

Disfigurement, Disability, and Dis-integration in *Sturlunga saga**

Near the end of *Sturlunga saga*, an enigmatic, harelippled figure bursts onto the scene as an arrogant, rebellious, altogether insufferable child, goes on to a career of fomenting murder and mayhem among his own kin, and dies a saintly martyr's death just a few years before the end of Icelandic independence, an end that he did so much to bring about. He is Þorgils skarði Bøðvarsson, a great-grandson of Hvamm-Sturla through Þórðr Sturluson and Bøðvarr Þórðarson, the eldest sons in each case and, ironically, the quietest. His first appearance in the compilation is in *Íslendinga saga*, chapter 152, where he is put out as a hostage to Gizurr jarl by his own father, who would rather hand his eldest son over to his mortal enemy than swear a loyalty oath to him — a not uncommon saga preference for truth in public speech over all other values, including blood kinship. Here, Þorgils bears his byname, *skarði*, without explanation.¹ In the first chapter of *Þorgils saga skarða*, however, we have the following description:

Þorgils var vænn maðr yfirlits, herðimikill ok gerviligr, hvítr á hár ok hörund, eygðr manna bezt, miðmjór ok herðibreiðr, þunnt hár ok fór vel. Hann var hraustr ok harðgerr, syndr vel ok inn mesti harðfari í hvívetna, fámæltr ok fastheitinn. Hvárt sem hann hét góðu eða illu, þá var hann örr í at efna. Í efri vör var skarð þat, er hann var alinn með, — því var hann kallaðr Þorgils skarði. (Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 2:104)

[Þorgils was a handsome man in appearance, big-shouldered and accomplished, fair of hair and complexion, very fine-eyed, slim-waisted and broad-shouldered, with fine hair that fell attractively. He was strong and hardy, a good swimmer, and very vigorous in whatever he entered upon. He was close-mouthed but kept his word. Whatever he promised, for good or ill, he was energetic in carrying out. In his upper lip was a cleft that he was born with — on that account he was called Þorgils *skarði* (harelip).]²

* This article was written with the support of a generous grant from Gallaudet Research Institute.

1. Since *skarði* means only “notch,” it need not refer to a harelip and usually does not. Cf. Þorgils Dalluson, whom his brother Kormákr calls *skarði* (*Kormáks saga* verses 53–55) but who is nowhere described as disfigured, and the character Eiríkr skarði in this saga. Clearly, *skarði* must refer usually to gat-toothedness or a cleft chin.

2. All translations are by the author in collaboration with William Sayers.

The dilemma posed by the birth of a child with a harelip in a society engaged largely in subsistence farming must have been resolved most often by exposure. Because such infants cannot nurse efficiently and must therefore be hand-fed, caring for them during their first year would have required the release of one grown woman from nearly all other duties for that length of time, a major investment on a major gamble, since hand-fed infants had a slim chance of survival.³ We note, however, that the narrator has been careful to state that Þorgils was an eldest son (that is, an only son at birth), thus establishing the rationale for what must have been a heroic effort to save him — and a needless one, since, as it happens, Þoðvarr fathers two other, nonexceptional sons on his wife. In any case, although we must surmise that the harelip was a rarely seen disfigurement in this period in Iceland, there is no reason whatever to second-guess the narrator's assessment of Þorgils as "handsome." Medieval Nordic peoples were quite capable of noting and describing physical disfigurements and disabilities without confusing such exceptionalities with ugliness, as so often happens in modern Western societies. In the sagas, ugliness has its own conventions, distinct from the exceptional or bizarre.⁴

It seems that the only noteworthy consequence of Þorgils's harelip in this introductory portrait is his penchant to say little: he is "fámæltr." The inability to articulate labials ([b], [p], and [m]) would not have prevented Þorgils from being understood speaking Icelandic, but certainly would have prevented him from being called eloquent (an asset in the pursuit of power and advancement) or from becoming a lagamaðr (another, and related, avenue to both material gain and honor). Like other speech-impaired characters who are blocked from these paths to power, Þorgils eschews speech in favor of the cultivation of an image of boldness in order to resolve his disputes and to acquire the respect and the property of others. As we learn from the boyhood deeds recounted immediately after this portrait, however, Þorgils is subject to outbursts of temper and rash words that he will not later rescind. While the introductory portrait has allowed for his rare utterance to be "for good or ill," what we in fact get is always "for ill." If we readers were tempted to understand the portrait's ambiguous "fámæltr ok fastheitinn" positively as "reserved and steadfast," we are soon disabused by the account of his perverse boyhood deeds and adjust our understanding to a negative "taciturn and intrac-

3. A harelip is often accompanied by a cleft palate, a condition that truly makes it impossible for the infant to feed without the intervention of modern technology. An infant with a harelip alone, however, is merely unable to suck efficiently, and could be spoon- or horn-fed. ("Baby horns," unlike modern baby bottles with nipples, allow the liquid to dribble out without sucking action.) The low survival rate is surmised based on the likelihood of bacterial infection from the handling of the milk, whether the mother's hand-expressed milk or cow's or sheep's milk. In the latter case, the child would in addition suffer from dietary deficiencies and the lack of immunities (conveyed in mother's milk) to colds and the like that carried off most motherless infants.

4. McDougall is simply wrong to read the saga ironically (1992, 59), since Þorgils's good looks are everywhere noted. The view of exceptionalities that McDougall has in mind is not found in Icelandic literature but rather in Saxo, who, typically, presents the non-Nordic view when, in Book 7, he cites a harelip as a disqualification for marriage. (Cf. Saxo's non-Nordic view of women as morally corrupt, for example.)

table.” The relationship between the harelip and these character traits is foregrounded by the ellipsis of the causal link, a kind of historiographical *asyndeton*, which readers must supply, as is the relationship between the father’s preference for truth in public speech that removes the son from the family and the son’s twisted intractability.

In addition to his hair-trigger temper and his self-cultivated image as a young tough, and related to his taciturnity, is his use of writing to get around his impairment, and this, too, has important consequences for his character and for the saga:

Þá er skip tóku at búast um várit, lét Þorgils rita á vaxspjöld ok sendi konungi. Var þat þar á, at hann beiddi, at konungr leyfði honum at fara til Íslands eða ella til annarra landa, kvaðst eigi lengr vera vilja í ófrelsi. En er konungr sá þetta, virði hann svá sem Þorgils gengi til stærð ok metnaðr, er hann vildi eigi sjálfr flytja við sik sem aðrir menn. En þó sendi konungr eftir honum. (*Þorgils saga skarða* chap. 5; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 2:112)

[Then, when they began to ready the ships in the spring, Þorgils had a wax-tablet written and sent it to the king. It stated there that he requested that the king give him permission to travel to Iceland or to other countries and that he no longer wished to be deprived of his freedom. When the king saw this, he judged that Þorgils was motivated by pride and honor so that he was unwilling to plead his case in person before the king like other men. Nevertheless the king sent for him.]

