

CHAPTER 6

Domestic Politics in Northern Iceland

The first biographies of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, both presumably written in Iceland, are largely celebratory and suggest some element of Norwegian patronage. It is only later, and a little tentatively, that a critical voice begins to be heard in the *Óláfs saga helga* incorporated into *Heimskringla*. For the most part *Heimskringla* seems to adhere to a certain diplomatic reticence in dealing with the Norwegian kings, and *Egils saga* shows considerable ambiguity. That the Icelanders had partisan views on royal policy in Norway is explicit only in *Morkinskinna*. But when the Icelanders began to write about their own history, they may have felt less constrained by diplomatic considerations and more inclined to express themselves openly about regional and family issues in Iceland. There are indications of this openness at the end of *Egils saga* and we will encounter an even more overt clash of interests in the present chapter. But before turning to our specific texts, we must say something in general about the emergence of saga literature in northern Iceland.

The Background

One of the key passages on saga writing is found in *Íslendinga saga* and recounts how, after a period of family hostilities, relations between Snorri Sturluson and his nephew Sturla Sighvatsson improved to the point that in 1230 Sturla spent considerable time with his uncle at Reykholt and was very assiduous in having the “saga books” compiled

by Snorri copied down.¹ It is inviting to suppose that these “saga books” refer to Snorri’s composition of *Heimskringla*, if he is the author. They could also include *Egils saga* if that text is early and if it too was written by Snorri, as so often hypothesized. The passage is usually evaluated in terms of Snorri’s literary activity, but I propose to examine it with respect to his nephew Sturla’s literary interests.

Sturla’s copying of his uncle’s books has sometimes been understood to suggest a transmission of saga writing from the west to Eyjafjörður in the north, where Sturla spent some early years.² Although Sturla was in western Iceland during his childhood, he did not necessarily acquire his literary tastes in the west. He was born in 1199 at Hjarðarholt and was fostered by Þorlákr Ketilsson to the south of Hjarðarholt at Hítardalur until 1214.³

He rejoined his father at the age of fifteen and presumably went with his family to Grund in Eyjafjörður in 1215.⁴ We know in any event that he visited Miklagarðr just south of Grund in 1217.⁵ Finally, we know that he had taken up residence at Sauðafell in the west in the spring of 1221 when he was twenty-two years of age.⁶ The years from 1215 to 1220 at Grund must therefore have been the formative ones in Sturla’s literary development. That period may also have been the crucial one for the development of saga writing in Eyjafjörður.

The most important manifestation of early literary activity in Eyjafjörður may be the first great compilation of kings’ sagas in *Morkinskinna*. I have tried elsewhere to buttress the arguments advanced by Eivind Kválen in support of the view that *Morkinskinna* was composed in Eyjafjörður around 1220.⁷ If those arguments hold, it is clear that saga writing in the north was not a secondary activity modeled on saga writing in Reykholt. On the contrary, when (and if) Snorri composed the third part of *Heimskringla*, he modeled it on *Morkinskinna* and may thus have been indebted to an initial impulse from Eyjafjörður. Sturla’s interest in copying his uncle’s books would therefore not have been an exercise in acquiring a new literary culture but merely an updating of his own literary culture.

Morkinskinna is not the only text that suggests saga writing in Eyjafjörður. *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Reykðæla saga*, and *Ljósvetninga saga* appear to belong to the same literary milieu and may well belong to the same period. The prominent Eyjafjörður chieftain Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson, who died in 1207, is mentioned in both *Reykðæla saga*

and *Ljósvetninga saga*. Þorvarðr's father, Þorgeirr Hallason, was at Hvassafell in Eyjafjörður as early as the 1150s, and his brother Þórðr was a monk at the local monastery at Munkaþverá.⁸ Þorgeirr Hallason retired to the monastery in 1168 and presumably died there in 1171.⁹ It therefore appears that the association of Þorvarðr's family with the monastery goes back to the time of the first literary activity at Munkaþverá, the composition of Abbot Nikulás Bergsson's *Leiðarvísir* in the 1150s.

These circumstances do not necessarily suggest that Þorvarðr had literary interests, but there is a curious passage in *Prestsaga Guðmundar Arasonar* in which Þorvarðr, in his chieftainly and avuncular capacity, tries to browbeat Guðmundr Arason into accepting the episcopal rank.¹⁰ Guðmundr replies with some pique that he has never received any favors from Þorvarðr other than being "beaten to the books," that is, presumably, being forced to acquire a clerical education whether he liked it or not. Þorvarðr's insistence on ecclesiastical training could betoken his own interest in the world of books, or it could suggest a wish to maintain a bookish tradition in the family such as may have been exemplified by his brother Þórðr at Munkaþverá. This learned tradition may not have been dissimilar from the one that blossomed in the Sturlung family after Snorri Sturluson's youth with Jón Loptsson at Oddi.

Þorvarðr's family was furthermore closely intertwined with the Sturlungs. We know, for example, that Þorvarðr and his brothers were with Hvamm-Sturla in 1157.¹¹ But if Þorvarðr was drawn to books, this was by no means a dominant preoccupation, any more than in the case of Snorri Sturluson or Sturla Sighvatsson. Þorvarðr was in fact destined to have an adventurous life. His first recorded adventure was an elopement with Yngvildr, the daughter of Þorgils Oddason.¹² Yngvildr was also connected with a tradition of learning; her brother Oddi Þorgilsson was fostered by Sæmundr Sigfússon at Oddi and would therefore have tapped into the same tradition that was later available to Snorri Sturluson. Literary traditions were thus alive in the households of Þorgils Oddason, Hvamm-Sturla, and Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson.

Þorvarðr remained a close ally of Hvamm-Sturla both politically and by marriage alliance.¹³ His sister Ingibjörg was married to Hvamm-Sturla and he himself was married to Sturla's granddaughter Herdís

Sighvatsdóttir.¹⁴ It might be imagined that the culture of the Sturlungs communicated itself to Ingibjörg's family, but if we bear in mind that Ingibjörg's family had ties with the monastery at Munkaþverá going back to the 1150s, we might rather suppose that the Eyjafjörður tradition interacted with the Sturlung tradition on an equal footing. The two traditions are likely to have been parallel rather than chronologically sequential.

The literary tradition in Eyjafjörður is, to be sure, a little shadowy and speculative. How much importance should we attach to the fact that Þorgeirr Hallason and his descendants lived in the vicinity of the monastery at Munkaþverá and that family members joined the order or retired there? Other families in the region presumably had similar connections, and a monastic link does not necessarily demonstrate a bookish streak. On the other hand, we may remind ourselves that another of Þorgeirr Hallason's sons, the priest Ingimundr Þorgeirsson, moved to Mõðruvellir in Eyjafjörður in 1172.¹⁵ Ingimundr's love of books is explicitly noted, "því at þar var yndi hans sem bækurnar voru" [for his delight was in books].¹⁶ His delight is illustrated by the famous episode in which he loses a chest full of books in a shipwreck. A literary miracle fortunately causes the chest to fetch up on shore with one of the three clasps still intact so that the books can be salvaged. All of the other less precious chests are found broken apart when they wash ashore.¹⁷

After 1215 Sighvatr Sturluson was at Grund in Eyjafjörður, and we might ask whether he had some connection with the monastery at Munkaþverá, directly or indirectly. An indirect connection can be traced through Sighvatr's step father-in-law Sigurðr Ormsson.¹⁸ We are told that Sigurðr gave his chieftainships to Sighvatr's son Tumi, with the result that they later passed into Sighvatr's hands.¹⁹ Sighvatr thus in some sense becomes Sigurðr's heir.

