

A Reader's View of Law in Njáls Saga

In the wake of the discarded view of the Íslendinga sögur as history, scholars have begun to see them as expressions of the political and ethical commentary of their creators. One consequence of this development is the change likely to be given current studies of law in the sagas. Legal scholarship of two or three generations ago treated the sagas as an historical repository of law whose descriptions of legal customs and practices reflected, if not always accurately, contemporary legal documents such as Grágás or Jónsbók. Such scholarship on Njáls saga, for example, often regarded the saga's deviations from contemporary law codices either as the author's ignorance or as evidence of legal materials no longer extant. But once we regard the sagas as fiction, absolute faith in their accuracy in depicting lawsuits no longer seems warranted. That is, if saga authors invented characters who play major and minor roles in the sagas, then they could also have freely modified legal customs and court procedures. No one doubts, for example, that the author exaggerates Njáll's role in instituting the Fifth Court. Such an imaginative reconstruction of history indicates that similar modifications of legal practices and reinterpretations of law can not be ruled out. Once recognized, these alterations lend themselves to new explanations, such as poetic license, the author's right to modify virtually whatever he chooses to suit his own narrative ends. Naturally, such solu-

tions involve certain risks, not the least of which is over-explication. If guilty of this crime, literary scholars invite ridicule when they venture solutions derived from "saga rhetoric" to problems traditionally regarded as best solved by the philologist and the historian.

My justification for tackling this subject is that despite the considerable scholarship devoted to the study of law in Njáls saga, no one so far as I know has thought it necessary to comment at length on the thematic role of the lawsuits. If not history, what seems to be the point to all these squabbles? Is the author really objective in narrating these lawsuits? Or does he side with some participants for reasons difficult to fathom? Although apparently subscribing to Njáll's dictum, "með lögum skal land vart byggja, en með ólögum eyða," he nevertheless recognizes that in a court of law justice occasionally fails to triumph. Put another way, respect for the principles of a legal code does not necessarily command admiration for the practice of law. Support for this claim will be sought in an examination of narrative patterns that provide their own commentary on the action.

Before turning to the saga itself, I would like to explain briefly a method of reading prose narrative developed in a spate of articles and books published in the last decade or so that will be employed in this paper. In the United States such writers as Stanley Fish, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, George Poulet, Paul de Man, Norman Holland, and Walter Slatoff have contributed to an understanding of the role

of literary response in interpreting narrative art. Likewise in Europe Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, and Michael Riffaterre--to name only three of the most well-known critics--have addressed themselves to the problem of how the reader's response to a work conditions and informs individual literary works. While I have no intention of summarizing the work of these critics, I hope to suggest by mentioning their names the direction this paper will take. In addition, I would like to single out from this pantheon of hermeneutic critics a few remarks of Wolfgang Iser's to give shape and focus to my thoughts on Njáls saga.

Iser argues that "in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text" ("Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction," in Aspects of Narrative: Selected Papers from the English Institute, ed. J. Hillis Miller. Columbia Univ. Press: New York and London, 1971; all quotations from Iser are from this essay). A literary work projects its meaning in a series of stages that give the reader a concrete form to contemplate. As these stages of a work necessarily link up in the course of the unfolding narrative, the connections between one episode and another remain for the most part implicit and must therefore be inferred by the alert reader. Inevitably, gaps between various episodes occur and offer the reader an opportunity to build bridges from one episode to another. These gaps must not be seen as defects, according to Iser, but rather as the inevitable result of story-

telling and the basis for aesthetic response. "Generally, [readers] will not even be aware of such gaps--at least so far as novels up to the end of the nineteenth century are concerned" (p. 12), but we nevertheless fill them in because the rhetoric of the work continually and implicitly connects episodes interrupted by the gaps. That the process of reading involves such an activity may be seen by our responses during second readings: as we re-read we see in a new light any incident that anticipates later developments. This *déjà-lù* effect, as it has been called, need not be thought of as applying only to such obvious devices of foreshadowing as the pistols in Hedda Gabler or Gunnarr's slapping Hallgerðr; they apply to all incidents the author's rhetoric connects. In this way every work of literature invites, some would say demands, some form of participation on the reader's part. Works that make all the decisions for the reader are dull, and Iser would have us believe that these gaps, or what he calls "indeterminacy," are the "fundamental preconditions for reader participation" (p. 14).

