's first two Norwegian overlords. Here is an author dealing with the events of his own day, and events in which he was directly concerned. Here are sagas with direct and obvious historical implications. From the standpoint of the historian at least, the more that we can learn about Sturla's background and possible bias the better. Of course, if we are unable to learn enough we must admit this openly.

But it must be emphasised that we should never leave out of account the literary qualities of Sturla's work if we are to reach a balanced interpretation of it. Balanced saga criticism of this sort is never easy. The Íslendinga sögur may not be historical documents in the simple sense that they were once taken to be. This makes it harder for the literary critic to relate them to history, but it certainly does not relieve him of that troublesome responsibility. And it is equally important for the historian to respect the literary qualities of the samtíðar sögur. Sturlunga saga is not a mere quarry of historical data. For the receptive reader, as Régis Boyer has pointed out, 'peu à peu, les textes s'animent. Ils sont directs, et surabondent de sève, comme la vie même.' (1) And a literary reading of Sturla's Íslendinga saga can indeed pay rich dividends. (2)

M.I. Steblin-Kamenskij's assertion that the saga-writers sought neither artistic truth nor historical truth but an amalgam of these to be styled 'syncretic truth' has not found much favour. (3) But his thesis may surely be defended if restated in a more restricted way, to the effect that the writers of various sorts of saga belonged, and consciously belonged, to a unitary literary tradition unknown to us today. (In modern times it may be merely the consciousness of belonging to a common literary tradition that is lacking in our writers. To look, for instance, for literary topoi in the work of a present-day academic historian would undoubtedly cause offence, but would not for that reason alone be invalid!)

Sturla's work was many-sided. In composing a version of Landnámabók, and in compiling Kristni saga, he was working in the tradition of Ari Þorgilsson. (4) In chronicling the lives of Norwegian kings he had before him the example of his uncle Snorri Sturluson. He was also a poet, and a lost version of Grettis saga has been ascribed to him. (5) It is with particular aptness that Julia McGrew's translation of Sturlunga saga glosses the word 'skáld', as applied to Sturla in the Formáli, as 'poet, historian, story-teller', since he displayed in his work so many facets of the Icelandic literary tradition. (6) Like all sturdy traditions this one was capable of

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assimilating outside influences with benefit to itself. Sturla's work may furnish an example of this, since it has been suggested that he learned lessons as a historian from the example of Matthew Paris, who had visited Norway in 1248. Hákonar saga bears the marks of the European chronicle style. It follows a strict annalistic chronology, and letters and documents are utilized in the narrative. (7) And the writer of the Formáli stresses that in Íslendinga saga Sturla made use of 'bréfum þeim, er þeir rituðu, er þeim váru samtíða, er sögurnar eru frá.' (8)

It cannot be doubted that Sturla Þórðarson was conscious of, and proud of, his place in the Icelandic literary lineage. As Hermann Pálsson has pointed out, Sturla recites this lineage in the peculiarly solemn context of King Hákon's last hours: (9)

Í sóttinni lét hann fyrst lesa sér Látínu-bækr. En þá þótti honum sér mikil mæða í, at hugsa þar eptir hversu þat þýddi. Lét hann þá lesa fyrir sér Norænu-bækr, nætr ok daga; fyrst Heilagra-manna-sögur; ok er þar þraut lét hann lesa sér Konunga-tal frá Hálfðani Svarta, ok síðan frá Öllum Noregskonungum, hverjum eptir annan... Messu-dagr Lucie meyjar var á Þórsdag. En Laugar-daginn eptir, síð um kveldit, þröngdi svá sóttar-fari konungsins, at hann misti máls síns. Nær miðri nátt var úti at lesa Sverris-sögu. En heldr at miðri nótt liðinni kallaði almáttigr Guð Hákon konung af þessa heims lífi. (10)

The clear implication is that, just as King Hákon is thus gathered to his ancestors, so will Hákon's saga shortly take its due place within a family of recorded accounts.

If we look for clues as to Sturla's motivation as a politician and observer of political events, it may well be that the internal evidence of his writings will provide some. But whether it does or not, I would regard as of questionable value any historical speculation on his career that is not grounded in the literary context of his writings.