Sigurðr was immediately involved in the affairs of Munkaþverá because, in 1204, Bishop Guðmundr Arason asked him to go to Munkaþverá to renovate the buildings, which had fallen into disrepair.²⁰ After a short time Guðmundr then established Sigurðr at Mõðruvellir, where Ingimundr Þorgeirsson had been and where his love of books must have left some trace.²¹ It was perhaps not coincidental that Bishop Guðmundr singled out Sigurðr to repair the fortunes at Munkaþverá because Sigurðr's father Ormr was the nephew of Bishop

Björn Gilsson, who had endowed the house at Munkaþverá in 1162.²² Ormr also retired at Munkaþverá and died there in 1191.²³ Relations between Bishop Guðmundr and Sigurðr Ormsson later soured to the point that Sigurðr found himself excommunicated. Not content with this measure, the bishop went on to remove from Sigurðr's home at Mõðruvellir a reliquary, relics, and some books, on the grounds that such things should not be in the hands of excommunicated men.²⁴ We thus learn that books were in the possession of Sigurðr Ormsson at Mõðruvellir and that all or some of them were confiscated in 1208, a year after the death of Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson.

These chance indications gathered from *Sturlunga saga* suggest the existence of a literary network including the family of Þorgils Oddason in the west, the Sturlungs in the west and north, and the family of Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson in Eyjafjörður. These families are linked in various ways, and there is evidence of literary activity in all three. The network may in fact be taken to underlie the opening sagas in the Sturlung complex, *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða*, *Sturlu saga*, *Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar*, and the beginning of *Íslendinga saga*. In addition, a band of references reaching from Reykjanes in the west to Reykjadalr in the north suggests that *Morkinskinna* was at home in the same region, most likely in Eyjafjörður.²⁵

There also emerged in this area a specific variety of regional saga. These sagas differ distinctly from the biographical sagas of the west, especially in Borgarfjörður (*Gunnlaugs saga*, *Bjarnar saga*, and *Egils saga*), because they focus on feuding in a limited region rather than on memorable individuals. They include *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Reykðæla saga*, and *Ljósvetninga saga*. All three have most often been dated near the middle of the century, that is to say, much later than *Morkinskinna*. On the other hand, Ólafur Halldórsson has suggested, albeit tentatively, that *Færeyinga saga*, which belongs to the same type of regional feud saga, may have been composed in Eyjafjörður in the period 1210–1215.²⁶ If this well-told saga is the work of such an early period, we may wonder why other regional sagas from the same area were so long delayed. It seems rather more likely that they should be assigned to the same chronological frame. We will begin with *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Reykðæla saga*, which have the peculiarity that they share a stretch of narrative and are therefore closely connected with each other. But the exact nature of this connection has proved to be

a particularly recalcitrant problem that must be addressed before we can settle on a chronology.

Víga-Glúms saga and Reykðæla saga

The shared narrative describes an encounter between the chieftain Víga-Glúmr in Eyjafjörður and his son-in-law and antagonist Víga-Skúta at Mývatn to the east. The matching text is located largely in chapter 16 of *Víga-Glúms saga* and chapter 26 of *Reykðæla saga*. The hostility between the two chieftains comes to a head after a divorce is effected between Glúmr's daughter Þórlaug and Skúta, on Skúta's initiative according to *Víga-Glúms saga* and on Glúmr's initiative according to *Reykðæla saga*. Skúta hires a spy and agent provocateur to lure Glúmr to an isolated chalet, where Skúta ambushes him. Glúmr makes good his escape by leaping into a gulch where he knows there is a ledge to catch him. He then gathers forces, but Skúta disguises himself as a shepherd and successfully eludes the posse. Skúta in turn gathers forces, but the confrontation ends in a standoff.

Commentary on this overlap goes back as far as Theodor Möbius's monograph of 1852.²⁷ Möbius did not enter into details but assumed that the plus passages in *Reykðæla saga* were added to supplement *Víga-Glúms saga* and that in the two passages where the author points out alternate traditions, he is referring to *Víga-Glúms saga* specifically (p. 68). In the first edition of his literary history Finnur Jónsson took the view that the two versions of the episode were oral variants, despite the almost verbatim correspondence in wording.²⁸ It was not until a full fifty years after Möbius's publication that the problem became an independent object of study.

The new initiative came from an unlikely source, a young American from Knoxville, Tennessee, named Claude Lotspeich. He studied with Eugen Mogk in Leipzig and devoted his dissertation to the topic in 1903. He begins his discussion by quoting Möbius to the effect that the episode is isolated in *Víga-Glúms saga* and not connected with the main thread of the story, Glúmr's ongoing feud with the nearby Esphœlingar.²⁹ Lotspeich reinforces the idea of isolation by noting that only in this episode is the protagonist referred to as "Vígá-Glúmr," whereas he figures elsewhere as "Glúmr" plain and simple.³⁰ This anomaly leads Lotspeich to agree with Finnur Jónsson's assessment

that the episode was interpolated into *Víga-Glúms saga*, but, unlike Finnur, he does not believe in an oral source but rather in a written source, which he labels “X.”³¹ A written source indeed accounts better for the close match in wording in the two recordings of the story in *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Reykðæla saga*. Lotspeich argues that the two sagas made similar use of “X,” but where the wording differs, he judged that the author of *Víga-Glúms saga* abbreviated “X.”

Lotspeich’s chief argument for the existence of a separate written text was stylistic; he pointed out that when the historical present is a possible option, it is used overall 28 percent of the time in *Reykðæla saga* and 26 percent of the time in *Víga-Glúms saga*.³² In the interpolated episode, however, it appears 75 percent of the time in *Reykðæla saga* and 73 percent of the time in *Víga-Glúms saga*. The episode therefore has a special profile that sets it apart from the larger narratives. Although Lotspeich left open the possibility that the author of *Víga-Glúms saga* might have copied directly from *Reykðæla saga*, he did not come to grips with the purpose of a free-floating episode unattached to any larger context.

The episode has been viewed tacitly as a kind of *þáttir*, but the *þættir* are predominantly about young Icelanders in Norway.³³ Perhaps the written source “X” could be compared to the semi-independent *þættir* in *Ljósvetninga saga*, but in the case of this saga the *þættir* either belonged to the original redaction or they were interpolated as oral addenda. They probably had no separate written existence. Quite apart from the greater simplicity of assuming that *Reykðæla saga* copied from *Víga-Glúms saga* or vice versa, episodic narratives about Saga Age events in Iceland are hard to document before the advent of saga writing.

It is in fact surprising that Lotspeich’s hypothesis carried as much weight as it did. When Knut Liestøl wrote an essay on *Reykðæla saga* in 1928, he did not refer to Lotspeich, but he may have been familiar with his conclusions through the second edition of Finnur Jónsson’s literary history.³⁴ Liestøl focused on the mismatch between chapter 26 of *Reykðæla saga* and the saga as a whole; in the episode we find 41–42 percent direct discourse, whereas the saga from beginning to end shows about 6 percent.³⁵ Liestøl did not draw the perhaps obvious conclusion that the episode was lifted out of *Víga-Glúms saga*, which also shows about 40 percent direct discourse. He remains

neutral on the relationship of *Reykðæla saga* and *Víga-Glúms saga*, saying only that it seemed quite certain that the episode in *Reykðæla saga* was an interpolation. On the origin of the interpolation he is agnostic: “Whether it was the author himself who added it in by using an unknown written source or a scribe who interpolated it (from an oral or written source), we have no way of deciding with certainty.”³⁶ Nor does Liestøl clarify the problem in his subsequent book.³⁷ On the other hand, his reference to “an unknown written source” suggests that Lotspeich’s hypothesis was still alive.