Iser's remarks on the gaps in narrative could have been derived from Njáls saga alone. We all sense these lacunae and recognize that their existence accounts, at least in part, for the earlier view of the saga's tripartite structure: *Hrúts saga, *Gunnars saga, *Njáls saga. While no one today maintains such a naive view of the saga's structure, we have all nevertheless puzzled over the relation between events in the first twenty-four chapters--the so-called Hrúts saga--and subsequent episodes. Our initial responses focus on the intricacies of the plot, so

confusing at first, especially give the barrage of characters introduced immediately after the Hrúts saga, that we tend to ignore the implicit similarities of theme between early and later episodes. Perhaps the most important episodes in Hrúts saga are the lawsuits between Mørðr gígja and Hrútr and between Hrútr and Gunnarr. A brief look at these two lawsuits will reveal the narrative gaps and demonstrate the reader's role in relating the episodes to later events.

A brief summary of events leading up to the lawsuit between Mørðr and Hrútr will facilitate its analysis: Unnr divorces Hrútr according to the instructions of her father, and Mørðr sues Hrútr to recovery the dowry. At issue here, among other things, is the amount of money to be returned: Mørðr demands not only what he paid out at the wedding but in addition Hrútr's share. Hrútr challenges Mørðr to a hólmganga, winner take all, and when he refuses Mørðr suffers defeat and humiliation. From the depiction of these events alone, the reader has difficulty deciding the significance of the lawsuit's conclusion. Although apparently legal, must Hrútr's challenge, as well as his charge that Mørðr is greedy, be accepted as legitimate, or should we regard Hrútr's conduct in the same spirit as Geirr goði later views Gunnarr's behavior: "muntú þá. . . skora mér á hól sem þú ert vanr ok þola eigi lög" (144)? The formalistic pronouncement accompanying Mørðr's defeat suggests he is at fault: "þá varð óþ mikit at lögbergi ok óhljóð, ok hafði Mørðr af ina mestu svívirðing" (28), but what is he guilty of? What we know of him, admittedly not much, scarcely prepares us for the harsh treat-

ment he receives. "Hann var ríkr hefðingi ok málafylgjumaðr mikill ok svá mikill lögmaðr, at engir þóttu lögligr/^{dómar}ðœmðir, nema hann væri við," we are told, normally qualities in favor of a man rather than the reverse. In addition, his conduct speaks for him: he seems flexible during the initial betrothal negotiations, readily grants Hrútr a three-year extension in which to claim his inheritance in Norway, and at the first sign of marital trouble summons Høskuldr and Hrútr to a discussion of the matter. During their talk he seems impartial, fair-minded, and reasonable. When he finds no evidence of misconduct on Hrútr's part, he chastizes his daughter and bids her return to her husband. Later when he learns the precise nature of Unnr's grievance, he gives her legal advice that enables her to dissolve the union. Forced to render a judgment from this recitation of incidents, most readers would find Mørðr's humiliation incommensurate with his conduct.

The reader's difficulty in grasping why the author comes down so hard on Mørðr is further complicated by Gunnarr's recovery of the dowry by means of the same tactics Hrútr employed. Acting strictly according to Njáll's advice, Gunnarr brings a court case against Hrútr, but just at the point where Njáll's further expertise seems necessary to save the case, Gunnarr challenges Hrútr to a hólmganga and wins his first lawsuit and "hafði ina mestu sœmð af málinu" (68). In the face of much that remains unclear during a first reading of the Hrúts saga, it does not seem far-fetched to believe that at least one of the three litigants acts contrary to law. If Mørðr has been

successfully exonerated as the innocent victim of Hrótr's brutality, then we presumably enjoy seeing Hrótr get precisely what he deserves, an impression reinforced by the irony involved in Gunnarr's table-turning. But then what about Gunnarr's conduct, by no means an isolated example of his using force? Moreover, the consequences of his court victory leave little room for rejoicing: Unnr uses her dowry to marry Valgarðr inn grái and gives birth to the evil Mgrðr. Could it be that the reader who poses such questions as these has been on the wrong tack all along? Rather than naively expecting victory to be granted to the just and the good, shouldn't we concentrate on the issues involved and refrain from character analysis? But what are the issues and where is the center of thematic interest in this stark narration? I submit that at this point in our reading we find ourselves in an ethical cul-de-sac because of insufficient evidence to make a satisfying analysis of the text. Re-reading Hróts saga fails to help much: as is often the case in reading the Íslendinga sögur, one must read further, collecting additional information and combining it with impressions already formed from the text.