Sturla Þórðarson was born in 1214. Guðbrandur Vigfússon has described Sturla's father, Þórðr Sturluson, as 'a man of great sagacity and fore-sight, with something of the Seer about him, loving to dwell in peace, ready to give wise counsel if he were asked for it.' (11) Sturla's youth coincided, in general, with a time of comparative peace in thirteenth-century Iceland because of the temporary ascendancy of the Sturlung family over their rivals among the goðar. But in particular the harmony of Sturla's immediate family circle seems likely to have provided the same congenial atmosphere for the young author that fosterage with Jón Loftsson provided for Sturla's uncle Snorri. And the fact that the Sturlung family as a whole was so large, with so many divergent purposes among its members, in itself entails that when Sturla came to write his Íslendinga saga, we have no need to imagine that he conceived it in any narrow clannish spirit of partisanship.

But there then followed the final turbulent decades of the Icelandic Commonwealth, in which so many members of the Sturlung family died, and in whose events Sturla Þórðarson himself could not avoid being caught up. He was fortunate enough to be given quarter at the bloody fight of Orlygsstaðir in 1238 when his uncle Sighvatr and cousin Sturla were slaughtered; and he must surely then have shared the thought which he attributes to his uncle Snorri:

Þótti honum inn mesti skaði eftir Sighvat, bróður sinn, sem var, þó 'at þeir bæri eigi gæfu til samþykkis stundum sín á milli. (12)

The eventual fall of the Commonwealth in 1262-4 meant not only the submission of the Icelanders to King Hákon, and then to his son Magnús, but also the reconciliation within Iceland itself of Gizurr Þorvaldsson and Hrafn Oddsson, from neither of whom had Sturla reason to expect any good. (13) It was Hrafn Oddsson who forced Sturla to go abroad in the summer of 1263. (14) Since Sturla was not one of those Icelandic politicians who had worked to further the cause of Norwegian overlordship, he was plainly in some danger in going, as he did, to Norway. We do not know the exact nature of the accusations against him that his enemies had brought before the Norwegian government, but it is indeed easy to accept the opinion that Sturlu þátr attributes to Gautr:

En Gautr segir honum aftr á móti, hversu mjök hann var affluttr við Magnús konung, en þó meir við Hákon konung... Ok ætla ek þú hafir mjök affluttr verit.

Sturla might not have lived to write his books if old King Hákon had returned from his expedition against the Scots. But Sturla found favour with the young king, and earned from him the compliment: 'Þat ætla ek, at þú kveðir betr en páfínn.' (15) For fifty years Sturla had had to pick his way among the perilous affairs of his own land. He had now come into his own, in that his literary gifts had made him acceptable at the powerful court of Norway, whose rulers were determined 'to climb to the top (of the cultural ladder) as soon as possible, by absorbing as much as they could of European manners, learning and literature.' (16) Sturla's gifts could at last be given full expression by assisting this royal cultural endeavour, and when King Magnús commissioned Sturla to write Hákonar saga one sees the decisive turning-point in Sturla's whole life. But his gifts were to be used even more fruitfully in his later recollection in tranquillity of the turmoil that had engulfed his native land.

Hákonar saga is a spare narrative, and this might be attributed either to Sturla's previous unfamiliarity with Norway, or to his inability to warm towards a king who had worked so long for the over-lordship of Iceland and to his desire to imply no adverse criticism of other Norwegian politicians who were still alive or who had living relatives. Sturla seems to have set out,

in the main, to record as simply as possible the events of Hákon's reign, and Hermann Pálsson for this reason posits a contrast between the saga's literary and its historical value: 'For the modern historian Hákonar saga is in many respects a more satisfactory document than most of the other Icelandic sagas, and conversely it does not rate very high among them as a work of art.' (17) It seems that the saga was completed in 1265, by which time Sturla had had still only some two years' experience of Norwegian life. If it is accepted that the saga has literary shortcomings, these may easily be explained sufficiently by the author's lack of due time to assimilate the materials of a largely unfamiliar theme. The sparseness of the narrative, the avoidance of direct personal comment, would need to be attributed to Sturla's political timidity only if these literary qualities were present in a way not found in the Íslendinga sögur and in Sturla's own Íslendinga saga, and it is by no means certain that this is so.

In his opening lines, Sturla powerfully creates the context for his account of Norwegian unrest in the years between Sverrir's death and Hákon's rise to power. (18) It is as if Europe as a whole is torn by the disorder which Sturla had seen in microcosm in Iceland, and to which Norway too was prone at the time. In Rome sits Pope Innocent 'er inn þriði var með því nafni í postulligu sæti.' There is grim irony in the fact that under him Europe is convulsed by the struggles of rival Emperors, 'Philipus af Sváfa út á Púli, en Otto son Heinriks hertuga af Brúnsvik fyrir norðan Fjall. Þeir stríddu sín í milli, þar til er Philipus af Sváfa var veginn af Philipo hertuga, sínum þjónustu-manni.' Meanwhile the Norwegians squabble over the choice of a king, one candidate being deemed 'útlendr at föðurkyni' and the other 'Norðann ok þar óðalborinn í Þröndheimi, ok kominn af inum bestum kynkvíslum er í vóru Noregi.' (19)