A few years later Gabriel Turville-Petre turned his attention to *Víga-Glúms saga*. In a paper from 1936 he was quite convinced that there had existed a written *þáttr* that was interpolated into both *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Reykðæla saga*, in compressed form in the *Möðruvallabók* version of the former and in fuller form in *Reykðæla saga*.³⁸ Though critical of Lotspeich’s lack of clarity, Turville-Petre supports his conclusion. As verification of the distinctive, and hence interpolated, state of the episode he cites Lotspeich’s observation that the name “Víga-Glúmr” occurs only here and that the historical present is used disproportionately. He also notes that the name form “Víga-Glúmr” occurs in *Reykðæla saga* for the first time in chapter 23 and believes that this occurrence reinforces the idea of a separate *þáttr*. He does not consider the possibility that the use of the name form “Víga-Glúmr” at this point could have been prompted by the fact that the author of *Reykðæla saga* was copying from *Víga-Glúms saga*, or that the rich use of the historical present could be explained in the same way.

But Turville-Petre may have had second thoughts because he was rather more circumspect when he published his comprehensive edition of *Víga-Glúms saga* four years later. Here he neither accepts nor rejects Lotspeich’s view but, like Liestøl, leaves the question open, suggesting that “the *þáttr* must first have been copied into *VGI* [*Víga-Glúms saga*] either from a text which was also the source of Ch. xxvi of *R.* [*Reykðæla saga*], or else from a manuscript of *R.* itself.”³⁹ That phrasing shows Lotspeich’s persistent footprint. Unfortunately, Turville-Petre did not pursue the matter further; we therefore do not know whether he favored Lotspeich’s separate text or a direct loan from *Reykðæla saga*.

Between Turville-Petre’s first and second statements there appeared the posthumously printed lectures of Björn M. Ólsen from the years

1911 to 1917. Ólsen refers to the problem briefly but decisively.⁴⁰ He emphasizes the discrepancies between the accounts of Þórlaug's marriage in the two texts and the identifications of the weapon Fluga: "In both places where *Víga-Skútu saga* addresses the discrepancies it plainly refers to the narrative of *Glúma*. That makes it clear that *Skútu saga* made use of *Glúma* in this section and not the other way around." In the latter mention (p. 424) Ólsen adds that the author of *Reykðæla saga* made use of a redaction of *Glúma* closer to the *Vatnshyrna* fragment than the *Möðruvallabók* redaction.

If Turville-Petre became less certain of an independent *þátrr* underlying the two sagas, the same is not true of Björn Sigfússon, who brought out his edition of *Reykðæla saga* in the same year in which Turville-Petre's edition of *Víga-Glúms saga* appeared. Far from downplaying the hypothetical *þátrr*, he advocated fuller dimensions for it, theorizing that it included the narrative pertaining to Glúmr's daughter Þórlaug and her marriage to and divorce from Skúta. He therefore identified Þórlaug as the central character and named the *þátrr* "Þórlaugar þátrr" in her honor.⁴¹ According to *Víga-Glúms saga* Skúta married Þórlaug but later repudiated her, giving rise to the subsequent enmity between Glúmr and Skúta. But *Reykðæla saga* offers a different account. Here Glúmr and his daughter connive to procure a better marriage, and she abandons Skúta. The author of *Reykðæla saga* knows the version in *Víga-Glúms saga* ("some people take the view that Skúta sent her home to Glúmr") but opts rather for the tale of trickery.

Björn Sigfússon does not understand the repudiation motif as a reference to *Víga-Glúms saga* and suggests instead that the author took the motif from "Þórlaugar þátrr" but changed it to improve Skúta's image. This is a complicated hypothesis that piles unknown on unknown; we do not know that there was a "Þórlaugar þátrr" or, if there was, what it contained, but Björn not only treats it as a given but goes on to speculate about the content, then speculates further that the author of *Reykðæla saga* rejected the content. Far simpler would be the assumption that the author of *Reykðæla saga* knew the repudiation motif directly from *Víga-Glúms saga* but also knew another version (perhaps a regional variant) more favorable to Skúta.

More compelling than Björn Sigfússon's hypothesis was Jónas Kristjánsson's analysis of the problem in his edition of *Víga-Glúms*

saga.⁴² His contribution was remarkable both for clarity and independence, especially with respect to the inherited assumption that a separate *þáttr* was interpolated into the saga. He begins by noting how out of keeping the style of the episode is with *Reykðæla saga* as a whole. In particular he calculates that, whereas chapter 26 of *Reykðæla saga* has 41–42 percent direct discourse, chapters 23–25 have only about 4.5 percent. He therefore considers it unlikely that these chapters all derive from a single source, Björn Sigfússon’s “Þórlaugar þáttr.” He argues that it is furthermore unlikely that the author of *Reykðæla saga* would have borrowed only one chapter from a long *þáttr* if such a text had really been at his disposal. That consideration makes him open to Björn M. Ólsen’s idea that *Reykðæla saga* borrowed directly from *Víga-Glúms saga* and used other sources as a basis for chapters 23–25.

The chief objection to such a direct borrowing had been the widely held belief that the episode was an interpolated *þáttr* in *Víga-Glúms saga*. Jónas systematically reviews the reasons used to support that belief: the fact that the daughter Þórlaug is mentioned nowhere else in *Víga-Glúms saga*, not even in the listing of Glúmr’s children in the following chapter; the sole occurrence of the name form “Víga-Glúmr” in chapter 16; Lotspeich’s observation of a disproportionate use of the historical present in chapter 16. With respect to the historical present, Jónas expresses some doubt about the significance of Lotspeich’s figures; his own calculation suggests a 63–64 percent use of the historical present rather than 73 percent, and he thinks that the sample may be too small to exclude coincidence.

Jónas attaches more weight to the author’s apparent unfamiliarity with the terrain in chapter 16, whereas elsewhere he seems perfectly at home in the area. Another discrepancy is that the action of chapter 16 seems less realistic and more improbable than in the remainder of the saga. These factors conspire to isolate chapter 16 and suggest that it was not written by the author of the main saga, although Jónas finds it difficult to decide whether the episode was incorporated by the author himself or was a later interpolation. That the incident is well positioned in both manuscripts of the saga inclines him to believe that it belongs to the original composition rather than being an interpolation. In his later survey of medieval Icelandic literature Jónas settled on a compromise solution; he accepted that there was a separate “Skútu

þátrr,” but he considered that it was not absorbed independently into both sagas, only into *Víga-Glúms saga*, from which it was adopted by the author of *Reykðæla saga*.⁴³

Jónas Kriţjánsson’s edition was not available to Walter Baetke when he published a paper that appeared two years later, but he arrived independently at similar conclusions.⁴⁴ Like Jónas, he criticizes Björn Sigfússon’s hypothetical “Þórlaugar þátrr” and challenges Lotspeich’s figures on the historical present. Echoing Jónas’s doubts about such a small sample, he makes the interesting observation that other small samples also produce disproportionate percentages of the historical present. Thus chapter 13 of *Reykðæla saga* shows 64 percent and chapter 15 shows 71 percent.⁴⁵ Baetke also reemphasizes the fact that the high percentage of direct discourse isolates the episode in the context of *Reykðæla saga* but not in the context of *Víga-Glúms saga*.