The result of this interview is that Þorgils becomes the king’s retainer and the recipient of valuable gifts: fourteen ells of leaf-green cloth, a shield, and a byrnie. In having his choice of writing over speech misinterpreted as pride, Þorgils not only gains these furnishings, but also increases his reputation as hot-tempered, impetuous, and arrogant — personality traits that the king, Hákon, admires. Although his facial disfigurement and speech impairment are in themselves of little consequence in many of his social and political pursuits, the character that the author constructs behind them and the behavioral modifications they entail become assets in the pursuit of power at any cost. And it is in pursuing power against the interests of his own kin that Þorgils emerges as a man of aberrant behavior: the bird in Jóreiðr’s dream “er í sitt hreiðr skít[r]” [that shits in its own nest] (*Íslendinga saga*, chap. 190; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:521).

That meeting with King Hákon is, of course, the determinant of Þorgils’s subsequent career, for not only does Hákon make Þorgils his man, but he also gives Þorgils a new face. Surgery to correct a harelip was known as early as the tenth century in England (Cameron 1993, 169) and would have been practiced in the Nordic countries as well by this time, at least among people who could afford to raise such a child, of whom there would have been few in Iceland. Why the surgery was not done back home probably had more to do with the lack of professional surgeons than any cultural difference.⁵ In any case, it is Hákon who patches over

5. As some Western societies are now learning, the incidence of a medical procedure for any given condition corresponds *not* to the incidence of that condition in the population but rather to the presence of persons whose advancement or even livelihood depends upon performing the procedure. Thus, when

the disfigurement and impairment that have shaped Þorgils's character, it is Hákon who becomes the father figure in whose name Þorgils attacks his kinsmen, and it is Hákon who will be the disembodied voice behind which Þorgils functions, having the king's letters read to the *bœndr* he is about to rob rather than speaking ineloquently to them himself (for surely without therapy some speech impairment would have persisted after the surgery).

This essay undertakes to examine the motif of disfigurement and disability in *Sturlunga saga*, a compilation of works which trace the history of the thirteenth century dis-integration of the Icelandic freestate over four generations of internecine violence. As we have seen in the case of Þorgils skarði, physical irregularities are treated with the light touch — being mentioned only once, just in passing, ostensibly to explain an episode or a byname, with connections between them and other characteristics omitted — that in typical saga style effectively foregrounds them. In many cases, as with the harelip, it is left to the reader to project the consequences. Disfigurement and disability function as metonymies in the compilation: literal twisted speech is part of a larger motif pattern that includes the twisting of oaths and of kinship ties. I call this particular kind of metonymy an incarnation, a figure of narrative (as distinct from a theory of personality) in which the ethical dimension is embodied in the physical. The author invents — or, in the case of a historical narrative such as *Sturlunga saga*, selects from among the set of available physical traits — those that are to be read as character traits. For example, Skarpheðinn's ugly mouth has been selected or perhaps invented to figure his sarcasm, while other physical traits such as the shape of ears or forehead are passed over in silence. This simple, nearly universal technique of selecting specific physical traits to suggest character traits is what we find in Sophocles's Oedipus, whose lamed feet indicate a sexual, and then ethical, crippling. In the case of Þorgils, the disfiguring and disabling harelip prevents the integration of character into society, so that he becomes both the embodiment of, and a principal agent in, the dis-integration of society that is played out in this work. The harelip marks the fissure in society.

In the more stylized, fictionalized sagas set in the tenth and early eleventh centuries, one can find very many disfigured or disabled characters, perhaps even more than one finds in *Sturlunga saga*, but they do not function in the way they do here. In the *Íslendinga sögur*, these dark figures — the ugly, the *eigi einhamir*, the surly and uncanny *bœndr* destined in traditional literary motifs to return as *draugar* — appear most often with their fair foils: Egill with his brother Þórólfr, Kormákr with his brother Þorgils, Þórólfr bægifótr with his son Arnkell, Grettir

northern surgeons learned how to fuse harelips and experienced the enhancement to their reputations and earnings that this procedure won them, they would have performed it as often as the low incidence of the condition in surviving adults permitted. Note the emphasis in this episode on the surgeon's fee and who will pay it.

with his better self. The presence of the fair brother in these sagas is one of the many devices that insulate the reader from the full impact of the dark figures. However revolting Egill's projectile vomiting may be, he is clearly an exceptional man — that is, an exception. There is a norm in his saga, evinced by other members of his family, and the narrative world is still a safe and familiar place where sunny decency can be found and conflicts can be resolved. Darkness and disfigurement and mental exceptionalities are thus bounded in the *Íslendinga sögur*.

In the *Sturlunga* compilation, on the contrary, the absence of the reassuring norm in the motif of the fair brother is one of the devices that force us to face the disfigured and disabled characters as incarnations of the component sagas' unrelievedly dark and disfigured reality. With relatively little narrative guidance, with no narrative bright side in the form of the fair brother, for example, we confront disfigurement, disability, and dis-integrity of body and soul run wild. Whereas in *Egils saga* readers are filled with awe at the uncanny darkness of this famous skáld, we are simply repulsed by the gratuitous grossness and incommensurate violence of some of his twelfth- and thirteenth-century descendants. Whereas the *Íslendinga sögur* provide a varied array of memorable moments — moments like Gunnarr's fall from his horse as he is leaving his homestead or his first meeting with Hallgerðr at the Alþing, as well as those like Hallgerðr's refusal to give him a strand of her hair — we remember nothing of *Sturlunga saga* so clearly as the blinding and castration of Órækja Snorrason, or the plea of Kristrún, the beggar-woman, during the attack on Sauðafell that she be allowed to keep the salve because “hon sagði . . . konu þá, er brjóstin bæði váru af höggvin, yfrit þungt at tekna” [she said . . . that woman, both of whose breasts had been cut off, had borne a very great deal] (*Íslendinga saga* chap. 71; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:328). In fact, rarely does a stage of the feuding close without a maiming of some sort, and the motif of mutilation quickly assumes thematic status in the compilation as a whole. Like the random, congenital disfigurement or disability, the random, intentional mutilation incarnates the dis-integration — the loss of wholeness — of the society through the loss both of its key members, like Snorri, and of its key values, like the inviolability of an oath. Congenital disfigurement or disability, therefore, is not the only incarnation in *Sturlunga saga*, and the support our theme gets from and gives to the better recognized mutilation theme is important to keep in mind.