Gunnarr's legal difficulties with Otkell Skarfnsson and the resulting settlement provide such additional information. Briefly summarized, the dispute results from the theft of various foodstuffs from Otkell's storehouse. Gunnarr discovers Hallgerðr's complicity in the theft and attempts to settle the matter with Otkell. Acting on the advice of Skammkell, Otkell rejects Gunnarr's offers of compensation and delivers a summons

on Gunnarr. Before the matter comes to court at the Alþing, Gizurr hvíti intercedes and offers Gunnarr sjálfdoemi. Inclined at first to reject the offer, Gunnarr yields to Njáll's urgings and settles the claim to his own advantage. Although the dispute does not culminate in a lawsuit, the episode nevertheless makes explicit a number of issues not clear in the two lawsuits in Hrúts saga. In order to focus attention on the parallels between the two earlier suits and Gunnarr's clash with Otkell, I have summarized all three in chart form (see Chart 1, "Lawsuits," p. 19).

The obvious parallel elements in these episodes justify the assumption that the structure of the lawsuits provides commentary the reader fails to find elsewhere in the narration. To be sure, the conducting of lawsuits then as now follows a set procedure dictated by fixed conventions and customs unrelated to narrative requirements, so that any report of a lawsuit naturally contains material found in many other such accounts. But proponents of the kind of formalistic analysis employed here argue that the degree of correspondence evident in stereotyped narrative scenes rules out coincidence. The rebuttal that such people are merely seeing their own eyes at the other end of the microscope has been heard since I. A. Richards and the early days of New Criticism and cannot be answered here. One merely begins with the observation that as the reader assimilates the Gunnarr-Otkell incident, the *déjà-là* effect referred to earlier begins to operate. As one notices how events resemble each other, one starts to receive a new perspective that fills in gaps in earlier

scenes. In this respect certain differences, always determined by context, assume a greater importance than the similarities that merely highlight the differences. As a consequence of the process of seeing familiar material treated in new ways, the reader slowly becomes conscious that the clash between Gunnarr and Otkell imitates the two previous lawsuits. In contrast to them, Gunnarr is here both guilty party and instigator of an attempted settlement. Gunnarr's ride over to Otkell's farm, moreover, parodies the typical summons described so often in the saga and first seen when Gunnarr disguised as Kaupa-Heðinn tricks Hrótr, a plan devised by Njáll, Gunnarr's legal counselor. Also in contrast to the earlier scenes, Gunnarr's legal advisor here (Kolskeggr) urges reparation rather than evasion. The initial legal advice given the prosecution (by Otkell's brother, Hallbjörn) advocates accepting Gunnarr's terms as opposed to further legal maneuvering. Still another legal advisor lies (Skammkell), and a fourth favors brute force (Hrótr). All of the elements of parody provide commentary on the lawsuits in Hrúts saga by underscoring parallel parts of a paradigm not perhaps apparent without these signals.

At the heart of this episode is the significance of the rejection of Gunnarr's offers of compensation. We remember that Hrótr's own bias in charging Mörör with greed complicated our evaluation of that issue, but here we see clearly that Otkell and Skammkell bear the responsibility for the disharmony. Even the reader lacking an understanding of the workings of early Icelandic law can be certain of the generosity of Gunnarr's

offers of compensation, at least as judged by contemporary standards: three members of Otkell's camp, Hallbjörn, Geirr goði and Gizurr hvíti, all of whom attempt to protect Otkell's interests, regard his failure to settle with Gunnarr as foolish. Moreover, the experienced reader of sagas familiar with the conventions of out-of-court settlements will understand Skammkell's motives in refusing Gunnarr's terms. The initial objection that Otkell's unpopularity would work against him ("þetta eru áheyrilig boð ok ójafnlig: þú er vinsæll af bóndum, en Otkell er óvinsæll") sounds reasonable enough. Moreover, it provides explicit confirmation of Otkell's meanness of spirit we witnessed in his refusal to sell or loan Gunnarr hay and at the same time justifies the modest nature of Gunnarr's first offer. But with the rejection of the second proposal, double compensation and a pledge of friendship, the reader begins to suspect that Skammkell is more interested in capitalizing on Gunnarr's misfortune than in protecting Otkell's interests. For when Skammkell tells Otkell that this offer constitutes sjálf-dœmi ("þenna skalt þú eigi þiggja, ok er þat grunnfóligt, ef þú ætlar at selja honum sjálf-dœmi, þar er þú ættir at taka"), he places an unusual interpretation on Gunnarr's remarks. Sjálf-dœmi was, of course, one of four ways of settling a dispute out of court (the other three: (1) immediate settlement without the intervention of a third party; (2) one party's naming of arbitrators; (3) the joint naming of arbitrators by the two parties). Before sjálf-dœmi was administered, both parties agreed, either tacitly or formally, to abide by the terms speci-