When the young Hákon emerges as one of those with a claim to the throne, it is made clear how great are the forces of disorder that threaten to engulf him. When he has to flee from his enemies, his name is explicitly linked with that of one of his greatest predecessors, who had imposed himself on his quarrelling subjects: (20)

Svá hafa vitrir menn sagt, at þat hafi líkast verit, vás þat ok erviði er Birkibeinar höfðu í þessari ferð, með ótta þeim er þeir höfðu af sínum óvinum aðr enn þeir kómu með konungs son norðr í Þröndheim, því vási [ok erviði] er Oláfr Tryggvason ok Ástriðr móðir hans fengu í sínum ferðum þá er þau flyðu ór Noregi austr til Svíþjóðar...

At apposite points in the narrative Sturla quotes from his own poem that had won the admiration of King Magnús, as for example:

Hafði Chrístr of konungs-efni
huliz-hjálms heilli góðu,
þá er allvallds ór ófriði
frægðar-son fagnandi kom.

The bad weather that permits Hákon's escape from his enemies expresses the divine will that Hákon shall survive to bring peace to his people.

Thereafter, the saga develops as the chronicle of Hákon's drive towards supreme power. But it also seems, implicitly, to be a justification of this drive. In a sense the story has come full circle when Hákon is crowned by the papal emissary, the representative of that supreme spiritual authority with reference to which the saga began. Cardinal William's speech emphasises the sanctification of Norwegian monarchy in the person of Hákon:

Lofaðr sé Guð, at ek hefi þat örendi full-gört í dag, sem ek hefir umboð til af hendi heilagrar Róma-borgar, ok herra Pávans, ok allra kardinála: ok nú [er] konungr yðarr kórónaðr, ok fullkomliga sæmðr, svá at eingi mun slíka sæmð fengit hafa fyrr í Noregi. (21)

But to add further emphasis Sturla again quotes from his own poem. Supreme honour has come to Hákon because he has brought peace to his people:

Sú kom gipta af Guðs syni
yfir Hákon heilli góðu:
er allvald öflgrar kristni
fyrir-maðr til friðar vígði

And when Hákon at length dies, Sturla's summary of his career again links the themes of sanctification and of peace and lawful government: again, the name of one of Hákon's mightiest predecessors is invoked:

Ett-víg öll lét hann af taka, svá at eingi skyldi gjalda annars tilverka, nema bæta at þeim hluta er lög segði á hann. Hákon konungr lagði meira hug á, at styrkja Guðs kristni í Noregi, en engi konungr fyrir honum, síðan er var inn helgi Óláfr konungr. (22)

It cannot however be urged that the saga is a mere homage to political authority for its own sake. Apart from his linking of the themes of political and divine harmony, Sturla shows that political harmony sometimes has a high purchase price. As W.P. Ker remarks, this is the idea expressed in the account of Hákon's struggle with Jarl Skúli. Sturla shows us 'the two different principles - the monarchy and the oligarchy' and brings out 'the tragic opposition of the two sorts of good intentions.' (23) Margaret, the daughter of Skúli and wife of Hákon, embodies this tragedy in one of the saga's most brilliant passages. She states, in all innocence, what are the requirements in Norway of harmony and good government; and then she is at once made aware of the consequences of this in terms of her own divided loyalties:

Hón spurði, ef konungrinn hefði frétt nokkur ný tíðendi. "Smá eru tíðendin," segir hann, "tveir eru konungar í Noregi í senn." Hón sagði: "Einn mun vera réttr konungr, ok erut þér þar; ok svá láti Guð vera ok inn helgi Óláfr konungr." Þá sagði konungr, at faðir hennar hefði látið gefa sér

konungs-nafn á Eyra-þingi. "Betr mun vera", segir hon, "ok görit fyrir Guðs sakir, trúit þessu eigi, meðan þér megit við dyljask." Kemr þá upp grátr fyrir henni, ok mátti hún ekki fleira um tala. Konungrinn bað hana vera káta; sagði, at hún skyldi ekki gjalda frá hönun tilmækja föður síns. (24)

I would suggest that, in his over-all handling of his theme, Sturla brings out one sense in which he is personally involved in it: here is the Icelander who has known dispeace at home describing how peace was brought to Norway. But in small touches he shows another sense of personal involvement. In Íslendinga saga Sturla was to say explicitly that Gizurr Þorvaldsson had King Hákon's written authorization to kill Sturla's uncle Snorri:

Helt hann þá upp bréfum þeim, er þeir Eyvindr ok Árni höfðu út haft. Var þar á, at Gizurr skyldi Snorra láta útan fara, hvárt er honum þætti ljúft eða leitt, eða drepa hann at öðrum kosti fyrir þat, er hann hafði farit út í banni konungs. Kallaði Hákon konungr Snorra landráðamann við sik. (25)

In Hákonar saga, as Hermann Pálsson has pointed out, Sturla is somewhat less explicit. (26) But there too the king's complicity in the murder is brought out at a later stage, when Órækja, Snorri's son, comes before King Hákon and is forgiven, though the king says that Órækja's guilt was greater than his father's. Hákon adds: "Ok eigi mundi faðir hans dáið hafa, ef hann hefði komit á minn fund." (27) Hermann Pálsson observes of this passage: 'To anyone who is familiar with the technique and art of the Icelandic sagas the words uttered by the king could hardly fail to convey the notion that the king was responsible for Snorri's death. We are clearly expected to read such an admission into his remark.' It may have been political caution that held Sturla back from being more explicit at this point. But it is at least as likely that it was in obedience to the dictates of the laconic saga-style that he said no more, in a saga whose main theme was not the disputes of the Icelanders. He had, after all, said enough.

A literary craftsman may work himself into the right mood for performance of an initially uncongenial task. But there is no need to suppose that Sturla had come, as a result of writing Hákonar saga, especially to revere the memory of King Hákon. Rather it would appear that he had come to appreciate the value of the strong Norwegian monarchy, and had sought to embody that value in literary terms. That monarchy had brought order to Norway itself, and there was now a hope that it might restore to Iceland a degree of order that Sturla had seldom experienced in his life-time.

It is, I suggest, in that spirit that we should see Sturla embarking on the next stage of his career, that of an administrator in Iceland on behalf of the Norwegian crown. He was to be the lögmaðr, and the lawcode within which he was to operate was the new code Járnsíða, brought from Norway in 1271 by Sturla and by King Magnús's hirðmaðr, Eindríði böggull, for the approval of

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the Alþing. Járnsíða was a code so Norwegian in its antecedents and its provisions, apparently so ill-adapted to Icelandic needs, that it required to be replaced by Jónsbók only ten years later. (28) Surely, it may be argued, Sturla's association with such a code reveals a culpable degree of collaboration with the Norwegian crown against the best interests of his own country?

We have no sure means of knowing how much responsibility Sturla bore for the framing of Járnsíða. As has been pointed out, (29) the statement in Sturlu þáttur that 'litlu síðar kom Sturla í ina mestu kærleika við konunginn, ok hafði konungr hann mjök við ráðagerðir sínar...' (30) does not at all amount to direct evidence that Sturla helped King Magnús frame his Icelandic law-code. It is true that there is a more positive statement in Abbot Arngrímur's version of Guðmundar saga where, with reference to an earlier period, there is a mention of Sturla Þórðarson

er síðan varð riddari Magnúsar konungs Hákonarsonar, ok lögmaðr, ok með hans ráði ok tillögu skrifaði konungrinn fyrstu lögbók til Íslands síðan landit gekk undir konungs vald. (31)

The tradition behind this remark, however, may stem merely from a belief among the Icelanders that Sturla Þórðarson, scion of such a prominent native house, must surely have had more to do with the framing of their new laws, however unpalatable they may have been in themselves, than, say, the Norwegian Eindriði böggull.

But if the authorship of Járnsíða must remain an open question, there seems no reason to doubt that Sturla was in full sympathy with the spirit and intention of the new code. And this in itself would not brand him as a quisling. Ólafur Lárússon's convincing argument (32) is important here, to the effect that, when it was stipulated in the Gizurar sáttmáli of 1262 that 'Hér í mót skal konungr láta oss ná friði og íslenskum lögum,' (33) this was by no means tantamount to saying that Grágás would continue in full force. The coming of monarchy created a wholly new situation, one in which the goðar, for instance, could not be allowed to retain those powers that had led to so much strife. Institutions and laws must be modified accordingly. In addition, while it would be a gross overstatement to say that Grágás had been forgotten, the wide general knowledge of the law that is implied in the custom of its regular annual recitation at the Alþing can scarcely have been a marked feature of Icelandic society in the troubled period up to 1262. And it may be suggested that a code that had been so often and so spectacularly defied had at least lost some credibility in the eyes of many Icelanders. For Sturla, just as for King Magnús, the need for a new start must have seemed very pressing. And if the work was somewhat botched and required to be done again, this was the unsurprising result of the speed with which it was attempted to set the machines of law and order in motion again. A modern government might in such circumstances have sent Sturla back to Iceland to preside, without limit of time, over a law reform commission; but this is not necessarily a sign of

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our superior wisdom in such matters.

