

1 Introduction

In the Middle Ages Iceland produced literature entirely unique in both quantity and variety. There have been countless attempts to comprehend and interpret the origin and the creative process involved in this branch of the European cultural tradition. It seems most natural to conclude, however, that it was the legitimate offspring of an extraordinary society rather than the bastard of an ordinary society. If the structure of Icelandic society was thus different from that of other European societies in the Middle Ages, then a study of that society must offer a key to an understanding of the literature it produced.

—Björn Porsteinsson

IT is impossible to understand the Old Icelandic sagas without comprehending the function of feud in medieval Iceland. Feud stands at the core of the narrative, and its operation reaches into the heart of Icelandic society. The dominant concern of this society—to channel violence into accepted patterns of feud and to regulate conflict—is reflected in saga narrative.

This study concentrates on feud in the family sagas and in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation. Both are collections of sophisticated, realistic narratives akin to but different from the heroic epics and folktales that flourished on the European continent during the same medieval period. The family sagas, the best-known and the largest group of Icelandic prose writings, have a long-standing reputation for violence. Just what the nature of this violence was is an important question, but little attention has been paid to it.

The violence did not arise from war. Unlike most European societies, Iceland was never embroiled in conflict to establish its boundaries or to expand them. Medieval Icelanders were never called upon to repel a foreign invasion; in fact, military defense was so distant a concern that Iceland's otherwise extensive medieval laws made no provision for it. Internally, Iceland was not divided into tribal regions or quarrelsome petty states. The competition for territorial control by warring clans, as in Ireland, was absent. Instead, medieval Icelanders were concerned with private feud of a particular Icelandic style. In examining Icelandic dispute and its forms of settlement, I suggest that the society engaged in an insular type of feud which channeled most violence into a socially stabilizing process. This vital process, in turn, provided the formal model for saga narratives about Iceland. The relationship between social and literary feud is not the precise reflection of a mirror image but the sharing of common features between the real lives of a people and the narrative form they created in order to tell stories about their island existence.

Feud in the sagas is structured in the context of the island's social, judicial, and governmental forms; it is quite different from the epic conflict found in many other medieval literatures. Saga conflicts, unlike epic struggles, are not contests between men and monsters, demons, or foreign or pagan forces. The outcomes of conflicts in the sagas do not decide the safety or the destruction of a people or a nation. Most epics deal with heroes on whom the society depends in the event of attack, describing the martial deeds of war leaders and their nemesis, treachery. In contrast, the Icelandic prose tales are primarily about disputes between ordinary people over ordinary matters, such as landownership, insult, inheritance, dowries, hay, and beached whales.

Epic heroes take risks on behalf of the greater good, often killing real or imagined agents of chaos to ensure continuity for a society. Roland is a warrior who fights for

his homeland and for his emperor against pagan forces and traitors. Beowulf battles destructive creatures on behalf of a foreign society and later of his homeland. The Icelandic hero does not reach the lofty heights of the epic hero because his actions do not determine success or failure for his society. Unlike epic heroes, the Icelandic hero looks primarily to his own self-interest. He exemplifies the attitude of a society that has never confronted a foreign military threat. He is not an Odysseus pitting the values of his mortal society against the immortal world. He is not a Cú Chulainn guarding the border of a tribal region or an Alexander pushing the borders of a civilization to its limits. The hallmark of saga literature is its presentation of characters as rational, though at times exceptional, human beings functioning in the nonfabulous world of the Icelandic Free State. The Icelandic tales are complex expressions of medieval social thought in which character, action, and audience judgment are usually prescribed by rigid cultural norms.

Scholars have argued that, of all family saga characters, Grettir Ásmundarson and Egill Skalla-Grímsson are closest to epic heroes. Such a comparison is based largely on the similarity of a few unmistakably epiclike deeds. Beyond the affinity of specific exploits, however, the sagas of these heroes, when viewed as narrative wholes, suggest only marginal resemblances to continental epics. Almost as an exception among saga heroes, Grettir, while at home in Iceland, actually fights monstrous apparitions whereas most Icelandic revenants are put to rest by legal means or by moving grave sites (see saga selection 2 at end of this chapter). Even though Grettir's deeds have epiclike traits, his actions fail to have the repercussions of those of an epic hero and do little to alter the basic nature of the tale. *Grettis saga* is the story of a misfit who is most memorable for staying alive for many years while being hunted as an outlaw. Egill, too, has epic and heroic attributes, especially his extraordinary skill as a warrior. While abroad, Egill is a

