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Egill Skalla-Grímsson

The Dark Figure as Survivor in an Icelandic Saga¹

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A wanderer and a poet, Egill Skalla-Grímsson is the most thoroughly developed dark figure in the Icelandic family sagas. Egill's family tree included werewolves, berserkers and shapechangers,² and he inherited not a little of his ancestors' fierceness. On one occasion Egill wins a duel by biting through his opponent's windpipe; on another he vomits on a stingy host.³ He is self-centered. His poems, although ostensibly intended to honor others, are chiefly about himself. Intensely ugly, swarthy, and at his best in middle age, Egill is anything but the fair-haired or tragically fated hero. He is obstinate and greedy. At the end of his life, he, like his father, throws his viking treasure into a bog rather than share it with his children.⁴

Egill is the transitional figure in a family moving its homestead from Norway to Iceland. *Egils saga*, one of the longest of the family sagas, begins in Norway in the mid-ninth century. At the end of that century the scene shifts to Iceland, where the main part of the saga eventually ends with the death of Egill toward the end of the tenth century. There follows a brief description of several generations of Egill's descendants, the Mýramenn. Much of the tale is set abroad as Egill travels to Norway, Sweden, England, Frisia, Denmark, the lands of the eastern Baltic, and Shetland. The saga, written in the thirteenth century, reflects the contemporary Icelandic view of the political and social turmoil of tenth-century Scandinavia. In the story, Iceland is a haven for unbending individualists, especially Norwegians uncomfortable with the attempt by King Haraldr harfagri (Harald Fairhair, ca. 872-930) to rescind some of the traditional rights of freemen.⁵ Without king or prince, the Icelanders organized themselves

into a commonwealth of freeholders. The contrast between Iceland and societies under the rule of princes, such as Norway and England, flows through *Egils saga* as an undercurrent and contributes to the literary development of the dichotomy between the characters of light and dark brothers.⁶

Most of the studies of *Egils saga* have been concerned primarily with Egill's poetry.⁷ The saga's authorship is another major issue,⁸ and some scholars have concentrated on comparing Egill with other Norse heroes.⁹ Little attention, however, has been directed toward understanding the whole character of Egill as revealed in the unfolding narrative. In this article, I examine Egill as a dark figure and consider darkness as an aspect of a coherent, nonsupernatural character who is the product of a strange, wild ancestry.

The dark figure has been defined by Franz Bäumel as an ambiguous character combining "significant virtue with significant evil for a purpose which may itself be ambiguous, but the achievement of which demands a capacity of understanding, evaluating, knowing, which exceed that of other figures."¹⁰ I could add that the dark figure is often a character who, despite towering above others in knowledge, cunning, and ability, is not foremost in political power or social position; this figure is also exceptionally self-contained. Egill demonstrates these characteristics.

Such traits, in conjunction with what we know of Egill's ancestors create a character that does not easily fit into the context of the Icelandic family sagas, which are marked by an overriding concern with mundane feud. Their roots reach deep into Icelandic social settings, and the sagas show only marginal interest in the actions of dark figures. One cannot easily place Egill's story in the subgrouping of "poets sagas."¹¹ Although Egill shows many similarities to other wandering skalds - Kormákr Ogmundarson (*Kormaks saga*), Gunnlaugr ormstonga (*Gunnlaugs saga*), (*Hallfrethar saga*) - he differs from them in that he is a well-adjusted individual in Icelandic society, whereas most skalds became outcasts because of their insulting verses. Egill relies not only on his poetic ability, but also on his strength as a fighter and his cunning as an Icelandic chieftain as well as on his

knowledge of runes.¹² As a result he is a successful warrior and a heroic rescuer. At the same time he is a threatening figure who often confuses his enemies, and at times his friends, by acting in an unexpected and unconventional way.

Beginning his career as a rash youth, Egill gains fame as a warrior and a poet; as he grows into manhood, he develops an unusually sharp perception of the intricacies of society. He is the type of figure who could have been a valued counselor to a king, but that kind of relationship has no place in the context of this antiroyal Icelandic tale. Instead, Egill uses his abilities to establish and maintain his personal independence.