If the evidence, which is somewhat in the nature of hearsay, be accepted, then Sturla was not an outstanding success as lögmaðr. This does not mean that he would in no circumstances have been competent for the job. He had once in the past been lögsögumaðr to the Icelandic Commonwealth, and had de-mitted office in a very short time: but this had been in the very difficult circumstances of 1251. Now, a man of almost sixty, he had played his part in the institution of the new order of government, but may well have found its detailed application an exhausting and disappointing business. The spectacular strife was in the past, but there were still many matters for the Icelanders to disagree about. In particular, Bishop Árni was intent on raising again and on solving the contentious question of the staðamál, and Sturla as a historian would have known how this had caused dissention before. The traditions that survive suggest that Sturla displayed indecision and vacillation when cases came before him. He earned the gratitude of none, and above all Bishop Árni came to see him scornfully as someone who set the avoidance of trouble above the performance of his duty:

As Þorvarðr Þórarinnsson told King Magnús: "Lögsögumaðr var ógreiðr, ok skaut flestum málum undir biskups dóm ok annarra manna, þeirra er sýndist. Af lögréttu-mönnum nýttist lítið." (34)

Or as Bishop Árni represented it to King Magnús: "... en af Sturla stóð minna gagn en þörf stóð til, ok þar þurfti ráð fyrir at sjá." (35)

Or as Sturlu þáttr has it: Sturla fór þá til Staðarhóls búi sínu ok hafði lögsögn, þar til er hófust deilur milli kennimanna ok leikmanna um staðamál. lét Sturla þá lögsögn lausa ok settist hjá öllum vandræðum, er þar af gerðust.

Margir menn heyrðu Árna biskup þat mæla, - ok þótti þat merkiligt -, at Sturla myndi nokkurs mikils góðs at njóta, er hann gekk frá þessum vanda. (36)

The editors of the modern edition of Sturlunga saga suggest that 'rétt er, að Sturla kemur lítið við deilur höfðingja og klerka um staðina' (37), and we can certainly understand it if Sturla's instinct was to have as little to do with the matter as possible. But the evidence is in any event rather too scanty to base a firm opinion on, and the criticisms of Sturla would be perfectly consistent with the case of a conscientious administrator who tried to avoid taking sides, and so found favour with neither side.

But between 1271 and his death in 1284 Sturla was to have another sojourn in Norway, working on the biography of his friend King Magnús. He can have had very little spare time. It seems best to accept those arguments that assign the composition of Islendinga saga to Sturla's last years, even though he had as it were been gathering the materials for it all his life. (38) Not

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only are its balance and tranquillity of mood consistent with this interpretation, but it also seems - at whatever date we assume its extant version to terminate - to be an open-ended and thus unfinished work, designed to bring the story of the Icelanders up to the fall of their Commonwealth and indeed, it may be suggested, perhaps even beyond, into the time of the new society which Sturla was helping to build. Sturla may well have been writing against time, impatient of those cares of office that disturbed his attempts at recollection of times past. If Þórðr Narfason from Skarð is the most likely candidate for compiling Sturlunga saga in the form which has survived for us, it may be significant that he is thought to have studied law with Sturla at Þagradalur in the winter of 1271-2. (39) The thoughts of the older historian, and perhaps, under his inspiration, of the younger too, may more often have been of the immediate past than of how to apply the technicalities of the law to the problems of the immediate future.

Islendinga saga has been praised by R. George Thomas for the 'distinctive quality', 'a passionate involvement in his country's fate' that Sturla brings to it. (40) Yet just as Hákonar saga is a royal success-story that is held on course by the saga-style, so that there is neither personal criticism of Hákon the man nor excessive adulation of the institution of monarchy, so Islendinga saga is an account of national disharmony in which no personal bias is allowed to obtrude, and in which the saga-style is employed to harmonise all elements of the story through the device of fair dealing with all the participants. For Sturla Þórðarson, passionate involvement is expressed through objectivity. This objectivity is basically a literary quality, and indeed is here the mark of an outstanding writer. Yet it seems likely that it was also a quality that informed Sturla's political outlook, or at least came to do so after the early 1260s. Sturla may of course have been and have remained one of those people who can separate their writings and their life. In the winter evenings he may have delighted his friends with a version of events that characterised his enemies with witty venom. I don't believe it, but I admit that there is no way of proving my belief.