In general Baetke favors the simpler option of deriving one saga from the other rather than introducing unknown quantities into the relationship. In addition he points out that Glúmr’s character in the episode is in line with *Víga-Glúms saga*, whereas Víga-Skúta’s personality is at odds with *Reykðæla saga* as a whole. That suggests that the episode is more naturally situated in *Víga-Glúms saga* than in *Reykðæla saga*. On the other hand, the mention of narrative variants in chapter 26 of *Reykðæla saga* is characteristic of that saga and makes it easy to believe that the author altered what he found in *Víga-Glúms saga*, especially since the most explicit deviations respond specifically to variants found in chapter 16 of *Víga-Glúms saga*.

Baetke notes a further echo of *Víga-Glúms saga* in *Reykðæla saga*. The latter characterizes a certain Þorvarðr Qrnólfsson in chapter 15 as “vitr maðr en miðlungi góðgjarn” [a wise man but not altogether well disposed]. The wording is close to a characterization of the same man in *Víga-Glúms saga* (ÍF 9:73): “Þorvarðr var vitr maðr ok var þá gamall, meðallagi góðgjarn” [Þorvarðr was a wise man, old at the time, and indifferently well disposed].⁴⁶ That the wording in *Reykðæla saga* is a draft on *Víga-Glúms saga* is made plausible by the fact that Þorvarðr has a role in *Víga-Glúms saga* but is mentioned only twice and is as good as invisible in *Reykðæla saga*. From his accumulation of evidence Baetke concludes that the author of *Reykðæla saga* lifted the encounter between Víga-Glúmr and Víga-Skúta directly from chapter 16 in *Víga-Glúms saga*.

One additional argument might be deduced from Baetke's material. He notes the old argument that the name form "Víga-Glúmr" occurs only in chapter 16 of *Víga-Glúms saga*, with the result that this chapter stands apart from the rest of the saga. He notes too that the name "Víga-Glúmr," alongside "Víga-Skúta," is used the first time Glúmr is mentioned in *Reykðæla saga* (chapter 23). This correspondence has more often than not been viewed as evidence that the name form derived from a separate *þátrr*, but it could also be construed to mean that when the author of *Reykðæla saga* set out to describe the encounter between the two warriors, he was looking at chapter 16 of *Víga-Glúms saga*, where, perhaps not coincidentally, the forms "Víga-Glúmr" and "Víga-Skúta" also appear more or less side by side.

With the publication of Jónas Kristjánsson's probing recapitulation and Walter Baetke's decisive assignment of the priority to *Víga-Glúms saga*, it looked as though there was a consensus in the making, but a third contribution appeared at about the same time (1956) and complicated the issues considerably.⁴⁷ Arie C. Bouman's monograph provided a veritable flood of stylistic statistics on such matters as direct and indirect discourse, sentence length, and tense. The statistics are so unsurveyable as to make the argument difficult to evaluate, but they led Bouman to the conclusion that chapters 13–16 in *Víga-Glúms saga* stand apart from the rest of the saga in terms of sentence brevity, parataxis in preference to hypotaxis, predominance of historical present, and abundance of direct discourse. This profile is particularly evident in the *Mjóðruvallabók* (*M*) redaction, which Bouman believed to be primary. The run of chapters 13 to 16 includes not only the encounter between Glúmr and Skúta but also the episode in which Glúmr kills Kálfr of Stokkahlaða and then incriminates a certain Ingólfr. Because Bouman found the two episodes to be stylistically uniform, he theorized that they were joined in a common written text "X," which was copied into the *M* version of *Víga-Glúms saga*. The *M* version then became the source of the *Vatnshyrna* version as well as chapter 26 of *Reykðæla saga*.

Bouman appears to embrace the idea of a separate *þátrr* incorporated independently into *Víga-Glúms saga* (chapter 16) and *Reykðæla saga* (chapter 26), but his *þátrr* is in fact quite different. It is about two disconnected episodes (the Kálfr episode and the encounter between Glúmr and Skúta), and it was not copied into *Reykðæla saga*; rather,

it was copied from *Víga-Glúms saga* (M) into *Reykðœla saga*. In our assessment of the relationship between these two sagas the *þáttr* is not implicated. It is merely a source for *Víga-Glúms saga*, which in turn became a source for *Reykðœla saga*. From the limited perspective of the two sagas it can be said that Bouman agrees with Baetke's conclusion that *Víga-Glúms saga* is the direct source for *Reykðœla saga*. In effect Bouman's work strengthens the growing consensus favoring the priority of *Víga-Glúms saga*.

That consensus was upset again in 1972 when Dietrich Hofmann published a tightly argued paper reversing the priorities.⁴⁸ Hofmann found the idea of an episodic *þáttr* intrinsically implausible and therefore concentrated on the direct relationship between *Reykðœla saga* and *Víga-Glúms saga*. He asks in which saga the episode is better integrated and gives the decided preference to *Reykðœla saga*, taking note of Jónas Kristjánsson's observation that the author of the episode in *Víga-Glúms saga* betrays a lack of familiarity with the locale. He also enlists the isolated appearance of Þórlaug in the episode and emphasizes the poor motivation of the episode in *Víga-Glúms saga*, in which Skúta repudiates Glúmr's daughter and then adds injury to insult by launching an unexplained attack on his father-in-law. In *Reykðœla saga*, by contrast, the episode follows logically on the heels of other strained dealings between the two.

The most palpable problem for those favoring the priority of chapter 26 in *Reykðœla saga* is the great disproportion of direct discourse in relation to the rest of the saga, a feature that argues for a poor fit of chapter 26 in the narrative as a whole. Hofmann seeks to counter this anomaly by suggesting that the encounter between the two warriors may have spurred the author on to an uncharacteristically lively presentation, but the argument that there can always be an exception is not necessarily persuasive. Hofmann also argues that the use of spies and assassins is quite in the spirit of *Reykðœla saga*, but we might demur on the ground that subterfuge is an even more recurrent feature in *Víga-Glúms saga*.

One of the reasons sometimes marshaled against the view that *Víga-Glúms saga* is the borrower is the unlikelihood that the author would have taken over the episode in chapter 26 without making use of the narrative pertinent to Víga-Glúmr in chapters 23–25 of *Reykðœla saga*. Hofmann disallows this reasoning on the ground that

the author, or more likely a later reviser, was under no compulsion to adopt everything available to him but was in a position to pick and choose. In a subsequent passage Hofmann goes on to argue that the borrowing of certain materials in chapter 23–25 would have involved the writer in awkward revisions. He also points out that the episodes in chapters 23–25 are largely located to the east of Eyjafjörður, where the focus of *Reykðæla saga* is centered. These episodes may therefore have been peripheral for the reviser of *Víga-Glúms saga*. Hofmann believes that Víga-Glúmr's somewhat isolated daughter Þórlaug may also have belonged to this eastern tradition and was therefore not well lodged in *Víga-Glúms saga*; the information given about her may well be spurious.

Hofmann turns then to the variant traditions recorded in *Reykðæla saga*, according to which the weapon Fluga could have been an ax or a sword. Hofmann finds it not surprising that the author (or reviser) of *Víga-Glúms saga* dropped the ax variant and settled on a sword, because he could deduce that Fluga was a thrusting weapon. When Skúta sees Glúmr's cloak floating in the water, the text says (ÍF 10:233): “Hann hleypr at ok leggr til kápunnar” [he runs up and thrusts at the cloak]. Quite apart from the fact that a sword is a hewing as well as a thrusting weapon, one could object that it is possible to use “leggja” with an ax if Skúta was poking at the cloak with the top of the ax shaft to ascertain whether it enveloped Glúmr's body. Finally, Hofmann disallows Baetke's argument that *Reykðæla saga* borrowed its characterization of Þorvarðr Örnólfsson (ÍF 10:197) from *Víga-Glúms saga* (ÍF 9:73). He admits that the introduction of Þorvarðr is awkward in *Reykðæla saga* but sees no reason not to attribute the awkwardness to the writer, who can be observed retrieving missing information in other passages as well.