Beyond describing the hero's fearsome nature, the sagaman develops Egill's character by exploring in a contrastive manner three distinct thematic strands. These elements unfold as *Egils saga* chronologically follows Egill's family from the distant past in Norway to the new world in Iceland. The first strand is the supernatural nature of Egill's ancestors. The second is the obvious differences between the light and the dark brothers of Egill's and his father's generations, manifested by their contrary responses to the demands placed upon them by kings. This strand emphasizes the contrast between the political centralization on the continent and the decentralized system in Iceland. The third strand is the theme that it is the dark skeptical son, not the more socially integrated light one, who carries on the bloodline. This theme is most clearly expressed in the role that first Skalla-Grímr, Egill's father, and then Egill himself play as settled farmers in Iceland.

The first strand has to do with family traits. Egill's great-great-grandfather, Úlfr, was called "inn óargi," (Wolf the fierce or unafraid),¹³ his great-grandmother, Ballbera, was sister to a half-troll. Egill's grandfather, Kveld-Úlfr (Night Wolf) was thought to be a shapechanger. The saga gives many indications of Kveld-Úlfr's dark nature. At the beginning it tells us that Kveld-Úlfr, after his viking days were over, became an important landholder. But, in the words of the saga: "Each day as night fell, he became difficult so

that few men were able to speak with him. In the evenings he was drowsy, and men said that he was a shapechanger; he was called Kveld-Úlfr." (4)

In describing kveld-Úlfr, the sagaman leaves little doubt that Úlfr had a dark nature. He was a warrior who, even in his old age, went into a wild rage in battle. The ability to draw temporarily on extraordinary powers was exhausting: "It is said of those men who were shapechangers or went berserk that, when the rage was upon them, they were so strong that nothing could stand up to them. After the rage left, however, they were weaker than usual. This was so with Kveld- [Mfr." (70)

Skalla-Grímr (Bald Grim), also had strange, dark characteristics. The saga tells of a particular incident that almost ended Egill's life. It took place at Skalla-Grímr's farm in Iceland, Borg, to which the family had moved after leaving Norway:

One time, as the winter passed, it happened that a ball game was played at Borg, south in Sandvík. Thórthr and Egill were pitted against Skalla-Grímr in the game. As Skalla-Grímr grew tired in playing against them, things became easier for the boys. But in the evening, after the sun had gone down, Thórthr and Egill found the going tougher. Grímr now grew so strong that he lifted Thórthr up and threw him down so hard that he was completely crushed and immediately died. Next he grabbed at Egill. (101)

It seems likely that Skalla-Grímr would have killed his son had an old bondswoman, Egill's foster mother, not intervened. Big, strong as a man, and skilled in magic, she diverted Skalla-Grímr's attention from the boy to herself, and after a chase Skalla-Grímr killed her.

However clearly the supernatural element is seen in the makeup of Egill's ancestors, the dark side of Egill's own character should not be overestimated. There is little indication in the saga that his traits, especially when he is in Iceland, are any more superhuman than an exceptional ability to compose poetry and a penchant for rage, coupled with fierceness, strength, and cunning. Egill uses magic tokens rarely. At one point he raises a *nithstǫng* (a polo of insult carved with runes and topped by a dead horse head)¹⁴ against his

enemy, King Eiríkr blóthæx (blood ax), and his queen, Gunnhildr, but he uses it to call upon supernatural forces, not to bring such forces out of himself. Egill is not a night wolf.

Contrasted with the dark brother in each generation is a light brother, both times named Thórólfr. The Thórólfrs adapt to the modern world, whereas the dark brothers, first Skalla-Grímr and then Egill, oppose change. While fighting for personal reasons, the dark brothers also champion traditional values. The saga has this to say about Egill's grandfather, Kveld-úlfr, and his very different sons:

Kveld-Úlfr and his wife Bera had two sons. The older was called Thórólfr and the younger Grímr . . . Thórólfr was the most handsome and accomplished of men. He resembled his mother's people and was cheerful, openhanded, ambitious, and full of energy. He was liked by everyone. Grímr was dark and ugly, like his father, both in outward appearance and in temperament.(5)

The difference between the brothers is manifested when Thórólfr chooses to seek out King Haraldr. Unlike his dark father and brother, Thórólfr perceives that he will easily find a place within the new order of society. Indeed, he is anxious to enter the service of the conquering king. To his father's warning that the king "will prove fatal to our family," Thórólfr replies:

To the contrary, I expect that I will receive from him the greatest advancement. For this reason my mind is fully made up to seek out the king and to become his man. And I have heard it truly spoken that his bodyguard is manned only by men of the highest valor. I am altogether willing to join this troop, if they will have me.
(14)

Fair, handsome, and courageous, Thórólfr rises quickly in the king's service and is awarded large estates. The king, however, soon begins to fear Thórólfr's growing power and popularity and burns him in his house. Vengeance then falls to the ugly dark brother, Skalla-Grímr. In a stunning feat of heroism, Skalla-Grímr and his brooding old father, Kveld-Úlfr kill a whole ship's crew of the king's retainers. Then, during the ensuing escape to Iceland, Kveld-Úlfr dies from the exhaustion brought on by this last berserker rage.

The giant-like Skalla-Grímr is the son who survives to carry on the family line. He resettles in Iceland where, away from the vengeful hand of the king, he flourishes. In the new generation there is again a pair of light and dark brothers who follow the pattern of the first pair:

Skalla-Grímr and Bera . . . had a son who was sprinkled with water and named Thórólfr. And when he grew up he was soon tall of stature and of the handsomest features. Everyone said that he would be a man just like Thórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson, after whom he was named. Thórólfr was far beyond those of his own age in strength, and as he grew up he became adept at most feats and skills then the vogue with men of ability. Thórólfr was a happy-natured man Once again Skalla-Grímr and his wife had a son. He too was sprinkled with water and had a name given to him. He was called Egill. But as he grew up it could soon be seen that he would prove a rare one for ugliness. Egill was black-haired like his father. When he was three years old he was as big and strong as boys who were six or seven.

When Thórólfr reaches manhood, he goes abroad to seek his fortune in the service of princes. After a glorious rise to military leadership, he is killed in England while commanding part of the army of the English king Athalsteinn (Aethelstan). Egill also becomes a mercenary, but he never trusts a king. As he matures he develops the ability to maintain his independence and relies on his skills as a poet and a warrior. On one occasion Egill falls into the hands of his bitter enemy Eiríkr blóthøx, the son of King Haraldr. Now in exile from Norway, Eiríkr has become king of York. Because of the *nithstøng* and other offensive acts, Eiríkr has forbidden Egill to enter his presence, but Egill is shipwrecked within the boundaries of Eiríkr's kingdom.¹⁵ With his life in danger, overnight Egill uses his talent as a poet to compose *Höfuthlausn*" (Head Ransom), a 20 stanza poem in praise of Eiríkr. In response, Eiríkr grants Egill his life.

In another situation King Athalsteinn, deciding that his wisest course is to avert Egill's fury after Thórólfr has died in the king's service, offers Egill atonement. The meeting between the Icелander and the monarch,¹⁶ which takes place immediately after Thórólfr is killed, gives insight into Egill's character, especially his potential for violence:

Then Egill went with his troop to find King Athalsteinn and at once came before the king as he sat drinking, When the king saw that Egill and his men had come in, he ordered that room should be made on the lower dais for them and said that Egill should sit there in the high seat opposite the king. Egill sat down, pushed his shield in front of his legs, and kept his helmet on his head. He laid his sword across his knees and kept drawing it halfway out of the sheath and then slamming it back into the scabbard. He sat upright, but hung his head forward. Egill was marked by prominent features. He had a broad forehead and large brows, a nose that was not long but enormously thick, and lips that, seen through his beard, were both wide and long. He had a remarkably broad chin, and this largeness continued throughout the jawbone. He was thick-necked and broad-shouldered, and more than other men hard-looking and fierce when angry. Well built and taller than others, he had thick wolf-gray hair but was early bald. While he sat as was written above, he jerked one eyebrow down to his chin and lifted the other one up into his hairline; Egill was black-eyed and swarthy. He refused to drink, although drink was borne to him, but alternately jerked his eyebrows up and down.

King Athalsteinn sat in the high seat and likewise laid his sword on his knees. When they had sat thus for a while, the king drew his sword from its sheath. He took a large, fine gold ring off his arm and put it on the sword point. Then he stood up, stepped onto the floor, and reached with the sword over the fire to Egill. Egill stood up, unsheathed his sword, and walked onto the floor. He thrust the sword into the center of the ring and drew it toward him. Then he returned to his place. The king sat down in the high seat. But when Egill sat down, he drew the ring onto his hand and then his eyebrows returned to normal.