That Sturla Þórðarson shared a style, and hence an attitude of balance and fairness, with the writers of the Islendinga sögur, is of course no new idea. It has perhaps been stated most authoritatively by Björn M. Ólsen, on the basis of his very meticulous study of Sturlunga saga:

Eftir því sem nú er um að dæma, verður ekki betur sjeð, enn að Sturla fullnægi hinni fyrstu kröfu, sem gera ber til góðs sagnaritara, að hann vilji ekki segja annað enn það, sem satt er, og vilji segja allan sannleikann. Hann segir eigi að eins kost, heldur ok löst á sínum nánustu vinum og ætt-
ingjum, t.d. á Snorra og Órækju, og jafnvel á föður sínum. Mjög sjaldan lýsir hann beinlínis þeim mönnum, sem við söguna koma. Enn hann kann þá íþrótt að láta verk þeirra og orð lýsa þeim svo, að lesandinn fær ljósa hug-
mynd um geðslag þeirra og lyndiseinkunn. Með einni lítilli smásögu dregur hann oft upp svo skarpa og lifandi mynd af þeim manni, sem hann vill lýsa,

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að það er eins og vjer sjáum manninn standa beran og afklæddan fyrir oss og skiljum eðli hans miklu betur enn af langri lýsingu. Þessar myndir brenna sig svo inn í minni lesandans, að þær gleymast aldrei. (41)

Björn M. Ólsen suggested that Íslendinga saga, as far as it was composed by Sturla, may not have extended beyond 1242, and he postulated the existence of a now-lost Gizurr saga ok Skagfirðinga which could have been used by the compiler of Sturlunga to fill part of the gap thereafter. (42) In arguing against this conclusion Pétur Sigurðsson sought to demonstrate that there was a unity of tone about Íslendinga saga, which would admit of the conclusion that Sturla himself had carried it as far as 1255. (43) That the later chapters dealt fairly with Gizurr Þorvaldsson was not in itself a departure from the manner of the earlier chapters, where Sturla had shown himself capable of this kind of fairness, leaving his audience to form their own conclusions about Gizurr from the recital of his words and deeds. Here Pétur Sigurðsson was working very much in the spirit of Björn's own statement that, while Sturla had ample reason for a personal and family bias against Gizurr, 'Sturla er of góður og samvirkusamur sagnamaður til að láta mikið á þessu bera, enda gefur hinn rólegi og ástríðulausi íslenski sögustíll höfundinum sjaldan tækifæri til að láta í ljós tilfinningar sínar.' (44)

And indeed the recitals of Gizurr's words and deeds, throughout the saga, are liable in themselves to leave the audience with severe reservations about Gizurr's character. Sturla Sighvatsson, for instance, is not acting honourably when he forces Gizurr to swear that he will go to Norway, and Gizurr might thereafter have with honour broken the oath obtained under compulsion. But the description of the oath-taking does not suggest honour on Gizurr's side either:

Síðan var bók tekin ok fengin Gizuri. Bað Sturla hann sverja útanferð sína ok at halda trúnað við hann.
Gizurr spyr, hvárt hann skyldi vinna norrænan eið eða íslenskan.
Sturla bað hann ráða.

"Þá mun ek norrænan eið vinna," segir Gizurr, "er ek skal þangat fara. En þat mun ek segja fyrir eið minn, at ek skal til þín aldri öfugt orð mæla ódrukkinn." (45)

Gizurr's laboured joke might in itself have been consistent with the behaviour of a man in mortal fear. But together with the wholly gratuitous, and again flippant, final remark, it reveals the godi of devious purpose. We seem to sense the battle of Orlygsstaðir already casting its shadow forward. We know what Sturla's attitude to Gizurr had been in the days before the Commonwealth had finally fallen:

Rauf við randa stýfi,
- rétt innik þat, - svinnan
allt, þvít oss hefr vélta,
Óðinn, þats hét goðu.

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Skaut, sás skrökmál flytir,
- skilk, hvat gramr mun vilja,
Gautr unni sér sleitu -,
slægr jarl við mér bægi. (46)

Recollection in tranquillity is far from bringing Sturla either to an attitude of approval of Gizurr's conduct, or to one of indifference towards it. But it enables him laconically to depict Gizurr not as the villain of a melodrama but as a man, like many of Sturla's own kin, whose moral senses have become blunted by involvement in fierce politics.