While the theme of disfigurement and disability is functioning on a literal level both to incarnate and to contribute to the social dis-integration that *Sturlunga saga* depicts, this theme is also a reflex of the mythological overlay⁶ of the compilation. As is well known, the Norse gods are remarkable for the frequency of disfigurement and disability among them, with Týr, Høðr, and possibly Heimdallr in addition to him who springs first to mind: Óðinn. Óðinn is a sort of nexus for

6. Haraldr Bessason coined this term (1977).

a variety of motifs that occur in various combinations in the dark figures of the Íslendinga sögur: disfigurement/disability/mutilation, skáldskapr, shape-shifting/disguise, and berserksgangr, that is to say, the multifaceted potential for hideous, unpredictable, uncontrollable violence. After all, it was Snorri Sturluson — a historian and mythographer in real life and, as a narrative persona, one of the principal characters in *Sturlunga saga* — who has told us much of what we know of Óðinn, so it is not at all farfetched to posit a mythic overlay to the contemporary historical compilation, much of which was written by his brother's son. Here, one example will suffice:

Þorbjörg, kona Páls, var grimmúðig í skapi ok líkaði stórilla þóf þetta. Hon hljóp fram milli manna ok hafði kníf í hendi ok lagði til Sturlu ok stefndi í augat ok mælti þetta við: “Hví skal ek eigi gera þik þeim líkastan, er þú vill líkastr vera, — en þar er Óðinn?” (*Sturlu saga* chap. 31; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:109)

[Þorbjörg, Páll's wife, was fierce-minded and greatly displeased with this wrangling. She ran up among the men and had a knife in her hand and thrust at Sturla and aimed for his eye, saying, “Why should I not make you most like him whom you wish most to be like — and that's Óðinn!”]

This seems quite close to an explicit statement of a mythic overlay to the societal dis-integration that Sturla is carrying out, as well, of course as to its incarnation as real mutilation. Like the Æsir, the Sturlungs have created the conditions of their own demise, have borne their own unnatural Fenrisúlfr.

Deceptively like the more stylized, fictionalized Íslendinga sögur, *Sturlunga* opens in the immigration past, establishing the genealogical credentials of the principals as a kind of invocation of the sagaman's muse: a search for and establishment of themes and tone. And as is sometimes the case, the first-generation, founding father or mother turns out not to be the forebear of the principals at all, but is rather someone historically tangential but associationally and thematically apropos to them, in the manner of Auðr djúpúðga, in *Eiríks saga rauða*, to her spiritual, though not blood, descendant Guðríðr. In *Sturlunga saga*, the tone-setting, theme-establishing immigrant is Geirmundr heljarskinn, the blood ancestor of the compiler, but the spiritual ancestor of the principals. And he is grossly disfigured:

Geirmundr heljarskinn var sonr Hjörs konungs . . . Annarr sonr Hjörs konungs var Hámundr, er enn var kallaðr heljarskinn. Þeir váru tvíburar . . . Þeir váru báðir ákafliga miklir vöxtum ok báðir furðuliga ljótir ásýnis. En þó réð því stærstu um ófríðleika þeira á at sjá, at engi maðr þóttist hafa sét dekkra skinn en á þessum sveinum var. Drottning felldi lítinn hug til sveinanna, ok sýndist henni þeir óástúðligir. (*Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns* chap. 1; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:5)

[Geirmundr *heljarskinn* (Hel-skin) was the son of King Hjorr . . . King Hjorr's other son was Hámundr, and he was also called *heljarskinn*. They were twins . . . They were both extraordinarily ugly in appearance. And yet the most remarkable thing about their ugliness was that no one thought they had seen darker skin than was on these boys. The queen took little liking to the boys, and they seemed unlovable to her.]

An aetiological account, not so simpleminded as the unlikely toponymic aetiologies that we find in the corresponding sections of the *Íslendinga sögur*, yet far more unlikely in that pigmentation darker than either of one's parents is genetically impossible.⁷ The queen, in short, has given birth to miraculously monstrous children, monstrous in four respects: extraordinarily big, hideously ugly, dark skinned, and, of course, twins. The boys are a double face that even a mother cannot love, for the mother here is no savvy Icelandic *húsfrú* familiar with the traditional ugly duckling motif and thus fiercely protective of the hideous and homicidal child who has, as Bera says of her son Egill, “vikingsefni” (*Egils saga* chap. 40).

“Þess er við getit eitt sinn, at Bragi skáld” [It is told that once Bragi the skald] was the one to recognize that character was a truer indicator of blood than physical features (chap. 2) — a nice fairy tale that, since the opposite is the factually, though not archetypally, truer. The boys are playing on the straw-covered floor of the hall watching the false heir, the pretty and effete Leifr, play with a gold ring. Observed by Bragi though believing themselves alone,

Þá mælti Geirmundr til bróður síns: “Viltu, at vit farim til Leifs ok takim af honum gullit? — ok leikum okkr at nökkura hríð.”

“Búinn em ek þess,” segir Hámundr.

Síðan hljópu sveinarnir innar at hásætinu ok tóku gullit af Leifi, en hann glúpnaði ok æpir eftir.

Þeir mæltu: “Heyr á,” sögðu þeir, “hvat konungssonr tekr til ok æpir eftir einum gullbaugi. Ok er þat satt at segja, at þat er illa komit, er þú ferr með.”

Prífa nú sveinarnir til Leifs ok ráku hann ór hásætinu ok hlæja at. (Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:6)

[Then Geirmundr said to his brother, “How about us going to Leifr and taking his gold away from him? Then let’s play with it for a while.”

“I’m ready for it,” said Hámundr.

Then the boys ran up to the highseat and took the gold from Leifr, and he looked crestfallen and cried out.

They said, “Listen,” they said, “to how the king’s son carries on and cries over one gold ring. And it’s true to say that there’s a bad end for things you’re in charge of.”

The boys now grab hold of Leifr and pull him off the highseat and laugh at the whole thing.]