With a confrontation avoided and his fury passed, Egill put his sword down and took off his helmet. He then completed the transaction by drinking from the horn.

A similar meeting between Skalla-Grímr and King Haraldr, which took place after the killing of Skalla-Grímr's brother Thórólfr, is described earlier in the saga. The difference was that its outcome was far from peaceful. Skalla-Grímr set out to ask King Haraldr for compensation for the loss of his brother. He arrived in the evening at the king's lodging with eleven companions, many of whom were shape-changers.¹⁷ Outside they were met by the king's retainers, who went in to report to the king: "Men have arrived here, twelve all together, but they are more grown like giants than human men." (63) Unlike the English king, the Norwegian ruler did not offer honorable compensa-

tion; the ensuing quarrel between Skalla-Grímr and the king was inherited by Eíríkr and Egill.

In both Egill's and his father's generations, the light brothers die young while the dark brothers produce sons and live to old age. Skalla-Grímr is the first of his family to settle in Iceland, and his son Egill belongs to the first generation born there. In this saga of generations, Egill is the pivotal character. He is the figure who absorbs the darkness of his ancestors and manifests this inheritance in his physical appearance as well as in his skepticism regarding authority. Like his dark forefathers, he is a lonely and brooding, yet self-assertive, individual.

By choice Egill lives most of his life outside Iceland as a viking, mercenary, and meddler in the affairs of kings. When in Iceland, however, he comes less socially disruptive. Between trips abroad "Egill was not a man to meddle in others' affairs, and when he was here in Iceland he stayed out of most men's way. People responded by staying out of his affairs." (211) After his final return to Iceland, Egill entertains at feasts instead of fighting duels:

Egill lived at Borg for many years and became an old man. It is not reported that he had legal disputes with men here in Iceland, nor is anything told of single combats or of his being involved in killings once he settled down here in Iceland. They say that Egill never left Iceland . . . The main reason for this was that Egill could not be in Norway because of the grievances, already recounted, which the kings believed they had against him. He kept a grand household, because he did not lack means; also, his temperament was well suited to it.(257)

The change seems to have been deliberate; Egill has lost none of his warrior capabilities but now lives in a society in which he feels comfortable. He is successful in Iceland because he abandons the traits of the dark figure that enabled him to assert himself against monarchical authority abroad, but which have no place in Iceland.

Perhaps dark figures play a larger role in tales that have an authority figure either to support or to oppose. But Iceland, a society of freemen, had little room for such a character, and it is

perhaps for this reason that dark figures are not prominent in saga literature.

In Iceland, political power was shared by peers called chieftains (*gothar*, sing. *gothi*) who held the thirty-six (later *thirty-nine*) chieftancies. The stability of the society depended on a balance of power. In this island society of the tenth century, a leader was successful precisely because he was not particularly dangerous or notably antisocial. Rather, success was gauged by his participation in the political life of a society that emphasized the importance of social exchange.

As an accomplished leader, Egill understood that in Iceland armed might was to be prominently displayed but all-cut violence was to be restrained. In one instance (283-288) He rides into the local assembly with a picked force of eighty fully armed followers. His purpose is not to challenge the authority of the state, but to support his son Thorsteinn, who is involved in a lawsuit. A competent lawyer, Egill dramatically positions his force in full view of his son's opponents; the case is then decided peacefully, according to legal procedure. Egill's influence in the local district assured the next generation of his family an important position in the society. In fact, the saga stresses the importance of Egill's son at the local assembly: "Thorsteinn had the greatest influence in the arrangement of the assembly, because it had been so while Egill held the chieftaincy." (283)

After Egill's generation, the sons no longer exhibit the dichotomy of light and dark in the supernatural sense, and the supernatural attributes disappear. The contrast, however, remains part of the family heritage: "Because to this line were born those who were the most handsome of Icelanders . . . but the majority of the Mýra family were the ugliest of men" (300). Thorsteinn- Egill's heir after the death by drowning of an older, favorite son - is farmer, fisherman, landowner, and lawyer. Thorsteinn in his turn is succeeded by his sons Skúli and Thorgeirr. Of these two, the first is the bigger, but the second is the stronger, Skúli carries on the bloodline, but neither son is described in terms like those used to depict their grandfather and his ancestors from Norway.