Questions of literary tone admit of no single answer, but it seems to me that Sturla's desire to bind up the wounds of Icelandic society is constantly present in his sober narrative. In the tiny vignette of the killing of Kálfr, for instance, there is not only humour amid the grimness, but also un-ironic compassion for both the slain man and his superstitious slayer:

Þórálfr mælti: "Ekki hyggur þú nú at, Kálfr, hvat þú gerir. Ver eigi svá nær krossinum, at blóðit hrjóti á hann."
Kálfr sagði: "Vant gerið þér mér nú" - ok lagðist niðr firr meir krossinum.
(47)

The set-piece description of the ill-fated wedding celebration at Flugumýrr is a deservedly famous part of the saga. Once the violence is over, Sturla sums up in masterly fashion. Here Gizurr Þorvaldsson is certainly given his due, since his grief is recorded directly, and recorded first. Then follows the wry enumeration of the material damage done. Sturla knew that bereavement is not the only cause of grief that is occasioned by civil war, since people become attached to their possessions too. He finally alludes to his own daughter Ingibjörg, the luckless bride:

Þá mælti Gizurr: "Páll frændi," segir hann, "hér máttu nú sjá Ísleif, son minn, ok Gróu, konu mína."
Ok fann Páll, at hann leit frá, ok stökk ór andlitinu sem haglkorn væri. Á Flugumýri brann mikit fé, er margir menn áttu, þeir er þar váru. Ok margir menn höfðu þangat lét gripa sinna, dúnklaða ok annarra gripa, ok brann þat allt. En þat brann þó mest í fémunum, er Gizurr átti... Þar brunnu ok margir gripir, er átti Ingibjörg Sturludóttir. Ingibjörgu bauð til sín eftir brennuna Halldóra, dóttir Snorra Bárðarsonar, frændkona hennar, er þá bjó í Odda. Fór hon þangat ok förunautar hennar með henni. Var hon mjök þrekuð, barn at aldri. (48)

The last sentence, the more telling for its brevity, reflects not merely the compassion of a father: there is also the compassion of the historian for an entire society that is worn out with strife.

It is a matter of particular regret that so little survives of Magnús

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saga lagabœtis, the royal biography that Sturla composed in the years 1277-8. Magnús was Sturla's patron and friend, and the king under whose aegis the work of Icelandic reconstruction had been begun. Perhaps in the full version of the saga Sturla found some way, within the context of his customary reticence, of expressing his personal identification with King Magnús's cause. As it is, all we have are hints. Sturla was surely speaking for himself as for his fellow-Icelanders when he says:

Petta sumar kom af Íslandi Hallvarðr gullskór. Hann sagði þau tíðendi, at allir Íslendingar höfðu þá vikiz undir hlýðni við Magnús konung... Hafa síðan Íslendingar aldri í móti mælt at hlýða boði ok banni Magnúss konungs. Gengu þeir ok með meiri blíðu undir hann enn Hákon konung föður hans. (49)

Icelanders in Sturla's audience would have called to mind how Snorri Sturluson had ignored the 'boð ok bann' of King Hákon, and what had come of it. Now that the Icelanders had identified their interests with those of the Norwegian crown, Sturla could identify himself too with King Magnús's efforts at international diplomacy, such as the attempt to reconcile members of the Swedish royal house:

Átti þá Magnús konungur hlut at, at setta þá bræðr; ok svá görði hann Jón Philippusson sættan við Valdimar konung. Þeir skyldu finnaz í Skörum, ok skyldu tólf menn sverja eiða at sættum þeirra... Var Valdimarr konungur með Magnúsi konungi alla þá stund, er þeir vóru ásamt; ok var þar hin ágætazta veizla. Fóru allir hlutir sem blíðligast með þeim; ok vóru þar margir merkiligir hlutir talaðir, þeir er vér ritum eigi. Magnús konungur gaf Valdimar konungi ágætar gjafir er þeir skildu; ok sendi Ólaf af Steini, ok fleiri góða menn, með Valdimar konungi austr á Skarir, at seá eiða þá sem þar skyldu fram koma um sætt þeirra bræðra ok Jóns Philippus-sonar, er Magnús konungur hafði þá tekit til handa þeim, at vilja Valdimars konungs. En eiðar þeirra fluttuz eigi sem þeim líkaði er sjá skyldu; ok dró þá enn til sundr-þykkju með Svíum. (50)

We are invited to glimpse the government of a good king at work: and we are left with the impression that the work of good government is never at an end.