viking and a mercenary serving foreign kings. Primarily a fierce, independent Icelander, Egill wanders and fights his way through the Baltic and the North Sea regions, more for monetary gain than for loyalty to a liege, a people, or a cause. When he returns to Iceland, he adapts his behavior to Icelandic norms and fights his antagonists in the law courts in the manner of a native chieftain. These and other attributes of *Egils saga*, the outlaw sagas, and the poets' sagas are discussed more thoroughly in chapter 10.

Icelanders did produce sagas similar in content to narratives that developed on the continent; in fact, four of the seven broad categories of sagas narrate events taking place primarily outside Iceland and strongly reflect the influence of hagiography and continental epic: the *konunga sögur* (kings' sagas) relate the history of the kings of Norway; the *fornaldar sögur* (sagas of antiquity) tell the fabulous and sometimes mythic tales of epic heroes such as the dragon slayer Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, and Þóðvarr bjarki, the bear's son; translated texts, such as the *riddara sögur* (knights' sagas) and the long *Karlamagnús saga*, which gathers together several chansons de geste about Charlemagne, relate continental tales of chivalric romance and epic; and the *lygi sögur* (lying or legendary sagas) form a category based on a mixture of the *fornaldar sögur* and the *riddara sögur*. These late sagas recount the fantastic adventures of wanderers in mythic lands.

The other three categories of sagas tell of events that take place mostly within Iceland: the *biskupa sögur* (bishops' sagas) concentrate on the lives of distinguished churchmen: the *Íslendinga sögur* (family sagas) describe characters and events from the earliest centuries of the Icelandic Free State, especially the so-called saga age (ca. 930–1030); and the *Sturlunga saga*, a compilation named after the famous political and literary family, the Sturlungar, recounts events mostly contemporary with the period when the sagas were written, from the late twelfth to the early fourteenth century.

Most literary studies of the sagas do not include the Sturlunga compilation. Yet if we investigate the formal characteristics of feud in the family sagas and the early Sturlunga sagas, we find more similarities than differences. In the family sagas, feuds tend to build into more elaborate narrative segments and resolutions are more a community affair. Conflicts in the Sturlunga sagas occur at a faster pace, one after the other, and the resolutions are more private and also more violent. I propose to demonstrate in this study that medieval Icelanders used a traditional means of saga composition for relating stories of their society, whether in the family or Sturlunga sagas.¹ These two groupings of tales describe disputes set in a rural society whose stable cultural development began in the period of settlement in the late ninth century and continued until the loss of independence to Norway in 1262–1264. It would be incorrect to assume that events narrated in the family sagas really happened, but accepting the sagas as revealing the tensions and dynamics of a rural medieval society is a different matter. We cannot agree that any text gives a factual representation of reality regardless of the author's intention. Even a chronicle is colored by the author's point of view. With this reservation in mind, I examine this corpus of consciously plausible medieval narratives for insight into their compositional technique and for an understanding of the place of feud in the sagas.

Although conflict is everywhere present in the sagas, the most recent comprehensive study of feud is Andreas Heusler's *Zum isländischen Fehdewesen in der Sturlungenzeit* (1912).² Focusing on the thirteenth-century Sturlung period, Heusler here builds upon his earlier study of crimi-

¹I am sure examples of similar narrative construction can be found in the later Sturlunga sagas and in the *biskupa sögur*, but that is not within the scope of this book.

²Andreas Heusler, *Zum isländischen Fehdewesen in der Sturlungenzeit*, Abhandlungen der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse, 1912, no. 4 (Berlin, 1912).

nal law in the family sagas, *Das Strafrecht der Isländersagas* (1911).³ As a scholar of his time, Heusler collected a mass of descriptive information. He recognized that system prevailed in the operation of Iceland's social order, but he offers little analysis of it. Although Heusler's discussion of saga character roles and of the legal history of the island is detailed, he evinces scant knowledge of how feud worked as an underlying narrative or social process.