Apart from the not always convincing critique of those who have given *Víga-Glúms saga* the priority, it should be noted that Hofmann was pleading a special conviction. He was a strong proponent of the role of oral tradition in the sagas and he begins his paper by recalling the once widespread view that *Reykðæla saga* stands particularly close to that tradition, although skepticism had in the meantime overtaken the old consensus. From Hofmann's point of view, the new skepticism could only be abetted if it were judged that *Reykðæla saga* was written later than *Víga-Glúms saga*, which Jónas Kristjánsson assigned to the

period 1220–1250 (ÍF 9:LIII). Indeed, Björn Sigfússon hesitated to date *Reykðæla saga* earlier than “close to the middle of the century” (ÍF 10:LXXXIX), that is, in the full flowering of saga writing. Hofmann, who believed in the saga’s proximity to the transition from oral tradition, therefore had a specific motive for making it as early as possible, hence earlier than *Víga-Glúms saga*.

Despite Walter Baetke’s clear prioritizing of *Víga-Glúms saga* and Dietrich Hofmann’s clear reversal, subsequent comments have been tentative. There are brief references to the problem in John McKinnell’s translation of *Víga-Glúms saga* and in the second volume of the collaborative Icelandic literary history from 1993.⁴⁹ The former assumes interpolation of the Ingólfr and Skúta episodes from different sources, and the latter presupposes Arie C. Bouman’s hypothesis of an interpolated narrative including both the Ingólfr and Skúta episodes. That is to say, both revert to the idea that the correspondence should be explained from an interpolated *þáttr*; the author of *Víga-Glúms saga* interpolated a whole *þáttr* or more (covering both the anecdote concerning Ingólfr and Hlǫðu-Kálfr and Glúmr’s encounter with Skúta), whereas the author of *Reykðæla saga* included only the encounter with Skúta because the story of Ingólfr and Hlǫðu-Kálfr had nothing to do with the action of his saga.

The idea of a separate *þáttr* suffers from the same implausibility that besets Lotspeich’s thesis: what is the precedent for and the purpose of such a partial narrative? Why introduce the complication of an additional text when the relationship between *Reykðæla saga* and *Víga-Glúms saga* can be explained more simply by a loan from one saga to the other? It is furthermore evident that the author of *Reykðæla saga* knew the story of the encounter between Glúmr and Skúta from oral tradition because he refers to variant versions of the story and adds more information on the interaction between Glúmr and Skúta than could be found in *Víga-Glúms saga*. If we ask why he copied from the earlier saga rather than retelling the tradition, the answer may be that he found the episode so well told in *Víga-Glúms saga* that he elected to take a shortcut and avail himself of the ready-made version in front of him.

Jónas Kristjánsson began the discussion in his edition with a strong statement to the effect that the encounter between Glúmr and Skúta was lodged more naturally in *Víga-Glúms saga* than in *Reykðæla*

saga, where it is stylistically anomalous (ÍF 9:XV): “It [chapter 26 of *Reykðæla saga*] is the main adornment of the saga and far exceeds anything else in it, like a new restoration on an old pot.” This praise attaches particularly to the lively dialogue in chapter 26, which is quite in line with the dialogue that we find throughout *Víga-Glúms saga* but is absent from the rest of *Reykðæla saga*. The latter has in fact the lowest percentage of direct discourse in any saga.⁵⁰ Despite Dietrich Hofmann’s representation that the author may have risen to a higher plane for an especially inspired incident, a sudden jump from 6 percent to 40 percent in a single chapter strains credulity. The average for *Víga-Glúms saga* is, however, precisely in the area of 40 percent and therefore seems to be the right context for the episode.

A minor point that must have been noticed but has not drawn comment is the presence of a half stanza in the encounter between Glúmr and Skúta. Skaldic verse is a regular feature of *Víga-Glúms saga*, but this is the only scrap of verse in *Reykðæla saga*. That too might suggest that the episode belongs originally to *Víga-Glúms saga*. A similar conclusion could be drawn from Walter Baetke’s observation that the characterization in the episode accords well with the thrust of *Víga-Glúms saga*, in which Glúmr is consistently remarkable for his “foresight and presence of mind.”⁵¹ Skúta’s trickery, on the other hand, is not in keeping with his characterization in *Reykðæla saga*.

Another indication that has been observed but not exploited occurs at the very beginning of the crucial chapter 16 in *Víga-Glúms saga*, where Þórlaug’s marriages are accounted for (ÍF 9:50): “Síðan [after her divorce from Skúta] bað hennar Arnórr kerlingarnef ok átti hana. Frá þeim eru komnir gofgir menn” [Later Arnórr kerlingarnef asked for her hand and was married to her. Distinguished men are descended from them]. These words recur in chapter 24 of *Reykðæla saga* (ÍF 10:228): “Síðast átti hana Arnórr kerlingarnef, ok eru gofgir menn frá þeim komnir.” The author of *Reykðæla saga* in fact mentions three husbands for Þórlaug, not just the two mentioned in *Víga-Glúms saga*. The easiest explanation is that the author of *Reykðæla saga* was already looking at chapter 16 of *Víga-Glúms saga* and borrowed the phrasing, but he also had additional information from oral sources and supplemented what he found in his written source. It is a little more difficult to believe that the author of *Víga-Glúms saga* borrowed from *Reykðæla saga* but dropped one of the husbands.

Much has been made of the fact that Glúmr is referred to as “Víga-Glúmr” only in chapter 16 of his saga, the implication being that this usage is not in line with the rest of the saga and could derive from a different source. But it should be pointed out that the author of *Grettis saga* names Barði Guðmundarson 32 times but calls him Víga-Barði only once (ÍF 7:116); the departure in name form in chapter 16 may therefore not be significant. On the other hand, it may provide another clue suggesting that the author of *Reykðæla saga* had *Víga-Glúms saga* in front of him.

As the author of *Reykðæla saga* begins the tale of Glúmr’s encounter with Skúta in chapter 23, he identifies Skúta’s aunt Þorbjörg (ÍF 10:221): “Hon var föðursystir Víga-Skútu” [she was Víga-Skúta’s paternal aunt]. He also identifies Glúmr’s sister Þorgerðr: “Hon var systir Víga-Glúms at Þverá ór Eyjafirði” [she was the sister of Víga-Glúmr at Þverá in Eyjafjörður]. Apart from the opening genealogy and the end of the saga (ÍF 10:240–41), this is the only time in *Reykðæla saga* that Skúta is referred to as “Víga-Skúta.” It is also the only time that Glúmr is referred to as “Víga-Glúmr.” It may be coincidence that the prefix “Víga-“ in the body of the saga is restricted to this passage, but it might also be explained by the supposition that the author of *Reykðæla saga*, as he began to tell the story of the encounter, was looking at the beginning of chapter 16 in *Víga-Glúms saga*, which also uses the forms Víga-Skúta and Víga-Glúmr only here.