Egill is a transitional character. He carries within his the traits of the dark figure inherited from his Norwegian ancestors, but there is also something new in him. The three thematic strands that formed Egill's character - the supernatural nature of his forefathers, the differences between light and dark brothers, and the fact that the dark son and not the light one carries on the family line - cease with Egill's death. Thorsteinn Egilsson and his progeny became an important and powerful family of capable but not extraordinary Icelandic chieftains.

NOTES:

¹ The standard edition of *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar* is Sigurthur Nordal, ed., *Islenzk fornrit, 2* (Reykjavik: Hith islenska fornritafelag, 1933). The saga is cited by page number in this edition. Translations are my own.

² Berserkers are frequently mentioned in the Icelandic sagas. Usually they were foreigners, especially Norwegians. Reference to werewolves was less common, perhaps because wolves were nonexistent in Iceland. See Anne Holtsmark, *On the Werewolf Motif in Egils saga Skallagrimssonar*, in *Science in Iceland* (Reykjavik: Vísindafélag Íslendinga, 1968), pp. 7-9. See also H. R. Ellis Davidson, "Shape-changing in the Old Norse Sagas," *Animals in Folklore*, ed. J. R. Porter and W. M. S. Russell (Cambridge: Brewer Ltd. and Totowa, NJ: Bowman and Littlefield for the. Folklore Society, 1978), pp. 126-142, esp. p. 134.

³ In *Egils saga* (ch. 65), Egill bites the windpipe of his opponent Atli inn skammi when his sword has no effect because of Atli's magic. Atli and his brother Berg-Onundr have been denying Egill's wife her share of an inheritance in Norway. Ármóthr skegg (ch. 71-72) is the victim of his own stinginess. As a host he states falsely that there is no ale and serves his guests, including Egill, only sour curds. When Egill learns that the farmer is lying about the ale, he drinks an inordinate amount, pins his host against the wall, and vomits on his face. Egill is begged by Ármóthr's wife and daughter not to kill the farmer; instead, he puts out Ármóthr's eye with his finger. Both these events take place in Norway.

⁴ According to legend, Skalla-Grímr (ch. 58) sank his treasure in a bog with a stone slab the day before he died. Egill (ch. 85) hid his money in a bog and killed the two slaves who helped him put it there. On both occasions the treasure was buried after words had been exchanged with a son or son-in-law.

⁵ From the late ninth century through the tenth century, Norway was undergoing political and social change. According to the saga, these changes were hastened by the extension of the power of Haraldr

harfagri over the whole of Norway. Previously, Norway had been divided into many petty kingdoms, some encompassing just a few fjords or valleys. By a form of allodium (*othal*), the farmers traditionally maintained rights of absolute family landownership. These *othal* rights were threatened by King Haraldr and in some instances were rescinded. Although the family sagas tend to exaggerate the tyranny of King Haraldr in order to explain the rapid settlement of Iceland in the decades right before and after 900, it is possible that the loss of traditional freemen's rights adversely affected families such as Egill's, who were unaccustomed to the demands of a strong central monarchy.

⁶ For a discussion of the light and dark aspects of characters in *Egils saga*, see the introduction of Herman Palsson and Paul Edwards, trans, *Egill's Saga* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976). Kaaren Grimstad considers the light/dark contrast in "The Giant as Heroic Model: The Case of Egill and Starkathr," *Scandinavian Studies* 48/3 (1976), 284-298. Lars Lönnroth contrasts the light and dark aspects of saga figures in terms of Christian metaphor; the blond figure is seen as good and Christian, whereas the dark figure is regarded as a problem for his society. He also stresses the foreign influence on the sagas. See his "Rhetorical Persuasion in the Sagas," *Scandinavian Studies* 42/2 (1970), 157-189, esp. p. 167. See also his *Kroppen som själens spegel - ett motiv i de isländska sagorna*, Lychnos-Bibliotek (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1963-64).