At this point, Bragi announces his recognition of the boys to the queen.

Here, returning to the very beginning of the compilation, we feel back in familiar, fictional territory, in a world where justice reigns and the truth will out.

7. Let us not confuse the (fictional) disfigurement of hypermelanism with the association between complexion and socioeconomic status asserted in *Rígsþula*, as the queen seems to have done, or with racism, a construct peculiar to our own era. Recall that while swarthy complexions were considered both unattractive and indicative of a less than noble ancestry or character, these notions appear not to have been connected with the African, who was exotically *blár* rather than *déclassé dǫkk*, or with the heljar-skinn twins, whose disfigurement causes them to be named for a supernatural being (cf. *tjǫrskinn* as a byname for a more ordinarily blemished character in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* chap. 2).

The disfigurement so monstrous as to cause a mother to disclaim and abandon her own children is not in fact an indicator of base character! As soon as the children's character is discovered, they are restored to the high position into which they were born and their disfigurement *er ór sǫgunni* [is out of the saga], so to speak: never mentioned again and no impediment to success. Its significance in the narrative world of the þáttir has been lowered to insignificance. Further reassuring to the reader is the message that it takes a skáld, and a legendary one at that, to see essential character through the veil of disfigurement.⁸ Ordinary people like the queen cannot be blamed for mistaking a disfigured appearance for a disfigured character, the tale seems to say. But what exactly are the character traits indicative of nobility? Obviously, they are *not* those connected with any fair brother:⁹ loyalty, cheerfulness, honesty, fairness, generosity, good judgment, eloquence, wisdom. No. The character traits necessary and proper to the ruling class are, not to put too fine a point on it, the desire and the ability to rob others of their possessions on a whim and for Schadenfreude. That is, not even for greed or personal advancement.¹⁰ The theme is set for *Sturlunga saga*: beneath a surface reading to the contrary, physical disfigurement really does appear as the incarnation of character dis-integrity: here, specifically, disloyalty and disrespect to the authority figure (Leifr, admittedly unimpressive but nevertheless the person *í háseti* [in the high seat]), the choice of violence over other available alternatives, and instant, selfish gratification (the gold ring becoming other men's wives among the adult characters). And these character traits, in turn, foreshadow the later casting down of authority figures, for although Geirmundr and Hámundr are a king's sons, they do not inherit or even return to their father's kingdom after their adolescent adventures as vikings, but rather sail, first, "í Nóregskonungs ríki" whence they are expelled by Haraldr hárfagri, who fears, reasonably enough, that they have come to depose him, and then to Iceland, where Geirmundr settles down to become a wealthy bóndi and to keep a force of never fewer than eighty fighting men, though there is now no one to fight.

The fairy-tale aspects of the first two chapters are obvious, but additionally the mythic overlay is hinted at in the boys' byname, *heljarskinn*, which they receive from their father when their identity is finally revealed to him: "At vísu ætla ek, at þessir sveinar sé minnar ættar, en þó hefi ek eigi sét slík heljarskinn fyrr sem sveinar þessir eru" [I certainly believe that these boys are my descendants, yet I have never before seen such "Hel-skins" as these boys are] (*Geirmundar þáttir*

8. This is an interesting point (which unfortunately cannot be pursued here), considering the relationship between disfigurement and skáldskapr, a relationship that we have already glanced at above in the characters of Egill and his patron, Óðinn.

9. Part of the interesting motif reversal here has to do, of course, with there being no fair brother: the brother is an identical(ly ugly) twin.

10. If one has ever felt in reading *Sturlunga saga* that the adult Sturla Sighvatsson and Órækja Snorrason were behaving like three-year-olds, here we have the template, presented in the literal three-year-old heljarskinn twins.

heljarskinns chap. 2; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:7). And thus likened to the goddess Hel are they nicknamed for her and put under death's sign.

To sharpen some of the observations made thus far, we might look at the single counterexample in *Sturlunga saga*, Guðmundr góði, bishop of Hólar, who figures so prominently in the affairs of the second generation of Sturlungs. Although Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga* probably gives us the more accurate information about the historical Guðmundr biskup's character and actions, it is to *Prests-saga Guðmundar góða* that we must look for the counterexample, since this piece is modeled on the imported genre of hagiography and evinces a continental Christian attitude toward disfigurement much different than that found elsewhere in the compilation. This foreign attitude is that disfigurements and disabilities derive from Satan and, therefore, appear in a narrative only as evidence of sin or as trials to be relieved by saintly people as evidence of their saintliness. Guðmundr appears in this saga largely as a miracle-working healer of disfigurements on the model of Jesus, but it is his own disfigurement that we shall look at here.

At the age of nineteen, Guðmundr sets out on a journey abroad, is shipwrecked, and injured, his right foot crushed and “horfðu þangat tær sem hæll skyldi” [the toes twisted to where the heel should be] (*Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* chap. 6; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:128). Like the foot of a devil, his foot is backwards. The next morning, when it becomes clear that they must abandon the ship, there is a great deal of discussion about how to remove Guðmundr. “Ok tók til orða sá maðr, er Bersi hét ok var kallaðr valbráð, því at kinn hans önnur var kolblá: ‘Hví munum vér fara með fótbrottinn mann, er vér megum eigi bjarga sjálfum oss, — ok skjóti fyrir borð’” [Then a man spoke up, who was named Bersi and was called “Dead-Flesh,” because one of his cheeks was black as charcoal. “How are we to carry on with a man with a broken leg when we may not be able to save our own selves? — so, throw him overboard!”] (Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:128). Guðmundr is brought safely to shore, however, and his foot is eventually healed — medically, not miraculously — though not before he makes a trip three weeks before Easter, “at úti stóðu leggjabrotin [while pieces of bone still protruded from his leg] . . . in passione domini” (Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:129). In later years, “þóttust menn mestan mun á hafa fundit, at skap hans hafði skipazt vetr þann, er hann lá eftir skipbrotit á Ströndum” [people thought it most noticeable that his disposition changed that winter when he was laid up after the shipwreck at Strandir] (chap. 11; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:135).