Nevertheless, Heusler was aware of what he understood to be an undefinable force inherent in transactions and obligations among saga characters as they gathered forces in assembly cases. He notes that legal success or failure depended upon this *formlose Gewalt* ("formless power"):

The criminal law was unjust to certain social levels of the country only insofar as the small farmer would never have been able successfully to bring suit against the chieftain without higher protection. The plaintiff's bringing of an action at the thing was, as stated, a move in feud itself, which, as in every other kind of feud, requires its means of power. But when the important farmers and the chieftains quarreled with their own kind, they did not find themselves to be above the legal process. Or, more cautiously expressed, they knew very well how to value the legal weapon, the bringing of actions. That they also called upon this formless power to aid them during the process of their action was of course a prerogative of those in power.⁴

Heusler perceived the essential relationship between chieftain and farmer as one of power; that power, however,

³Andreas Heusler, *Das Strafrecht der Isländersagas* (Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1911).

⁴Heusler, *Fehdewesen*, pp. 69–70: Ständisch ungerecht war dieses Strafrecht nur darin, dass der Kleinbauer ohne höheren Schutz nie gegen den Häuptling hätte erfolgreich klagen können. Die Dingklage war, wie gesagt, eine Art Fehdezug, der seine Machtmittel erheischte wie jede andere Fehde. Aber wo die Grossbauern und Goden mit ihresgleichen stritten, da fanden sie sich über Gesetz und Recht nicht erhaben—oder vorsichtiger gesagt: sie wussten auch die gesetzlichen Kampfmittel, die Dingklage, gar wohl zu schätzen. Dass sie auch auf dem Klagewege die formlose Gewalt zu Hilfe riefen, war freilich wieder ein tatsächliches Vorrecht der Mächtigen.

was certainly not formless. Heusler never determined that this relationship of power was a formal element in feud; in this study I point out that it is this recurring element that defines Icelandic feud. With foresight, Heusler consistently approached the sagas in terms of Icelandic society and throughout *Strafrecht* argues that the sagas, more than any other source, give information about the operation of law within the context of the society.

The fact that one has to go as far back as Heusler to find a treatment of saga feud as both a social and a literary phenomenon reflects the lack of attention to textual and extra-textual liaisons. Saga scholarship during the past half century has tried to pry the sagas loose from their traditional social moorings in order to raise the status of these tales from bits and pieces of folklore and history to the realm of great literature. This effort was led by scholars who became known as “bookprosists” because of their belief in the written origin of the sagas.⁵ Beginning in the first decades of the twentieth century, they came into conflict with “freeprosists,” who advocated a theory of oral origins and stressed the historical roots of the family sagas. Neither the bookprosists’ nor the freeprosists’ position is tenable by today’s standards, although the bookprosists have been highly influential since the 1950s.⁶ They implanted the

⁵The leading bookprosisist Sigurður Nordal argued this point strongly. In *Hrafnkatla*, *Studia Islandica* (Íslenzk fræði) 7 (Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja H. F., 1940); English translation, *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða: A Study*, trans. R. George Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958), he wrote that character portrayals in *Hrafnkels saga* were “far in advance of the disjointed and simple portrayals of character in folk sagas and oral tales” (p. 55).

⁶Different aspects of the bookprose/freeprose controversy have been reviewed by Theodore M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey*, *Yale Germanic Studies*, I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), and Marco Scovazzi, *La Saga di Hrafnkell e il problema delle saghe islandesi* (Arona: Paideia, 1960). Also see Peter Hallberg, *The Icelandic Saga*, trans. Paul Schach (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), pp. 49–69; Jón Helgason, *Norrøn litteraturhistorie* (Copenhagen: Levin and Munksgaard, 1934), pp. 109–120; and Richard F. Allen, *Fire and Iron: Critical Approaches to Njáls saga* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), pp. 3–28.

prevailing concept that the sagas, instead of being a traditional narrative form, are the creation of a literary movement whose writers were interested in antiquarian lore.