Sturla's determination 'að hann vilji ekki segja annað enn það, sem satt er, og vilji segja allan sannleikann', without injecting his own prejudices into the account, might seem to be at root a political attitude. It might be held to stem from a caution and wariness forced upon him in hard political times. But it is my contention that Sturla's works should be read first of all in their over-all literary context: and this context includes the *Íslendinga sögur*. It is not through mere political accident that Sturla's works share the 'strict epic detachment' (51) of the *Íslendinga sögur*. Sturla's attitude of laconic impartiality, I submit, is at root a literary attitude. His development is not one from political caution to literary balance and impartiality,

but one from literary balance to political maturity and fairmindedness. The practice of his literary craft showed him how to rein in the strong prejudices that he must have had while involved in the struggles of Iceland's Sturlungaöld. We have a strong sense of his dignity of character, but we are not permitted to know him intimately, or to hear the justifications that he no doubt could have made of his own conduct. Modern historians may regret the consequent loss of raw material for their studies: but if we read Islendinga saga, and indeed Hákonar saga too, for its own sake, we will feel that there is immeasurably more gain than loss.

FOOTNOTES

1. Régis Boyer, 'L'Évêque Guðmundr Arason, Témoin de son Temps', Études Germaniques, xxii. 426-44 (1967), at p. 426.
2. See for example, Robert J. Glendinning, 'The Dreams in Sturla Þórðarson's Islendinga saga and Literary Consciousness in 13th Century Iceland', Fyrirlestrar: Alþjóðlegt Fornsagnabing (2 vols., Reykjavík, 1973).
3. M.I. Steblin-Kamenskij, The Saga Mind, trs. Kenneth H. Ober (Odense, 1973), esp. 21-48. See review by Hermann Pálsson in Mediaeval Scandinavia, vi. 215-21 (1973), and Peter Hallberg, 'The Syncretic Saga Mind: A Discussion of a New Approach to the Icelandic Sagas', Mediaeval Scandinavia, vii. 102-17 (1974).
4. Jón Jóhannesson, Gerðir Landnámabókar (Reykjavík, 1941), 69ff.
5. Sigurður Nordal, Sturla Þórðarson og Grettis saga (Reykjavík, 1938).
6. Sturlunga Saga, trs. Julia McGrew (2 vols., New York, 1970-74), i. 55, 465.
7. Knut Helle, 'Anglo-Norwegian Relations in the Reign of Hákon Hákonsson (1217-63)', Mediaeval Scandinavia, i. 101-14 (1968), at p. 111; N. Björgo, 'Om skriftlege kjelder for Hákonar saga', Historisk Tidsskrift (Norsk), XLVI: iii-iv. 185-218 (1967).
8. Sturlunga saga, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, Kristján Eldjárn (2 vols., Reykjavík, 1946), i. 115. This edition is referred to below as Ss.

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9. Hermann Pálsson, 'Hákonar saga - Portrait of a King', Orkney Miscellany, v. 49-56 (1973), at p. 51. This article is referred to below as HP.
10. Hákonar saga, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon (Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores: Icelandic Sagas, ii: London, 1887), 354-5. This edition is referred to below as Hs.
11. Sturlunga saga, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon (2 vols., Oxford, 1878), i. p. xcvi.
12. Ss, i. 440.
13. Ss, i. 529.
14. Ss, ii. 230-2.
15. Ss, ii. 234.
16. E.F. Halvorsen, 'Norwegian Court Literature in the Middle Ages', Orkney Miscellany, v. 17-26 (1973), at p. 21.
17. HP, at p. 50.
18. Hs, 1.
19. Hs, 2-3.
20. Hs, 5-6.
21. Hs, 248-9.
22. Hs, 358.
23. W.P. Ker, 'Sturla the Historian', in Ker's Collected Essays (2 vols., London, 1925), ii. 195.
24. Hs, 190.
25. Ss, i. 453.
26. HP, at pp. 54-5.
27. Hs, 237.
28. Magnús Már Lárusson, 'Járnsíða', Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder, vii. 566-7.
29. Gunnar Benediktsson, Sagnameistarinn Sturla (Reykjavík, 1961), 183. But see Jón Jóhannesson, Íslendinga saga (2 vols., Reykjavík, 1956-8), ii. 16-17.
30. Ss, ii. 234.
31. Biskupa sögur, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Jón Sigurðsson (2 vols., København, 1858-78), ii. 162. This edition is referred to below as Bs.
32. Ólafur Lárusson, 'Den isländska rättens utveckling sedan år 1262', Svensk Juristtidning, xxxv. 241-59 (1950), and his Lög og saga (Reykjavík, 1958), 199-222.
33. Diplomatarium Islandicum (Köbenhavn & Reykjavík, 1857 -), i. 619-25.

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