Among the several remarkable aspects of this story (and we will not touch on the archetypal sexual image of the foot injury here) is the satanic imagery connected with disfigurement: the foot with the toes where the heel should be and the man with the coal-black birthmark who offers to toss Guðmundr overboard. Equally important here are the facts that the disfigurement is completely cured (an

outcome unlikely in fact though expected in hagiographical writing) and that the cure marked a noticeable change of character, a motif not common elsewhere in *Sturlunga saga* or Icelandic saga writing in general. Compare this episode and its thematic function in *Prestssaga* with the very different treatment of the heljar-skinn twins and of Þorgils skarði, each of whose disfigurements is impossible to imagine as a “Cross to bear,” like Guðmundr’s. Recall that unlike the satanic imagery here that occurs with the onset of the disfigurement, the heljar-skinn twins acquire their underworld connection as a badge of acceptance-as-they-are from their father. This counterexample demonstrates that here, atypically, disfigurement is an evil that Guðmundr overcomes (i.e., he is cured) to become a better man.

In contrast to this hagiographical treatment of Guðmundr’s laming, disfigurements and disabilities are not otherwise treated as humiliations or as social barriers as they are in most modern societies. Nordic peoples have long lacked that sense of shame over disfigurements and disabilities that bleeds other Western societies of considerable human resources. While the hard-of-hearing English were withdrawing from friends to avoid the shame of the inability to engage in normal conversation (Finucane 1977, 107) and Christian Europe everywhere was institutionalizing the blind in monasteries and the facially disfigured, even the psoriatic, in leper hospitals, the Icelanders seem largely to have ignored such exceptionalities.¹¹ Again, this is not to say that such things went unnoticed, for certainly they did not. The extant documentation of this fact extends to hundreds of men whose bynames distinguish them by their disabilities. A glance through *Sturlu saga*, just as an example, gives us Ásbjörn daufi (chap. 1), Skeggi skammhondung (chap. 3), Halldórr slakkafótr (chap. 7), Eyjólfur halti (chap. 29).¹² The point is that deafness, a withered hand, or a crippled leg are features on the same order as those designated by other common bynames such as *digri*, *rauði*, *auðgi*, *dýri*, *fróði*. Complimentary or denigrating, these bynames all identified the Guðmundr or Ásbjörn in question, and there is no indication in *Sturlunga* or elsewhere that bynames such as *daufi* were insulting. Guðmundr is the only character in *Sturlunga saga* who

11. Again, Saxo provides the non-Nordic view: “Weakness is generally recognised by the way it needs others’ help. Although in that age young men used regularly to set about a request for marriage in their own persons, Helgi was hampered by such disability of speech that he was ashamed when strangers and even members of his own household heard him. People always avoid advertising their failings, since natural defects are a greater curse the more they are made public” (Book 3; Davidson 1979–80, 1:71).

12. These names all appear in genealogies, leaving the modern reader in doubt as to exactly what they imply. It is possible that some refer to a single episode in the man’s life, or were to be understood figuratively. For example, Ásbjörn daufi might (1) be congenitally deaf, (2) have been deafened by a head injury or illness, (3) have been temporarily deaf due to an ear infection at some crucial event in his life, (4) be normally hearing but absentminded, (5) have failed to have heard something important at one time, or (6) ironically, have acute hearing or be extraordinarily attentive and sharp. It should be noted that bynames suggesting disabilities are a male phenomenon, probably because women were not social agents and thus there was little need to distinguish among them, but perhaps also because women were by virtue of their sex already disfigured or disabled with regard to the male norm and so acquired no further labels of this sort.

is threatened with death for being disabled, who accepts disability as suffering, and does so with Christ-like humility, and whose character is seen by others as strengthened by the adversity overcome.

Precisely how well disfigurements and disabilities were tolerated is shown in the one well-narrated episode in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*. Doubtless included for the verses it contains, this episode, comprising chapter 10, is set at a wedding and concerns Þórðr Þorvaldsson of Vatnsfjörðr, one of the most prominent men in the district, but a man with a chronic condition, here described both clinically and in its embarrassing social dimension:

Þórðr var ekki mikill drykkjumaðr, nökkut vangæft um fæðsluna, sem oft kann at verða þeim, er vanheilsu kenna, því at maðrinn var á efra aldri ok var þó enn hraustr. Hann kenndi nökkut innanmeins ok var því ekki mjök matheill ok nökkut vandblæst at eta slátr, því at hann blés svá af sem hann hefði vélindisgang ok varð þá nökkut andrammr. Þórðr var mikilúðligr maðr, eygðr mjök, ok lágu vel augun, framsnoðinn ok strýhærðr, sá upp mjök ok riðaði lítt at. (Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:24)

[Þórðr was not much of a drinker, and was somewhat disadvantaged in matters of diet, as can often be the case with those who experience ill-health, since he was advanced in years; yet he was still vigorous. He had some internal ailment and because of it did not have a very good digestion and developed gas when he ate meat so that he belched, and he had rather bad breath. Þórðr was an imposing man to look at: he had large, well-set eyes, a bald forehead, and very fair hair. He looked up a great deal and trembled slightly.]

As we shall see in the continued, lengthy quotation, the inclusion of some elements of this description is necessitated by the story that follows — the digestive problem causing gas and halitosis, the receding hairline, and perhaps even the imposing appearance (to prevent an otherwise likely though erroneous assumption that Þórðr is weak in character). The scene that follows provides a standard for the attitudes toward his disgusting dysfunction and his consequent stench, a “disfigurement” in its deviation from the normal or acceptable. The scatological double entendres are indicated in parentheses in the translation.

Þeir drukku nú ákaft, ok fær á þá alla nökkut. Gerast nú málgir, ok má kalla, at hverr stingi annan nökkuru hnæfilyrði, — ok er þó fátt hermt af þeira kerskiyrðum í þessari frásögn.

Þess er getit, at Ingimundr prestr laut at sessunaut sínum ok mælti við hann, svá sem hinn spyrði:

4. Hvaðan kennir þef þenna?

Þórðr andar nú handan.

Ok verðr at hlátr mikill, ok er næsta gerr at þessu gyss mikill. Ok er því léttir, þá kveðr Þórðr í mót:

5. Andi es Ingimundar

ekki góðr á bekkjum.

Ok af þessum áköstum tekr heldr at grána gamanit, ok koma kviðlingar við svá. Þá var þetta kveðit til Þórðar:

6. Rymr í barka

ríkismanni.

Glitar skallinn við
á goða yðrum.

Hér hlær Þórðr mjök at þessum kviðlingi ok kveðr þegar í mót:

7. Vaxa blástrar
á bekk þaðra.
Raunillr gerisk þefr
at ropum yðrum.

Porgils brosti nú at, en lagði aldri til um áköstin.