By today's standards this concept is hard to accept, principally because it is based on three outdated assumptions. The first assumption is that elaborate prose narratives, such as the family sagas, with their intricate feuds and large numbers of characters, were beyond the memorization capacity of an oral storyteller. Memorization, however, is not the issue. These prose texts are built according to a simple compositional technique which enabled the sagaman to narrate in detail a specific instance of feud while preparing future conflicts and the involvement of other characters. The result is a method of narrative construction which at any specific instance is straightforward and simple, whereas, from the perspective of the entire tale, it appears marvelously complex. The method, quite suitable for literary composition, most likely grew out of oral compositional techniques that were not dependent upon memorization. The narrative elements form groups, which in turn link into longer feud chains. These groups, or clusters of narrative elements, are arranged not by some mechanical process but according to the logic of Icelandic feud. Within the clusters, the feud elements combine in a variety of ways and are not sequentially bound. What emerges is a narrative composed of simple basic elements. The clusterings of these elements indicate movement within Icelandic feud and, like any process essential to social operation, have a certain predictability. The technique of prose composition is simple because it is adaptable; in this quality lies its vitality. Within a society constructed around feud, this arrangement of the narrative not only meant something, but it lent an aura of plausibility to the saga.

The second assumption, historically related to the first, is that the thirteenth-century saga authors needed to look outside native traditions for the narrative tools adequate for constructing sophisticated tales about their not-so-

distant forefathers. In keeping with this view, some scholars have tried to explain the sagas as either end products of ancient Germanic heroic tradition or innovative Icelandic adaptations of contemporary continental Christian thought and narrative forms, especially hagiography. Certainly both heroic tradition and Christian thought are present in the sagas, but as graftings, not as underpinnings.

The third assumption is that the sagas' realism is determined by whether or not the sagas are factually accurate. The bookproseist Sigurður Nordal used this complex line of reasoning in his monograph, *Hrafnkatla*,⁷ to counter the freeproseists' belief in the historicity of the sagas. He argues against the reliability of specific facts in *Hrafnkels saga*, such as the importance of the sons of Þjóstarr and the habitability of certain highland valleys.⁸ From his demonstration of the lack of "historical" accuracy in *Hrafnkels saga*, Nordal and subsequent scholars drew the conclusion that the realism of the sagas was little more than a literary artifact.

Each of these three assumptions in its time has been helpful in bringing us to a closer understanding of the sagas, but together they have compounded inherent errors. Notable scholars have initiated change in the critical approach to saga literature. Peter Foote has consistently stressed the need to consider medieval Icelandic society in studies of the sagas.⁹ Aron Ya. Gurevich explores the giving of gifts and the place of economic issues in medieval Scandinavia.¹⁰ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen presents a brief but salient

⁷See n. 5, above.

⁸Óskar Halldórsson doubts many of Sigurður Nordal's findings. See his *Uppruni og þema Hrafnkels sögu*, Rannsóknastofnun í bókmenntafræði við Háskóla Íslands, Fræðirit 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1976).

⁹See, for instance, Peter Foote and David Wilson, *The Viking Achievement* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1970), p. xxiv.

¹⁰A. Ya. Gurevich [Aron J. Gurevitj], "Wealth and Gift-Bestowal among the Ancient Scandinavians," *Scandinavica* 7 (1968):126-138, and *Feodalismens oppkomst i Västeuropa*, trans. Marie-Anne Sahlin (Stockholm: Tidens förlag, 1979).

argument for reconceiving the association between saga and society.¹¹ Vésteinn Ólason, in reviewing formal studies of the sagas, questions their correlation with the texts.¹² The historians Björn Þorsteinsson, Gunnar Karlsson, Björn Sigfússon, and Sveinbjörn Rafnsson¹³ discuss different aspects of Iceland's social and political history, which, if taken together, illustrate the essential continuity of Icelandic society and its cultural norms from the saga age to the thirteenth century.

Two of my conclusions in this study are that feud stories set in Iceland, though appearing to be quite different from one another in content and in form, may have many formalistic similarities, and that the realism in these sagas is not tied to factual accuracy but to the societal normative code. In order to illustrate these and other conclusions I have included throughout the book numerous examples from the sagas. In the following pages I present a sampling of nine saga selections for two reasons: to give the reader examples to serve as points of reference, and to show that these samples of narrative, although at times quite different, have a great deal in common. The sagas are constructed according to a shared narrative base and, in order to understand that base, we must consider the correlation and modeling between the society and its literature. Although not obvious now, the compositional similarities of the texts and the repetitive use of three basic narrative elements will become clearer as the study progresses.

¹¹Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Saga og samfund: En indføring i oldislandsk litteratur* (Copenhagen: Berlingske forlag, 1977), esp. "Samfundsbygningen," pp. 26–58.