⁷ Along with many shorter verses, *Egills saga* offers three famous longer poems: "Höfuthlausn" (Head Ransom), "Sonatorrek" (Lament for a Son), and "Arinbjarnarkvitha" (In Praise of Arinbjörn). In "Sonatorrek" (p. 255, stanzas 22-24) Egill himself ascribes his poetic genius to Othinn. For discussions of Egill's poetry within the general context of skaldic verse, see E. O. Gabriel Turville-Petre, "On Skaldic Poetry," *Medieval Scandinavia* 7 (1974), 7-14, esp. p. 8, and *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 15-41; Margaret Clunies Ross, "The Art of Poetry and the Figure of the Poet in *Egils saga*," *Parergon* 22 (1978), 3-12. On "Sonatorrek" see Lee M. Hollander, "The Poet Egill Skallagrímsson and his Poem, 'On the Irreparable Loss of his Sons' (Sonatorrek)," *Scandinavian Studies* 14/1 (1936), 1-12; Klaus von See, "Sonatorrek und Hávamál," *ZfdA* 99 (1970), 26-33; Mario Gabrieli, "Il 'Sonatorrek' di Egill Skallagrímsson e poesia le poesia," *Rivista di Letterature moderne e comparate* 12/3 (1959), 181-200; M. C. van den Toorn, "Egils Sonatorrek als dichterische Leistung," *ZfdP* 77/1 (1958), 46-59; Ro Ralph, "Om tillkomsten av Sonatorrek," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 91 (1976), 153-165; Hallvard Lie, "Sonatorrek str. 1-4," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 61 (1946), 182-207; Henrik Birnbaum, "The Sublimation of Grief: Poems by Two Mourning Fathers," in *For Viktor Weintraub: Essays in Polish Literature, Language and History Presented on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. Viktor Erlich et al. (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), pp. 85-98. On "Arinbjarnarkvitha," see Lee M. Hollander, "The Lay of Arinbjörn (Arinbjarnarkvitha)," *Scandinavian Studies and Notes* 15/4 (1938), 110-121. On the poem composed for Eiríkr blóthöx, "Höfuthlausn," see P. M. Mitchell, "Höfuthlausn: Eiríkr's izzat," *Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (1972), 45-48; Jon Helgason, "Höfuthlausnarhjal," in *Einarsbok: Afmae liskvaethja til Einars Ol. Sveinssonar 12 dezember 1969* (Reykjavik, 1970),

pp. 156-76; Felix Niedner, "Egils Hauptlösung," *ZfdA* 57 (1920), 97-122; Dietrich Hofmann, "Bas Reimwort gjör in Egill Skallagrimssons Höfuthlausn," *Mediæval Scandinavia* 6 (1973), 93-101.

⁸ Much attention has been given to the question of whether Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), author of *Heimskringla* and the *Prose Edda*, was also the author of *Egils saga*. Snorri's authorship was proposed in the nineteenth century by the Danish poet and historian N. F. S. Gruntvig in his translation, *Norges kongekrønike of Snorro Sturluson*, 1st ed. (Copenhagen, 1818), p. xxix, and by the Icelandic/English scholar Guthbrandur Vigfusson in his translation, *Sturlunga saga*, I (Oxford, 1878). In the twentieth century the literature on the subject has become extensive. Snorri's candidacy has been argued by Björn M. Olsen in "Landnama og Egils saga," *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie*, 2d set., 19/3 (1904), 167-247, and in "Er Snorri Sturluson höfundur Egilssögu?" *Skirnir* 79/4 (1905), 363-368; Andre Key, *Eigla-Studien* (Ghent: Van Goethem, 1910); Sigurthur Nordal, "Höfundurinn," in *IF* 2, pp. lxx-xcv; M. C. van den Toorn, *Zur Verfasserfrage der Egils saga Skallagrimssonar* (Cologne and Graz: J. Trier und H. Grundmann, 1959); Peter Hallberg, *Snorri Sturluson och Egils Saga Skallagnimasonar: Ett försök till språklig författarbestämning*, *Studia Islandica*, 20 (Reykjavik: Heimspekideild Haskola islands og Bokautgafa Menningarsjofhs, 1962). Opposing Snorri's authorship are Finnur Jonsson's review in *Skirnir* 79/3 (1905), 274-278, of Olsens 'Landname og Egils saga,' and Per Wieselgren, *Författarskapet till Eigla* (Lund: C. Bloms boktryckeri, 1927). Vesteinn Olason, "Er Snorri Höfundur Egils Sögu?" *Skirnir* 142 (1968), 48-67, concludes that the authorship will remain an enigma.