Ingimundr mælti, at nökkurr þeira bekkjunauta skyldi sjá í móti við Þórð. Þá var þetta kveðit:

8. Þat es válítit,
þótt vér reptim
búðunautar
af bolakjötvi, —
reptir Þórðr
Þorvalds sonr,
Kjartans sonar,
af kana sínum.

Þórðr lítr eftir kviðlingi þessum, ok þótti honum mjök bera hljóðit þar yfir, sem maðr sat á forsætinu, mjök þrekligr ok allvel hærðr . . .

Þórðr mælti: “Eigi munum vit báðir sitja at veizlu þessari lengi, ok send þú hann á brott á annan bæ, ellegar munum vér riða á brott.” (Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:24–26)

[They now drank heavily and and they all became a bit drunk. They now became talkative and it could be said that each poked fun at the other with some gibe — and yet little of the repartee from their joshing is recorded in this account. It is said that Ingimundr the priest leaned toward his benchmate and said to him as if the other had asked:

4. Where is that stink coming from?

Þórðr is breathing across the board (from the other end).

And loud laughter is raised, and great mockery is more or less made of this. And when it lets up, then Þórðr says in response:

5. The breath of Ingimundr
is not good for the benchmates (the bench).

From these taunts the sport began to grow rather rough, and longer lampoons were composed. Then this was addressed to Þórðr:

6. It roars in the windpipe (colon)
of the great man.
The bald pate (buttocks)
glistens on your chieftain.

Þórðr laughed heartily at this lampoon and said in return:

7. The blasts grow
on the bench over there.
The stench gets very bad
from your belches (farts).

Porgils smiled at this, but never responded to the taunt. Ingimundr said that one of the benchmates should respond to Þórðr. Then this was recited:

8. It is harmless
even though we belch,
boothmates,

from bull-flesh.
 Þórðr belches —
 the son of Þorvaldr,
 the son of Kjartan —
 from his *kani* (from [eating] his own shit).¹³

Þórðr looked over after this lampoon, and it seemed to him to have provoked a great deal of laughter where a man sat on the front bench, very strongly built and having fine hair . . . Þórðr said, “We can’t both sit at this feast any longer; send him away to another farmhouse or we will ride away.”]

The modern reader may be surprised at the high threshold at which Þórðr’s hearty laughter turns suddenly to angry, hasty departure at this last lampoon. It is clear, however, that in the world of the Sturlungs, scatological taunts about such dysfunctions and “disfigurement” are well tolerated. Note, for example, the pun in verse 6 on *skalli* ‘bald pate’, *skall* ‘noise’, and its plural *skoll* ‘derision’, a pun that compares Þórðr’s head/buttocks with the roar from his windpipe/colon as he belches/farts, and both with the mocking verses. Þórðr’s reaction is hearty laughter. That he becomes angry at verse 8 has a great deal to do with the speaker of this verse, the strongly built and fine-haired man who is a socially marginal figure in this saga, not Þórðr’s peer as Ingimundr is, and his impertinent references to Þórðr’s genealogy as well, of course, as with the charge of autocoprophygy. Thus does this episode delineate the extent to which disfigurements and teasing about them were socially acceptable.

Several characters in *Sturlunga saga* would repay the analysis of their disabilities or disfigurements and of the incarnation of character traits and societal conditions in these features. Most prominent among these, in addition to Þorgils skarði, are the myopic and lisping Einarr Þorgilsson (Hvamm-Sturla’s nemesis in *Sturlu saga*), the myopic Guðmundr dýri Þorvaldsson, and the stammering Þórðr kakali Sighvatsson.¹⁴ It is my contention that these particular disfigurements — those of vision and speech — incarnate the moral blindness and crooked speech that are the root and branch of the social dysfunctions that we witness in this compilation. With just a glance at Guðmundr dýri, who can see but cannot recognize (“Guðmundr sá mennina ok kenndi eigi, því at hann var óskyggn” [Guðmundr looked at the men, but did not recognize them because he was weak-sighted] [*Guðmundar*

13. Verse 8 is one of the many defamatory verses with punch lines that are ambiguous to modern readers because they may have been intended as double entendres based on informal usage that has not elsewhere survived (and that may have been misunderstood by later copyists). The 1946 edition glosses *kani* as “(sennil.) skoltur, munnur” [(probably) snout, mouth] while Jan de Vries gives “schüssel” (Vries 1962, 300). The key here seems to lie in the intended, and perhaps ironic, parallelism of the *af* phrases: *af bola-kjotvi*, meaning “because of bullmeat,” and *af kana sínum*, which appears to mean “from a part of the body, i.e. the bowels,” but may in fact mean “because of what Þórðr has eaten”: clearly something deeply taboo and certainly not bullmeat; cf. Latin *caenum*.

14. For *kakali*, Jan de Vries gives “vgl. nnorw. *kakla* ‘gackern’ . . . Wohl schallnachahmende bildung” (1962, 297).

saga dýra chap. 23; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:207]) and a short remark on Þórðr kakali, who stammers until his tongue is smoothed by demagoguery (“En nökkut þótti mönnum hann stirt tala í fyrstu. En þess at djarfari ok snjallari var hann í málinu, er hann hafði fleira mælt ok fjölmennara var við” [And it seemed to men that he spoke rather stiffly at first, but then more boldly and eloquently once into the case when he had spoken at greater length and more men were in attendance] [*Þórðar saga kakali* chap. 4; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 2:11]), we shall take a closer look and make a longer comment on Einarr, who stands as a chronological bookend opposite Þorgils in *Sturlunga saga*.

If, as I shall contend, Einarr Þorgilsson’s disfigured speech and distorted vision propel him to dominate Hvamm-Sturla’s agenda in *Sturlu saga* and are at least partly and perhaps largely responsible for the continuation of the feud and the number of deaths and volume of destruction, it is another’s disability that had got the feud underway, back before Einarr inherited the goðorð from his father. The feud between these two centers of power — the Sturlungs and the goðorð at Staðarhóll — was in fact begun by a couple of the most marginal people to be met with in the entire compilation: Aðalrikr, the son of a foreign priest, who lived by hiring himself out for wages, and Vigdís, a halfwitted woman unintegrated into any household and living in sheephouses near the coast.¹⁵ When she steals linen from the bóndi by whom Aðalrikr is then employed, and Aðalrikr subsequently axes his employer to death, both Sturla and Einarr’s father, Þorgils Oddason, are drawn in to support their clients and wind up at odds with one another. “Þessi váru af Sturlu upphöf fyrst, er hann átti málum at skipta við menn” [This was the first occasion that Sturla had a lawsuit to prosecute with other men] (*Sturlu saga* chap. 5; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:68). Vigdís does not come into the saga again, and we leave her beachcombing, an incarnation of the dis-integration of the society that cannot encompass a disabled woman and thus allows her to become the cause, along with a vagrant foreigner, of the death of a good bóndi and the setting of goðar against one another.