¹²Vésteinn Ólason, "Frásagnarlist í fornum sögum," *Skírnir* 152 (1978): 166–202, and "Nokkrar athugasemdir um Eyrbyggja sögu," *Skírnir* 145 (1971): 5–25.

¹³See, for instance, Björn Þorsteinsson, *Ný Íslandssaga* (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1966), and *Íslensk miðaldasaga* (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1978); Gunnar Karlsson, "Goðar og bændur," *Saga* 10 (1972):5–27; Björn Sigfússon, "Full goðorð og forn og heimildir frá 12. öld," *Saga* (1960):48–75; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Studier i Landnámabók: Kritiska bidrag till den isländska fristatstidens historia*, Bibliotheca Historica Lundensis 31 (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1974).

Selections from the Sagas

Selection 1: *Egils saga* (ch. 81)

That day men went to the thing slope and discussed their lawsuits, for in the evening the courts would convene to consider prosecutions. Þorsteinn was there with his following and had the greatest say in the conducting of the thing, because that had been the custom while Egill was still a leader and was in charge of the *goðorð* [chieftaincy]. Both sides were fully armed.

From the thing site men saw a group of horsemen come riding up along the Glúfr River. Their shields shone in the sun and there in the lead, as they came toward the spring assembly, was a man in a blue cape. On his head was a gilded helmet and at his side was a shield worked with gold. He held in his hand a barbed spear, the socket of which was inlaid with gold. A sword was bound to his waist. This man was Egill Skalla-Grímsson, come with eighty men, all well armed, as if they were prepared for battle. It was a carefully picked troop; Egill had with him the best of the farmers' sons from south in the Nesses, those whom he thought most warlike. Egill rode with his following to their booths, which Þorsteinn had had tented but which had stood empty. There they dismounted. And when Þorsteinn learned of his father's arrival, he went to meet him with his entire following and greeted him well. Egill and his men had their gear taken into the booths and their horses driven out to pasture. When that was done Egill and Þorsteinn went with all their followers up to the thing slope and sat down where they were accustomed to sit.

Then Egill stood up and spoke loudly: "Is Qnundr sjóni here on the thing slope?" Qnundr replied that he was, "And I am glad, Egill, that you have come. It will help to mend those breaches which here divide men." "Is it your doing," asked Egill, "that Steinarr, your son, is bringing charges against Þorsteinn, my son, and has gathered to-

gether a large crowd in order to make my son an outlaw?"

"It is not my fault," replied Qnundr, "that they are involved in a dispute. I have put in quite a few words and asked Steinarr to come to an agreement with your son, for it seems to me that in each instance Þorsteinn ought to be spared dishonor. In this matter my feeling is based on the old and dear friendship [*ástvinátta*] that has been between us, Egill, since we were raised next door to each other."

"It will soon be clear," said Egill, "whether you are making this statement in earnest or are lying, although I think the latter less likely. I remember the time when it would have seemed unlikely to either of us that we might press charges, or that we might fail to prevent our sons from behaving with such foolishness, as I hear they are doing now. It seems advisable to me that, while we are alive and so close to their affairs, we should take over this case and settle it and not let Tungu-Oddr and Einarr bait our sons to fight like old nags. From now on we should let them [these chieftains] find other means of increasing their wealth than by meddling in such affairs."

Selection 2: *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 55)

But when these wonders had reached this stage [of destroying the people on the farm], Kjartan [from Fróðá] journeyed to Helgafell to meet with his uncle Snorri goði from whom he sought advice about the specters who had descended upon them. By that time the priest, whom Gizurr hvíti [the white] had sent to Snorri goði, arrived at Helgafell. Snorri sent the priest to Fróðá with Kjartan along with his son Þórðr kausi [cat] and six other men. Snorri advised them that the bed furnishings of Þórgunna [a deceased Hebridean woman] should be burned and then all the revenants should be summoned to a *duradómr* [a door court, held at the entrance to a farmhouse]. He asked the priest to conduct holy services, to consecrate with water,

and to hear confessions. They then set off for Fróðá and along the way they called on men from the nearby farms to ride with them.