fied by the party exercising it. Normally, it was offered by the defendant either in an effort to avoid harsher punishments (lesser or full outlawry) or as a means of showing respect and good faith towards the plaintiff. An example of the former occurs when Gizurr hvíti and Geirr plead with Gunnarr to accept sjálfðæmi in order to avoid being drawn into the dispute themselves ("Þess, at þú vinnir eið," segir Gunnarr. "Þat vil ek gera," segir Gizurr, "ef þú vill þiggja sjálfðæmit?"), and examples of the latter are Gunnarr's and Njáll's repeated offers of sjálfðæmi in composing the killings drafted by their wives. But in none of the seventy or so parallel instances in the sagas do we find a comparable example in which a party exercising sjálfðæmi penalizes himself. Skammkell's odd construing of Gunnarr's gesture of good will can be variously interpreted: either he is ignorant of law and its practice, or he figures that Otkell's stupidity will prevent him from spotting the flaw. Whatever the explanation, Otkell swallows the fallacy and parrots Skammkell's advice: "Eigi vil ek selja þér sjálfðæmi, Gunnarr." Although more than once guilty of rashness, Gunnarr here controls his temper ("skil ek hér tilleggur manna, nærgi er launat verðr") and offers Otkell sjálfðæmi, who refers the matter to the judgment of Geirr and Gizurr. Having followed Skammkell's daring exploitation of Gunnarr's predicament, we see through his plan and anticipate Skammkell's and Otkell's disappointment. Skammkell quite obviously hopes by rejecting Gunnarr's proposals for settlement to defeat Gunnarr in a court case. For despite the prestige Otkell might hope to derive from

being offered sjálfðæmi from Gunnarr, no matter how dishonorably obtained, the prospect of humbling Gunnarr at the Alþing proves too tempting for the pair. A private settlement such as that offered by Gunnarr would have been witnessed by relatively few people, but defeating Gunnarr at the Alþing would be witnessed, so to speak, by all of Iceland. The numerous lawsuits at the Alþing reported in dozens of sagas suggest that they represented the greatest stimulus to public gossip and perhaps even the chief form of entertainment. (An Alþing where no disputes were settled often receives authorial comment.) And at the conclusion of every court case in Njáls saga we learn either that someone won fame from his victory or that someone else lost prestige because of a defeat.

Thus the reader learns from the Gunnarr-Otkell encounter that the desire to conduct a court case rather than to settle out of court can itself be a vice. We observe also by implication that such a disagreement between men of good will would have been a minor source of friction rather than an opportunity for humiliating an opponent. We see the first clear example of why court procedures often arise and why sensible men avoid them if possible. Because they are as stupid as they are small-minded, Otkell and Skammkell fail to understand that Gunnarr simply possesses too much muscle for them. That they are first humiliated and then killed provides one of the few really satisfying chapters in a largely bleak saga of thirteenth-century Iceland.

Of course what we learn from the Gunnarr-Otkell case we

have already experienced from the lengthy narration of the killings instigated by Hallgerðr and Bergþóra. But the information we obtain from this chain of killings becomes more significant when the reader recognizes its relation to the two lawsuits and Gunnarr's settlement with Otkell. We might well have overlooked the elements missing from the settlements Gunnarr and Njáll make after each killing were it not for the contrast provided by the two earlier lawsuits in the Hrúts saga and by the Gunnarr-Otkell affair. These missing elements become clear when one glances briefly at the outlines provided in the chart (see Chart 2: "Killings and Settlements," p. 20): we see no legal tactics, no summonses, and no court procedures, for the obvious reason that Gunnarr and Njáll solve their problems out of court. The significance of this missing material in the absence of any authorial commentary is by no means clear when we first read the episodes, for nothing in the two previous lawsuits suggests that Mørðr or Gunnarr had any alternative to court action. But given the chance to see how effectively Gunnarr and Njáll deal with their problems in contrast to how ineffective the court cases prove for Mørðr and Hrútr and in contrast to the aggravation Otkell causes by the exploitation of the legal system, the reader begins to understand in retrospect the importance of Gunnarr's and Njáll's conduct. They observe the law but shun litigation.

