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NJALS SAGA

that the unity of the poem is at least disputable; Achilles, for instance, appears in less than half of the twenty-four books.

The degree to which a single author was responsible for each of these poems is still being disputed, and perhaps always will be. But it is coming to be more and more a matter of agreement that the poems as they stand, whatever their origins may be, are nonetheless works of remarkable unity, and that the apparent breaks in their structures are actually highly functional.<sup>9</sup> Each of the poems is constructed differently; but, at the risk of oversimplification, one may observe that the apparently broken but actually unified structure corresponds to the apparently double but actually single subject: the hero as an individual (Roland, or the young Beowulf, for instance), and the hero as a member of society (Charlemagne, the old Beowulf).

*Njáls saga*, like the epic poems, seems to have some structural flaws. Not only is the saga sharply divided into two main parts—the first covering Gunnar's life and death, and the second dealing with Njal's family, their death, and the revenge taken for them—but even within these parts there are many apparent digressions. In the tradition of the Homeric analysts, it has often been held that the saga was unskillfully soldered together from two hypothetical earlier sagas, one of which had Gunnar for its hero and the other Njal.<sup>10</sup> The comparison with the epic poems, however, suggests that it is possible that the saga has a genuine unity. Argument by analogy here is, of course, worthless; the demonstration of unity must rest solely on analysis of the saga. But the analogy is still useful, since it indicates that an apparently disjointed subject matter has repeatedly been an ingredient in works of epic scope and unity.

Although the saga breaks very obviously into two main parts, it can also be divided more precisely into five sections.<sup>11</sup> Chapters 1-27, which

<sup>9</sup> To take examples almost at random, I have in mind such writings as C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958); G. de F. Lord, "The *Odyssey* and the Western World," *Sewanee Review*, LXII (1954), 406-427; J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XXII (1936), 245-295; Albert Pauphilet, "La Chanson de Roland," in his *Le Legs du Moyen Age* (Melun, 1950), pp. 65-89.

<sup>10</sup> Sveinsson's *Um Njálu*, I, is largely devoted to destroying this theory. Sveinsson himself makes a comparison between this dismemberment of *Njáls saga* and the nineteenth-century treatment of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Roland*, and *Beowulf* (p. 6). See also Baetke, *Über die Entstehung*, p. 46. In most of the analogies which have been made between *Njáls saga* and other literatures, the saga has been likened to the Middle High German epics, a comparison which seems rather less fruitful, from a strictly literary point of view. See Baetke, pp. 86-98, and Wilhelm Goetz, *Die Nialssaga ein Epos* (Berlin, 1885).

<sup>11</sup> This division is to some extent arbitrary; a slightly different one is given in the introduction to Sveinsson's edition (pp. cxxiii-cxxv). (Hermann Pálsson has pointed out to me that the variety of different ways in which the saga can be