They arrived at Fróðá the evening before Candlemas, as the kitchen fires were being laid. By then Þuríðr, the mistress of the house, had taken sick in the same way as the others who had died. Kjartan immediately went inside and saw that Þóroddr and his companions [the previous master of the house who along with his men had drowned] were sitting by the fire, as was their custom. Kjartan took down Þórgunna's precious bed hangings and went into the kitchen. There he took glowing embers from the fire and went outside and burned all Þórgunna's bedclothes. After that Kjartan summoned Þórir viðleggr [wooden leg] while Þórðr kausi summoned farmer Þóroddr. They charged these [dead] men with going about the dwelling without permission and depriving people of life and health. All those who sat by the fire were summoned.

Next a *duradómr* was convened. The charges were announced, and all procedures were followed as if it were a thing court. Witnesses were heard, the cases were summed up, and judgments were made. When sentence was passed on Þórir viðleggr, he stood up and said: "We have sat as long as we could sit it out." After that, he went out a door, other than that before which the court (*dómr*) was held. Then sentence was passed on the shepherd; and when he heard that, he stood up and said: "Now I will leave, though I think that this would have been more fitting earlier." And when Þorgríma galdrakinn heard sentence being passed on her, she stood up and said: "I stayed here while it was safe." Then one after the other, the defendants were called and each in turn stood up as judgment was handed down. All said something as they went out; their remarks indicated that they departed unwillingly. Then sentence was pronounced against farmer Þóroddr; and when he heard it, he stood up and said: "Friendships here are few, I think. Let's

flee now, all of us.” After so saying, he left.

Then Kjartan and his companions entered. The priest carried consecrated water and holy relics through the entire house. Later in the day the priest sang holy services and held a solemn mass. After that all the ghosts disappeared, and the hauntings at Fróðá ceased. Þuríðr recovered from her sickness and became healthy. In the spring after this wonder, Kjartan took on a new servant couple. He lived for a long time afterward at Fróðá and became a most outstanding man.

Selection 3: *Laxdoela saga* (ch. 47)

Þórarinn the farmer at Tunga [in Sælingsdalr] announced that he wanted to sell his farm Tunguland [the Tongue lands], both because he needed money and also because he felt enmity was growing among people in the district, and he was a close friend of both sides. Bolli felt he needed to buy a residence, for the people of Laugar had much livestock but little land. On Ósvífr’s advice, Bolli and Guðrún rode to Tunga; they thought it would be convenient to obtain land so close by, and Ósvífr told them not to let any small details block a deal. Guðrún and Bolli discussed the sale with Þórarinn, and they reached agreement on what the price should be and also on the terms of payment. A deal was struck between them. But the sale was not witnessed, for there were not enough men present that it could be considered legal. After this, Bolli and Guðrún rode back home.

When Kjartan heard about the sale, he rode at once with eleven men to Tunga and arrived there early in the day. Þórarinn greeted him warmly and invited him to stay; Kjartan said that he would be riding back in the evening but would pause there for a while. Þórarinn asked him what his errand was.

Kjartan said, “My errand is to discuss a sale of land which you and Bolli have made, for it is against my wishes

that you sell this land to Bolli and Guðrún.”

Pórarinn said that anything else would not suit him, “for the price Bolli has promised me for the land is a very fine one and is to be paid quickly.”

“You will not suffer if Bolli doesn’t buy the land,” said Kjartan, “for I will buy it at the same price, and it will not avail you much to go against what I want done, for you will find that I intend to have my way in this district and to oblige others more than the people of Laugar.”

Pórarinn replied, “Costly to me are the master’s words in this matter. It would be most to my liking that the deal made between Bolli and myself should stand.”

“I don’t call anything a sale of land that isn’t witnessed,” said Kjartan. “Now either sell me the land here and now on the same terms as you agreed upon with others, or else live on the land yourself.”

Pórarinn chose to sell him the land, and this time there were witnesses to the sale. Kjartan rode home after the purchase.

Word of the sale spread throughout Breiðafjörðr, and the people of Laugar heard about it that same evening. Then Guðrún said, “It seems to me, Bolli, that Kjartan has given you two choices, rather harsher than he offered Pórarinn: either you leave this district with little honor, or else you confront him and show that you have a sharper bite than you have evidenced up to now.”

Selection 4: *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (ch. 21)

. . . and for another three winters he traveled throughout Iceland, meeting with chieftains and asking them for support. But because of the curse that Þorgrímr nef had laid on him through magic and the power to cast a spell, he did not succeed in convincing any of the chieftains to give him aid. When at times it seemed that some chieftains might take up with him, something always got in the way.