Einarr Þorgilsson was born during the year that his father was in full outlawry, the second of two sons among seven daughters. His elder brother, Oddi, bore the name of the boys’ paternal grandfather and was “vitr maðr ok manna snjallastr í máli” [a wise man and most eloquent in speech] (*Sturlu saga* chap. 6; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:68). When Oddi died without issue in an epidemic that also killed their father,

Einarr tók þá fé sitt ok goðorð, ok gerðist hann höfðingi, því at margar stoðar runnu undir hann, frændr ok mágar ok vinir, er Þorgils, faðir hans, hafði fengit sér. Hann skorti ok eigi kapp né áræði. Engi var hann lagamaðr ok blestr í máli. (*Sturlu saga* chap. 6; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:68)

15. Vigdís is described as “skillítill” (chap. 4), lacking in discernment: specifically, we find as the story unfolds, unable to distinguish between public and private property. Clearly, she was mentally deficient.

[Einar took over his property and goðorð and became a chieftain, because there was much support for him from kinsmen, in-laws, and friends — support that Þorgils, his father, had acquired. He was lacking neither ardor nor daring. He was no lawman and was lisping in speech.]

Thus are we introduced to Einarr Þorgilsson: while his elder brother was wise, he is daring; while his brother was eloquent, he is lisping. Had the saga picked up these characters earlier, we would have had the traditional and familiar pair of dark and light brothers, a motif that would have allowed the narrator to play Einarr off as a Kormákr against his emotionally stable and physically sound fair brother. By picking up the thread after Oddi's death, however, the narrative presents the disfigured Einarr without context, a kind of mutant who acts as the irritant that will drive the first Sturla to greatness and set the tone for the age. We might read his portrait thus: Einarr has a lisp, which mitigates against pursuit of his conflicts in a court of law not only because of his lack of eloquence in pleading but also because he could be cited for procedural misarticulation and see his cases dismissed or lost by default. He therefore, like Þorgils skarði, cultivates an image of boldness to resolve conflicts in his favor out of court. He further capitalizes on his father's and brother's reputations and assumes their friends, followings, and affines, as the necessary correlate to assuming their enemies (not least among them the Sturlungs), and all the more necessary in that while legal resolution is difficult for him due to his lisp, vengeance is also difficult due to his myopia. Einarr therefore gets around his deficiencies by choosing other styles of play, such as the use of a surrogate:¹⁶

En um vetrinn eftir jól fór Einarr Ingibjargarson norður til Eyjafjarðar. Ok er Einarr Þorgilsson frétti þat, þá fór hann við átta manni suður í Tungu. Hann kvaddi til sín Þorgeir Grímsson ok kveðst vilja, at hann ynni á Lofti, fóstura Guðnýjar Brandsdóttur, ok lézt vilja gera þeim nökkura ákenning sinna verka.

Þá er þeir kómu í Tungu, gengu þeir í stofu, ok var þeim heilsat ok spurðir tíðinda. Þeir settust niður. En er Einarr sá, at ekki varð tilræði Þorgeirs, þá stóð hann upp ok gekk útar á gólfít. Hann var nærsýnn ok þekkti eigi, hvar Loftr sat. Hann sneri at þeim manni, er Þórólfr hét, ok lagði spjóti í lær honum, svá at út skar ór, ok var þat svöðusár.

Þá hlaupa upp allir menn, þeir er inni váru, ok helt hverr á öðrum. Þar var Guðfinna Sveinsdóttir, ok helt hon Einari. Þau sendu konu eina út í Hvamm at segja Sturlu, en konur ok karlar heldu þeim, þeir er þar váru, ok myndi þeir eigi á braut komast, ef Svertingr Starrason veitti þeim eigi. Hann lét þá lausa ok kvað eigi hæfa, at þar yrði meiri vandræði, ok kom hann þeim í braut. Hann var þar heimamaðr. (*Sturlu saga* chap. 11; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:77)

[In the winter after Christmas, Einarr Ingibjargarson went north to Eyjafjörður. And when Einarr Þorgilsson learned of that, he went with a party of seven men south to Tunga. He summoned Þorgeir Grímsson and said he wanted him to attack Loftr, the foster father of Gudný Brandsdóttir, and declared that he wanted to make some retaliation on them for their actions.

16. Recall Þorgils skarði's use of a surrogate to read King Hákon's letters aloud, a case of double surrogacy.

When they reached Tunga, they went into the main room and they were greeted and asked their news. They sat down. And when Einarr saw that Þorgeirr's attack was not forthcoming, then he stood up and walked across the floor. He was nearsighted and could not make out where Loftr was sitting. He turned toward a man named Þórólfr and thrust his spear into his thigh so that flesh was cut from it, leaving a bone-deep wound.

Then all the people who were inside jumped up and seized them one after another. Guðfinna Sveinsdóttir was there and she took hold of Einarr. They sent a woman off to Hvamm to inform Sturla, and the men and women restrained those who were there, and they would not have gotten away if Svertingr Starrason had not helped them. He had them released and said that it was not proper that there should be more trouble, and he got them away. He was one of the household there.]

To be myopic to the extent that one cannot distinguish one man from another across the short width of an Icelandic hall is, today, to be legally blind. We understand now why Einarr summons one of his men to be the assassin. Contrary to the usual procedure of bribing a man to do one's killing so that one can arrange to be elsewhere as an alibi, Einarr leads the expedition and appears to have intended to take the credit for the killing. It's just that he needed another man to do it. Not only does this scheme fail, however, but Einarr is further humiliated in the aftermath by being held by a woman.