We notice in re-examining the settlements between Gunnarr and Njáll in the light of the Gunnarr-Otkell wrangle the privacy in which they negotiate. Both men must be aware of the poten-

tial danger public opinion can cause a settlement, for at first only Gunnarr and Njáll themselves take part. Later Skarpheðinn and Kolskeggr participate, but after the killing of Þórðr, Njáll purposely excludes his sons from the settlement, "því at eigi munu þeir rjúfa þá sett, er ek geri; en ef þeir eru við staddir, þá munu þeir ekki saman draga." In addition, they make their settlements before public opinion has a chance to polarize the two groups into conflicting camps, an implied danger that the explicit avowals of friendship seem designed to control: "Helzk með þeim sett nokkura hríð; jafnan mæltusk þeir vel við, Gunnarr ok Njáll ok synir hans, þá at fátt væri meðal annars liðsins." Moreover, public opinion directly threatens their settlements, for the arrangements they make privately at one point fail to satisfy the anonymous bystanders: "margir mæltu, er hjá stóðu, at mikit þótti gert vera." Gunnarr's anger ("Gunnarr reiddisk ok kvað þá bætta fullum rétti, er eigi væri vaskari menn en Atli var") has little point unless we recognize the role played by public opinion in a "shame society" such as that depicted by the sagas. Gunnarr's and Njáll's triumph in these episodes consists in their settling with a minimum of public controversy a series of disputes designed by their wives to create public condemnation of each other. We can see from Chart 2 (p. 20) that, with one exception ("Brynjólfur kills Atli, 3a"), the commentary consists of the bickering of the two wives or of the predictions of members of the immediate family. Hallgerðr is particularly abusive because of her anger over Gunnarr's private neutralization of her public revenge. Finally, the pressure

of public opinion after the death of Sigmundur ("nú liðu þrjú þing, þau er menn ætluðu, at [Gunnarr] myndi sækja málit") becomes so great that Njáll broaches the matter of settlement to Gunnarr (see Chart 2, "Njálssynir kill þá Sigmundur"). Njáll seems to recognize that Gunnarr can have no peace until this matter has been settled and that their friendship can be endangered by public speculation. Even Njáll must be surprised at Gunnarr's apparent indifference to public opinion, for after hearing of the death of Sigmundur, Njáll gleefully comments: "Njótið heilir handa. Hér skulu eigi sjálfðæmi fyrir koma at svá búnu." Of course, he reacts in hot blood to the news of the death of the author of the insults "taðskeggingar" and "karl inn skegglasi," but given Njáll's reaction to this news we can well imagine what public opinion hostile to Gunnarr must be like. But after three years the settlement that Njáll had previously written off is precisely the one he offers Gunnarr ("Njáll vildi ekki annat en Gunnarr gerði um málit"), most likely in recognition of danger in further delay.

Armed with this knowledge, the reader can return to the two lawsuits in Hrúts saga for a second look. We can see now Mörör gígja's mistake that dooms any chance of a harmonious settlement with Hrútr, for Mörör's plan by which Unnr divorces Hrútr defeats itself by making public what would have best been kept private: the precise nature of the failure of the marriage. Here the text can keep the reader guessing, for whereas we know in clinical detail what Unnr tells her father, we remain ignorant of how the information is made public. But we do know from

the children's skit following the lawsuit that the charges against Hrútr have become public gossip and demeaning slander as intolerable to Hrútr as the insults to Njáll, Gunnarr, and Flosi are to them. If so many other worthy men in the saga confronted with similar public embarrassment prove incapable of mastering their pride and anger, then by comparison Hrútr's conduct appears less blameworthy than before. To be sure, none of these men comes away from the saga totally exonerated by the comparison, but by observing the patterns narrating their similar dilemmas the reader gains an understanding of the destructive forces at work in the saga age. No contemporary of the twentieth century need be reminded that these forces, albeit in altered form, have not lost their influence.