In calculating the probabilities, we may also observe that it has been a majority view that *Reykðæla saga* borrowed from *Víga-Glúms saga* rather than vice versa. This was the opinion expressed by Theodor Möbius and Björn M. Ólsen.⁵² Lotspeich and Turville-Petre left latitude for the opposite view, but Bouman’s more complicated scheme again suggested that *Víga-Glúms saga* had the original.⁵³ Jónas Kristjánsson could find no contrary evidence (ÍF 9:XVI): “Is it thinkable that chapter 26 of *Reykðæla saga* was taken directly from *Glúma*? That was the opinion of Björn M. Ólsen, and I have not noted anything that would speak categorically against it.” Walter Baetke was an outspoken advocate for this option, and only Dietrich Hofmann formulated arguments for the opposite view. The position taken here in favor of a priority for *Víga-Glúms saga* is therefore well anchored in the previous literature.

Although the relative dating of these two sagas may be fairly secure, absolute dates are even more difficult to fix. The dating of *Reykðæla*

saga turns on a small passage in chapter 12. The *saga* as a whole begins with the settlement of Reykjadalr by two Norwegian brothers and goes on to tell the story of their descendants. This story is one of hostile encounters, notably a protracted feud between Vémundr kǫgurr Fjórleifarson in Reykjadalr and Steingrímur Þórólafsson to the west in Eyjafjörður. Vémundr is tirelessly aggressive, and despite the best efforts of his chieftain and uncle Áskell, the hostilities are never settled and result in Steingrímur's death.

At one point Vémundr persuades a somewhat imbecilic fellow named Þorgeirr to strike Steingrímur with a sheep's head attached to a pole during a heated horse match, an occasion always conducive to mischief. In exchange for this wanton misdeed Vémundr offers the malefactor a winter's lodging. Þorgeirr carries out the commission and is immediately killed, but he calls out to Vémundr for help so that it is clear who is behind the plot.

During the negotiation between troublemaker and henchman, Þorgeirr asks what his compensation will be, and Vémundr makes the following offer (ÍF 10:182):

Vémundr kǫgurr svarar, at hann mun fá honum vetrvist, ef Þorgeirr vill þat vinna til, at ljósta Steingrím um daginn með sauðarhǫfðinu fyrir augum ǫllum mönnum.

[Vémundr kǫgurr [coverlet] replies that he will give him a winter's lodging if he will agree to strike Steingrímur during the day with a sheep's head for all to see.]

The action itself is described in the following terms (ÍF 10:183):

Ok í einhverri hvíld, þá er menn varði minnst, lýstr Þorgeirr Steingrím mikit hogg með sauðarhǫfðinu á hálsinn ok kallar nú á Vémund, at hann skyldi duga honum. En Steingrímur hleypr þegar eptir honum ok þeir mágar hans, Steinn ok Helgi, ok vá Steingrímur Þorgeir, fekk honum nú vetrvistina ok tók nú starf af Vémundi.

[During an intermission, when people were least expecting it, Þorgeirr struck Steingrímur a great blow on the neck with a sheep's head and called out to Vémundr to help him. But Steingrímur immediately ran

after him, together with his kinsmen Steinn and Helgi, and Steingrímur killed Þorgeirr, giving him the winter's lodging and saving Vémundur the trouble.]

This is a quite minor incident in *Reykðæla saga*, but some of the wording recurs in the *Þórðarbók* redaction of *Landnámabók* (ÍF 1.2:257) in a passage that reviews Steingrímur's ancestry:

Þeira synir váru þeir Þórðr ok Þorvarðr í Kristnesi ok Steingrímur at Kroppi, er Vémundur kǫgurr lét ljósta með sauðarhǫfði ok lézk mundu fá þeim vetrvist, er þat gerði, en sá hét Þorgeirr smjörkengr, en þat endisk, því at Steingrímur drap hann þegar, ok kvazk þess hǫggs skyldu hefna, meðan hann lifði.

[Their sons were Þórðr and Þorvarðr at Kristnes and Steingrímur at Kroppr, whom Vémundur kǫgurr caused to be struck with a sheep's head; he said he would give the man who did it a winter's lodging, and his name was Þorgeirr smjörkengr, and that was carried out because Steingrímur killed him immediately and said that he would avenge that blow as long as he lived.]

In the footnote to his edition Jakob Benediktsson referred to several explanations of the correspondence between the saga and *Landnámabók*, all of them to the effect that the incident found its way into the saga from a redaction of *Landnámabók*. Dietrich Hofmann argued the reverse, that the lost redaction of *Landnámabók* compiled by Styrmir Kárason (died 1245) and known as *Styrmisbók* borrowed the episode from *Reykðæla saga* and that the composition of *Styrmisbók* therefore serves as a terminus ante quem for *Reykðæla saga*.⁵⁴

The filiation of the various redactions of *Landnámabók* is a complicated puzzle. Jón Jóhannesson and, following him, Jakob Benediktsson (ÍF 1.1:CV), believed that *Styrmisbók* was the source for *Melabók*, from which the passage under discussion would have passed into *Þórðarbók*. They also believed that *Styrmisbók* was written ca. 1220 or a little later. If the passage in *Styrmisbók* is derivative from *Reykðæla saga*, that would locate the saga before 1220, but there are uncertainties. The evidence that *Styrmisbók* was written around 1220 includes among other things the *argumentum e silentio* that

Styrmisbók did not make use of *Egils saga*, but that is a slender reed. Subsequent to the publication of Dietrich Hofmann's paper Sveinbjörn Rafnsson also wrote a book in which he proved to be quite skeptical about the view that *Styrmisbók* was the source of *Melabók*.⁵⁵ It is therefore entirely possible that *Styrmisbók* is not as early as Hofmann thought and that it did not contain the sheep's head incident.

To these reservations should be added the consideration that Jón Jóhannesson's hypothesis is quite complex.⁵⁶ He thought the phrasing in *Pórðarbók* too archaic to be a recasting of the saga and traced it instead to *Melabók*, from which it migrated into *Styrmisbók*, *Reykðæla saga*, and ultimately into *Pórðarbók*. Sturla Þórðarson, he surmised, deleted the passage from his redaction of *Landnámabók* because he was familiar with the saga and knew that the story was told in greater detail there. This hypothesis is in line with Jón Jóhannesson's general thinking, which allowed for extensive borrowing from *Landnámabók* into the sagas and privileged literary derivation over oral derivation.⁵⁷

Although Jón Jóhannesson thought that the source of the sheep's head incident was *Styrmisbók*, Sveinbjörn Rafnsson was doubtful about the proposition that *Melabók*, *Sturlubók*, and *Hauksbók* all made use of *Styrmisbók*; he was more inclined to believe that *Melabók* was entirely independent of the other redactions.⁵⁸ If he is right, *Pórðarbók* inherits the passage directly from *Melabók* and not through the mediation of *Styrmisbók*. In this case the dating of *Styrmisbók* is again irrelevant, and Hofmann's terminus ante quem evaporates. But what can we say about the dating of *Melabók*? Sveinbjörn Rafnsson suggests evidence that would make Snorri Markússon the author of *Melabók* sometime between 1275 and 1313. He also argues that Snorri Markússon's exemplar could have been composed in the time of his grandfather Snorri Magnússon, who died in 1226. The original of *Melabók* might therefore be from the same period as *Styrmisbók*, and if the sheep's head incident was taken over from *Reykðæla saga* into *Melabók* rather than *Styrmisbók*, the terminus ante quem would be roughly the same.

But even if we concede that the story originated in *Reykðæla saga*, as seems not unlikely, we must remain in doubt about how and when it entered the *Landnámabók* transmission. It may not have been in the original *Styrmisbók* or the original *Melabók* and could have been interpolated at some later date. Any use of *Landnámabók* to arrive at

an absolute date for *Reykðæla saga* therefore seems quite precarious, and we are left with the general indications early in this chapter that there may well have been some saga writing in Eyjafjörður around 1220. All that we can say with any degree of certainty is that *Víga-Glúms saga* probably preceded *Reykðæla saga*. But before concluding the discussion, we may ask how the theme of partisanship plays out in these two sagas.