⁹ In "The Giant as a Heroic Model," Kaaren Grimstad compares Egill with the family saga hero Grettir Asmundarson and the legendary giant warrior Starkathr, whose tale is told in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus and the legendary Gautreks saga. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen adds a comparison with the god Loki in "Starkathr, Loki, og Egill Skallagrimsson," in *Sjötiuthritgerthir helgathar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20 juli 1977*, ed. lunar G. Petursson and Jonas Kristjánsson (Reykjavik: Stofnun Arna Magnússonar a Íslandi, 1977), pp. 759-768.

¹⁰ Franz Bäuml, "Changing Patterns of Cohesion: The Dark Figure in Later Middle High German Narrative," in this volume pp. 90.

¹¹ Other skalds are usually ruled and ruined by unrequited love. Egill composes verses for a woman and eventually marries her. His match is successful and he is not an outcast. An interesting article about the difficulty of grouping Egill with the other wandering poets is Bjarni Einarsson, "The Lovesick Scald: A Reply to T. M. Andersson (*Mediæval Scandinavia*, 1969)," *Mediæval Scandinavia* 4 (1971), 21-41. Einarsson also discusses the relationship of *Hallfrethar saga*, *Egils saga*, and *Kormaks saga* to one another.

¹² Egill uses runic knowledge on two well-known occasions. When he is offered a poisoned drink by Queen Gunnhildr through his host, Barthr (ch. 44), Egill stabs the palm of his hand, carves runes on the horn bearing the poison drink, and smears the horn with blood. When he composes a verse, the horn splits. Later in the saga, while stay-

ing with a family, Egill learns that the daughter of his host is deathly ill. He checks the runes carved by a local farm boy, the spurned lover, and finds that they are harmful. The girl immediately begins to recuperate.

¹³ Úlfr's fearsome nature is arrived at in a rather roundabout way. *Oarga* is the negative (with privative o or u) of *argr*, a word that refers to cowardice through the connotation of unmanliness or effeminacy. In some usages the word carries the meaning of "lewdness." Cleasby-Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2d ed. with supplement (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), defines *Uargr* as "fierce." See also Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, (Leiden: Brill, 1962).

¹⁴ See ch. 57. Egill's purpose, to drive the royal couple from the country, was eventually realized, and Eiríkr and Gunnhildr carried a deep hatred for Egill. Erecting a *nithstöng* was an extremely serious insult. See T. L. Markey, "Nordic nithvisur: An Instance of Ritual Inversion?" *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 5 (1972), 7-18, esp. p. 10; Bo Almqvist, *Norrön Niddiktning: Traditions historiska studier i versmagi. 1, nid mot furstar*, Nordiska Texter och Undersökningar, 21 (Uppsala, 1965); F. Ström, *Nith, ergi, and Old Norse Moral Attitudes*, Dorothea Coke Lecture 1973 (London: Published for University College by the Viking Society for Northern Research, 1974).

¹⁵ Because Egill was unknown in that part of England it is not clear why he did not disguise himself and escape. Egill was shipwrecked on the coast and, because Eiríkr was inland at York, it seems likely that Egill could easily have avoided Eiríkr's small kingdom by going a short distance along the coast. Hallvard Lie, "Jorvikferden," *Edda* 46/3-4 (1946), 145-248, suggests that Egill may have chosen purposefully to meet with Eiríkr and Gunnhildr. Lie combines his investigation with a lengthy discussion of magical underpinnings of Norse verse forms. See also Kristjan Albertsson, "Egill Skallagrímsson i Jorvík," *Skirnir* 150 (1976), 88-98.

¹⁶ The meeting between Egill and Athalsteinn (ch. 51-55) is discussed in John Mack Simpson, "Sapientia et Fortitudo: The Drama of Athalsteinn," *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 7/1-2 (1979), 113-120.

¹⁷ Anne Holtmark considers the nature of Skalla-Grímr and his companions in "Skallagríms heimamenn," *Maal og Minne* (1971, pub. 1972), pp. 97-105.