The reader also gains insight into Mørör's character as a result of witnessing other figures operating in similar circumstances. Mørör seems to represent a caricature of a rigid legal mentality that sees solutions to nearly all problems only in legal terms. When his daughter has a marital problem, then he responds by ascertaining the guilty party and then taking the appropriate legal action. (We can ignore in this discussion the fact that before marrying Unnr to Hrútr he failed to concern himself with her preferences.) Mørör's defeat and the commentary accompanying it, the sudden collapse of Unnr following her father's death, and her ill-advised marriage to Valgarör and its consequences suggest that Mørör's way of thinking appears unacceptable to the author. Moreover, Mørör's alternative is clear both from the peaceful, private negotiations conducted by Njáll

and Gunnarr and from the numerous private negotiations involving Hrútr in which he proves reasonable and flexible. Thus whatever motives we ascribe to Męrdęr, he errs in exposing to public scrutiny what could only be solved through private agreement. A legal system capable of solving this kind of problem in open court is scarcely conceivable.

After having observed Gunnarr's behavior in the Otkell affair, we are better prepared to evaluate his performance in the lawsuit against Hrútr. We must not forget the contrast in circumstances of the two men at the time of the lawsuit. Hrútr has achieved full maturity as a viking adventurer and prescient counselor to his brother, Hęskuldr; he is, in fact, the dominant male thus far in the saga. Gunnarr, on the other hand, has just been introduced as a man of unmatched physical prowess, but his encounter with Hrútr represents his heroic debut and belongs to his juvenalia. Recognizing these circumstances color's the reader's response to Gunnarr's behavior, so that we tend to overlook, while not forgetting, conduct in the young man we might censure in the older and more experienced one. Thus we observe his deception of Hrútr as a game, despite the stakes and the danger, played between men who can look after themselves. Consequently, at the conclusion of the lawsuit we do tend to think that Hrútr gets what he deserves; his own boasting after all plays a major role in the success of Gunnarr's charade. Hrútr's resigned acceptance of defeat ("illu mun þęr launat verða") and prediction of a future alliance between the family and Gunnarr ("ęn þę er þat líkast, at hann snúisk til vęrrar ættar um vin-

fengit") add to the light-hearted tone of the episode.

But such is the brilliant economy of the episode that we see in addition alarming signals that prepare us for later and heavier scenes. Gunnarr shows for the first time when he brushes aside Njáll's legal first-aid in favor of his own direct challenge an impatience that leaves its mark on the reader. However we choose to regard Gunnarr's much-disputed motives for turning back, the suddenness of his decision hardly comes as a surprise. Moreover, we experience in this scene the first of Gunnarr's many court victories, most of them gained in an effort to thwart Gunnarr's enemies but which contribute ironically to his defeat because "þfunduðu mátstøðumenn hans mjök hans sðmð." Gunnarr simply becomes too successful in and out of court: finally, nothing short of his death or outlawry will satisfy his enemies.

Space limitation prohibit analysis of the later lawsuits. In any event by the time the reader reaches the lawsuit between Geirr goði and Gunnarr over the killing of Otkell, the lessons gained in the earlier skirmishes make commentary less necessary. An outline of any lawsuit contested after this settlement would reveal fewer attempts to settle out of court, a greater complexity of legal advice and counter-plotting, and the conscious twisting of law in ways that the drafters of the legal code could not have anticipated. Legal disputes become increasingly a matter of fighting fire with fire in a vain effort to delay the inevitable. At the end of the saga, as in the beginning, the solutions to men's problems are found in mutual trust between men of good will who refuse to insist on the letter of the law.

Chart 1: Lawsuits

Mörör gegja versus Hrútr

1. Conflict: En fátt var um með þeim Hrúti um samfarar.
2. Out-of-Court Settlement: "Hví þykkir dóttur minni svá illt vestr þar? . . . Heim skalt þú fara ok una vel við ráð þitt, því at honum ganga öll vitni betr en þér."
3. Conflict: "Ék vilda segja skíllit við Hrút." 4. Legal Advice: "mun ek leggja ráð á með þér."
5. Convening of Court: nefndi Mörör sér vátta ok lýsti ísæk á hendr Hrúti um fémal dóttur sinni."
6. Rebuttal: "Mæli ek svá fyrir . . . at ek skora þér á hölm." 7. Settlement: Þá kvað Mörör þat upp, at hann mundi eigi berjask við Hrút.
8. Commentary: Þá varð óp mikit at lögbergi ok óhljóð, ok hafði Mörör af ina mestu svívirðing.