If we look back to our point of departure in Chapter 3, we may well allow that the early Icelandic biographies of Norwegian kings, notably Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, are largely celebratory, with the hint of some acquiescent relationship between Icelandic author and Norwegian patronage. It is only gradually and rather tentatively that a critical voice begins to be heard in the *Óláfs saga helga* that forms the second part of *Heimskringla*. But for the most part *Heimskringla* seems to adhere to a certain diplomatic reticence with respect to the Norwegian kings. This cautious outlook seems also to have left traces, even contradictions, in *Egils saga*. That the Icelanders may have had definite opinions about royal policy in Norway becomes apparent, though not overtly so, only in *Morkinskinna*.

When the Icelanders began to write about their own history, however, they may have felt less trammled by diplomatic considerations and more inclined to express themselves unguardedly about regional and family issues. There were indications of this openness at the end of *Egils saga*, and we will find an even more uncompromising clash of interests below. But before turning to *Ljósvetninga saga*, we must say a word about the covert contentions in our first two sagas.

We have seen that in the evolution of the kings' sagas there is an increasingly well developed dialogue on matters pertaining to personality and political outlook. When the narrative scene shifts to Iceland, these preoccupations appear in *Egils saga*, but somewhat more subtle antagonisms may be found in the northern sagas as well. It is evident that Víga-Glúmr is a special blend of personal opaqueness and political astuteness, a personality designed for conflict. He grows up as a male Cinderella, but his self-isolation is only a disguise adopted for the purpose of allowing him to bide his time until the right moment for action presents itself.

Although Norway is not much involved in the saga plot, both Glúmr's father Eyjólfur and Glúmr himself begin their careers there.

Eyjólfr makes a Norwegian friend and asks for passage to Norway, but, once arrived, his friend hesitates to extend hospitality. It turns out that he is apprehensive because he has a brother with a special dislike of Icelanders. The brother's sentiments get considerable coverage, but Eyjólfr, by dint of patience, is able to overcome them and establish himself by killing a bear, participating in viking expeditions, and defeating a berserk. Capitalizing on his new-found standing, he marries the daughter of a district chieftain and returns to Iceland.

Eyjólfr's son Glúmr follows in his father's footsteps and makes his way in Norway too. At first he gets a tepid reception from his maternal grandfather, but then asserts himself by driving out a berserk who has made it a habit to terrorize his grandfather's hall. Such Norwegian preludes become a regular feature of the Icelandic sagas, but the link with Norway is cut off decisively in *Víga-Glúms saga*; the remainder of the action is almost willfully Icelandic. It may be pressing a point, but it is as if Norway is mentioned only to be relegated, as if the author wishes to suggest that Norway has yielded the stage to Iceland. The literary initiative has passed from one country to another.

Glúmr is best known as a master of subterfuges. His career as chieftain in Eyjafjörður is to some extent a sequence of subterfuges and to some extent an alternation of subterfuges and determined actions. His trick to escape the clutches of Víga-Skúta is one illustration of his resourcefulness, but the more famous examples are the killing of a calf in a barn to inculpate another man for his own killing of an antagonist named Hloðu-Kálfr (barn calf) and an ingeniously worded ambiguous oath that serves to put his enemies off the scent for a time. Glúmr has his heroic moments, but he is not primarily a heroic figure, in the mold, for example, of Egill Skallagrímsson. He triumphs more often by deceit than by confrontation.

The appropriate comparison is perhaps with Þrándr í Gøtu, who makes his way against the Norwegian crown and his fellow Faroese Islanders by dissembling. Like Víga-Glúmr he lives to a ripe old age, and ultimately dies of grief over the death of a nephew. Both *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Færeyinga saga* could have been written in Eyjafjörður around 1215. They share a certain sardonic view of what makes a chieftain successful. This image could have been fostered by Norwegian hegemony and an emerging view that the dominant state lives by the power of authority while the subordinate state lives by its

wits. The triumph of wit over power is a recurrent, if not *the* recurrent theme in the *þættir*, in which resourceful Icelanders repeatedly hold their own against kings. *Víga-Glúms saga* may therefore be both about political separation from Norway and about a new paradigm for political success.

Reykðæla saga lends itself to generalization less readily than *Víga-Glúms saga*. If the latter is a tale of political sagacity, the former initially eludes any search for an overarching theme. It reads like a detailed but unfocused account of regional feuds and disputes extending over two generations, the first dominated by Áskell Eyvindarson and the second by his son Skúta now familiar from *Víga-Glúms saga*. We have devoted a considerable space to making the case that the author of *Reykðæla saga* knew and borrowed from the latter. He in fact concludes with an evaluation of Skúta Áskelsson that sounds like an echo of *Víga-Glúms saga* (ÍF 10:243):

En þó er þat eina satt af honum at segja, at hann var vitr maðr ok inn mesti fullhugi, ok margir gengu ekki betr en til jafns við hann, þótt miklir þættisk fyrir sér vera, en eigi þótti hann öllum jafnaðarmaðr vera.

[But it can truly be told of him that he was a wise man and a great warrior, and many were no better than his equals though they thought themselves very eminent, but he did not impress everyone as being an equitable man.]

This phrasing recalls the judgment passed on Glúmr at the end of his saga (ÍF 9:98):

Þat er ok [mál] manna, at Glúmr hafi verit tuttugu vetr mestr höfðingi í Eyjafirði, en aðra tuttugu vetr engi meiri en til jafns við hann.

[People say that for twenty years Glúmr was the greatest chieftain in Eyjafjörður, and for another twenty no one was more than his equal.]

Reykðæla saga seems to be making the assertion that Skúta was one of those who, during Glúmr's last twenty years, was definitely his equal, whatever the exaggerated claims in *Víga-Glúms saga* might be.

“Skútu saga” could even be understood as a counterpoise to *Víga-Glúms saga* as a whole, in effect telling the other side of the story. Going a step further, we could surmise that *Reykðæla saga* is a counterthrust on the qualities that are appropriate for a chieftain. Whereas Víga-Glúmr is secretive and deceitful, Áskell is in every way the model chieftain, open, admired and trusted by everyone, and consistently just. He achieves no fewer than eight reconciliations in a persistent series of bloody disputes; even when mortally wounded, his only thought is to effect a peaceful settlement. The contrast to Víga-Glúmr could hardly be more explicit, and it could well be calculated. If so, *Reykðæla saga* might be considered as a polemical response to the political perspective that unfolds in *Víga-Glúms saga*.⁵⁹

Ljósvetninga saga

We turn now to the third early saga from Eyjafjörður, *Ljósvetninga saga*. The study of this saga is beset by particularly difficult textual issues. It exists in two very different redactions known as A and C, and the dating and relationship of these redactions have been viewed very differently. The editor, Björn Sigfússon, considered the fragmentary A redaction to be original, but the translators, Andersson and Miller, considered the full C version to be original.⁶⁰ The dating is contingent on this choice as well as other matters. There are two clear literary borrowings, one from *Morkinskinna* (less likely *Heimskringla*) and one from *Porgils saga ok Haflíða*. Such links often provide dating indices, but in this case there are too many uncertainties. If the author borrowed from *Morkinskinna*, the dating is likely to be early, but if the source is *Heimskringla*, which superseded *Morkinskinna*, it could be quite late. A study of the parallel columns from these texts printed by Björn Sigfússon (ÍF 10:XXXIV–XXXV) suggests to this reader that the order of composition was *Morkinskinna*—*Ljósvetninga saga*—*Heimskringla*, but such matters have often become mired in inconclusive debates.