Sturla, with his habitual perspicacity, attempts to capitalize on Einarr's myopia in an episode in which we see the latter already in a spot of trouble. Never one to miss a chance or shirk an expedition, Einarr sets out with a party to steal sheep from a kinsman of Sturla's. Aided by a light snowfall that covers their tracks, his men round up the sheep successfully while Einarr himself blindly rides into a pot-hole, falls off his horse, and is injured (chap. 20). When the news of the rustling reaches Hvammr, Sturla and his men arm themselves and mount up two men to a horse in pursuit of Einarr. Einarr's men spot the pursuers and debate the size of their party and whether they should stand or run. Depending for his long-distance vision on his men, Einarr makes the wrong guess about relative numbers and consequently the wrong decision.¹⁷ When the parties meet and do battle, Einarr is at first protected from blows by one of his men, but is eventually among the wounded, though apparently among the very few who *do* no wounding. This episode in the continuing feud is ended by arbitration, but “var þat mál flestra manna, at á þeim fundi skipti um mannvirðing með þeim Sturlu ok Einari” [in most people's opinion that encounter was decisive in determining the relative honor of Sturla and Einarr] (*Sturlu saga* chap. 22; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946 1:94) — that is to say, decisive in Sturla's favor.

Other episodes demonstrate Einarr's avoidance of legal action. Sturla and Einarr are each on their way to the þing at a time when the most recent salvo has redounded to Sturla's honor, when Einarr decides to double back and burn

17. Note that this episode is a negative version of the watchman motif, which features correct interpretation of reported (sharp) sightings.

Hvammr. In this episode, Einarr is faced with no opposition in the form of peers, that is, other adult males, to his use of force, so the scheme comes off without a hitch, for once, and even Sturla has to admit that “Einar mundu elt hafa frýjulaust eina nótt” [Einarr must have once lit a fire at night without a mistake] (*Sturlu saga* chap. 10; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:75). In another episode, Einarr even makes a joke about his preference for force over law. When a certain Oddr will not sell the property that Einarr wants to own, Einarr makes this remark: “Þat hefi ek heyrt menn segja, at þú munir eigi vera skilgetinn, ok mun þat vera réttara, at þú hafir ekki af” [I have heard men say that you were not lawfully conceived, but it would be more accurate to say you have no heritage] (*Sturlu saga* chap. 16; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946 1:83). The unfortunate Oddr misunderstands what was actually a threat to rob him of his property and instead, fearing legal action on the question of his legitimacy, offers to bear iron to prove it. He ends up robbed of everything he has, Einarr even taking the ring off his finger in a scene recalling the heljarskinn twins.

It would not be true to say, however, that Einarr is an incompetent legal manipulator. He is “eigi lagamaðr” in the sense that he avoids legal resolution where it is possible to use force instead, but he does go to court on occasion, the most memorable being the suit over his sister’s abduction. Yngvildr Þorgilsdóttir is a widow (her husband having left home on an arduous trip, during which he dies, because the couple could not bear one another), and has set up housekeeping with a certain Bǫðvarr when she initiates a liaison with a third man, Sturla’s kinsman Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson. In an elaborate scheme involving advance planning with many conspirators, Yngvildr secretly bears Þorvarðr’s child and subsequently escapes Bǫðvarr by cutting her hair and dressing as a man (chap. 9).¹⁸ Despite the unmistakably voluntary, apparently even initiatory, nature of Yngvildr’s role in the elopement, Einarr brings suit against Sturla, of all people, for being privy to the abduction plot. The result was that “gengu hvár tveggja málin fram, ok urðu báðir sekir fjörbaugsmenn, Sturla ok Einarr” [each of their cases progressed with the result that both Sturla and Einarr were sentenced to lesser outlawry] (*Sturlu saga* chap. 9; Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946 1:74). And the two of them tie again in outlawing each other a second time in chapter 19.

It is often observed that the various authors of the *Sturlunga* compilation, not least Sturla Þórðarson himself, showed remarkable restraint and objectivity in recounting events in which they and their close kinsmen played major roles. In the case of Einarr Þorgilsson, as in the cases of the other characters we have examined, the remarkably light touch with which his distorted vision and crooked speech, and their historical consequences, are treated serves in fact to foreground them for us. The sagaman is selecting and omitting to show us the results, on the

18. Yngvildr’s behavior and her unnatural dress constitute a kind of disfigurement or self-mutilation, which incarnates her societal dysfunctioning (from her brother’s point of view): acting independently of her brother’s approval, Yngvildr, like the vagrant woman Vigdís, fractures the social structure.

assumption that we have attended to symbolic clues. Sturla, a man not remarkable for his honor, has nevertheless gained a good deal of this finite commodity at Einarr's expense. We are shown Einarr falling off his horse, misjudging the numbers of his adversaries, unable to kill anyone but the wrong and utterly defenseless man or to terrorize anyone but women and children, but we are not reminded of why. Einarr's disfigurement of speech and impairment of sight are no causes of shame in and of themselves and are thus no barriers socially or legally to his assumption and maintenance of the *goðorð*: as such they are of no particular interest to the narrative. Yet these disabilities are translated into certain character traits and styles of play that in turn drive the action in *Sturlu saga*. Einarr, as the first adversary of the patriarch of the family that gave the age (and the compilation) its name, shapes the character and style of both Sturla and the saga. Because Einarr's disabilities block him from more peaceful routes to the resolution of conflict, and because his character has been shaped by his need to strike a compensatory figure of boldness, he chooses alternative approaches to conflict resolution — more violent and more deceitful — which in turn only raise the volume and the stakes of the conflict. As Einarr becomes a magnet, and increasingly a template, for anyone having a grudge against the initially bland Sturla, and as the narrative world mirrors his brotherless state by becoming increasingly and unidimensionally dark, Einarr Þorgilsson truly begins, as Þorgils skarði ends, the Age of the Sturlungs.

Bibliography

- Bessason, Haraldur. 1977. "Mythological Overlays." In *Sjöttú ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni, 20. júlí 1977*, ed. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson, 1:273–92. Rit 12. 2 vols. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.
- Cameron, M[alcolm] L. 1993. *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*. Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 7. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Davidson, Hilda Ellis, ed. 1979–80. Saxo Grammaticus, *The History of the Danes*, trans. Peter Fisher. 2 vols. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.
- Finucane, Ronald C. 1977. *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons.
- Jóhannesson, Jón, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn, eds. 1946. *Sturlunga saga*. 2 vols. Reykjavík: Sturlunguútgáfan.
- McDougall, Ian. 1992. "The Third Instrument of Medicine: Some Accounts of Surgery in Medieval Iceland." In *Health, Disease, and Healing in Medieval Culture*, ed. Sheila Campbell, Bert Hall, and David Klausner, 57–76. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Vries, Jan de. 1962. *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 2d ed. Leiden: E. J. Brill.