Gunnarr versus Hrútr

1. Conflict: "Ék vil, at þú heimtir fé mitt undan Hrúti."
2. Legal Advice: "Nú skalt þú ríða heiman við þriðja mann."
3. Summons: Heðinn stefndi þá rétt ok . . . stefndi hand-seldri sök Umarr.
4. Convening of Court: Gunnarr sækir mál þetta á þingi.
5. Rebuttal: Hrútr nefndi vátta ok sagði ónýtt málit.
6. Counter Rebuttal: "ek skal gera Hrúti slíkan sem hann gerði Mörði. . . ek skora þér, Hrútr, til hölm-göngu."
7. Settlement: Þeir greiddu fétt allt vel af hendi.
8. Commentary: Menn ríðu heim nú af þinginu, ok hafði Gunnarr ina mestu söemð af málinu.

Otkell versus Gunnarr

1. Conflict: "Illa er þá, ef ek em þjöfnautr, "--ok lýstr hana kinnhest.
2. Legal Advice: "Þú munt þykkja skyldastr til at bœta fyrir konu þína."
3. Out-of-Court Settlement: a. "Hér vil ek bjóða fyrir góð boð ok bjóða. . . ." b. "Bjóða mun ek. . . at gera um sjálf. . . ." c. "Skil ek hér tillögur manna, nærgi er launat verða, enda dœm þú nú sjálf."
4. Legal Advice: a. "En þó er hann svá vel at sér, at hann mun láta standa boð þessi, þó at þú þiggir síðar." b. "er þat villi þeirra Geirs. . . at sættask ekki."
5. Summons: Otkell lætr þegar dynja stefnuna.
6. Legal Advice: "Þú skalt skora á hölm Gizuri hvíta, ef þeir bjóða þér eigi sjálfðemi."
7. Settlement: "Þat er boð várt, at þú, Gunnarr, dœmir sjálfir þetta mál."
8. Commentary: Gunnarr hafði mikit söemð af málinu.

Chart 2: Killings and Settlements

Kolr kills Svartur

1. Conflict: "Víg hefi ek at segja þér." "Sjálfir skalt þú dæma."
3. Commentary: a. "en jafnmikit íé skal koma fyrir Kol, er stundir líða." b. Hallgerðr hœldisk jafnan af vígi Svarts, en Bergþóra líkaði þat illa.

Atli kills Kolr

1. Conflict: "Illa hefir nú orðit. . . er húsfreyja mín skal hafa rofit gríð ok látit drepa húskarl þinn."
2. Settlement: "Dæm þú nú málit."
3. Commentary: a. hon kvazk aldri vægja skyldu fyrir Hallgerði. b. Hallgerðr leitaði á Gunnar mjök, en hann hafði sætzk á vígít.

Brynjólfir kills Atli

1. Conflict: "Víg Atla hefi ek at segja þér."
2. Settlement: "vil ek, at þú gerir sjálfir."
3. Commentary: a. Margir málta, er hjá stóðu, at mikít þótti gert vera. b. "Jafnkomit mun á með ykkur. . . er hvártveggi er blauðr."

Þórðr kills Brynjólfir

1. Conflict: Þeir gingu þá til móts við Gunnar ok sögðu honum vígít.
2. Settlement: Njáll bauð honum þegar sættina. Gunnarr játti því ok skyldi sjálfir hundrað silfrs.
3. Commentary:

Sigmundur þeir kill Þórðr

1. Conflict: "Hérð tíðendi hefi ek at segja þér. . . víg Þórðar leysingjasonar."
2. Settlement: "vil ek bjóða þér sjálfðemi fyrir vígít."
3. Commentary: "Svá munu vér þá gera. . . en ef til verðr nekkut með oss, þá munu vér minnask á inn forna fjandskap."

Njállssvynir kill þá Sigmundur

1. Conflict: Njáll málta þá ok tók til Gunnars: "Öerit lengi hefir Sigmundur, frændi þinn, óþettir verit."
2. Settlement: Njáll vildi ekki annat en Gunnarr gerði um málit.
3. Commentary: Gunnarr sagði sætt þeira upp á þingskálalþingi, þá er þar var mest fjelmeni, ok sagði um orð þau in illu, er Sigmundi dró til hefðuðsbana.