A borrowing from *Porgils saga ok Haflíða* seems equally certain, but dates for this saga have run the gamut from an unlikely 1160 to after 1237.⁶¹ There is thus too much latitude for such a source to be useful. In addition, both literary borrowings are at the very end of *Ljósvetninga saga* and look like afterthoughts that could have been added late in the manuscript tradition. Given these uncertainties,

the most likely dating indication may be the mention of Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson (died 1207). In chapter 23 a spy is sent to observe the doings at a farm named Veisa. He is roughly treated and prevented from entering so that he must return with nothing accomplished, though with a strong suspicion that there was a large group of armed men inside. The manhandling of the would-be spy became quasi-proverbial, and the saga states (ÍF 10:73): “Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson was subsequently in the habit of saying, whenever there was a ruckus, ‘Let’s try the Veisa grip’.” This reference suggests that at the time of writing Þorvarðr was within living memory; it would seem strange to quote a trivial phrase spoken by a man who had already been dead for forty or fifty years.

Þorvarðr is also mentioned in *Reykðæla saga* (ÍF 10:213) from the same neighborhood, but the two sagas are remarkably different. Although there are compositional weaknesses and real questions about the narrative relevance in some passages, *Ljósvetninga saga* is endowed with a dramatic structure and a scenic vividness not to be found in *Reykðæla saga*, apart from the episode borrowed from *Víga-Glúms saga*. The dramatic line is particularly well managed in the first of the two generations described in *Ljósvetninga saga*. The story pits the great Eyjafjörður chieftain Guðmundr ríki against the family of the Ljósvetningar to the east. It is revealed that there is gossip in the region to the effect that Guðmundr is homosexual. This is the kind of rumor that cannot be confronted directly, but Guðmundr’s revenge is narrated in brilliant and escalating detail, with a sequence of sharply focused scenes. Guðmundr holds the better cards and duly accomplishes his revenge, but the author works almost surreptitiously against the grain. Although Guðmundr succeeds, he gains no credit. Indeed, the author allows the charge against him to stand. The saga is thus a drama of cross-purposes. The political winner becomes the moral loser, and the two victims of his revenge emerge as the heroes of the story.

If the saga indeed dates from as early as the 1220s, we can observe that saga narrative has already achieved real complexity in psychological terms. More important than the actual events or the spoken words are the unarticulated thoughts and ponderings that motivate them. This art of insinuation is destined to become one of the hallmarks of the sagas in their full flower. It is not altogether new in *Ljósvetninga*

saga; we have seen the operations of subterfuge in the remnants of **Hlaðajarla saga* as well as in *Víga-Glúms saga*, but the art is more fully and consistently evolved in *Ljósvetninga saga*. It leads the reader to reflect on what is really being said, and to imagine what is not being said. This fondness for a subnarrative with crucial intimations must have been anticipated in some way in the antecedent oral narrative art, but it becomes tangible only in the written versions.

Another prominent feature of *Ljósvetninga saga* is a peculiarly moralizing outlook. The sagas overall have often been credited with a special brand of authorial objectivity, but in the case of this saga such a generalization is particularly misplaced. We have seen that the author indirectly but quite explicitly undermines the greatest chieftain of the region, Guðmundr ríki, on moral grounds.⁶² The critique does not stop with Guðmundr but persists into the next generation in the person of his son and successor Eyjólfur Guðmundarson. Eyjólfur embodies a number of flaws also peculiar to his father, notably a consuming sense of his own importance. He too becomes involved in a protracted and uncompromising feud, but whereas Guðmundr's antagonists were scattered and located both to the west and east, Eyjólfur's hostility is focused on a particular family to the east around Ljósavatn (hence "Ljósvetningar"). Eyjólfur's behavior is characterized chiefly by intransigence, but the Ljósvetningar, especially their chieftain Þorvarðr, display more admirable qualities, a degree of flexibility, loyalty to one another, and group solidarity. As in the first generation, Eyjólfur has all the material advantages and consequently gets the better of the feud, but, like his father, he gains only opprobrium.

The saga thus pits an eastern group, the Ljósvetningar, against the chieftains in Eyjafjörður. This confrontation suggests something about regional sympathies and perhaps about the author's location. Although the literary activity in northern Iceland in the early thirteenth century probably centered in the most prosperous area in Eyjafjörður, the home turf of Guðmundr and Eyjólfur, the author's sympathies are clearly aligned against these chieftains and favor the easterners. The author is likely to have been associated with the latter, and if the writing was done in Eyjafjörður, it was surely done by someone with eastern family connections or an eastern allegiance.

It is difficult to think of another saga that is quite so regionally colored as *Ljósvetninga saga*, and we may inquire where the idea of

regional conflict originated. Perhaps the precedent may be found in the orbit of the kings' sagas. These sagas are replete with conflicts between Norway and Denmark or Norway and Sweden. We might also think of *Færeyinga saga*, tentatively dated around 1215, in which a major theme is the conflict between the Faroese chieftains and the Norwegian kings. This tension is no less characteristic of *Orkneyinga saga*, whatever the date and original form of that saga may have been.⁶³ These texts incorporate a sympathetic view of local resistance to monarchical overlordship, and that is, in an extended sense, the gist of *Ljósvetninga saga*. Regal instincts have been detected in Guðmundr ríki, and the Ljósvetningar might be considered the victims of oppression.⁶⁴

Another form of regionalism may be hypothesized for **Hlaðajarla saga*. Since we do not have it, we cannot speculate on the degree to which it not only promotes the special status of Þrændalög but also portrays tensions between that region and the central monarchy, but some such opposition seems likely. If my supposition that **Hlaðajarla saga* reached down to the middle of the eleventh century and included the contest between Haraldr harðráði and Einarr þambarskelfir is correct, that clash may have sown the literary seeds of regional conflict in Iceland as well. Furthermore, if **Hlaðajarla saga* underlies both *Fagrskinna* and *Morkinskinna*, it too must date from ca. 1215 and could have exercised an influence on *Ljósvetninga saga*.

Political antagonism is in any event a fundamental theme in the feud between Mǫðrvellingar and Ljósvetningar. The political dimension is reinforced by a sharp contrast in portraiture. Guðmundr and Eyjólfur are systematically disparaged and are not given the benefit of redeeming qualities, while the leading Ljósvetningar, notably Þorvarðr Hǫskuldsson, Ófeigr Járngerðarson, and Hallr Ótryggsson, are exalted, sometimes extravagantly. Personal qualities count for a great deal in the story, and contrastive personalities are also a prominent feature of the kings' sagas.

In **Hlaðajarla saga* the contrast between a supremely guileful Hákon jarl and an unsuspecting King Haraldr Gormsson guides the action. In this case the regional chieftain triumphs. If the saga included the contest between Einarr þambarskelfir and King Haraldr Sigurðarson, the contrast between guile and sturdy independence is central, but guile is condemned and all the sources prefer the regional chieftain. It seems not unlikely that the author of *Ljósvetninga saga* stood heir

to these patterns of regional antipathy and personal craftiness that were well established in the sagas about Norwegian kings and their antagonists at home and abroad. Such oppositions became thematic especially in *Morkinskinna* with its persistent distinctions between peaceable and militant kings. In *Ljósvetninga saga* these large-scale conflicts were translated onto a more limited local scene, but with no loss of vigor.